The Saint

by Antonio Fogazzaro

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THE SAINT

By Antonio Fogazzaro

Since the condemnation of The Saint by the Congregation of the Index, the

publishers of the authorized translation of this novel feel that, in justice to its author, Senator Antonio Fogazzaro, they owe to the public a word of explanation by way of making plain (what the author has in more than one letter made plain to them) how it comes about that, in spite of the decree of the Index, the Senator sanctions the appearance of the book in America. The explanation is found in the fact that the American publishers secured, before the sentence of the Congregation had been passed, the sanction for the publication of their translation—a sanction which the author, as a loyal Catholic, could not have given later, but which, once it was given, he did not feel justified in withdrawing.

NEW YORK, July, 1906.

NOTE:

The Saint, though it is independent of Fogazzaro's earlier romances, and though it explains itself completely when read in its entirety, will perhaps be more readily understood and enjoyed, especially in the opening chapters, if a few words are said with regard to certain of its characters who have made an appearance in preceding stories by the me author. All needful information of this kind is conveyed in the following paragraph, for which we are indebted to Mrs. Crawford's article, "The Saint in Fiction," which appeared in The Fortnightly Review for April, 1906:

"Readers of Fogazzaro's earlier novels will recognise in Piero Maironi, the Saint, the son of the Don Franco Maironi who, in the Piccolo Mondo Antico, gives his life for the cause of freedom, while he himself is the hero of the Piccolo Mondo Moderno. For those who have not read the preceding volumes it should be explained that his wife being in a lunatic asylum, Maironi, artist and dreamer, had fallen in love with a beautiful woman separated from her husband, Jeanne Dessalle, who professed agnostic opinions. Recalled to a sense of his faith and his honour by an interview with his wife, who sent for him on her death-bed, he was plunged in remorse, and disappeared wholly from the knowledge of friends and relatives after

depositing in the hands of a venerable priest, Don Giuseppe Flores, a sealed paper describing a prophetic vision concerning his life that had largely contributed to his conversion. Three years are supposed to have passed between the close of the Piccolo Mondo Moderno and the opening of Il Santo, when Maironi is revealed under the name of Benedetto, purified of his sins by a life of prayer and emaciated by the severity of his mortifications, while Jeanne Dessalle, listless and miserable, is wandering around Europe with Noemi d'Arxel, sister to Maria Selva, hoping against hope for the reappearance of her former lover."

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Introduction

By William Roscoe Thayer

Author of "The Dawn of Italian Independence"

ANTONIO FOGAZZARO AND HIS MASTERPIECE

I

Senator Fogazzaro, in The Saint, has confirmed the impression of his five and twenty years' career as a novelist, and now, through the extraordinary power and

pertinence of this crowning work, he has suddenly become an international celebrity. The myopic censors of the Index have assured the widest circulation of his book by condemning it as heretical. In the few months since its publication, it has been read by hundreds of thousands of Italians; it has appeared in French translation in the Revue des Deux Mondes and in German in the Hochland; and it has been the storm centre of religious and literary debate. Now it will be sought by a still wider circle, eager to see what the doctrines are, written by the leading Catholic layman in Italy, at which the Papal advisers have taken fright. Time was when it was the books of the avowed enemies of the Church—of some mocking Voltaire, some learned Renan, some impassioned Michelet—which they thrust on the Index; now they pillory the Catholic layman with the largest following in Italy, one who has never wavered in his devotion to the Church. Whatever the political result of their action may be, they have made the fortune of the book they hoped to suppress; and this is good, for The Saint is a real addition to literature.

Lovers of Italy have regretted that foreigners should judge her contemporary ideals and literary achievements by the brilliant, but obscene and degenerate books of Gabriele d'Annunzio. Such books, the products of disease no matter what language they may be written in, quickly circulate from country to country. Like epidemics they sweep up and down the world, requiring no passports, respecting no frontiers, while benefits travel slowly from people to people, and often lose much in the passage. D'Annunzio, speaking the universal language—Sin,—has been accepted as the typical Italian by foreigners who know Carducci merely as a name and have perhaps never heard of Fogazzaro. Yet it is in these men that the better genius of modern Italy has recently expressed itself. Carducci's international reputation as the foremost living poet in Europe and a literary critic of the first class gains slowly, but its future is secure. Thanks to the wider circulating medium of fiction, Fogaz-* *zaro's name is a household word in thousands of Italian families, and he combines in his genius so many rare and important strands that the durability of his literary

renown cannot be questioned.

II

Antonio Fogazzaro, the most eminent Italian novelist since Manzoni, was born at Vicenza on March 25th, 1842. He was happy in his parents, his father, Mariano Fogazzaro, being a man of refined tastes and sound learning, while his mother, Teresa Barrera, united feminine sweetness with wit and a warm heart. From childhood they influenced all sides of his nature, and when the proper time came they put him in charge of a wise tutor, Professor Zanella, who seems to have divined his pupil's talents and the best way to cultivate them. Young Fogazzaro, having completed his course in the classics went on to the study of the law, which he pursued first in the University of Padua and then at Turin, where his father had taken up a voluntary exile. For Vicenza, during the forties and fifties, lay under Austrian subjection, and any Italian who desired to breathe freely in Italy had to seek the liberal air of Piedmont.

Fogazzaro received his diploma in due season, and began to practise as advocate, but in that casual way common to young men who know that their real leader is not Themis but Apollo. Erelong he abandoned the bar and devoted himself with equal enthusiasm to music and poetry, for both of which he had unusual aptitude. Down to 1881 he printed chiefly volumes of verse which gave him a genuine, if not popular reputation. In that year he brought out his first romance, Malombra, and from time to time during the past quarter of a century he has followed it with Daniele Cortis, Il Mistero del Poeta, Piccolo Mondo Antico, Piccolo Mondo Moderno, and finally, in the autumn of 1905, Il Santo. This list by no means exhausts his productivity, for he has worked in many fields, but it includes the books by which, gradually at first, and with triumphant strides of late, he has come into great fame in Italy and has risen into the small group of living authors who write for a cosmopolitan public.

For many years past Signor Fogazzaro has dwelt in his native Vicenza, the most

honoured of her citizens, round whom has grown up a band of eager disciples, who look to him for guidance not merely in matters intellectual or aesthetic, but in the conduct of life. He has conceived of the career of man of letters as a great opportunity, not as a mere trade. Nothing could show better his high seriousness than his waiting until the age of thirty-nine before publishing his first novel, unless it be the restraint which led him, after having embarked on the career of novelist to devote four or five years on the average to his studies in fiction. So his books are ripe, the fruits of a deliberate and rich nature, and not the windfalls of a mere literary trick. And now the publication of The Saint confirms all his previous work, and entitles him, at a little more than threescore years, to rank among the few literary masters of the time.

III

Many elements in The Saint testify to its importance; but these would not make it a work of art. And after all it is as a work of art that it first appeals to readers, who may care little for its religious purport. It is a great novel—so great, that, after living with its characters, we cease to regard it as a novel at all. It keeps our suspense on the stretch through nearly five hundred pages. Will the Saint triumph—will love victoriously claim its own? We hurry on, at the first reading, for the solution; then we go back and discover in it another world of profound interest. That is the true sign of a masterpiece.

In English we have only John Inglesant and Robert Elsmere to compare it with; but such a comparison, though obviously imperfect, proves at once how easily The Saint surpasses them both, not merely by the greater significance of its central theme, but by its subtler psychology, its wider horizon, its more various contacts with life. Benedetto, the Saint, is a new character in fiction, a mingling of St. Francis and Dr. Dollinger, a man of to-day in intelligence, a medieval in faith. Nothing could be finer than the way in which Signor Fogazzaro depicts his zeal, his ecstasies, his

visions, his depressions, his doubts; shows the physical and mental reactions; gives us, in a word, a study in religious morbid psychology—for, say what we will, such abnormalities are morbid—without rival in fiction. We follow Benedetto's spiritual fortunes with as much eagerness as if they were a love story.

And then there is the love story. Where shall one turn to find another like it? Jeanne seldom appears in the foreground, but we feel from first to last the magnetism of her presence. There is always the possibility that at sight or thought of her Benedetto may be swept back from his ascetic vows to the life of passion. Their first meeting in the monastery chapel is a masterpiece of dramatic climax, and Benedetto's temptation in her carriage, after the feverish interview with the cabinet officer, is a marvel of psychological subtlety. Both scenes illustrate Signor Fogazzaro's power to achieve the highest artistic results without exaggeration. This naturalness is the more remarkable because the character of a saint is unnatural according to our modern point of view. We have a healthy distrust of ascetics, whose anxiety over their soul's condition we properly regard as a form of egotism; and we know how easily the unco' guid become prigs. Fogazzaro's hero is neither an egotist of the ordinary cloister variety, nor a prig. That our sympathy goes out to Jeanne and not to him shows that we instinctively resent the sacrifice of the deepest human cravings to sacerdotal prescriptions. The highest ideal of holiness which medievals could conceive does not satisfy us.

Why did Signor Fogazzaro in choosing his hero revert to that outworn type? He sees very clearly how many of the Catholic practices are what he calls "ossified organisms." Why did he set up a lay monk as a model for 20th century Christians who long to devote their lives to uplifting their fellow-men? Did he not note the artificiality of asceticism—the waste of energy that comes with fasts and mortification of the flesh and morbidly pious excitement? When asked these questions by his followers he replied that he did not mean to preach asceticism as a rule for all; but that in individual cases like Benedetto's, for instance, it was a

psychological necessity. Herein Signor Fogazzaro certainly discloses his profound knowledge of the Italian heart—of that heart from which in its early medieval vigour sprang the Roman religion, with its message of renunciation. Even the Renaissance and the subsequent period of scepticism have not blotted out those tendencies that date back more than a thousand years: so that today, if an Italian is engulfed in a passion of self-sacrifice, he naturally thinks first of asceticism as the method. Among Northern races a similar religious experience does not suggest hair shirts and debilitating pious orgies (except among Puseyites and similar survivals from a different epoch); it suggests active work, like that of General Booth of the Salvation Army.

No one can gainsay, however, the superb artistic effects which Signor Fogazzaro attains through his Saint's varied experiences. He causes to pass before you all classes of society,—from the poorest peasant of the Subiaco hills, to duchesses and the Pope himself,—some incredulous, some mocking, some devout, some hesitating, some spell-bound, in the presence of a holy man. The fashionable ladies wish to take him up and make a lion of him; the superstitious kiss the hem of his garment and believe that he can work miracles, or, in a sudden revulsion, they jeer him and drive him away with stones. And what a panorama of ecclesiastical life in Italy! What a collection of priests and monks and prelates, and with what inevitableness one after another turns the cold shoulder on the volunteer who dares to assert that the test of religion is conduct! There is an air of mystery, of intrigue, of secret messages passing to and fro—the atmosphere of craft which has hung round the ecclesiastical institution so many, many centuries. Few scenes in modern romance can match Benedetto's interview with the Pope—he pathetic figure who, you feel, is in sad truth a prisoner, not of the Italian Government, but of the crafty, able, remorseless cabal of cardinals who surround him, dog him with eavesdroppers, edit his briefs, check his benign impulses, and effectually prevent the truth from penetrating to his lonely study. Benedetto's appeal to the Pope to heal the four wounds from which the

Church is languishing is a model of impassioned argument. The four wounds, be it noted, are the “spirit of falsehood,” “the spirit of clerical domination,” “the spirit of avarice,” and “the spirit of immobility.” The Pope replies in a tone of resignation; he does not disguise his powerlessness; he hopes to meet Benedetto again—in heaven!

IV

The Saint may be considered under many aspects—indeed, the critics, in their efforts to classify it, have already fallen out over its real character. Some regard it as a thinly disguised statement of a creed; others, as a novel pure and simple; others, as a campaign document (in the broadest sense); others, as no novel at all, but a dramatic sort of confession. The Jesuits have had it put on the Index; the Christian Democrats have accepted it as their gospel: yet Jesuits and Christian Democrats both profess to be Catholics. Such a divergence of opinion proves conclusively that the book possesses unusual power and that it is many-sided. Instead of pitching upon one of these views as right and declaring all the rest to be wrong, it is more profitable to try to discover in the book itself what grounds each class of critics finds to justify its particular and exclusive verdict.

On the face of it what does the book say? This is what it says: That Piero Maironi, a man of the world, cultivated far beyond his kind, after having had a vehement love-affair is stricken with remorse, “experiences religion,” becomes penitent, is filled with a strange zeal—an ineffable comfort—and devotes himself, body, heart, and soul to the worship of God and the succour of his fellow-men. As Benedetto, the lay brother, he serves the peasant populations among the Sabine hills, or moves on his errands of hope and mercy among the poor of Rome. Everybody recognises him as a holy man—“a saint.” Perhaps, if he had restricted himself to taking only soup or simple medicines to the hungry and sick, he would have been unmolested in his philanthropy; but after his conversion, he had devoured the Scriptures and studied the books of the Fathers, until the spirit of the early, simple, untheological Church

had poured into him. It brought a message the truth of which so stirred him that he could not rest until he imparted it to his fellows. He preached righteousness,—the supremacy of conduct over ritual,—love as the test and goal of life; but always with full acknowledgment of Mother Church as the way of salvation. Indeed, he seems neither to doubt the impregnability of the foundations of Christianity, nor the validity of the Petrine corner-stone; taking these for granted he aims to live the Christian life in every act, in every thought. The superstructure—the practices of the Catholic Church to-day, the failures and sins of clerical society, the rigid ecclesiasticism—these he must in loyalty to fundamental truth, criticise, and if need be, condemn, where they interfere with the exercise of pure religion. But Benedetto engages very little in controversy; his method is to glorify the good, sure that the good requires only to be revealed in all its beauty and charm in order to draw irresistibly to itself souls that, for lack of vision, have been pursuing the mediocre or the bad.

Yet these utterances, so natural to Benedetto, awaken the suspicions of his superiors, who—we cannot say without cause—scent heresy in them. Good works, righteous conduct—what are these in comparison with blind subscription to orthodox formulas? Benedetto is persecuted not by an obviously brutal or sanguinary persecution,—although it might have come to that except for a catastrophe of another sort,—but by the very finesse of persecution. The sagacious politicians of the Vatican, inheritors of the accumulated craft of a thousand years, know too much to break a butterfly on a wheel, to make a martyr of an inconvenient person whom they can be rid of quietly. Therein lies the tragedy of Benedetto’s experience, so far at least as we regard him, or as he thought himself, an instrument for the regeneration of the Church.

On the face of it, therefore, The Saint is the story of a man with a passion for doing good, in the most direct and human way, who found the Church in which he believed, the Church which existed ostensibly to do good according to the direct and

human ways of Jesus Christ, thwarting him at every step. Here is a conflict, let us remark in passing, worthy to be the theme of a great tragedy. Does not Antigone rest on a similar conflict between Antigone's simple human way of showing her sisterly affection and the rigid formalism of the orthodoxy of her day?

V

Or, look next at The Saint as a campaign document, the aspect under which it has been most hotly discussed in Italy. It has been accepted as the platform, or even the gospel of the Christian Democrats. Who are they? They are a body of the younger generation of Italians, among them being a considerable number of religious, who yearn to put into practice the concrete exhortations of the Evangelists. They are really carried forward by that ethical wave which has swept over Western Europe and America during the past generation, and has resulted in "slumming," in practical social service, in all kinds of efforts to improve the material and moral condition of the poor, quite irrespective of sectarian or even Christian initiative. This great movement began, indeed, outside of the churches, among men and women who felt grievously the misery of their fellow-creatures and their own obligation to do what they could to relieve it. From them, it has reached the churches, and, last of all, the Catholic Church in Italy. No doubt the spread of Socialism, with its superficial resemblance to some of the features of primitive Christianity, has somewhat modified the character of this ethical movement; so far, in fact, that the Italian Christian Democrats have been confounded, by persons with only a blurred sense of outlines, with the Socialists themselves. Whatever they may become, however, they now profess views in regard to property which separate them by an unbridgeable chasm from the Socialists.

In their zeal for their fellow-men, and especially for the poor and down-trodden classes, they find the old agencies of charity insufficient. To visit the sick, to comfort the dying, to dole out broth at the convent gate, is well, but it offers no

remedy for the cause behind poverty and blind remediable suffering. Only through better laws, strictly administered, can effectual help come. So the Christian Democrats deemed it indispensable that they should be free to influence legislation. At this point, however, the stubborn prohibition of the Vatican confronted them. Since 1870, when the Italians entered Rome and established there the capital of United Italy, the Vatican had forbidden faithful Catholics to take part, either as electors or as candidates, in any of the national elections, the fiction being that, were they to go to the polls or to be elected to the Chamber of Deputies, they would thereby recognise the Royal Government which had destroyed the temporal power of the Pope. Then what would become of that other fiction—the Pope's prisonership in the Vatican—which was to prove for thirty years the best paying asset among the Papal investments? So long as the Curia maintained an irreconcilable attitude towards the Kingdom, it could count on kindling by irritation the sympathy and zeal of Catholics all over the world. In Italy itself many devout Catholics had long protested that, as it was through the acquisition of temporal power that the Church had become worldly and corrupt, so through the loss of temporal power it would regain its spiritual health and efficiency. They urged that the Holy Father could perform his religious functions best if he were not involved in political intrigues and governmental perplexities. No one would assert that Jesus could have better fulfilled his mission if he had been king of Judea; why, then, should the Pope, the Vicar of Jesus, require worldly pomp and power that his Master disdained?

Neither Pius IX nor Leo XIII, however, was open to arguments of this kind. Incidentally, it was clear that if Catholics as such were kept away from the polls, nobody could say precisely just how many they numbered. The Vatican constantly asserted that its adherents were in a majority—a claim which, if true, meant that the Kingdom of Italy rested on a very precarious basis. But other Catholics sincerely deplored the harm which the irreconcilable attitude of the Curia caused to religion. They regretted to see an affair purely political treated as religious; to have the belief

in the Pope's temporal power virtually set up as a part of their creed. The Lord's work was waiting to be done; yet they who ought to be foremost in it were handicapped. Other agencies had stepped in ahead of them. The Socialists were making converts by myriads; skeptics and cynics were sowing hatred not of the Church merely but of all religion. It was time to abandon "the prisoner of the Vatican" humbug, time to permit zealous Catholics, whose orthodoxy no one could question, to serve God and their fellow-men according to the needs and methods of the present age.

At last, in the autumn of 1905, the new Pope, Pius X, gave the faithful tacit permission, if he did not officially command them, to take part in the elections. Various motives were assigned for this change of front. Did even the Ultra-montanes realise that, since France had repealed the Concordat, they could find their best support in Italy? Or were they driven by the instinct of self-preservation to accept the constitutional government as a bulwark against the incoming tide of Anarchism, Socialism, and the other subversive forces? The Church is the most conservative element in Christendom; in a new upheaval it will surely rally to the side of any other element which promises to save society from chaos. These motives have been cited to explain the recent action of the Holy See, but there were high-minded Catholics who liked to think that the controlling reason was religious—that the Pope and his counsellors had at last been persuaded that the old policy of abstention wrought irreparable harm to the religious life of millions of the faithful in Italy.

However this may be, Senator Fogazzaro's book, filled with the Liberal and Christian spirit, has been eagerly caught up as the mouthpiece of the Christian Democrats, and indeed of all intelligent Catholics in Italy, who have always held that religion and patriotism are not incompatible, and that the Church has most injured itself in prolonging the antagonism. In this respect, The Saint, like Uncle Tom's Cabin and similar books which crystallise an entire series of ideals or sum up

a crisis, leaped immediately into importance, and seems certain to enjoy, for a long time to come, the prestige that crowns such works. Putting it on the Index can only add to its power.

VI

But readers who imagine that this aspect measures the significance of The Saint have read the surface only. The probability of restoring friendly relations between Church and State is a matter of concern to everybody in Italy; but of even greater concern are the implications which issue from Signor Fogazzaro's thought. He is an evolutionist; he respects the higher criticism; he knows that religions, like states and secular institutions, have their birth and growth and inevitable decay. So Catholicism must take its course in the human circuit, and expect sooner or later to pass away. This would be the natural deduction to draw from the premise of evolution. Signor Fogazzaro, however, does not draw it. He conceives that Catholicism contains a final deposit of truth which can neither be superseded, wasted, nor destroyed.

"My friends," says Benedetto, "you say, 'We have reposed in the shade of this tree but now its bark cracks and dries; the tree will die; let us go in search of other shade.' The tree will not die. If you had ears, you would hear the movement of the new bark forming, which will have its period of life, will crack, will dry in its turn, because another bark shall replace it. The tree does not die, the tree grows."

Through this parable, Signor Fogazzaro reveals his attitude, which it appears, does not differ from that proposed by many Anglicans and other Protestants towards their respective churches. Herein his Saint takes on the largest significance. He is a religious man who constantly praises Reason, and urges his hearers to trust Reason; but who, at a given moment, falls back on Faith, cleaves to Faith, insists that Faith alone brings its own warrant. Hence arise paradoxes, hence contradictions which elude a reasonable solution. For instance, in one discourse Benedetto says: "The

Catholic Church, which proclaims itself the fountain of truth, opposes to-day the search for Truth when it is carried on on its own foundations, on the holy books, on the dogmas, on its asserted infallibility. For us this means that it has no longer faith in itself. The Catholic Church which proclaims itself the minister of Life, to-day shackles and stifles whatever lives youthfully within it, and to-day it props itself on all its decadent and antiquated usages." Yet a little farther on he exclaims: "But what sort of faith is yours, if you talk of leaving the Church because certain antiquated doctrines of its heads, certain decrees of the Roman congregations, certain ways in a pontiff's government offend you? What sort of sons are you who talk of renouncing your mother because she wears a garment which does not please you? Is the mother's heart changed by a garment? When, bowed over her, weeping, you tell your infirmities to Christ and Christ heals you, do you think about the authenticity of a passage in St. John, about the real author of the Fourth Gospel or about the two Isaiahs? When you commune with Christ in the sacrament do the decrees of the Index or the Holy Office disturb you? When, giving yourself up to Mother Church, you enter the shadows of death, is the peace she breathes in you less sweet because a Pope is opposed to Christian Democracy?"

So far, therefore, as Fogazzaro is the spokesman of loyal yet intelligent Catholics, he shows that among them also the process of theological solution has been going on. Like Protestants who still profess creeds which they do not believe, these intelligent Catholics have to resort to strange devices—to devices which to a looker-on appear uncandid if not insincere,—in order to patch up a truce between their reason and their faith. This insincerity is the blight of the present age. It is far more serious than indifferentism, or than the open mockery of the 18th century philosophers. So long as it lasts, no deep, general religious regeneration will be possible. Be it remarked, however, that Signor Fogazzaro himself is unaware of his ambiguous position; being still many removes from Jowett, the typical Mr. Facing-both-Ways of the epoch.

VII

In conclusion, we go back to the book as a work of art, meaning by art not mere artifice, but that power which takes the fleeting facts of life and endues them with permanence, with deeper purports, with order and beauty. In this sense, Signor Fogazzaro is a great artist. He has the gift of the masters which enables him to rise without effort to the level of the tragic crises. He has also a vein of humour, without which such a theme as his could hardly be successfully handled. And although there is, by measure, much serious talk, yet so skilfully does he bring in minor characters, with their transient sidelights, that the total impression is that of a book in which much happens. No realist could exceed the fidelity with which Signor Fogazzaro outlines a landscape, or fixes a passing scene; yet being an idealist through and through, he has produced a masterpiece in which the imagination is sovereign.

Such a book, sprung from “no vain or shallow thought,” holding in solution the hopes of many earnest souls, spreading before us the mighty spiritual conflict between Medievalism still triumphant and the young undaunted Powers of Light, showing us with wonderful lifelikeness the tragedy of man’s baffled endeavour to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and of woman’s unquenchable love, is a great fact in the world-literature of our time.

Cambridge, Massachusetts,

April 25, 1906.

THE SAINT

CHAPTER I. LAC D’AMOUR

Jeanne was seated by the window with the book which she had been reading open upon her lap. She gazed pensively into the oval sheet of leaden water slumbering at her feet, at the passing clouds, casting their ever-changing shadows on the little villa, on the deserted garden, the trees of the opposite bank, the distant fields, on the

bridge to the left, and on the quiet roads, which lost themselves behind the Béguinage, and on the slanting roofs of Bruges, grand, mysterious, dead. Could it be that l'Intruse of whom she had just been reading, that fatal, unseen visitor, was even now crossing the sepulchral city; could it be that the short ripples upon the face of the dark water were her shadow, while she herself had reached the threshold of the villa, bringing with her the coveted gift of eternal sleep! The church bells chimed the hour of five. High, high up, near the white clouds, magic voices of innumerable bells sang over the houses, the squares, the streets of Bruges that melancholy incantation which renders its rest eternal. Jeanne felt two cool hands upon her eyes, a wave of perfume touched her cheek, a breath stirred her hair, whispering "encore une intruse," and then soft lips kissed her. She did not seem surprised; and, raising her hand, caressed the face bending over her, saying: "Welcome, Noemi. Magari fossi tu l'Intruse," (Would that you were l'Intruse.)

Noemi failed to understand.

"Magari," she said. "Is that Italian? It sounds like Arabic. Explain at once, please."

Jeanne rose. "You would not understand any better if I did," she said with a smile. "Shall we have our Italian conversation lesson now?"

"Yes, with pleasure," answered Noemi.

"Where did you go with my brother?"

"To the Hospital of St. John, to call on Memling."

"That's all right; let us talk about Memling. But first tell me whether Carlino made you a declaration?"

The girl laughed. "Yes, he made me a declaration of war, and I did likewise to he."

"To him, you should say. I wish he would fall in love with you," added Jeanne seriously. The girl frowned.

"I do not," she said.

“Why? Is he not charming, brilliant, cultured, and distinguished? He is very wealthy too, you know. We may despise riches, but after all they are very good in their way.”

Noemi d’Arxel placed her hands on her friend’s shoulders, and gazed steadily into her eyes. The blue questioning eyes were grave and sad; the brown eyes, thus scrutinised, bore the gaze with firmness, flashing in turn defiance, embarrassment, and mirth.

“Well,” said the girl, “I enjoy seeing Memling with Signor Carlino, playing classical music with him, discussing à Kempis with him, although this affection he has recently developed for à Kempis seems a profanation, when you consider that he believes in nothing. Je suis catholique autant qu’on peut l’être lorsqu’on ne l’est pas, but when I hear an unbeliever like your brother read à Kempis so feelingly, I very nearly lose my faith in Christianity as well. I like him for one other reason, dear, because he is your brother. But that is all! Oh! Jeanne Dessalle says such strange things sometimes—such strange things! I do not understand—I really do not understand. But warte nur, du Räthsel, as my governess used to say.”

“What am I to wait for?”

Noemi threw her arm round her friend’s neck, “I will drag your soul with so fine a net that it will bring beautiful great pearls to the surface, perhaps some sea-weed as well, and a little mud from the bottom, or even a very tiny pioeuvre.” “You do not know me,” answered Jeanne. “You are the only one of my friends who does not know me.”

“Of course. You imagine that only those who adore you really know you? Indeed, this belief that everybody adores you is a craze of yours.”

Jeanne made the little pouting grimace with which all her friends were familiar.

“What a foolish girl,” she said; but at once softened the expression with a kiss and a half-sad, half-quizzical smile.

“Women, as I have always told you, do adore me. Do you mean to say that you do

not?”

“Mais point du tout,” exclaimed Noemi. Jeanne’s eyes sparkled with mischief and kindness.

“In Italian we say: Si, di tutto cuore,” she answered.

The Dessalles, brother and sister, had spent the preceding summer at Maloja. Jeanne striving to make herself a pleasant companion, and hiding as best she could her incurable wound; Carlino searching out traces of Nietzsche in mystic hours round Sils Maria or in worldly moments flitting like a butterfly from one woman to another, frequently dining at St. Moritz, or at Pontresina, making music with a military attaché of the German Embassy at Rome, or with Noemi d’Arxel, and discussing religious questions with Noemi’s sister and brother-in-law. The two d’Arxel sisters, orphans, were Belgian by birth, but of Dutch and Protestant ancestry. The elder, Maria, after a peculiar and romantic courtship, had married the old Italian philosopher Giovanni Selva, who would be famous in his own country, did Italians take a deeper interest in theological questions; for Selva is perhaps the truest representative of progressive Catholicism in Italy. Maria had become a Roman Catholic before her marriage. The Selvas spent the winter in Rome, the rest of the year at Subiaco. Noemi, who had remained true to the faith of her fathers, divided her time between Brussels and Italy. Only a month before, at the end of March, at Brussels, death had claimed the old governess, with whom she had lived. Neither Giovanni Selva nor his wife had been able to come to Noemi at this great crisis, for Selva was seriously ill at the time. Jeanne Dessalle, who had become much attached to Noemi, persuaded her brother to undertake the journey to Belgium, a country with which he was hitherto unacquainted, and then offered to take the Selvas’ place in Brussels. It thus happened that towards the end of April Noemi was with the Dessalles at Bruges. They occupied a small villa on the shore of the little mirror of water called “Lac d’Amour.” Carlino had fallen in love with Bruges and especially

with the Lac d'Amour, the name of which he contemplated giving to the novel he dreamed of writing. As yet, however, the novel existed only in his brain, while he lived in the pleasant anticipation of one day astonishing the world with an exquisite and original work of art.

"En tout cas," Noemi replied—"not with all my heart."

"Why?"

"Because I am thinking of giving my heart to another person."

"To whom?"

"To a monk."

Jeanne shuddered, and Noemi, to whom her friend had confided the story of her hopeless love for the man who had disappeared, buried in the hidden solitude of a cloister, trembled lest she had erred in thus lightly introducing a subject with which her mind was much occupied.

"By the way, what about Memling," she said, colouring violently, "we were going to talk about Memling."

She spoke in French, and Jeanne answered gently:

"You know you must speak Italian."

Her eyes were so sad and despairing that Noemi took no notice of her reproof, and continued in French, saying many endearing things, and begging for a loving word and a kiss. Both were willingly bestowed. Noemi did not at once succeed in restoring her friend to her usual calm; but Jeanne, smoothing back Noemi's hair from her brow with both hands, and following the caressing gesture with her eyes, begged her gently not to be afraid that she had wounded her. Sad she was indeed, but that was no new thing. True she was never gay. This Noemi admitted, but to-day the cloud of sorrow seemed heavier than ever. Perhaps it was the fault of l'Intruse. Jeanne said, "Indeed it must be so," but with a look and an accent that implied that

l'Intruse who had made her so sad was not the imaginary being in Maeterlinck's book but the terrible Reaper in person.

"I have had a letter from Italy," she said, after gently waving aside Noemi's pressing inquiries. "Don Giuseppe Flores is dead."

"Flores? Who is he?" Noemi did not remember him, and Jeanne chided her sharply, as if such forgetfulness rendered her unworthy of her position of confidante. Don Giuseppe Flores was the old Venetian priest who had brought a last message from Piero Maironi to Villa Diedo. Jeanne had then believed that his counsels had decided her lover to renounce the world, and, not satisfied with giving him an icy reception, had wounded him with ironical allusions to his supposed attitude, which she pronounced truly worthy of a servant of the Father of infinite mercy. The old man had answered with such clear understanding, in language so solemn and gentle and so full of spiritual wisdom—his fine face glowing with a radiance from above—that she had ended by begging him not only to forgive her, but to visit her from time to time. He had, in fact, come twice, but on neither occasion had she been at home. She had then sought him out In his solitary villa, and of this visit, of this conversation with the old man so lofty of soul, so humble in heart, so ardent in spirit, so modest and reticent, she had retained an ineffaceable memory. He was dead, they wrote. He had passed away, bowing gently and humbly to the Divine Will. Shortly before his death he had dreamed continually during a long night, of the words addressed to the faithful servant in the parable of the talents: "Ecce superlucratus sum alia quinque," and his last words had been: "Non fiat voluntas mea sed tua." Her correspondent was unaware that, in spite of many misgivings, of certain yearning towards religion, Jeanne, stubborn ever, still denied God and immortality as eternal illusions, and if from time to time she went to Mass, it was only to avoid acquiring the undesirable reputation of being a free-thinker.

She did not relate the particulars of Don Giuseppe's death to Noemi, but pondered

them herself with a vague, deeply bitter consciousness of how different her destiny might have been, had she been able to believe; for at the bottom of Piero Maironi's soul there had always lurked a hereditary tendency to religion, and to-day she was convinced that when, on the night of the eclipse, she had confessed her unbelief, she had written her own condemnation in the book of destiny. Then her thoughts dwelt on another painful passage in the letter from Italy which she had not mentioned. But, in spite of her silence, her misery was evident. Noemi pressed her lips to Jeanne's forehead, and letting them rest there in silence, touched by the secret sorrow which accepted her sympathy. Then she slowly drew away from the long embrace as if fearful of severing some delicate thread which bound their two souls together.

"Perhaps that good old man knew where—Do you think he was in communication with ——" she murmured.

Jeanne shook her head in denial. During the September following that sad July, Jeanne's unfortunate husband had died in Venice of delirium tremens. She had gone to the Villa Flores in October, and there in that same garden where the Marchesa Scremin had once laid bare her poor, suffering old heart to Don Giuseppe, had expressed a desire that Piero should be told of her husband's death, should realise that he might henceforth think of her without a shadow of guilt, if indeed he still wished to think of her at all. Don Giuseppe first gently urged her not to abandon herself to this dream, and then avowed to her in all sincerity that no tidings of Piero had reached him since the day of his disappearance.

Fearing other questions, and unwilling any longer to expose her wound to the touch of unskilled fingers, Jeanne sought to change the subject. "Tell me about your monk," she said. But just at that moment Carlino's voice was heard in the hall.

"Not now," replied Noemi. "To-night."

Carlino came in, a white silk muffler round his neck, grumbling at the Lac d'Armour, which he pronounced a huge fraud, which only filled the air with odious,

poisonous, little creatures. “To be sure.” said he, “love itself is no better.” Noemi would not allow him to talk of love. Why should he discuss a subject which he did not understand? Carlino thanked her. He had been on the point of falling in love with her; had greatly feared such a catastrophe. Her words, coming as they did so soon after her appearance in a certain offensive hat, with an ungraceful feather, and after some rather bourgeois expressions of admiration for that poor, tiresome devil Mendelssohn, had saved him à jamais. The two sparred gaily for some time, and, in spite of his poisoned tonsils, Carlino was in such high spirits that Noemi congratulated him on the subject of his novel. “It must be making rapid progress,” she said.

“Nonsense,” answered the author. “It is not progressing at all.” He was making no headway, but was, in fact, floundering hopelessly in the shallows of a desperate situation. Two personages had stuck in the author’s throat, and could move neither up nor down; one fat and good-natured, the other thin and sarcastic, like Mademoiselle d’Arxel. He felt like a certain unfortunate Tuscan peasant, who had lately swallowed a fig with a bee upon it, and had died in consequence. The “bee” understood that he really wanted to talk of his book; she stung him again and again to such a degree that he actually did talk about it. His story was founded on a curious case of spiritual infection. The hero was a French priest, an octogenarian, pious, pure, and learned. French? Why French? Simply because the character must be possessed of a certain tinge of poetic fancy, a certain elasticity of sentiment, and according to Carlino, not one Italian priest in a thousand was likely to possess these exalted attributes. It happened one day that this priest received the confession of a man of great intellect whose faith was assailed by terrible doubts. His confession over, the penitent went his way completely reassured, leaving the confessor shaken in his own faith. Here would follow a long and minute analysis of the different phases through which the old man’s conscience passed. He lived in daily expectation of death with a feeling of dismay akin to that of the schoolboy who

waits his turn for examination in the ante-room, conscious only of his empty head. The priest comes to Bruges. At this point the hostile critic exclaimed:

“To Bruges? Why?”

“Because,” answered Carlino, “I send him wherever I wish. Because at Bruges there is the silence of the ante-chamber of Eternity, and that carillon (which honestly is beginning to exasperate me) may pass for the voices of summoning angels. Finally, because at Bruges there is a dark young lady slight, tall, and whom we may also call intelligent, although she speaks Italian badly, and does not understand music.”

Noemi pursed her lips and wrinkled her nose.

“What nonsense,” she said.

Carlino continued, saying he did not yet know how, but in some way or another the brunette would become the penitent of the old priest. Noemi protested, laughing. How? The girl could not be herself. A heretic go to Confession? Carlino shrugged his shoulders, One Comedy of Errors more or less, what did it matter? Protestantism and Roman Catholicism were, after all, much the same thing. The priest would then regain his old faith through contact with the simple, steadfast belief of the girl. Here Carlino interrupted his story, avowing, in parenthesis, that he really did not know what kind of belief Noemi held. She flushed, and replied that she was a Protestant. Protestant, certainly; but a Protestant pure and simple? Noemi lost her patience. “I am a Protestant, that is enough,” she exclaimed; “and you need not trouble yourself about my faith.”

Noemi was, in fact, true to her own faith, not so much from conviction as from her reverent affection for the memory of her parents; and in her heart she had disapproved of her sister’s conversion.

Carlino continued. A mystic, sexual influence induced the old man to seek for a union of souls with the girl. “What rubbish!” said Noemi, with her familiar pout. Carlino went on unmoved. The most subtle, the most exquisite part of his book was

the analysis of this recondite influence of sex operating alike on the old priest and the girl.

“Carlino,” exclaimed Jeanne, “what are you thinking of? An old man of eighty!” Carlino looked up as though he would exclaim to some superior, invisible friend, “How dense they are!”

He had even thought of making his hero older still—say ninety; of creating a sort of intermediary being between man and spirit, who should have in his eyes the nebulous depths of the fast approaching things of eternity. And the girl should have in her blood that mysterious inclination towards old men, not unusual in her sex, which is the truest mark of real feminine nobility, and by which the woman is differentiated from the female. Carlino had in his mind some inspired thoughts to which he would give utterance, concerning this mystic sense which attracts the girl of four and twenty to the man of ninety; a priest, on the verge of the grave, but upheld by an indomitable spirit—unconquered as often happens by the ravages of time. But how is all this to end? Neither Noemi nor Jeanne could imagine. Well, Carlino had said from the first that the fig and the bee could neither get up nor down. One consolation, however, there was—the idea that a book must have a fitting end was a mere vulgar prejudice. What is there in the world that really has an end? That is all very well, said the girls, but the book must certainly have some ending. The last scene, one of ineffable beauty, should describe a walk at night and by moonlight through the streets of Bruges, when the souls of the priest and the maiden should be revealed to one another, and they should commune half as lovers, half dreaming like prophets. The two should find themselves at midnight beside the sleeping waters of the Lac d’Amour, listening in silence to the weird notes of the carillon under the clouds, and then should come to them the vague revelation of a sexuality of their souls, of a future of love in the star Fomalhaut.

“But why especially in Fomalhaut?” exclaimed Noemi.

“You are really intolerable,” answered Carlino. “Because the name is so delightful, it has the ring of a word congealed by German frost and then melted by the Eastern sun.”

“Nonsense! You are talking chemistry! I prefer Algol.”

“You and your pastor may go to Algol.”

Noemi laughed, and Carlino appealed to Jeanne. Which star would she prefer? Jeanne did not know; she had not been listening. Carlino was greatly annoyed; he seemed to want to reprove her, not so much for her inattention, as for the hidden thoughts which had caused it; and then, fearing to say too much, he sent her away to meditate, to dream, to write the philosophy of smoke and clouds. But when she, not in the least annoyed, was about to leave the room, he called her back to inquire whether she had heard how his novel was to end. Yes! she had heard; a moonlight walk of the hero and heroine through the streets of Bruges.

“Well,” said Carlino, “as there will be a moon to-night, I should like to walk with you and Noemi from ten to twelve and take some notes.”

“Shall I dress myself as a priest?” asked Jeanne as she went out. Noemi wished to follow her, but Jeanne herself begged her to remain. She stayed behind to tell Carlino that he was unworthy of such a sister. Carlino went to the music portfolio to search for a small volume of Bach, grumbling the while that she knew nothing—absolutely nothing. They kept up their skirmish for some time, Bach himself failing to soothe their ruffled feelings, and even while playing they continued joking, first concerning Jeanne, and then about one another’s false notes. At last, however, the clear stream of sound, which had been ruffled by the eddies of their angry outbursts, conquered their ill-humour, and flowed on smoothly, reflecting the heavens and idyllic banks. Jeanne carried “l’Intruse” to her room, but did not continue her reading. The room looked out on the Lac d’Amour. She sat down by the window. Beyond the bridge, beyond the rolling hilltops—destitute of

trees—which loomed between intervening houses, she could see the summit of a lofty tower, shrouded fantastically in azure mists. She heard the continuous peaceful flow of Bach, and thought of Don Giuseppe with that feeling of melancholy which we experience when we catch a last glimpse of some beloved home, turning at every step to look back until at length some bend in the road hides the last corner, the last window from sight. There was an element of anxiety in Jeanne's grief. The letter told her that among the papers of the dead man, a sealed packet had been found with the following superscription In Don Giuseppe's hand: "To be consigned by my executor to Monsignor the Bishop." The order had been executed, and according to a rumour coming straight from the Episcopal Palace, the packet contained a letter from Don Giuseppe to the Bishop, and a sealed envelope bearing in another hand the words: "To be opened after Piero Maironi's death." The Bishop was reported to have said: "Let us hope that Piero Malroni, of whose abode we are ignorant, may reappear to let us know of his death."

Jeanne was unaware that previous to the night when he fled from home, leaving no trace, Piero had entrusted to Don Giuseppe a written account of a vision of his own life in the future and his death; a vision of which she was ignorant, and which had come to Piero in the little church adjoining the asylum where his wife lay dying. What did that sealed envelope contain? Surely something he himself had written; but what? A confession, probably of his sins. The conception of such an action, the manner in which it had been carried out, would be in harmony with his innate mysticism, with the predominance in him of imagination over reason, with his intellectual physiognomy. Three years had passed since the day at Vena di Fonte Alta, when Jeanne in despair had sworn to herself to love Piero no longer, feeling that henceforward she could love nothing else in the world. Nevertheless she always loved him; still, as in the past, she judged him with her intellect independent of her heart, an independence dear to her pride. She judged him with severity in all his actions, all his attitudes, from the moment when he had conquered her by sheer

strength in the monastery of Praglia to the moment when their lips had met near the basin of the Acqua Barbarena. He had shown himself incapable of loving, incapable of decisive action, irresolute, effeminate in the instability of his mind. Yes, he had been effeminate until the last; effeminate, unfit to form any virile judgment of his own hysterical mysticism. In this judgment there was perhaps an imperfect sincerity, an excess of bitterness, a futile act of rebellion against this all-powerful, invincible love.

If he had actually become a monk, Jeanne foresaw that he would regret it. He was too sensual. The first period of sorrow and fervour passed, his sensuality would reawaken, and lead him to rebel against a faith that appeals rather to the sentiments and habits of youth than to the intellect. But had he really become a monk? Jeanne imagined that the colossal tower of Notre Dame, with its slender spire piercing the sky, the gloomy walls of the Béguinage, the poor stagnant Lac d'Amour, and even the solemn silence of the dead city, answered "Yes." But it would be superstitious to hearken to their voices.

"Where are we going?" asked Jeanne, at ten o'clock, putting on her gloves, while Carlino, who had given Noemi an end of his interminable muffler to hold, the other being fastened behind his neck, revolved like a spindle on its axis, until his neck was bigger in circumference than his head. "And am I really to be the priest of ninety?"

Carlino was annoyed because Noemi laughed, and did not hold the scarf tight enough.

"You or she, no matter which," he answered, when Noemi, having fastened the muffler with a pin, at last set the swathed novelist at liberty. "Go wherever you like, provided you go towards the centre of the town, and return by the other side of the Lac d'Amour, and talk of something that interests you particularly."

"With you present?" said Noemi. "How can that be possible?"

Carlino explained that he would not walk with them, but would follow, note-book

and pencil in hand. They would be obliged to halt from time to time according to his pleasure, and must be prepared to obey any other orders he might see fit to issue. “Very well,” said Noemi, “first let us go to the Quai du Rosaire to see the swans.”

They set forth in the direction of Notre Dame. Carlino twenty yards behind his sister and Noemi. At first a lively altercation was kept up through the deserted streets between the van and rearguard. The vanguard walked too fast, and Carlino shouted: “At ninety? at ninety?” or they laughed, and Carlino exclaimed: “What are you laughing at? Hush!” or stopped to gaze at an ancient church, its gables, and pinnacles looming weird in the moonlight, the cemetery nestling close by; Carlino, again interrupting, would beg them to talk, converse, gesticulate. “Don’t stare into space,” said he. A mutiny broke out in the vanguard, Noemi being the more petulant. She turned on the Dyver, and stamping her foot, protested that she would go home if this most tiresome novelist in a muffler did not cease ordering and complaining. Jeanne then whispered:

“Tell me about your monk.” “The monk, oh yes,” answered Noemi, and called to Carlino that they would try to satisfy him, but that he must keep farther off.

From the Quai du Rosaire the swans were no longer visible. Noemi had watched them in the morning, disporting themselves on the water, blurring with their stately movements the still reflection of that pile of houses and cottages that raise their long, big-eared faces out of the water, like weird, glutted beasts, staring stupidly, some in one direction, some in another, all herded together by the dominating tower of the Halles. The moon shone across the houses, throwing shadows on some glorifying roof-tree and pinnacle, the peaked cap of a Chaldean magician which crowned a little turret, and above it all, stood out the sublime octagonal diadem of the mighty tower. But no beam fell on the dark waters. Nevertheless Jeanne and Noerni leaned for some time against the parapet, gazing into the gloomy depths; Noemi talked incessantly. They lingered so long that Carlino had time to fill three or

four pages of his note-book, and to sketch the frieze with which an ambitious Bruges merchant had adorned his house, even introducing the memorable date 1716, the year in which the sun, the moon, and the stars had first beheld it.

The monk, said Noemi, was a Benedictine, by name Don Clemente, belonging to the monastery of Santa Scolastica at Subiaco. He was an acquaintance of the Selvas, and Giovanni had first met him near some ruins on the path leading to Spello, and after having inquired the way, had entered into conversation with him. He looked little over thirty, and was of refined manner and bearing. They began to talk of the ruins; the conversation then drifted on to monasteries and monastic rules, and finally to religion. The very voice of the Benedictine seemed to breathe an odour of sanctity; nevertheless it was evident at the same time that his was a mind that hungered after knowledge and modern thought. They had parted with a mutual desire for, and the promise of, another meeting. The atmosphere surrounding the youthful monk, whose face seemed illumined by the beauty of his soul, was a stimulus to Giovanni, and the Benedictine had felt the fascination of his companion’s religious culture, and of the horizons of thought which this brief conversation had opened up to his faith, eager for rational light. Giovanni had heard them speak, at Subiaco, of a young man of noble birth who had taken the habit of the Benedictines at Santa Scolastica after the death of the woman he loved. He had no doubt that this was he. He had questioned other monks about him without gaining any information; but he and Don Clemente had since met repeatedly and had had long talks together. Giovanni had lent the young man books, and Don Clemente had been to Selva’s house and made Maria’s acquaintance. He had shown himself a musician, and had once played a Psalm of the Dawn to them, which he had composed for organ and voices after having heard Giovanni liken the sun in its slow progress from the first mist-enveloped gleam to the triumphal glory of noonday, to the manifestation of God, as displayed in the lightning-torn cloud on the rocky summit of Sinai, to the triumphal glory—not even yet perfectly developed—in the mind of man. On another occasion Giovanni

propounded a question to him which he had already discussed with Noemi; whether, on leaving this world, human souls at once acquire knowledge of their future destiny, Don Clemente's answer had been, that after death—

At this point in Noemi's narrative, Carlino inquired whether he should set up three tents that they might pass the night on the spot? His sister and Noemi aroused themselves and started in the direction of the Rue des Laines. "The answer," continued Noemi, "was, that probably human souls found themselves in a state and in surroundings regulated, as in this life, by natural laws; where, as also in this life, the future can be divined only by indications, and without certainty."

A wayfarer, whom they met at the entrance of the narrow, dark street, turned back, and on passing the ladies, scrutinised them closely. Jeanne pretended to be afraid of the man; she stopped, and calling Carlino, proposed to return home. Her voice really sounded different, but Carlino could not believe she was afraid. Afraid of what? Did she not see there before them only a few steps away, the lights of the Grande Place? Moreover he knew the man, and was going to put him into his book. He was the brother of the swan-necked Edith, a spirit of darkness, condemned to wander at night in the streets of Bruges, as a penance for having attempted to seduce St. Gunhild, sister of King Harold. Each time that Carlino had ventured at night into the more lonely parts of Bruges he had seen this sinister figure, wandering, as it seemed, aimlessly.

"That is a nice way to reassure people," said Noemi.

Carlino shrugged his shoulders, and declared the meeting to have been most fortunate, since it had suggested the name of Gunhild for his heroine, Noemi being that of a mother-in-law.

In the black shadow of the enormous Halles, towering on the right of the street, the sinister-looking man, who had retraced his steps, almost brushed Jeanne's side in passing, and this time she really shuddered. At this moment, however, the

innumerable bells rang out amid the clouds above her head.

She pressed Noemi's arm convulsively without speaking. In silence they crossed the square. Carlino directed them to take a lonely street on the left, brightly illumined by the moon, which hung just above the dark, serrated house-tops. Jeanne whispered to her companion:

"Let us make haste and get home quickly."

But Carlino, hearing the sound of dance-music issuing from the Hôtel de Flandre, ordered them to stop and began writing in his note-book. Noemi was saying something about the Hôtel de Flandre, where she had stayed some years before, when Jeanne suddenly interrupted her:

"Did Maria write you that long story?"

Noemi answered, apprehensive rather than surprised.

"Yes, it was Maria."

"I do not understand," replied Jeanne, "why she should have taken all that trouble."

Noemi did not answer. Jeanne shook her arm which she still held. "Will you not speak? What do you think?"

Although both now were silent, they did not hear Carlino call to them to turn to the left. He came up angrily, and taking them by the shoulders, turned them, fuming the while, in another direction. They obeyed without noticing his voice or manner.

"Will you not answer?" Jeanne repeated, half aggrieved and half amazed.

Noemi in her turn pressed her friend's arm.

"Wait until we get home," she said.

Carlino shouted.

"Stop under those trees."

But Jeanne, having reached an open space filled with small trees and bathed in

moonlight, under the great wall of the ancient cathedral, stopped at once, and stretching out her arm, which had rested on Noemi's, seized her friend's hand and said, trembling with agitation:

"Noemi, answer me at once; have you told your sister anything?"

Carlino called to them to stop there if they liked, but to pretend to be engaged in an interesting conversation.

Noemi answered her friend with a "yes" so timid and soft that Jeanne understood all. Maria Selva believed that her monk, this Don Clemente, was Piero Maironi.

"Oh, God!" she exclaimed, tightly pressing Noemi's hand. "But did she really say so?"

"Say what?"

"What indeed!"

Good heavens! How difficult it was to make the girl speak out. Jeanne freed herself from her, but Noemi, alarmed, at once seized her arm again.

"Capital!" cried Carlino. "But don't overdo it."

"Forgive me," Noemi pleaded. "It is only a supposition after all; only a conjecture. She herself says so."

"No," Jeanne burst out, sweeping away doubt and conjecture. "No, it is not he, it is not possible. He was never a musician."

"No, no, it is not he, it is not," Noemi hastened to reassure her, speaking under her breath, for Carlino was approaching. He came, praised their acting, and expressed a desire that they should move on slowly among the trees.

In the shadow of the trees Jeanne complained almost indignantly, that her friend had waited until then to make such a disclosure; she ought to have spoken sooner, and at home. And once more she protested that this Benedictine monk could not be Maironi, because Maironi had never been a musician. Noemi tried to justify herself.

She had intended to speak on her return from the Hospital of St. John, from the visit to Memling, but Jeanne had been so sad! Still she would have spoken had Carlino not come in. And now while they had been walking she had not known how to parry Jeanne's questions. If, when they were standing near the Hôtel de Flandre, Jeanne had not returned to the subject, she would not have referred to it again; and she, Noemi, would not have made her disclosure until they reached home.

"And your sister really believes?" said Jeanne.

Well, Maria was in doubt. It would seem that Giovanni was the more certain. Giovanni was sure; at least Maria said so in her letter. At receiving this reply Jeanne flared up. How could he be sure? what did he know about it? Maironi could not play a single chord on the piano. Good grounds for certainty indeed! Noemi observed submissively that he might have learned in three years; that the monks had their reasons for training brothers to play the organ.

"Then you believe it too?" exclaimed Jeanne. Noemi stammered "I do not know" so hesitatingly that Jeanne, in great agitation, declared she must leave at once for Subiaco, that she must know the truth. She had already promised Maria Selva to bring her sister back. She would find some means of persuading Carlino to start immediately. Noemi was frightened. For her own peace of mind, as well as for Don Clemente's, her brother-in-law would not wish Jeanne Dessalle to return to Subiaco. It was Noemi's mission to convince her of the propriety of such a renunciation. Selva was restored to health, and had himself offered to come and meet his sister-in-law, would even come to Belgium, were it necessary. She now tried to oppose the idea of immediate departure; but only succeeded in irritating Jeanne, who repeatedly protested that the Selvas were mistaken, but was unable to give any other reason for her violent resistance. Carlino, having caught a sharp "That is enough" uttered by his sister, drew nearer. Were they quarrelling, the priest and the girl? Now, when the mystical tenderness ought to begin? "Do leave us alone," said

Noemi. “By this time your old priest of ninety would be dead ten times over of fatigue. Don’t give us any more orders. I will lead the way. I know Bruges better than you, and you keep a hundred paces behind.” Carlino could find nothing to say but “Oh, oh—oh, oh—oh, oh!” and Noemi carried Jeanne off with her, following the railing of the little cemetery of Saint-Sauveur. It seemed the right moment for her final revelation.

“I really believe Giovanni is right, you know,” said she. “This Don Clemente comes from Brescia.”

Jeanne, overcome by an excess of misery, threw her arms round her friend’s neck and burst into tears. Noemi, dismayed, implored her to calm herself.

“For God’s sake, Jeanne!”

Between her sobs, she asked Noemi whether Carlino knew. Oh, no, but what would he think now?

“He cannot see us here,” sobbed Jeanne. They were in the shadow of the church. Noemi was surprised that Jeanne, in spite of her emotion, had noticed the fact.

“For mercy’s sake, do not let him find out. For mercy’s sake!”

Noemi promised to be silent. Jeanne grew calmer little by little, and was the first to move. Oh, to be alone! Alone in her own room! The sight of the tower of Notre Dame piercing the sky with its pointed spire hurt her, like the sight of some victorious and implacable foe. She now saw clearly that for three years she had been deceiving herself in thinking that she no longer hoped. This hope which she had thought dead, how it still struggled and suffered, how it persisted in assailing her heart. No, no, he has not become a monk, it is not he! In an access of longing, she pressed Noemi’s arm. The reassuring voice was growing weaker, was fading away. Probably it was he, probably all was really over for ever. The silence of the night, the sadness of the moon, the gloom of the dead streets, an icy breeze which had sprung up, were in harmony with her thoughts.

Just a little beyond Notre Dame they again saw the sinister-looking wayfarer gliding along close to the wall, on the dark side of the street. Noemi hastened her steps, herself anxious to reach home. Carlino, perceiving that his companions were going straight to the villa instead of crossing the bridge, which leads to the opposite shore of the Lac d'Amour, protested loudly. How was this? What about the last scene? Had they forgotten? Noemi showed signs of rebellion, but Jeanne, fearing lest Carlino should discover aught of her secret, begged her to yield.

"Stop a minute or two on the bridge," Carlino called out.

They leaned against the parapet, gazing into the oval mirror of motionless water. The moon was hidden behind the clouds.

"This absence of the moon is perfect for me," said Carlino. "But now I would give half my future glory if a little window could be opened in the clouds with a tiny star shining in the middle and reflected in the water. You cannot imagine what a success this last chapter is going to be. Listen, on the Quai de Rosaire you looked at the swans."

"But they were not there," said Noemi, interrupting him.

"Never mind," Carlino went on. "You looked at the swans in the moonlight."

"But the moon did not touch the water," retorted Noemi.

"What does it matter?" replied Carlino, vexed. Noemi, having observed that in that case it was useless to drag them about Bruges at such an hour, he poetically compared his preparatory study, his almost photographic notes, to the garlic which is useful in the kitchen, but is not brought to table, and he continued to talk of the swans and the moon.

"You compared the living purity with the dead purity. The old priest utters this exquisite sentiment, that perhaps the living whiteness of the girl's soul irradiates his thoughts, bleached, like his hair, by approaching death, while he now feels in his soul the dawn of a warm purity. Then he murmurs to himself almost involuntarily:

‘Abishag.’ The girl asks: ‘Who is Abishag?’ because she is ignorant like you two, who do not know Abishag, my first love. The priest does not answer, but proceeds with the girl down the Rue des Laines. She asks again who may be Abishag, and still the old man is silent. Then appears that horrible black shadow, which comes and goes and at last vanishes at the sound of the twenty-four bells.”

“That is not correct,” murmured Noemi. Carlino was on the point of saying, “Stupid!”

“The priest,” he continued, “likens the black shadow to an evil spirit, which comes and goes round pure spirits (you do not understand the connection, but there is a connection), eager to enter into them, to dwell in them, he, with others worse than himself. Then—and here I have not yet found the connection, but I shall find it—they are led to talk of love. You have crossed the Grande Place. To-night there was no music, but usually there is, and we will suppose that many amorous glances are exchanged, as is everywhere the case. The old tower and the old priest show a certain indulgence; the maiden, on the contrary, finds this phase of love stupid. She scorns it. It is the love of the world, says the priest; and here is the Hôtel de Flandre and the wedding dance-music.”

“What?” exclaimed Noemi. “Was there really a wedding dance?”

Carlino shrugged his shoulders and clenched his fists, gasping with impatience. After a deep sigh he continued:

“The girl asks, ‘But is there a heavenly love?’ It was then I told you to stop under the trees of Saint-Sauveur, and you, instead, stopped at the entrance to the square. It makes no difference; the cathedral was in sight, and that is enough. The priest answers: ‘Yes, there is a heavenly love,’ The majesty of the ancient cathedral, of the night, of the silence, inspires him. He speaks, I cannot now repeat his discourse, it is rather confused in my mind; but at any rate the essence of it is this, that even heavenly love has its birth, but never reaches maturity on earth. The old man almost

allows himself to be led into making a confession. With, bursting heart and burning tongue he does confess to not having felt any inclination towards individuals nor indeed any inclination which could cause him shame, but an intellectual and moral aspiration to unite himself with some incorporeal feminine spirit, that should belong completely to his incorporeal being, at the same time remaining sufficiently distant from it, to admit of the intervention of love between the two."

"Gracious!" murmured Noemi. Carlino was so excited, that he did not hear her.

"The old man," said he, "seems to perceive in this union a human trinity similar to the Divine Trinity, and therefore finds it just, finds it a holy thing, that man should aspire to it. At last he is silent, overcome by the things he has said; and walks towards Notre Dame. The maiden takes his arm. Here behold the evil one, the spirit of temptation. You yourselves have seen him! Tell me now, is not all this well thought out, is it not well arranged? The old man and the girl flee from the evil spirit, but like the sky, so their hearts grow dark. Now I need the little window in the clouds, with the tiny star in the centre. The old priest and the girl should silently watch the star quivering in the Lac d'Amour, and many secret workings of their minds should culminate in this idea; perhaps, beyond the clouds of the earth, there in that distant world!"

Jeanne had not spoken a single word, nor shown in any way that she was listening to her brother's story. Leaning over the parapet, she looked into the dark water. At this point she started impetuously.

"But surely you do not believe this," she exclaimed. "You know that these are delusions—dreams. You would never wish me to believe such things. You would be the first to drive me away from you if I did."

"No," protested Carlino.

"Yes! And for the sake of producing something beautiful in literature you, also, take to nurturing these dreams, which are already enervating humanity to such a degree,

already diverting people from the actualities of life! I do not like it at all. An unbeliever like you! One who is convinced, as I myself am convinced, that we are merely soap-bubbles which sparkle for a moment, and then return not into nothing, but into everything!"

"I, convinced?" answered Carlino, in astonishment. "I am not convinced of anything. I am a doubter. It is my system; you know that. If now some one were to tell me that the true religion was that of the Kaffirs, or that of the Redskins, I should say, It may well be! I do not know them, I see the falsity of those I do know, and for that reason I should certainly not wish you to become a believing Catholic. As to driving you from home—"

"Perhaps I had better leave before being driven away?"

So saying, Jeanne took Noemi's arm. Carlino begged them to walk round the Lac d'Amour. Who knows, perhaps the little window in heaven would open. He wished it would. Noemi, recalling the conversation of a few hours before, expressed a doubt that Fomalhaut would be the star to appear at the window.

"To be sure," said Carlino thoughtfully. "I had forgotten Fomalhaut. If it is not Fomalhaut now, it will be Fomalhaut then."

But Noemi had other difficulties to suggest. What if no star appeared at the window, either large or small? For this difficulty Carlino promptly found a remedy. The star will be there. It may be minute, lost in an immense profundity, but it will be there. The girl does not see it, but the priest sees it with the long-sightedness of decrepitude. Later, through faith, the girl discerns it also.

"And so the poor girl," said Jeanne bitterly, "relying on the faith of an old, dim-sighted priest, will see stars where there are none, will lose her common-sense, her youth, her life, her all. I suppose you will end by having her buried at the Béguinage?"

And she went on with Noemi without waiting for an answer.

They had now walked round the Lac d'Amour, and the two friends paused for some time on the other bridge. But no little window opened in the heavens. The great distant tower of the Halles, the enormous campanile of Notre Dame, a squat tower near the pond, the pointed roofs of the Béguinage stood outlined against the milky clouds, like a venerable assembly of old men. Carlino, not knowing what better to do, began discoursing in a loud voice on the most appropriate position for his window.

"What day is this?" Jeanne asked her friend under her breath.

"Saturday."

"To-morrow I will speak to Carlino, Monday and Tuesday we will settle our affairs, Wednesday we will pack our boxes, and Thursday we will start. You can write to your sister that we shall be at Subiaco the week after next."

"Don't decide so suddenly. Think about it."

"I have decided. I must know. If it is he, I will not be a hindrance in his path. But I wish to see him." "We will talk it over again to morrow, Jeanne. Do not decide yet."

"I have thought it over, and I have made up my mind."

Midnight sounded from the great tower of the Halles. High up in the clouds rang out the long solemn melancholy song of the innumerable bells. Noemi, who had intended to have her own way, was silent, her heart full of despondency. It was as if those melancholy voices from the darkening sky were proclaiming her friend's destiny; a destiny of love and suffering, which must be accomplished.

CHAPTER II. DON CLEMENTE

The light was fading in Giovanni Selva's study, and on the little table covered with books and papers. Giovanni rose and opened the west window. The horizon was on fire behind Subiaco, along the oblique line of the Sabine hills, which stretch from

Rocca di Canterano and Rocca di Mezzo to Rocca San Stefano. Subiaco, that pointed pile of houses large and small which culminates in the Rocca del Cardinale, was veiled in shadow; not a branch stirred on the olives clustered behind the small, red villa with green blinds, rising on the summit of the circular cliff, round whose base winds the public road; not a branch stirred on the great oak beside it, overhanging the little ancient oratory of Santa Maria della Febbre. The air, laden with the odours of wild herbs and recent rain, came fresh from Monte Calvo. It was a quarter past seven. In the shell-shaped tract watered by the Anio the bells were ringing; first the big bell of Sant' Andrea, then the querulous bells of Santa Maria della Valle; high up on the right, from the little white church near the great wood, the bells of the Capuchins, and others in the far-away distance. A woman's voice, submissive and sweet, the voice of five and twenty, came from the half-open, door behind Giovanni, saying almost timidly In French:

"May I come in?"

Giovanni, smiling, turned half round, and stretching out his arm, encircled the young woman pressing her to his side without answering.

She felt she must not speak; that her husband's soul was following the dying night, and the mystic song of the bells. She rested her head on his shoulder, and only after a moment of religious silence did she ask softly;

"Shall we say our prayer?"

A pressure of the arm encircling her was the answer. Neither her lips nor his moved. Only the eyes of both dilated, straining towards the Infinite, and assumed that look of reverence and sadness which mirrors the thoughts that remain unspoken, the uncertain future, the dark portals which lead to God. The bells became silent, and Signora Selva, fixing her blue eyes on her husband's eager gaze, offered him her lips. The man's snowy head and the woman's fair face met in a long kiss which would have filled the world with astonishment. Maria d'Arxel, at one and twenty,

had fallen In love with Giovanni Selva after having read one of his books on religious philosophy, translated into French. She wrote to the unknown author in such ardent words of admiration, that Selva, in answering, alluded to his fifty-six years and his white hair. The girl replied that she was aware of both, that she neither offered nor asked for love, she only craved a few lines from time to time. Her letters sparkled with brilliant intellect. They came to Selva when he was passing through a dark crisis, a bitter struggle, which need not be related here. He thought this Maria d'Arxel might prove his saving star. He wrote to her again.

"Do you know what anniversary this is?" asked Maria. "Do you remember?"

Giovanni remembered; it was the anniversary of their first meeting. During the correspondence the two had bared the very depths of their souls to one another in an inexpressible fervour of sincerity, while as yet unacquainted save by means of portraits. After they had exchanged four or five letters, Giovanni asked his unknown correspondent for her likeness; a request she had expected and dreaded. The girl consented on condition of a speedy restitution of the photograph, and was in agony until it was returned, accompanied by some very tender words from her friend. He was charmed with the intellectual, passionate, and youthful face, with the sweetness of the great eyes, with the symmetry of the figure. Then when they had arranged to meet, he coming from the Lake of Como, she from Brussels to Hergyswyl near Lucerne, both had been in a fever of apprehension. She reflected:

"The portrait pleased him, but the bearing of the real person, a line, the colour of the garments, the manner of meeting, the first words, the tone of voice, may perhaps destroy his love at one blow."

He thought:

"She knows my face, ravaged by time, my white hair, and she loves them in the picture, but I am ageing day by day; perhaps when she sees me this incredible love will be killed at a blow."

He had reached Hergyswyl by boat some hours before her; she, leaving Basel in the morning, arrived by the Brünigbahn in the afternoon.

“Do you know,” Maria continued, “when I did not see you at the station, my first sensation was one of relief; I trembled so! The second sensation was different, was one of fright.”

Giovanni smiled,

“You never told me that,” said he.

The young wife looked up at him and smiled in her turn.

“Perhaps you yourself have never told me quite everything about those moments.”

Giovanni placed his hands on her shoulders and whispered in her ear:

“That is true.”

She started, and then laughed at herself for starting, and Giovanni laughed with her.

“What, what?” she cried, her face aglow, vexed but still laughing. Her husband whispered again, in a tone of great mystery:

“That your hat was in disorder!”

“Oh, that is not true! Really not true!”

Sparkling with mirth, and at the same time trembling at the idea of the great danger she had encountered unawares, she protested that it was impossible; she had looked in the mirror of her nécessaire so many times before reaching Hergyswyl.

Every moment of that hour passed two years before, they recalled together jestingly; she often kissing his breast, and he her hair. Giovanni had not waited for her at the station, where there was a crowd of holiday-makers, but a few yards distant, on the road leading to the hotel. He had seen her coming, tall, slender, with a tiny sprig of Olea fragrans, the sign they had chosen, at her breast. He had approached her, his head bared, and they had pressed one another’s hands in silence. He had signed to the porter, who was following with her travelling bag, to precede them. They had

followed slowly, their throats contracted by a nameless emotion. She had been the first to murmur, in her sweet refined voice: “Mon ami.”

Then he had spoken in subdued tones, in broken sentences, of his infatuation, of his love, of his ecstasy, and had not noticed when they passed the hotel. Twice the porter called after them:

“Monsieur! Madame! C’est ici!” and neither had heard. Then the girl had gone to her room smiling, but pale with fatigue, and with aching head. Giovanni went out again to wander among the level gardens and orchards of Hergyswyl, breathing hard like a man exhausted by excess of feeling, blessing every stone and every leaf of this verdant corner of a foreign land, the lake, sleeping in its bosom, the crowd of great religious mountains; blessing God, who at his time of life had sent him such a love. And he had returned soon, too soon, to the hotel. The only other guests there on that May day, an old German professor and his daughter, had gone up Mount Pilatus. There was no one in the little reading-room. In that reading-room Maria and Giovanni had spent two happy hours, hand in hand, talking with hushed voices, often trembling in fear lest some one should come in.

“Do you remember,” said Maria, “that there was a fireplace in the room, near the sofa where we sat?”

“Yes, dear.”

“And that it was cold, although it was May; so cold that the waiter came in to light the fire?”

“Yes, and it was then I made you cry.”

“Could you repeat those same words to-day?”

“Oh, no!”

So saying, Giovanni kissed his wife’s white forehead reverently, as if it were a holy thing. When the waiter came in to light the fire in the little salon at Hergyswyl,

Giovanni had dropped the beloved hand, and had said, while the servant still lingered:

“The old log will surely burn on to the end, but who can tell how long the youthful flame will last?” Maria had not answered, but had looked at him, her eyes dilating, and dimmed by the cold touch of the unjust suspicion, as the glass of a hothouse is dimmed by the touch of a frost outside.

No, Giovanni had never again harboured such a thought. He and Maria often said to each other that perhaps there was no other union on earth like theirs, so penetrated with, so full of peace derived from the solemnly sweet and grave certainty that, no matter how God might order their existence after death, their spirits would surely be united in the love of the Divine Will. Nevertheless, they did not neglect to lay the desire of their souls before the Almighty. The prayer they had just prayed together, both wrapt in inward contemplation, had been composed by Giovanni, and ran as follows:

“Father, let it be with us as Jesus prayed that last night; life with Him in Thee, for all eternity.”

Even in the present they were two in one, in the narrowest, the most accurate sense of the phrase, for their duality was also perceptible in their spiritual union; as, when a green current mingles with a blue current, it sometimes happens, at the beginning of their united course, that broken waves flash here and there—some the colour of the woods, some as blue as the sky. Giovanni was a mystic, who harmonised all human affections with Divine love, in his heart. His wife, who had come through him from Protestantism to a Catholicism thirsting for reason, had entered into his mystic soul as far as was possible; but love for Giovanni predominated in her over every other sentiment. She was rich and he comfortably off, but they lived almost poorly, that they might have greater means for their broad charities. They lived in Rome in the winter, in Subiaco from April to November, in the modest villa of

which they had hired the second floor. Only on books and on their correspondence did they spend freely. Giovanni was preparing a work on reason in Christian morality. His wife read for him, made extracts, took notes.

“I should so much like to go to Hergyswyl next summer,” said she, “that you might write the last chapter of the book there, the chapter on Purity!”

So saying, she clasped her hands, happy in the vision of the little village, nestling among the apple trees at the head of the tiny bay, the calm lake, the great religious mountains, the quiet days, spent in work and peaceful contemplation. She was acquainted with the entire plan of her husband’s work, with the subject of each chapter, with the principal arguments.

The chapter on Purity was her favourite because of its rational trend. In it her husband intended to propose and to solve the following problem: “Why does Christianity exalt, as an element of human perfection, that renunciation which subjects man to fierce struggles, is of no benefit to any one, and closes the door of existence to possible human lives?” The answer was to be deduced from, the study of the moral phenomenon in its historical origins, and its development; to this study the first two chapters of the work were dedicated. Selva showed by the example of the brutes, who sacrifice themselves for their young, or for companions of their own kind, and are sometimes capable of strictly monogamous unions, that in inferior animal nature the moral instinct becomes manifest and develops in proportion as the carnal instinct diminishes. He maintained the hypothesis that the human conscience was thus being progressively developed in the inferior species. He now proposed to return to this conclusion, and to lay down the general principle that the renunciation of carnal pleasures for a satisfaction of a higher order signifies the striving of the species towards a superior form of existence. He would then examine the exceptional cases of individuals who, with no other end in view than that of honouring the Divinity, oppose to the carnal instincts—greatly stimulated in them by

intellect and sensual imagination—a still stronger instinct of renunciation. He would show that many creeds furnish such examples and extol renunciation, but that It must, however, always remain a spontaneous action on the part of the individual. He was willing to admit that it would be both a blameworthy and foolish action, did it not correspond to a mysterious impulse of Nature herself—to that so-called spiritual element—which persists in its eternal antagonism to the carnal instinct, in obedience to a cosmic law. Unconscious collaborators of Him who governs the universe, these heroes of supreme renunciation imagine that only through their sacrifice are they honouring Him, while in reality they incarnate, according to the Divine design, the progressive energy of the species, strengthening their own spiritual element, that it may have the power to create for itself a superior corporeal form, more in the likeness of the Master; thus their purity is human perfection, is the elevation on which our human nature culminates, and touches the nebulous beginnings of an unknown superhuman nature.

“When I think of incarnate purity,” said Giovanni, “I see! Don Clemente before me. Did I tell you he is coming to the meeting to-night? He will come down directly after supper.”

Maria started. “Oh!” said she, “I almost forgot to tell you Noemi has written to me. She was to leave Milan yesterday with the Dessalles, They are going to stay in Rome a day or two, and then they are coming here.”

“You recalled this because I mentioned Don Clemente,” said Giovanni smiling. “Yes,” replied his wife; “nevertheless, you know I do not believe.”

How could Don Clemente’s lofty forehead, his blue eyes, so serene and pure, have known passion? In the soft, submissive, almost timid voice of the young Benedictine there was—to Maria’s mind—a chastity too delicate, a purity too virginal.

“You do not believe,” Giovanni answered, “and perhaps, after all, you are right; perhaps, after all, he is not Maironi. Still it will be better to let him know to-night, in

some way, that Signora Dessalle is coming to Subiaco, and that she will, of course, visit the convents. Especially as he would be obliged to accompany her, being the Father who receives visitors."

There could be no doubt about this. Maria herself would warn him. As she did not believe him to have been Jeanne's lover it would be easier for her to speak naturally to him of her. But what a terrible thing it would be if he really were Maironi, and if they should meet face to face, quite unprepared, in front of the monastery, he and the woman! Was Giovanni quite sure the monk was coming to the meeting? Yes, quite sure. Don Clemente had obtained the abbot's permission while Giovanni was at the convent, and had at once told him. He was coming, and would bring with him, and introduce to them, the man who helped the kitchen-gardener, of whom he had already spoken to Giovanni. Thus, another time, the gardener could come alone, and would teach him to bank up the potatoes in the little piece of ground he had hired behind the villa, intending to cultivate it with his own hands. Manual labour, to which he had recently taken, was a pet hobby of Giovanni's of which Maria did not altogether approve, deeming it incompatible with his habits and with his age. However, she respected his whim and held her peace. At that moment the girl from Affile, who served them, came to tell them that their guests were on their way upstairs, and that supper would be ready shortly.

Three people, in fact, were ascending the narrow winding stair of the little villa, Giovanni went down to meet them. First came his young friend Leynì, who, on greeting Giovanni, begged to be excused for preceding the two ecclesiastics who were his companions.

"I am master of ceremonies," he explained, and proceeded to introduce them there on the stairs.

"The Abbé Marinier of Geneva. Don Paolo Faré of Varese, with whose name you are already acquainted."

Selva was slightly perplexed; nevertheless he at once invited his guests to follow him, and conducted them to the terrace, where some chairs had been placed.

“And Dane?” said he anxiously to Leynì, taking his arm, “And Professor Minucci, and Father Salvati.”

“They have arrived,” the young man replied, smiling. “They are at the Aniene. I must tell you about it—but it is a long story! They will be here presently.”

Meanwhile the Abbé Marinier had gone out on the terrace, and now exclaimed:

“Oh, c’est admirable!”

Don Paolo Faré, always loyal to his native Como, murmured, “Beautiful, beautiful indeed!” as if he would have liked to add, “but if you could only see my country!”

Maria joined them, and the introductions were repeated; then Leynì told his story while Marinier let his little sparkling eyes wander over the landscape, from the pyramid-shaped Subiaco, standing out with a dark scenic effect against the bright background in the west, to the wild hornbeams close by, which shut out the east.

Don Faré was devouring Selva with his eyes, Selva, the author of critical essays on the Old and New Testament, and especially of a book on the basis of future Catholic theology, which had elevated and transfigured his faith. Baron Leynì was telling his story. At the station of Mandela it had been very windy, and Professor Dane greatly feared he had taken cold; suspecting that there would be no cognac in the house of such an alcohol hater as Selva, and, moreover, the hour having arrived at which it was his daily custom to take two eggs, he had stopped at the Albergo dell’ Aniene for the eggs and cognac. On the terrace of the restaurant, which faced the river, there was too much air, and in the small adjacent rooms there was too little, so he had ordered his repast served in a room at the hotel, and had sent the eggs back twice. Then the others had walked on, leaving him in the company of Professor Minucci and Father Salvati.

As Professor Dane, who was so delicate and sensitive to the cold, was not of the

party, Giovanni proposed having supper on the terrace. He at once abandoned the idea, however, on perceiving that it did not suit the Abbé from Geneva. The elegant, worldly Marinier took as great care of his own person as did his friend Dane, but with more dissimulation and without the excuse of ill-health. He had not, stayed to supper at the Aniene with his friend, because, on a previous visit to Subiaco, he had found the cuisine of that hotel too simple to suit his taste, and he had hopes of a French supper from Signora Selva. Baron Leyni knew well how fallacious such hopes were; but in a spirit of mischief he refrained from enlightening him. There was barely: room for the five people in the tiny dining-room. It was fortunate the other two had not come. In fact, neither the Abbé Marinier nor Don Faré was expected, but others who had been expected were absent. A monk and a priest, men of repute from northern Italy, who should have been present, had both written to apologise for their absence, to the lively regret of Selva, of Faré, and of Leynì. Marinier, on the other hand, proffered his apologies for having intruded. Dane was responsible for his presence, as Leynì was for the presence of Don Paolo Faré. Selva protested. Friends of his friends were, of course, always welcome. Leynì and Dane both knew they were free to bring any one in whom they had confidence, any one who shared their views. Maria was silent; she was not greatly pleased with Abbé Marinier. She also felt that Leynì and Dane would have done well had they abstained from introducing strangers without notifying Giovanni. Marinier spoke, with slightly knitted brows, after a close scrutiny of his bean soup.

“I fear,” said he, “we shall weary Signora Selva if we talk now of the subject to be discussed at the meeting.”

Maria reassured him. She should not be present at the meeting, but she took the liveliest interest in its objects.

“Very well, then,” Marinier continued. “It will be a great advantage to me to become better acquainted with those objects, for Dane has spoken of them only in rather

vague terms, and I do not feel sure that I entirely share your views."

Don Paole could not restrain a movement of impatience. Selva himself seemed slightly annoyed, because unanimity of opinion on certain fundamental principles was surely necessary. Without this unanimity the meeting might prove worse than useless, even dangerous. "Well," said he, "there are many Catholics in Italy and outside of Italy who, with us, desire certain reforms in the Church. We wish them to be brought about without rebellion, to be the work of the legitimate authorities. We desire reforms in religious instruction, in the ceremonies, in the discipline of the clergy, reforms even in the highest sphere of ecclesiastical government. To obtain these ends it is necessary to create a current of opinion strong enough to induce the legitimate authorities to act in conformity with our views, be it twenty, thirty, or even fifty years hence. Now we who hold these opinions are widely dispersed, and, save in the case of those who publish articles or books, are ignorant of one another's views. Very probably a large number of pious and cultured people in the Catholic world feel as we do; and I believe it would afford the greatest assistance in the spreading of our opinions if we could, at least, know one another. To-night a few of us are to meet together for a first discussion."

While Giovanni spoke, the others kept their eyes fixed on the Genevese. The Abbé gazed steadily as his plate. A brief silence followed, and Giovanni was the first to break it.

"Has Professor Dane not told you this?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," replied the Abbé, raising his eyes from his plate at last; "he has told me something similar." The tone was that of one who only half approves. But, why, then, had he come? Don Paolo looked displeased; the others were silent. An embarrassing pause ensued. At last Marinier said:

"We will discuss this again to-night."

"Yes," answered Selva quietly; "we will discuss it again to-night."

He felt he had found an adversary in this abbé, and he thought Dane had committed an error both of judgment and of tact in inviting him to the meeting. At the same time he comforted himself with the tacit reflection that it would be an advantage to hear all possible objections set forth; and that a friend of Professor Dane was, at least, sure to be trustworthy, and would not divulge names and speeches it were better to keep secret for the present. Young di Leynì, on the other hand, was very apprehensive of this danger knowing how many and how various were the Abbé Marinier's acquaintances in Rome, where he had lived for five years, pursuing certain historical studies; and he was also annoyed at not having known of his coming in time to write to Selva, suggesting the advisability of seeking to propitiate him, beginning through his palate. The table at the Selvas', always exquisitely neat, and decorated with flowers, was most frugal, and very simple as regards food. The Selvas never drank wine, and the pale, acid wine of Subiaco could only have a souring effect on a man accustomed to French vintages. The girl from Affile had already served the coffee, when, at the same moment, Don Clemente arrived on foot from Santa Scolastica, and Dane, Professor Salvati, and Professor Minucci, in a two-horse carriage, from Subiaco. But Don Clemente, who was followed by his gardener, seeing the carriage approaching the gate of the villa, and understanding that it brought guests for the Selvas, hastened his steps, that Giovanni might see the gardener and speak with him a few moments before the meeting.

The Selvas and their three companions had risen from the table, and Maria, coming out to the terrace on the arm of the gallant Abbé Marinier, saw, in spite of the growing darkness, the Benedictine on the steep path leading up from the gate which opened upon the public road. She greeted him from above, and begged him to wait for a light at the foot of the stairs. She herself descended the winding stairs with the light, and signed to Don Clemente that she wished to speak to him, casting a significant glance in the direction of the man standing behind him. Don Clemente turned, and requested him to wait outside under the acacias. Then, having ascended

a few steps at the lady's silent invitation, he stopped to listen to what she had to tell him.

She spoke hastily of her three guests, particularly of the Abbé Marinier, saying she was much annoyed on account of her husband, who had such faith in this cherished idea of a Catholic association, and who would now find himself confronted with an unexpected opposition. She wished Don Clemente to know this that he might be prepared. She herself had come to explain to him, because her husband could not leave his guests at that moment. At the same time she would say good-night to Don Clemente, as she did not intend to be present at the meeting, being a woman and so ignorant. Perhaps she should meet him at the monastery in a few days. Was not he the Padre who received visitors? She would probably be going to Santa Scolastica in three or four days, with her sister—

At this point Signora Selva involuntarily raised the light to observe her companion's face more narrowly, but she at once repented of the action, as if she had failed in respect towards that soul which was surely holy, surely in harmony with the manly and virginal beauty of the tall slender person, with the head habitually held erect, in a pose almost military in its frank modesty; with the face so noble in its spacious forehead, in its clear blue eyes, expressing at the same time womanly sweetness and manly fire.

"There will also be an intimate friend of my sister's, a certain Signora Dessalle," she added, in a low voice, as if ashamed.

Don Clemente turned his head away, starting violently, and Maria, feeling the counter-shock, trembled. Then it was he? He at once turned towards her again, his face slightly flushed, but composed.

"Pardon me," said he, "what is the lady's name?"

"Whose, Signora Dessalle's?"

"Yes."

“Her name is Jeanne.”

“About what age is she?”

“I do not know. I should say from thirty to thirty-five.”

Maria was now completely at a loss to understand. The Padre put these questions with such indifference, such calmness! She herself risked a question.

“Do you know her, Padre?”

Don Clemente made no answer. At this point poor, gouty Dane arrived, having dragged himself up from the gate with great difficulty, leaning on Professor Minucci’s arm. They were both intimate friends, and Signora Selva welcomed them kindly, but in a somewhat absent manner.

The meeting was held in Giovanni’s little study. It was very small and as—out of regard for Dane and his rheums—the windows could not be opened, the fiery Don Faré felt he should stifle, and said as much, in his outspoken Lombard fashion. The others pretended not to have heard, except Leynì who signed to him not to insist, and Giovanni, who opened the door leading to the corridor, and the one beyond opening upon the terrace. Dane at once perceived an odour of damp woods, and the doors had to be closed again. An old petroleum lamp was burning on the writing-desk. Professor Minucci, who had weak eyes, asked timidly for a shade; which was looked for, found, and put in place. Don Paolo grumbled under his breath: “This is an infirmary!” His friend Leynì, who also thought these numerous petty cares should be set aside at such a moment, experienced an unpleasant sensation of coldness. Giovanni experienced the same sensation, but in a reflex manner, for he knew the impression that those present, who were strangers to them, must receive of Dane and perhaps also of Minucci. He himself knew them well. Dane, with all his colds and his nerves and his sixty-two years, possessed, besides great learning, an indomitable vigour of mind and a steadfast moral courage. Andrea Minucci, in spite of his disordered fair hair, his spectacles, and a certain

awkwardness in his movements, which gave him the appearance of a learned German, was a youthful and most ardent soul, tried in the fire of life, not sparkling on the surface like the soul of the Lombard, but enveloped in its own flame, severe, and, probably, stronger.

Giovanni began speaking in a frank, open way. He thanked those present for coming, and excused the absent ones, the monk and the priest, at the same time expressing regret for their absence. He said that in any case their adherence was insured, and he insisted upon the importance of their adherence. He added, speaking louder and more slowly, and fixing his eyes on the Abbé Marinier, that for the time being he deemed it prudent not to divulge anything regarding either the meeting, or any measures which might be adopted; and he begged all to consider themselves bound in honour to silence. He then explained, rather more fully than he had done at supper, the idea he had conceived, and the object of the meeting,

“And now,” he concluded, “let each one express his opinion.”

A profound silence followed. The Abbé Marinier was about to speak when Dane rose feebly to his feet. His pale, fleshless face, refined and full of intellect, wore a look of solemn gravity. “I believe,” said he in Italian, which sounded foreign and formal, but which was nevertheless warm with feeling, “that finding ourselves, as we now do, united at the beginning of a religious movement, we should at once do two things. The first is to concentrate our souls in God, silently each in his own way, until we feel the presence in us of God Himself, the desire of Him, His very glory, in our hearts. I will now do this, and I beg you to do it with me.”

So saying, Professor Dane crossed his arms over his breast, bent his head, and closed his eyes. The others rose, and all save Abbé Marinier clasped their hands. The Abbé, with a sweeping gesture which embraced the air, brought them together on his breast. The soft complaining of the lamp, a step on the floor below could be distinctly heard. Marinier was the first to glance up furtively, to ascertain if the

others still prayed. Dane raised his head, and said:

“Amen.”

“The second thing!” he added. “We propose to ourselves to obey in all things the legitimate ecclesiastical authority—”

Don Paolo Faré burst out, exclaiming: “That must depend!”

The vibration of sudden thought, the muffled rumbling of unspoken words, shook all present. Dane said slowly: “Exercised according to just principles.” The movement shrunk to a murmur of assent, and then ceased. Dane went on: “And now one thing more! Let there never be hatred of any one on our lips nor in our hearts!”

Don Paolo burst out again: “No, not hatred but indignation! ‘Circumspiciens eos cum ira!’”

“Yes,” said Don Clemente in his sweet, soft voice; “when we shall have enthroned Christ within us; when we shall feel the wrath of pure love.”

Don Paolo, who was near him, made no answer; he looked at him, his eyes suffused with tears, and, seizing his hand, carried it to his lips. The Benedictine drew back, startled, his face aflame.

“And we shall not enthrone Christ within us,” said Giovanni, much moved, and pleased with the mystic breath he seemed to feel passing over the assembly, “If we do not purify our ideas of reform through love; if, when the time comes to operate, we do not first purify our hands and our instruments. This indignation, this wrath of which you, Don Paolo, speak, is really a powerful snare which the evil one uses against us; powerful precisely because it bears the semblance of virtue and sometimes, as is the case with the saints really has the substance of virtue. In us it is nearly always pure malevolence, because we do not know how to love. The prayer I love best, after the Pater Noster, is the prayer of Unity, which unites us all in the spirit of Christ, when He prays thus to the Father: ‘Ut et ipsi in nobis unum sint.’ The desire and hope are always strong within us of a union in God with those of our

brothers whose beliefs separate them from us. Therefore say now whether you accept my proposal to found this association. First discuss the question, and then, if the proposal be accepted we will examine the means of promoting it."

Don Paolo exclaimed impetuously, that the principle needed no discussion; and Minuccì observed, in a submissive tone, that the object of the meeting was known to all before they came; therefore, by their presence, they had implied their approval and their willingness to bind themselves together in a common action; the question of ways and means remaning still undecided. Abbé Marinier asked permission to speak. "I am really very sorry," he said smiling, "but I have not brought even the smallest thread with which to bind myself. I also am one of those who see many things going wrong in the Church. Still, when Signor Selva carefully explained his views to me (first at supper and then here), views which I had not clearly understood from my friend Professor Dane's explanation, certain objections, which I consider serious, forced themselves upon me."

"Exactly," thought Minucci, who had heard how ambitious Marinier was; "if you look for promotion, you must not join us;" and he added aloud: "Let us hear them."

"In the first place, gentlemen," the clever Abbé said, "it seems to me you have begun with the second meeting. I may say, with all due respect, that you remind me of a party of good people who sit down to a game of cards, and cannot get on because one holds Italian, one French, another German cards, and therefore they cannot understand one another. I have heard unanimity of opinions mentioned; but there exists perhaps among us rather a unanimity of negative opinions. We are probably unanimous in believing that the Catholic Church has grown to resemble a very ancient temple, originally of great simplicity, of great spirituality, which the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries have crowded with superfluities. Perhaps the more malicious among you will say that only a dead language may be spoken aloud in this temple, that living languages may only be whispered there, and

that the sun itself takes on false colours when it shines through the windows. But I cannot believe we are all of one mind as regards the quantity and quality of the remedies to be applied. Therefore before initiating this catholic freemasonry, I think it would be wiser to come to an understanding respecting these reforms. I will go even farther; I believe that, were it possible to establish perfect harmony of opinion among you, it would still be inexpedient to bind yourselves together with visible fetters, as Signor Selva proposes. My objection is of a most delicate nature. You doubtless expect to be able to swim in safety, below the surface, like wary fishes, and you do not reflect that the vigilant eye of the Sovereign-Fisherman, or rather Vice-Fisherman, may very easily spy you out, and spear you with a skilful thrust of the harpoon. Now I should never advise the finest, most highly flavoured, most desirable fishes to bind themselves together. You will easily understand what might happen should one be caught and landed. Moreover, you know very well that the great Fisherman of Galilee put the small fishes into his vivarium, but the Great Fisherman of Rome fries them."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Don Paolo with a laugh. The others maintained a frigid silence. The Abbé continued:

"Furthermore, I do not believe any good can be achieved through this league. Associations may be useful in helping to raise salaries, they may promote industries and commerce; but science and truth, never. Reforms will surely be brought about some day, because ideas are stronger than men, and are always pressing forward; but by arraying them in armour, and marching them forward in companies, you expose them to a terrible fire, which will check their progress for a long time to come. Science and religion progress only through the individual, through the Messiah. Have you a saint among you? Do you know where to look for one? Then find him and let him march forward. Fiery language, broad charity, two or three little miracles, and your Messiah alone will achieve more than all of you together."

The Abbé was silent, and Giovanni rose to speak.

“Perhaps the Abbé,” said he, “has not yet been able to form a true conception of the value of the union we desire. We have just prayed together, seeking to stand united in the Divine Presence. This is sufficient to indicate the character of our union. In consideration of the ills afflicting the Church—which in substance are the result of discord between her mutable human element and her immutable element of Divine Truth—we wish, in our desire that He may remove these discords, to become one in the God of Truth; and we wish to feel ourselves united. Such a union has no need of community of opinion on certain subjects, although many of us hold many opinions in common. We do not propose to create a collective movement, either public or private, in order to bring about this or that reform. I am old enough to remember the time of the Austrian domination. If the Lombard and Venetian patriots called us together in those days to talk of politics, it was by no means always in order to conspire, nor to determine revolutionary acts; it was to enable us to communicate news, to become acquainted, to keep the flame of the idea alive. This is what we wish to do in the religious field. The Abbé Marinier may rest assured that that negative accord of which he spoke will amply suffice. We must strive to widen it, that it may embrace the majority of the intelligent faithful; that it may even reach the Hierarchy. He will see that positive accord will ripen in it, mysteriously, as the seed of life ripens in the decaying body of the fruit. Yes, yes, the negative accord is sufficient. The feeling that the Church of Christ is suffering is sufficient to unite us in the love of our Mother, and to move us at least to pray for her, we and our brothers who, like us, feel her sufferings! What is your answer, Abbé?”

The Abbé murmured with a faint smile:

“C’est beau, mais ce n’est pas la logique.”

Don Paolo started up:

“Logic has nothing to do with it.” “Ah!” Marinier replied, assuming a contrite

expression, “if you intend to forego logic——!”

Don Paolo, all on fire, wished to protest, but Professor Dane signed to him to be calm.

“We do not intend to forego logic,” said he, “but it is not as easy to measure the logical value of a conclusion in questions of sentiment, of love of faith, as it is to measure the logical value of a conclusion in geometrical problems. In the questions which interest us the logical process is hidden. Surely my dear friend Marinier, one of the most acute-minded men I know, when he answered my dear friend Selva, did not intend to imply that when a person very dear to us falls ill, it is necessary for us to decide what method of treatment to adopt before hastening to his bedside together.”

“These are very fine figures,” said the Abbé Marinier with vehemence; “but you are all aware that similes are not arguments!”

Don Clemente, standing in the corner between the door leading into the corridor and the window, and Professor Minucci, seated near him, began to speak at the same moment, but both stopped short; each wishing to allow the other to speak first. Selva proposed that the monk be heard first. All eyes were fixed on that noble face, the face of an archangel: Don Clemente’s colour deepened, but he held his head erect. After a moment of hesitation he spoke in his soft, modest voice. “The Abbé Marinier made an observation which seemed to me very just. He said that we need a saint. I also believe this, I do not despair of finding one, for perhaps, even now, he exists. Who knows?”

“Himself,” murmured Don Paolo.

“Now,” Don Clemente went on, “I wish the Abbé Marinier to understand this: that we are, in a manner, the prophets of this saint, of this Messiah, preparing the way for him; which simply means that we point out the necessity of a renovation of all that, in our religion, is outward clothing, and not the body of truth, even should such a

renovation cause suffering to many consciences. Ingemiscit et parturit! We must point out this necessity, standing the while on absolutely Catholic ground, looking for the new laws from the old authorities, bringing proofs that if these garments which have been worn so long and in such stormy times, be not changed, no decent person will come near us; and God forbid that some among us should be driven to cast them off without permission, out of a loathing not to be borne. I wish furthermore to say, if the Abbé Marinier will permit me, that we have very few human fears."

A murmur of hearty assent answered him, and Minucci started up, every nerve vibrating. While the Abbé Marinier had been speaking, di Leynì and Selva had watched Minucci, who was fuming, with knitted brows; and Giovanni, knowing well the violent temper of this ascetic mystic, had intended to give him time to control himself by requesting Don Clemente to speak first. He now sprang up excitedly. His words did not flow smoothly, their very impetus causing them to tremble and break, and, broken, they poured from his lips in a torrent, precise, nevertheless, and powerful, with their vigorous Roman accent.

"That is true! We have no human fears. We are striving for things too great, and we desire them too intensely to feel human fears! We wish to be united in the living Christ, all among us who feel that the understanding of the Way, the Truth, and the Life—is—is—is—growing, yes, is growing in our hearts, in our minds! And this understanding bursts so many—what shall I call them?—so many bonds of ancient formulas which press us, which suffocate us; which would suffocate the Church were the Church mortal! We wish to be united in the living Christ, all among us who thirst—who thirst, Abbé Marinier! who thirst! thirst!—that our faith, if it lose in extent, may gain in intensity—gain a hundredfold—for God's glory! And may it irradiate from us, and may it, I say, be as a purifying fire, purifying first Catholic thought and then Catholic action! We wish to be united in the living Christ, all among us who feel that He is preparing a slow but tremendous reformation, through

the prophets and the saints; a transformation to be accomplished by sacrifice, by sorrow, by the severing of affections; all who know that the prophets are consecrated to suffering, and that these things are revealed to us not by flesh and blood, but by God Himself, dwelling in our souls. We wish to be united, all of us, from many lands, and to regulate our course of action. Catholic freemasonry? Yes; the freemasonry of the Catacombs. You are afraid, Abbé? You fear that many heads will fall at one blow? I answer. Where is the sword mighty enough for such a blow? One at a time, all in turn may be struck; to-day, for instance, Professor Dane; to-morrow, Don Faré; the next day, this Padre here. But should the day come on which Abbé Marinier's fantastic harpoon should bring up, all bound by a common cord, famous laymen, priests, monks, bishops, perhaps even cardinals, what fisherman is there great or small, who would not be terrified, and who would not cast back into the water harpoon and all the rest? Moreover, I must beg you to pardon me, Abbé Marinier, if I ask you and other prudent persons like you, where is your faith? Would you hesitate to serve Christ from fear of Peter? Let us band together against the fanaticism which crucified Him and which is now poisoning His Church; and if suffering be our reward, let us give thanks to the Father: 'Beati estis cum persecuti vos fuerint et dixerint omne malum adversum vos, mentientes, propter me.'"

Don Paolo Faré started to his feet and embraced the orator. Di Leynì fixed upon him eyes aflame with enthusiasm. Dane, Selva, Don Clemente, and the other monk were silent and embarrassed, feeling—especially the three ecclesiastics—that Minucci had gone too far, that his words concerning the extent and intensity of faith, concerning the fear of Peter, were not weighed; that the whole tone of his discourse was too aggressive, and not in harmony with Dane's mystical exhortation, or with the language Selva had used in delineating the character of the proposed association. The Genevese abbé had never for a moment removed his small bright eyes from Minucci's face while he was speaking. He watched Don Paolo's demonstration with an expression of mingled irony and pity; then he rose:

“Very well,” he said; “I do not know whether my friend Dane, in particular, shares this gentleman’s views. Indeed, I am inclined to doubt it. The speaker mentioned Peter. In truth it seems to me the present company is preparing to leave Peter’s bark, in the hope perhaps of being able to walk upon the waves. I humbly declare that my faith is not sufficient, and I should sink at once. I intend to remain in the bark, at the most plying a small oar, according to my light, for, as this gentleman says, I am very timid. It is therefore necessary for us to part, and it only remains for me to beg you to pardon my coming. I feel the need of a stroll to aid my digestion. Dear friend,” said he addressing Dane, “we shall meet at the Aniene.” He approached Selva to bid him good-night, his hand extended. At once the entire company, with the exception of Don Paolo and Minucci, gathered round him, urging him to remain. He insisted quietly, checking his over-zealous assailants with a cold smile, a delicately sarcastic phrase, or a graceful gesture. Di Leynì turned to Faré, motioning to him to join the others; but the fiery Don Paolo responded only by an emphatic shrug and a scowl of irritation. In the meantime, a Tuscan voice was heard above the clamour of Marinier’s assailants.

“Stia bono!” it said. “As yet nothing has been decided! Wait! I have not yet spoken!”

The speaker was Father Salvati, a Scolopio, and an old man with snowy hair, a florid complexion, and bright eyes.

“Nothing has as yet been decided,” he repeated. “I, for one, approve of uniting, but I have one special end in view, while the discourses I have heard seem to me to favour a very different end. Intellectual progress is good, renovation of the formulas according to the spirit of the times is also good, a Catholic reform is excellent. I hold with Rafaello Lambruschini, who was a great man; with the ‘Pensieri di un solitario’’; but it appears to me that Professor Minucci is advocating a reform of an eminently intellectual nattire, and that——”

Here Dane lifted his small, white, refined hand,

“Allow me, Father,” he said. “My dear friend Marinier sees that the discussion is reopened. I beg him to resume his seat.” The Abbé raised his eyebrows slightly, but obeyed. The others also sat down, quite satisfied. They had little faith in the Abbé’s discretion, and it would have been a great misfortune had he left ab irato. Father Salvati resumed his discourse.

He was opposed to giving an eminently intellectual character to the movement of reform, not so much on account of the danger from Rome as of the danger of troubling the simple faith of a multitude of quiet souls. He wished the Union to set itself first of all a great moral task, that of bringing back the faithful to the practice of gospel teachings. To illumine hearts was, in his eyes, the first duty of those who aspired to illumine minds. Speaking with all due respect, it was obviously less important to transform Catholic faith in the Bible, than to render Catholic faith in the word of Christ efficacious. It must be shown that, in general, the faithful praise Christ with their lips, but that the heart of the people is far from Him; it must further be shown how much egoism enters into a certain form of fervent piety which many believed to be a source of sanctification.

Here Don Paolo and Minucci protested, grumbling: “This has nothing to do with the question.”

Salvati exclaimed that it had much to do with it, and he begged them to listen to him patiently. He continued, alluding to a general perversion of the sense of Christian duty as regards the desire for, and the use of, riches; a perversion it would be very difficult to eradicate, it having—In the course of centuries, and with the full sanction of the clergy—taken deep root in the human conscience.

“The times, gentlemen,” the old monk exclaimed, “demand a Franciscan movement. Now I see no signs of such a movement. I see ancient religious orders which no longer have power to influence society. I see Christian democracy, both

administrative and political, which is not in the spirit of St. Francis; which does not love holy poverty. I see a society for the study of Franciscan thought—simply an intellectual pastime! I believe that we should promote a Franciscan movement; that is, if we desire Catholic reform.."

"But how?" Faré demanded, while Minucci, much vexed, grumbled: "It's not that at all!"

Selva felt that the souls which had been united by a first impulse were drifting apart again. He felt that Dane, Minucci, and probably also Faré, wished, as did he himself, to initiate an intellectual movement, and that this Franciscan flash had come out of season and was out of place. It was all the more inopportune in that it was hot with living truth. For undoubtedly there was much truth in Padre Salvati's words: he recognised this, he, who had often debated in his own mind if it had not been wiser and for the greater good of the Church to promote a moral agitation rather than an intellectual one. But he himself did not feel qualified for this Franciscan apostolate, nor could he discover the necessary qualifications in any of his friends; not even in the most zealous of all, Luigi Minucci, a recluse, an ascetic, shunning the world like Selva himself. Salvati's arguments served to demolish, but not to build up. Giovanni secretly felt the irony of applying them either to Marinier or to Dane, of whom it was well known that their tastes were anything but Franciscan, that their palates were fastidious, their nerves delicate, and their affections lavished on parrots and little dogs. If anything was to be achieved, a line of defence must at once be adopted.

"Dear Padre Salvati must pardon me," he began, "if I observe that his discourse—so warm with the true Christian spirit—is ill-timed. I gather that he is with us in desiring a Catholic reform. To-night only a proposal is before us; the proposal to form a sort of league among all those who cherish the same desire. Let us then decide this point."

The Scolopio would not yield. He could not understand an inactive league, and action, according to the ideas of the intellectualists, did not suit him. The Genevese abbé exclaimed:

“Je l’avais bien dit!”

And he rose, determined this time to depart. But Selva would not allow this, and proposed closing the meeting, intending again to summon Professor Dane, Minucci, di Leynì, and Faré, on the morrow, or perhaps later on. Salvati was intractable, and It would be wiser to let Marinier carry away the impression that the plan was abandoned. Minucci guessed his motive, and was silent; but the thoughtless Don Paolo did not understand, and insisted that they should deliberate and vote at once. Selva, and di Leynì also—out of respect for Giovanni’s wishes—persuaded him to wait. Nevertheless he continued to fume, his vexation directed mainly against the Swiss. Dane and Don Clemente were dissatisfied, each for a reason of his own; Dane being at heart vexed with Marinier, and sorry he had brought him; while Don Clemente would have liked to say that Padre Salvati’s words were very beautiful and holy, and not out of season, because it was right that each should labour according to his vocation, the intellectualist in one way, the Franciscan in another. He who called them would provide for the co-ordination of their actions. The different vocations might well be united in the League. He would have liked to say this, but he had not been prepared, and had let the right moment pass; partly from mental shyness, fearing he should not speak well, partly out of consideration for Selva, who evidently wished to cut the meeting short. It was cut short, for all rose, and all, save Dane and Giovanni, went out to the terrace.

The Abbé Marinier proposed going to Santa Scolastica and the Sacro Speco on the morrow, returning perhaps to Rome by way of Olevano and Palestrina, that road being new to him. Could any one show him the way from the terrace? Don Clemente pointed out the road. It was the same that he had followed as he came from Subiaco.

It passed just below them, crossed the Anio a little to the left, by the Ponte di S. Mauro, turned to the right, and then rose towards the hills of Affile, over yonder. The air rose to them laden with the odours of the woods, of the narrow gorge below the convents, from whence the river issued. The sky was overcast save just above the Francolano. There, over the great black mountain, two stars trembled; Minucci called di Leynì's attention to them.

"See how those two little stars flash," said he.

"Dante would say they are the 'little flames' of San Benedetto and Santa Scolastica, glittering because they perceive, in the shadow, a soul akin to theirs."

"You speak of saints?" said Marinier, drawing near. "A few minutes ago I inquired whether you had a saint among you, and I expressed the hope that you might possess one. These were simply oratorical figures, for I know well enough that you have no saint. Had you one, he would immediately be cautioned by the police, or sent to China by the Church."

"Well," di Leynì replied, "what if he were cautioned?"

"Cautioned to-day, he would be imprisoned to-morrow." "And what of that?" the young man repeated. "How about St. Paul, Abbé Marinier?"

"Ah! my friend! St. Paul, St. Paul—"

By this unfinished sentence the Abbé Marinier probably meant to convey that St. Paul was St. Paul. Di Leynì, on the other hand, reflected that Marinier was Marinier. Don Clemente remarked that not all saints could be sent to China. Why should not the saint of the future be a layman?

"I believe he will be," exclaimed Padre Salvati, The enthusiastic Don Faré, on the contrary, was convinced that he would be a Sovereign Pontiff. The Abbé laughed. "A simple and excellent idea," said he. "But I hear the carriage coming that is to take Dane and myself, and any one else who wishes to join us, to Subiaco, so I will go and take leave of Signor Selva."

He leaned over the parapet to gather a small branch of the olive, planted on the terrace of the ground floor.

“I should offer him this,” he said, “and to you, gentlemen, as well,” he smilingly added, with a graceful gesture, and then entered the house.

The noise of a two-horse carriage on the road below could in fact be heard. It rounded the cliff upon which the villa stood, and stopped at the gate. A few moments later Maria Selva and Dane, in his heavy overcoat and huge black broad-brimmed hat, came out on the terrace; Giovanni and the Abbé followed.

“Who is coming with us?” Dane asked. No one answered. Above the deep rumbling of the Anio, voices and steps could be heard approaching the villa from the gate. Minucci, who was standing at the eastern end of the terrace, looked down, and said:

“Ladies. Two ladies.”

Maria gasped. “Two ladies?” she exclaimed. Hastening to the parapet she perceived two white figures ascending slowly; they were at the first turning of the steep little path. It was impossible to recognise the figures, they were still too far away, and it was too dark. Giovanni observed that they were probably people coming to the first floor to see the proprietors of the house. Professor Dane smiled mysteriously.

“They may be coming to the second floor,” said he.

Maria exclaimed:

“You know something about this!” and called down:

“Noemi, est-ce vous?”

Noemi’s clear voice answered:

“Oui, c’est nous!”

Another female voice was heard saying aloud to her:

“What a child! You should have kept quiet!”

Maria gave a little cry of joy and disappeared, running down the winding stairway.

"You knew, Professor Dane?" Selva asked. Yes, Dane knew. He had made Signora Dessalle's acquaintance at her villa in the Veneto—the villa containing the frescoes by Tiepolo—and had recently seen her in Rome. Her brother, Signor Carlino Dessalle, had remained in Florence. She and Signorina d'Arxel, wishing to surprise the Selvas, had forbidden him to tell. The name Dessalle recalled to Selva's mind in a flash what he had not at first remembered—the presence of Don Clemente, the suspicion that he was this woman's missing lover, and the necessity of preventing a meeting, which might prove terrible to both. He was, of course, unaware of the conversation which had taken place between his wife and the Padre. In the meantime they heard Maria hastening down the path, and then joyous exclamations and greetings. Dane, uneasy lest he had stayed too long on the terrace, proposed going downstairs. The ladies had certainly availed themselves of the carriage which was coming for him. Don Clemente also seemed very uneasy. Hiding his own agitation, Selva hastily took his arm.

"If you do not care to meet these ladies," he said, "come with me at once, and I will let you out through the Casino, by the upper path." The Padre seemed greatly relieved, and the two started off in haste, the Benedictine even forgetting to say good-night.

"It is late, too" said he. "When I asked the Father Abbot's permission, I said I should be back at half-past nine."

They ran down the widening stairway, but when they reached the little open space where the acacias stood, Jeanne Dessalle, Maria, and Noemi were just entering it from the opposite direction.

It was not too dark under the acacias for Maria to recognise her husband and Don Clemente in the two figures coming from the house. Being in advance of her sister with Jeanne, she promptly turned to the right, making her companion turn with her, and directed her steps towards the little Casino, an addition to the villa, and standing

with its back to the larger house. Selva, on his part, seeing his wife's movement, promptly whispered to the Padre:

"Go down the straight path at once."

But it was all to no purpose.

All to no purpose, because Noemi, astonished at seeing her sister turn to the right, stopped short, exclaiming:

"Where are you going?" and Don Clemente, having perhaps noticed a lady standing in his way, instead of passing her and going down, went to summon the gardener, who was waiting for him in the darkest corner of the little opening, where the side of the house meets the hill. He called "Benedetto!" and then turning to Selva said: "Would you like to show him the little field?" "At this hour?" Giovanni answered, while his wife whispered to Noemi: "Some visitors are just leaving, let us stay here at the Casino until they have passed," shaking her head at her so emphatically the while, that Signora Dessalle noticed the action, and at once suspected some mystery.

"Why?" she said. "Are they dangerous?" and slackened her pace. Noemi, on the other hand, having understood her sister's wish, but not her secret motive, was over-zealous in seconding her; and clasping her two companions round the waist, she pushed them towards the Casino. Jeanne Dessalle was instinctively moved to rebel, and turning upon her, exclaimed: "What are you doing?" Then she saw Selva coming towards them. He hastened to greet them, spreading out his arms as if to hide Don Clemente, who, followed by the gardener, passed rapidly within five paces of Jeanne, and descended the steep path.

Noemi, who had also turned at her brother-in-law's greeting, ran to embrace him; Selva in the meantime, feeling gratified that Don Clemente had avoided a meeting. Selva, releasing himself from Noemi's embrace, extended his hand to Jeanne, who did not see it, and murmured absently some incomprehensible words of greeting. At that point Dane, Marinier, Faré, di Leynì, and Padre Salvati issued from the villa.

The Selvas went to meet them, leaving Noemi and Signora Dessalle to await their return. The parting compliments lasted some time. Dane wished to pay his respects to Signora Dessalle, but Maria, not seeing her where she had left her, supposed that she and Noemi had gone into the house, passing behind them, so she promised to be the bearer of the professor's greetings. At last, when the five had started down the hill accompanied by Giovanni, Maria heard Noemi calling her:

"Maria! Maria!"

A peculiar note in her sister's voice told her something had happened. She ran back, and found Signora Dessalle seated on a bundle of fagots, in the corner where the gardener from Santa Scolastica had stood, not five minutes before, and repeating in a weak voice: "It is nothing, nothing, nothing! We will go in directly, we will go in directly!" Noemi, greatly agitated, explained that her friend had suddenly felt faint while those gentlemen were talking, and that she had with difficulty been able to drag her as far as the bundle of fagots.

"Let us go in, let us go in," Jeanne repeated, and rising with an effort, dragged herself as far as the villa, supported by her two friends. She sat down on the steps waiting for some water, of which she took only a sip. She would have nothing else, and was presently sufficiently restored to ascend the stairs very, very slowly. She apologised at each halt, and smiled, but the maid who, walking backwards, led the way with the light nearly fainted herself, at sight of those dazed eyes, those white lips, and that terrible pallor. They led her to the sofa in the little salon; and after a minute of silent relaxation with closed eyes, she was able to tell Signora Selva, still smiling, that these attacks were caused by anaemia, and that she was accustomed to them. Noemi and Maria spoke softly together. Jeanne caught the words "to bed" and with a look of gratitude, consented by a nod. Maria had prepared the best room in the little apartment for Jeanne and Noemi—the corner room opposite Giovanni's study, on the other side of the corridor. While Jeanne was walking painfully towards

it, leaning on Noemi's arm, Selva returned, having accompanied his friends as far as the gate. His wife heard his step on the stairs, and went down to detain him. They spoke, in the dark, with hushed voices. Then it was really he; but how could she have recognised him? Indeed Giovanni had attempted to place himself between Jeanne and Don Clemente at the critical moment, and the Padre had passed her almost running; but he, Giovanni, had at once suspected something, for Signora Dessalle had stood like a statue, not giving him her hand, and hardly responding to his greeting. On the terrace the Padre himself had shown uneasiness when he heard that Signora Dessalle had arrived. His desire to avoid her had been evident; but he was quite master of his feelings. Oh! yes, he was quite master of his feelings. Maria was of the same opinion, and she told of her conversation with him at the foot of the stairway. Husband and wife slowly ascended the stairs, absorbed in contemplation of this extraordinary drama, of the poor woman's crushing grief, of the terrible impression the man must have borne away with him, and—now that it was over—of the night both must pass, wondering what would happen to-morrow, what he would do, what she would do.

"It is well to pray over such matters, is it not?" said Maria.

"Yes, dear, it is. Let us pray that she may learn to give her love and her sorrow to God," the husband answered.

Hand in hand they entered their bedroom, which was divided in two by a heavy curtain. They went to the window and looked up at the sky, praying silently. A breath of the north wind soughed like a lament through the oak overhanging the tiny chapel of Santa Maria della Febbre.

"Poor creature!" said Maria. It seemed to her and to her husband that their affection for one another was more tender than ever to-night, but nevertheless—though neither said so—both felt that there was something deterring them from the kiss of love.

Jeanne, as soon as Noemi had closed the door of their room behind them, fell upon her neck in a paroxysm of uncontrollable sobbing. Poor Noemi had concluded, from the effect produced on her friend when the monk hastened past her, that he was Maironi, and she was now overcome with pity. She spoke most loving, tender, and sweet words to her, in the voice of one soothing a suffering child. Jeanne did not answer, but her sobbing continued.

“Perhaps it is better so, dear,” Noemi ventured to say. “Perhaps it is better for you to know, that you may no longer cherish a false hope; better for you to have seen him in that habit.”

This time an answer came between the sobs, “No, no!” Jeanne repeated passionately and vehemently many times, and the tone, though hardly sorrowful, was so strange that Noemi was greatly puzzled. She resumed her soothing, but more timidly now.

“Yes, dear! yes, dear! because knowing there is no help—-”

Jeanne raised her tear-stained face, “Do you not understand? It is not he!” she said.

Noemi drew away from her embrace, amazed,

“What do you mean? Not he—! All this scene because it is not he?”

Jeanne again fell upon her neck.

“The monk who passed me, is not he,” she said sobbing; “it is the other man!”

“What other man?”

“The one who was following him, who went away with him!”

Noemi had not even noticed this person. With a convulsive laugh Jeanne nearly suffocated her in a close embrace.

CHAPTER III. A NIGHT OF STORMS

On his way down from the villa to the gate, Don Clemente asked himself with secret anxiety: “Did he recognise her, or not? And if he did, what impression did she

make?" On reaching the gate he turned to him he had called Benedetto, and scrutinised his face closely—a fleshless, pallid, intellectual face, in which he read no sign of agitation. The eyes met his wonderingly, almost as if questioning: "Why do you look at me thus?" The monk said to himself: "Probably he did not recognise her, or he supposes me to be unaware of her arrival." He passed his arm through his companion's, holding him close, and in silence turned to the left towards the dark and noisy gorge of the Anio. When they had walked on a few paces under the trees which border the road, he said: "Do you not wish to question me about the meeting?" There was more tenderness in his tone than the commonplace words demanded. His companion answered:

"Yes, tell me about it."

The voice was husky and devoid of interest. Don Clemente said to himself: "He certainly recognised her!" Then he talked of the meeting, but as one preoccupied with other thoughts, without warmth, without details; nor did his companion once interrupt him with questions or comments.

"We separated," he said, "without having come to any conclusion; this was partly owing to the arrival of some foreigners. So I was not able to arrange with Signor Giovanni about you. But I think some of us, at least, will meet again tomorrow. And you yourself," he added hesitatingly, "do you, or do you not feel inclined to return?"

Benedetto, walking steadily on, answered in the same submissive tone as before: "Are the foreign ladies I saw going to remain?"

Don Clemente pressed his arm very hard.

"I do not know," he said, adding, much moved, and with another pressure of the arm: "If I had only known—!"

Benedetto opened his lips to speak, but checked himself. They proceeded thus in silence towards the two black cliffs in the noisy ravine, and leaving the main road, which turns to cross the Anio by the Ponte di San Mauro, took the mule-path leading

to the convents, which winds up to the cliff on the left. The enormous, slanting mass of rock before them seemed to Don Clemente at that moment the symbol of a demoniacal power standing in Benedetto's way; so, too, the gathering darkness seemed to him symbolically threatening, and threatening also the ever-increasing, ever-deepening roar of the lonely river.

Beyond the oratory of San Mauro, where the mule-path to the convents turns to the left, running along the side of the hill towards the Madonnina dell' Oro, and another mule-path leads straight into the ravine, past the ruins of the Baths of Nero, Benedetto disengaged himself gently from the monk's arm, and stopped.

"Listen, Padre," said he; "I must speak with you; perhaps at some length."

"Yes, my friend, but it is late; let us go into the monastery."

Benedetto lived at the Ospizio for pilgrims, the farmhouse, which is reached from a courtyard communicating by a great gate with the public way and by a small gate with the corridor of the monastery, leading from the public way to the church and to the second of the three cloisters.

"I had rather not return to the monastery tonight, Padre," said he.

"You had rather not return?"

On other occasions during the three years he had spent in the free service of the monastery, Benedetto had obtained permission from Don Clemente to spend the night in prayer, out among the hills. Therefore the master at once concluded that his disciple was passing through one of those periods of terrible inward struggle, which forced him to flee from his poor couch and from the shadows of his room, accomplices, these, of the evil one, in tormenting his imagination,

"Listen to me, Padre!" said Benedetto.

His tone was so firm, so laden with the gravity of coming words, that Don Clemente judged it wiser not to insist upon the lateness of the hour. Hearing the beat of hoofs

above them, and knowing the riders were coming in their direction, the two stepped aside on to the small, grassy plateau, upon which still remain humble remnants of Neronian grandeur, which, with some arches hidden in the thick grove of hornbeams on the opposite bank, once formed part of the same Terme, but are now divided by the complaining of the Anio far below. Above those arches once dwelt the priest of Satan, and the shameless women, who assailed the sons of St. Benedict with their wiles. The monk thought of Jeanne Dessalle. There, at the end of the ravine, high up above the hills of Preclaro and of Jenne Vecchio, shone the two stars which had bean spoken of on the Selvas' terrace as "holy lights."

They waited for the riders to pass. When they had done so, Benedetto, in silence, fell upon his master's neck. Don Clemente, full of wonder and noticing that he trembled and was shaken by convulsive starts, concluded that the sight of that woman had caused this emotion, and, kept repeating to him:

"Courage, dear friend, courage; this is a trial sent by the Lord!" Benedetto whispered to him:

"It is not what you think."

Having controlled his feelings, he begged the master to sit down upon a ruined wall, against which he himself—kneeling on the grass—rested his folded arms.

"Since this morning," said he, "I have been warned by certain signs that the Lord's will concerning me is changed; but I have not been able to understand in what way. You know what happened to me three years ago in that little church where I was praying, while my poor wife lay dying?"

"You allude to your vision?"

"No; before the vision—having closed my eyes—I read on my eyelids the words of Martha: 'Magister adest et vocat te!' This morning, while you were saying Mass, I saw the same words within me. I believed this to be an automatic revulsion of memory. After the communion I had a moment of anxiety, for it seemed to me

Christ was saying in my soul: ‘Dost thou not understand, dost thou not understand, dost thou not understand?’ I passed the day in a state of continual agitation, although I strove to tire myself more than usual in the garden. In the afternoon I sat reading a short time under the ilex tree, where the Fathers congregate. I had St. Augustine’s De Opere Monachorum. Some people passed on the upper road, talking in loud voices. I raised my head mechanically. Then, I cannot tell why, but instead of resuming my reading, I closed the book and fell to thinking. I thought of what St. Augustine says about manual labour for monks, I thought of the order of St. Benedict, of Rancé, and of how the Benedictine order might again return to manual labour. Then, in a moment of weariness, but with my heart still full of the immense grandeur of St. Augustine, I believed I heard a voice from the upper world crying: ‘Magister adest et vocat te!’ Perhaps it was only an hallucination, only because of St. Augustine, only some unconscious memory of the ‘Tolle, lege’; I do not deny this, but, nevertheless, I trembled, trembled like a leaf. And I asked myself fearfully, Does the Lord wish me to become a monk? You know, Padre mio—I have repeated it to you on two or three occasions—that in one particular, at least, this would correspond with the end of my vision. But when you counselled me, as did also Don Giuseppe Flores, not to put faith in this vision, I told you that, to me, another reason for not putting faith in it was that I do not feel myself worthy to be a priest, and, furthermore, that the idea of joining any religious order is strangely repugnant to me. But what if God should enjoin it upon me! What if this great repugnance be but a trial! I wished to speak to you when we were on our way to the Selvas’, but you were in haste to be there, and so it was not possible. There, seated on the bundle of fagots under the acacias, I received the last blow. I was weary, very weary, and for five minutes allowed myself to be overcome by sleep, I dreamt that I was walking with Don Giuseppe Flores under the arches of the courtyard at Praglia. I said to him weeping: ‘Here, it was here!’ And Don Giuseppe answered with great tenderness: ‘Yes, but do not think of that, think rather that the Lord calls you.’ And I replied:

‘But whither, whither does He call me?’ My anguish was so great that I awoke. I heard a voice calling from the top of the house, and some one answered in French from the bottom of the garden. I saw a lady leave the villa, running. I heard the greetings she exchanged with the new-comers; I distinguished her voice! At first I was not sure of it, but presently, the voices coming nearer, I could no longer doubt. It was she! For a second I was dazed, but only for a second. Then a great light shone out in my mind.”

Benedetto raised his head and his clasped hands. His voice rang with mystic ardour. “Magister adest,” said he. “Do you understand? The divine Master was with me, I had naught to fear, Padre mio! And I feared naught, neither her, nor myself. I saw her coming up to the open space. My thought was: ‘If we meet alone, I will speak to her as to a sister, I will beg her forgiveness; perhaps God will give me a word of truth for her. I will show her that I have hopes for her soul, and that I do not fear for my own.” Don Clemente could not refrain from interrupting him.

“No, no, no, my son!” he exclaimed, greatly alarmed; and while he held the young man’s face imprisoned between his hands, he was casting about in his mind for a means of preventing such a meeting, and of getting Benedetto away. The Selvas, the Selvas! they must be warned!

“I can understand why you speak thus to me,” Benedetto resumed, breathlessly; “but if I meet her, must I not seek to give her of the good that is in me, as I once sought to give her of the evil? And have not you yourself taught me that placing the saving of our own souls above all things is incompatible with the love of God above all things? That when we love truly we do not think of ourselves? That we strive only to do the will of the person beloved, and desire that others do the same? That thus we are sure of salvation, and that he who constantly has in mind the saving of his own soul risks losing it?”

“That is very true, very true, my dear friend,” answered the Padre, stroking his hair.

“But nevertheless to-morrow you must go to Jenne, and remain there until I send for you. I will give you a letter to the parish priest, who is a most worthy man, and you can stay with him. Do you understand? And now we will go to the monastery, for it is late!”

He rose and obliged Benedetto to do the same. Above their heads the clock of Santa Scolastica was ringing the hour. Was it ten o’clock, or was it eleven? Don Clemente had not counted the strokes from the beginning, and feared the worst; for with all these conflicting emotions he had lost account of time. What was going to happen? Who could have foreseen? And what would take place now? They left the grassy plateau and started up the steep and rocky mule-path, Don Clemente in front, and Benedetto following close behind; both silent and with stormy souls, while the deep voice of the Anio answered their thoughts. At a bend of the path they see the lights of distant Subiaco. Only a few, however, so it is probably eleven o’clock! Presently a dark corner of the inclosure of Santa Scolastica looms before the wayfarers. Benedetto is thinking by what a mysterious way God has led him from the logge at Praglia, where Jeanne tempted and conquered him, to this toilsome ascent amidst the gloom towards another holy spot, with Jeanne near, and his heart anchored in Christ.

In the meantime, the reasons for practical prudence which pressed upon Don Clemente at this time of distress, and the reasons for ideal holiness which in calmer moments he had taught his beloved disciple, were contending for supremacy over Benedetto’s will, no longer so steadfast as in the beginning; the first striving at close quarters, and with imperious violence; the second, from a distance and by means only of their stern and sad beauty. It seemed to him the two “holy lights” high above the dark angle of the inclosure were watching him sternly and sadly. Oh! unholy earth, he thought; oh! sad earth! And, perhaps, unholy prudence, sad prudence—earthly prudence!

Upon reaching the corner, the two wayfarers turned to the left, leaving the deep roar

of the Anio behind them. They passed the great gate of the monastery, and having turned the other corner of the inclosure, and traversed the long, dark passage which runs beneath the library, reached a low door. Don Clemente rang the bell. They would be obliged to wait some time, for at nine o'clock, or shortly after, all the keys of the monastery were taken to the Abbot.

"Then you will allow me to remain outside?" Benedetto asked.

On other occasions when the master had granted him this permission, he had climbed the bare heights of Colle Lungo above the monastery, and passed the night in prayer, either there, or on the heights of Taleo, or on the rocky hillside which is crossed in going from the oratory of Santa Crocella to the grove of the Sacro Speco. The master hesitated a moment; he had not thought of this wish of Benedetto's again. And precisely to-day his disciple had looked to him more emaciated, more bloodless, than usual; he feared for his health, which was much impaired by the fatigues of labour in the fields, by penance, and by a life devoid of comfort. This the master told him.

"Do not consider my body," the young man pleaded humbly and ardently. "My body is infinitely remote from me! Fear rather that I may not do all that is possible to ascertain the Divine Will!"

He added that he would also pray for light concerning this meeting, and that he had never felt God so near as when praying on the hills. The master took his face between his hands, and kissed him on the forehead.

"Go," said he.

"And you will pray for me?"

"Yes, nunc et semper."

Steps in the corridor. A key turns in the lock. Benedetto vanishes like a shadow.

Good old Fra Antonio, the doorkeeper of the monastery, did not betray the fact that

he had expected to see Benedetto also, and, with that dignified respect in which were blended the humility of an inferior and the pride of an old and honest retainer, he told Don Clemente that the Father Abbot was waiting for him in his private apartment. Don Clemente, carrying a tiny lantern, went up to the great corridor, out of which the Abbot's rooms and his own opened.

The Abbot, Padre Omobono Ravasio of Bergamo, was waiting for him in a small salon dimly lighted by a poor little petroleum lamp. The salottino, in its severe, ecclesiastical simplicity, held nothing of interest, save a canvas by Morone—the fine portrait of a man; two small panels with angels' heads, in the style of Luini; and a grand piano, loaded with music. The Abbot, passionately fond of pictures, music, and snuff, dedicated to Mozart and Haydn a great part of the scant leisure he enjoyed after the performance of his duties as priest and ruler. He was intelligent, somewhat eccentric, and possessed of a certain amount of literary, philosophical, and religious learning which, however, stopped short with the year 1850, he having a profound contempt for all learning subsequent to that date. Short and grey-haired, he had a clever face. A certain curtness of manner, and his rough familiarity, had astonished the monks, accustomed to the exquisitely refined manners of his predecessor, a Roman of noble birth. He had come from Parma, and had assumed his duties only three days previously.

Don Clemente knelt before him and kissed his hand.

"You have strange ways here at Subiaco," said the Abbot. "Is ten o'clock the same as eleven o'clock to you?"

Don Clemente apologised. He had been detained by a duty of charity. The Abbot invited him to be seated,

"My son," said he, "are you sleepy?" Don Clemente smiled without answering.

"Well," the Father Abbot continued, "you have wasted an hour of sleep, and now I have my reasons for robbing you of a little more. I intend to speak to you about two

matters. You asked my permission, to visit a certain Selva and his wife. Have you been there? Yes? Can you assure me that your conscience is at rest?"

Don Clemente answered unhesitatingly, but with a movement of surprise:

"Yes, most certainly."

"Well, well, well," said the Abbot, and took a large pinch of snuff with evident satisfaction. "I do not know these Selvas, but there are people in Rome who do know them, or, at least, think they do. Signor Selva is an author, is he not? Has he not written on religion? I fancy he is a Rosminian, judging by the people who are opposed to him; people unworthy to tie Rosmini's shoe-strings; but let us discriminate! True Rosminians are those at Domodossola, and not those who have wives, eh? Very well then, this evening after supper I received a letter from Rome. They write me—and you must know my correspondent is one of the mighty—that precisely to-night a conventicle was to be held at the house of this false Catholic, Selva, who had summoned to it other malignant insects like himself; that probably you would wish to be present, and that I was to prevent your going. I do not know what I should have done, for when the Holy Father speaks I obey; if the Holy Father does not speak, I reflect. But, fortunately for you, you had already started. There are really some good people who will ferret out heretics in Paradise itself! Now you tell me that your conscience is quiet. Am I not then to believe what the letter says?"

Don Clemente replied that there had certainly been neither heretics nor schismatics at Signor Selva's house. They had talked of the Church, of her ills, and of possible remedies, but in the same spirit in which the Abbot himself might speak.

"No, my son," the Abbot answered. "It is not for me to reflect upon the ills of the Church, or upon possible remedies. Or rather, I may reflect upon these matters, but I must speak of them only to God, that He Himself may then speak of them to the proper persons. And do you do the same. Bear this in mind, my son! The ills exist, and perhaps the remedies also exist, but—who knows?—these remedies may be

poisons, and we must let the Great Healer apply them. We, for our part, must pray. If we did not believe in the communion of saints, what would, there be to do in the monasteries? So for the sake of our peace of mind, my son, do not return to that house. Do not again ask permission to go there."

The Abbot had ended in a paternal tone, and now laid an affectionate hand upon his monk's shoulder. Don Clemente was much grieved at the thought of not seeing his good friends again, and especially not to be able to confer with Signor Giovanni the next day, to warn him of Benedetto's danger, and to consult with him concerning a means of defence.

"They are Christians of gold," he said sadly, and in submissive tones.

"I believe you," replied the Abbot. "They are probably far better than the zealots who write these letters. You see I speak my mind. You come from Brescia, eh? Well, I come from Bergamo. In either place they would be called piaghe—festers! They are indeed festers of the Church. I shall answer in a fitting tone. My monks take no part in meetings of heretics. But, nevertheless, you will not revisit the Selvas."

Don Clemente kissed the hand of the fatherly old man resignedly.

"And now I come to the other question," said the Abbot. "I learn that a young man whom you installed there has lived for three years at the Ospizio for pilgrims, where, as a rule, only the herder should have a permanent abode. Oh, I know, of course, that my predecessor sanctioned what you did! This young man is greatly attached to you, you are his spiritual director, and you encourage him to study in the library. It is true that he also works in the kitchen-garden, true that he displays great piety, that he is a source of edification to all, still—as he does not appear to have any intention of becoming a monk—his presence at our Ospizio, where he has had a place for three years, Is somewhat irregular, What can you tell concerning this matter? Come, let us hear."

Don Clemente knew that some of his brother monks—and not the oldest, but precisely the youngest among them—did not approve of the hospitality the late Abbot had extended to Benedetto. Neither was the attachment existing between himself and Benedetto entirely to their taste. Don Clemente had already had trouble on this account. He now at once perceived that certain brothers had lost no time, but had already tried to influence the new Abbot. His fine face flushed hotly. He did not answer immediately, wishing first to quell the anger burning within him by an act of mental forgiveness. At last he assured the Abbot that it was both, his duty and his wish to enlighten him.

“This young man,” he began, “Is a certain Piero Maironi of Brescia. You must surely have heard of the family. His father, Don Franco Maironi, married a woman without birth or money. His parents were already dead at the time, and he lived with his paternal grandmother, Marchesa Maironi, an imperious and proud woman.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the Abbot, “I knew her! A perfect terror! I remember her well. In Brescia they called her the ‘Marchesa Haynau’ [Footnote: In allusion to the terrible Austrian, General Haynau, who, on account of his cruelty to the Italian patriots, was surnamed the “Hyena of Brescia.”—TRANSLATOR.] She had twelve cats and wore a great black wig! I remember her well!”

“I knew her only by reputation,” Don Clemente continued, smiling, while the Abbot, with a sort of guttural purr, took a generous pinch of snuff, to rid himself of the bad taste this unpleasant memory had left.

“Well, the grandmother would not hear of this ill-assorted marriage. The young couple therefore were guests in the house of the bride’s uncle, she being also an orphan. He, Don Franco, enlisted in 1859, and died of the wounds he received. His wife died soon after. The little boy was cared for by the grandmother, Marchesa Maironi, and, after her death, by certain Venetian relations of hers, of the name of Scremin. The grandmother left him very wealthy. He married a daughter of these

Scremins,’ who, unfortunately, went mad soon after her marriage, I believe. Piero felt this affliction keenly, and led a life of retirement until he had the misfortune to come in contact with a woman separated from her husband. Then a period of transgression set in; he transgressed morally and in matters of faith. At last (it seems like a miracle performed by the Lord Himself) the wife in her dying moments recovered her reason, summoned her husband, spoke with him, and then died the death of a saint. This death turned Piero’s heart towards God; he left the woman, renounced his rights, left everything, and fled from his home in the night, telling no one whither he was going. Having met me once at Brescia, where I had gone to visit my sick father, and knowing I was at Subiaco, he came here. He was, moreover, fond of our Order, and cherished certain memories connected with our poor Praglia. He told me his story, entreating me to help him lead a life of expiation. I supposed he aspired to enter the Order. But he told me that, on the contrary, he did not feel himself worthy; that he had not as yet been able to ascertain the Divine Will on this point; that he wished, in the meantime, to do penance, to labour with his hands, to earn his bread—only a crust of bread. He told me other things; he spoke of certain incidents of a supernatural character which had happened to him. I at once told the late Father Abbot about him, and we decided to lodge him in the Ospizio, to let him work within the inclosure, helping the kitchen-gardener, and to provide him with the frugal fare he craved. In three years he has never once tasted coffee, wine, milk, or eggs. He has touched nothing save bread, polenta, fruit, herbs, oil, and pure water, He has led the life of a saint, all can assure you of that. Still he believes himself the greatest sinner on earth!”

“Hm!” the Abott ejaculated thoughtfully, “Hm! I see! But why does he not join the Order? Then, another thing: I know he has passed several nights outside the inclosure.”

Don Clemente felt his face once more aflame. “In prayer,” he said.

“That may be, but perhaps some may not believe it. You know what Dante says:

Ad ogni ver che ha faccia di menzogna Dee l’uom chiuder la bocca quant’ei puote, Però che senza colpa fa vergogna.” [Footnote:Aye to that truth which has the face of falsehood A man should close his lips as far as may be, Because without his fault it causes shame. —Longfellow’s Translation of the “Inferno.”]

“Oh!” Don Clemente exclaimed, blushing, in his modest dignity, for those who were capable of harbouring vile suspicions.

“Forgive me, my son!” said the Abbot. “He is not accused, the appearances alone are criticised. Do not vex yourself. It is wiser to pray in the house! And these incidents of a supernatural character—pray tell me about them.”

Don Clemente said they were visions—voices heard in the air.

“Hm! Hm!” ejaculated the Abbot, with a complicated play of wrinkled forehead, eyebrows, and lips, as if he were swallowing a mouthful of vinegar.

“You said his name was—? His real name?”

“Piero, but when he came here he wished to part with that name, and begged me to give him another. I chose ‘Benedetto’—it seemed the most appropriate.” At this point the Abbot expressed a wish to see Signor Benedetto, and desired Don Clemente to send him to him on the following morning after the office in the choir. At this Don Clemente was somewhat embarrassed, and had to confess that he could not promise to do so, because, as it happened, the young man had gone out among the hills to pass the night in prayer, and he did not know precisely at what hour he would return. The Abbot was greatly annoyed, and mumbled a series of reproaches and caustic remarks. Don Clemente therefore decided to tell him of the meeting with Signora Dessalle, the former mistress; of what had followed on the way home, of his determination to send Benedetto to Jenne, and to oblige him to remain there until the woman had gone. The Father Superior kept up a continuous, low grumbling, and heard him with knitted brows.

“Here,” he exclaimed at last, “you are going back to the days of St. Benedict! to the wiles of shameless women! Let your Benedetto go, let him go, let him go! To Jenne and farther still! And you were not going to tell me this? Did it seem a matter of slight consequence? Was it of no consequence that intrigues of this sort should be carried on round the monastery? Now go; go, I say!”

Don Clemente was about to answer that he had not known of any intrigue, nor if the woman had recognised his disciple; that at any rate he had already informed Benedetto of his intention of sending him away; but he silenced this useless self-justification and, kneeling, took leave of the Abbot.

Don Clemente took up again the tiny lantern, which he had left in the corridor, but did not go to his cell. Slowly, very slowly, he walked to the end of the corridor; slowly, very slowly, and not without frequent pauses, he descended by a little winding stair to the other passage leading to the chapter-hall. The thought of his beloved disciple wandering amidst the darkness on the mountains; the anticipation of the resolutions he might form, after communing with his God; the covert hostility of his brother monks; the Abbot’s frowns and doubts; the fear that he would oblige Benedetto to choose between leaving the convent and taking the monastic vows, all weighed heavily upon his heart. Benedetto’s mystic fervour, his great and unconscious humility, his progress in comprehending the Faith according to the ideas originating with Signor Giovanni, a new lucidity of thought which flashed from him in conversation, the growing strength of their mutual affection, had awakened in him hopes of a revelation of Divine Grace, of Divine Truth, of Divine Power for the saving of souls, to be made, at no distant period, through this outcast of the world. They had said at the meeting at Signor Selva’s house, “A saint is needed.” The first to affirm this had been the Swiss Abbé. Others had said that the saint should be a layman. This was moreover his own opinion, and Benedetto’s repugnance to a monastic life seemed to him providential. The coming of the woman seemed almost providential also, forcing him as it did to leave the convent. But what

was happening out on the hills? What words was God uttering in his heart? And if—

This unexpected, formidable if flashing into his mind stopped the ponderer in his slow walk. “Magister adest et vocat te!” Perhaps the Divine Master Himself was even now calling Benedetto to serve Him in the habit of a monk.

He ceased thinking, terrified, and, having set the tiny lantern down, passed from the chapter-hall into the church, directing his steps towards the chapel of the Sacrament. With that dignity of which no internal storm could rob his refined bearing and the lofty beauty of his face, he sank upon his knees at the desk which stands in the centre of the chapel, between the four columns, under the lamp, raising his eyes to the tabernacle.

The Teacher of the Way, of Truth, of Life, the Beloved of the soul, was there, and sleeping, as He had slept on that stormy night on the Lake of Gennesaret, between Gadara and Galilee, in the bark which other wave-tossed barks followed through the roaring darkness. He was there, praying as on that other night, alone, on the hillside. He was there, saying with His sweet eternal voice: “Come unto Me all ye who suffer, all ye who are heavy laden, come unto Me.” He was there and speaking, the living Christ: “Believe in Me, for I am with you; I am your strength, and I am peace. I the Humble, son of the Almighty; I the Meek, son of the Terrible; I who prepare hearts for the kingdom of justice, for the future union of all with Me in My Father.” He, the Merciful, was there in the tabernacle, breathing the ineffable invitation: “Come, open thy heart; give thyself up to Me!”

And Clemente gave himself up, confiding to Him what he had never confessed even to himself. He felt that everything in the ancient monastery was dying, save Christ in the tabernacle. As the germ-cell of ecclesiastical organism, the centre from which Christian warmth irradiates upon the world, the monastery was becoming ossified by the action of inexorable age. Within its walls noble fires of faith and piety, enclosed—like the flames of the candles burning on the altars—in traditional forms,

were consuming their human envelope, their invisible vapours rising towards heaven, but sending no wave of heat or of light to vibrate beyond the ancient walls. Currents of living air no longer swept through the monastery, and the monks no longer, as in the first centuries, went out in search of them, labouring in the woods and in the fields, co-operating with the vital energies of nature while they praised God in song. His talks with Giovanni Selva had brought him indirectly, and little by little, to feel thus regarding the monastic life in its present form, although he was convinced that it has indestructible roots in the human soul. But now, perhaps for the first time, he looked his belief squarely in the face. For a long time his wish and his hope had been that Benedetto might become a great gospel labourer; not an ordinary labourer, a preacher, a confessor, but an extraordinary labourer; not a soldier of the regular army, hampered by uniform and discipline, but a free champion of the Holy Spirit. The monastic laws had never before appeared to him in such fierce antagonism with his ideal of a modern saint. And now, what if the Divine Will concerning Benedetto should reveal itself contrary to his desires?

Ah! was he not already almost on the verge of committing mortal sin? Had he not been about to judge the ways of God, he presumptuous dust? Prostrate upon the kneeling-stool, he sought to merge himself in the Almighty, praying silently for forgiveness, for a revelation to Benedetto of the Divine Will, and ready to worship it, whatever it might be, from this time forth. As he rose, with a natural ebbing of the mystic wave from his heart, his eyes still turned towards the altar, but no longer fixed upon the tabernacle, he could not refrain from thinking of Jeanne Dessalle and of what Benedetto had said. The very indifferent picture above the altar represented the martyr Anatolia offering, from Paradise, the symbolical palms to Audax, the young pagan who had attempted to seduce her, but whom, instead, she had led to Christ. Jeanne Dessalle had seduced Benedetto; of this Don Clemente had no doubts, notwithstanding Benedetto’s attempt to exonerate her and accuse himself. What if she should now be converted through him? Was it perhaps right that he should try?

Was Benedetto's impulse really more Christian than his own fears and the Abbot's scruples? As he crossed the church with bowed head, Don Clemente's mind was struggling with these questions. Anatolia and Audax! He remembered that a sceptical foreigner, upon hearing the explanation of the picture from him, had said: "Yes, but what if neither of them had been put to death? And what if Audax had been a married man?"

These jesting words had seemed to him an unworthy profanation. He thought of them again now, and, sighing, took up the little lantern he had left on the floor in the chapter-hall.

Instead of going towards his cell he turned into the second cloister to look at the ridge of the Colle Lungo, where, perhaps, Benedetto was praying. Some stars were shining above the rocky, grey ridge, spotted with black, and their dim light revealed the square of the cloister, the scattered shrubs, the mighty tower of Abate Umberto, the arcades, the old walls, which had stood for nine centuries, and the double row of little stone friars ascending in procession upon the arch of the great gate where Don Clemente stood, lost in contemplation. The cloister and the tower stood out majestic and strong against the darkness. Was it indeed true that they were dying? In the starlight the monastery appeared more alive than in the sunlight, aggrandised by its mystic religious communing with the stars. It was alive, it was big with many different spiritual currents, all confused in one single being, like the different wrought and sculptured stones, which, united, formed its body; like different thoughts and sentiments in a human conscience. The ancient stones, inclosing souls which love had mingled with them, saturated with holy longings and holy sorrows, with groans and prayers, radiated a dim something which penetrated the subconsciousness. They had the power of infusing strength into those of God's labourers who, in arid moments, withdrew from the world, seeking brief repose among them, as a spring of water infuses strength into the reaper on the lonely hills. But in order that the life of the stones might continue, a ceaseless living stream must

flow through them, a stream of adoring and contemplating spirits. Don Clemente felt something akin to remorse for the thoughts he had harboured in the church about the decrepitude of the monastery; thoughts which had sprung from his own personal judgment, pleasing to his self-esteem, and therefore tainted by that arrogance of the spirit which his beloved mystics had taught him to discern and abhor. Clasping his hands, he fixed his gaze on the wild ridge of the hill, picturing to himself Benedetto praying there, and, in an act of silent renunciation, he humbly relinquished his own desires concerning the young man's future. He praised God should He choose to let him remain a layman; he praised God should He choose to make him a monk, should He reveal His will, or should it remain hidden. "Si vis me esse in luce sis benedictus, si vis me esse in tenebris sis iterum benedictus." And then he sought his cell.

As he passed the Abbot's door in the broad corridor where the two dim lamps were still burning, he thought of the talk he had had with the old man, of those maxims of his concerning the ills affecting the Church, and the wisdom of struggling against them. He remembered something Signor Giovanni had said about the words "Fiat voluntas tua," which the majority of the faithful understand only as an act of resignation, and which really point out the duty of working with all our strength for the triumph of Divine Law in the field of human liberty. Signor Giovanni had made his heart beat faster, and the Abbot had made it beat more slowly: which had spoken the word of life and of truth?

His cell was the last one on the right, near the balcony which overlooks Subiaco, the Sabine Hills, and the shell-shaped tract watered by the Anio. Before entering his cell Don Clemente stopped to look at the distant lights of Subiaco; he thought of the little red villa, nearer but not discernible; he thought of the woman. Intrigues, the Abbot had said. Did she still love Piero Maironi? Had she discovered, did she know that he had sought refuge at Santa Scolastica? Had she recognised him? If so, what did she propose to do? Probably she was not staying in the Selvas' very small

lodging, but was at some hotel in Subiaco. Were those distant lights fires in an enemy's camp? He made the sign of the cross, and entered his narrow cell, for a short rest until two o'clock, the hour of assembly in the choir.

Benedetto took the road to the Sacro Speco. Beyond the further corner of the monastery he crossed the dry bed of a small torrent, reached the very ancient oratory of Santa Crocella on the right, and climbed the rocky slope which tumbles its stones down towards the rumbling Anio and faces the hornbeams of the Francolano, rising, straight and black, to the star-crowned cross on its summit. Before reaching the arch which stands at the entrance to the grove of the Sacro Speco, he left the road, and climbed up towards the left, in search of the scene of his last vigil, high above the square roofs and the squat tower of Santa Scolastica. The search for the stone where he had knelt in prayer on another night of sorrow distracted his thoughts from the mystic fire which had enveloped him, and cooled its ardour. He soon perceived this and was seized with a heavy sense of regret, with impatience to rekindle the flame, enhanced by the fear of not succeeding in the attempt, by the feeling that it had been his own fault, and by the memory of other barren moments. He was growing colder, ever colder. He fell upon his knees, calling upon God in an outburst of prayer. Like a small flame applied in vain to a bundle of green sticks, this effort of his will gradually weakened without having moved the sluggish heart, and left him at last in vague contemplation of the even roar of the Anio. His senses returned to him with a rush of terror! Perhaps the whole night would pass thus; perhaps this barren coldness would be followed by burning temptation! He silenced the clamour of his fervid imagination, and concentrated his thoughts on his determination not to lose courage. He now became firmly convinced that hostile spirits had seized upon him. He would not have felt more sure of this had he seen fiendish eyes flashing in the crevices of the neighbouring rocks. He felt conscious of poisonous vapours within him; he felt the absence of all love, the absence of all sorrow; he felt weariness, a great weight, the advance of a mortal drowsiness. Once more he fell into stupid contemplation of

the noise of the river, and fixed his unseeing eyes upon the dark woods of the Francolano. Before his mental vision passed slowly, automatically, the image of the evil priest, who had lived there with his court of harlots. He felt weary from kneeling, and let himself sink to the ground. Again he was the slow automaton. With a painful effort he rose to a sitting posture, and dropped his hand upon the tufts of soft, sweet-smelling grass, pushing up between the stones. He closed his eyes in enjoyment of the sweetness of that soft touch, of the wild odour, of rest, and he saw Jeanne, pale under the drooping brim of her black, plumed hat, smiling at him, her eyes wet with tears. His heart beat fast, fast, ever faster; a thread, only a thread of will-power held him back on the downward slope leading him to answer the invitation of that face. With wide eyes, his arms extended, his hands spread open, he uttered a long groan. Then, suddenly fearing some nocturnal wayfarer might have heard him, he held his breath, listening. Silence: silence in all things save the river. His heart was growing more calm. “My God! my God!” he murmured, horrified at the he had been in, at the abyss he had crossed. He clung with his eyes, with his soul, to the great, sacred, cube-shaped Santa Scolastica, down below with its squat, friendly tower, which he loved. In spirit he passed through the shadows and the roofs; he had a vision of the church, of the lighted lamp, of the tabernacle, of the Sacrament, at which he gazed hungrily. With an effort he pictured to himself the cloisters, the cells, the great crosses near the monks’ couches, the seraphic face of his sleeping master. He continued in this effort as long as possible, checking in anguish of soul frequent flashes of the drooping plumed hat and of the pale face, until these flashes grew fainter, and were finally lost in the unconscious depths of his soul. Then he rose wearily to his feet, and slowly, as though his movements were controlled by a consciousness of great majesty, he clasped his hands and rested his chin upon them. He concentrated his thoughts on the prayer from the Imitation: “Domine, dummodo voluntas mea recta et firma ad te permaneat, fac de me quid-quid tibi placuerit.” He was no longer inwardly agitated; it seemed to him that

the evil spirits had fled, but no angels had as yet entered into him. His weary mind rested upon external things: vague forms, the flakes of white among the shadows, the distant hoot of an owl among the hornbeams, the faint scent of the grass which still clung to his clasped hands upon the grass, before Jeanne's sad smile had appeared to him. Impetuously he unclasped his hands and turned his hungry eyes towards the monastery. No, no, God would not allow him to be conquered! God had chosen him to do His own work. Then from the depths of his soul, and independently of his will, arose images, which, in obedience to his master's counsels, he had not allowed himself to evoke since his arrival at Santa Scolastica; images of the vision, a written description of which he had confided to Don Giuseppe Flores.

He saw himself in Rome at night, on his knees in Piazza San Pietro, between the obelisk and the front of the immense temple, illumined by the moon. The square was deserted; the noise of the Anio seemed to him the noise of the fountains. A group of men clad in red, in violet and in black, issued forth from the door of the temple and stopped on the steps. They fixed their gaze upon him, pointing with their forefingers towards Castel Sant' Angelo, as if commanding him to leave the sacred spot. But now it was no longer the vision, this was a new imagining. He was standing, straight and bold, before the hostile band. Suddenly behind him he heard the rumbling of hastening multitudes pouring into the square in streams from all the adjacent streets. A human wave swept him along, and, proclaiming him the reformer of the Church, the true Vicar of Christ, set him upon the threshold of the temple. Here he faced about, as if ready to affirm his world-wide authority. At that moment there flashed across his mind the thought of Satan offering the kingdoms of the world to Christ. He fell upon the ground, stretching himself face downward on the rock, groaning in spirit: "Jesus, Jesus, I am not worthy, not worthy to be tempted as Thou wast!" And he pressed his tightly closed lips to the stone, seeking God in the dumb creature. God! God! the desire, the life, the ardent peace of the soul! A breath of wind blew

over him, and moved the grass about him.

“Is it Thou?” he groaned. “Is it Thou, is it Thou?”

The wind was silent.

Benedetto pressed his clenched hands to his cheeks, raised his head, and, resting his elbows on the rock, listened, for what he knew not. Sighing he rose to a sitting posture. God will not speak to him. His weary soul is silent, barren of thought. Time creeps slowly on. To refresh itself, the weary soul makes an effort to recall the last part of the vision, its soaring flight through a stormy nocturnal sky to meet descending angels. And he reflects dimly: “If this fate awaits me, why should I repine? Though I be tempted I shall not be conquered, and though I be conquered still God will raise me up again. Neither is it necessary to ask what His will is concerning me. Why not go down, and sleep?”

Benedetto rose, his head heavy with leaden weariness. The sky was hidden by thick clouds as far as the hills of Jenne, where the valley of the upper Anio turns. Benedetto could hardly distinguish the black shadow of the Francolano opposite, or the livid, rocky slope at his feet. He started down, but stopped after a few steps. His legs would not support him, a rush of blood set his face aflame. He had scarcely broken his fast for thirty hours, having eaten only a crust of bread at noon. He felt millions of pins pricking him, felt the violent beating of his heart, felt his mind becoming clouded. What was that tangle of serpents winding themselves about his feet, in the disguise of innocent grasses? And what sinister demon was that, waiting for him down there, crouching on all fours on a rock, disguised as a bush and ready to jump upon him? Were not the demons waiting for him at the monastery also? Did they not nest in the openings of the great tower? Was there not a black flame flashing in those openings? No, no, not now; now they were staring at him like half-closed and mocking eyes. Was this the rumbling of the Anio? No, rather the roaring of the triumphant abyss. He did not entirely credit all he saw and heard, but

he trembled, trembled like a reed in the wind, and the millions of pins were moving over his whole body. He tried to free his feet from the tangle of serpents, and did not succeed. From terror he passed to anger: “I must be able to do it!” he exclaimed aloud. From the gloomy gorge of Jenne, the dull rumble of thunder answered him. He glanced in that direction. A flash of lightning rent the clouds and disappeared above the blackness of Monte Preclaro. Benedetto tried again to free his feet from the serpents, and again the leonine voice of the thunder threatened him.

“What am I doing?” he asked himself, trying to understand. “Why do I wish to go down?” He no longer knew, and was obliged to make a mental effort to recall the reason. That was it! He had decided to go down and sleep, because one sure of the kingdom of heaven has no need of prayer. Then, like the lightning flashing round him, came a flash within him:

“I am tempting God!”

The serpents pressed him tighter; the demon crept towards him on all fours, up the rocky slope, all hellishly alive with fierce spirits; the black flames burst forth in the openings of the great tower, the abyss the while howling, triumphant! Then the sovereign roar of the thunder rumbled through the clouds: “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God!” Benedetto raised his face and his clasped hands towards heaven, worshipping as best he might with the last glimmer of clouded consciousness. He swayed, spread wide his arms, clutching the air. Slowly he bent backwards, fell prostrate upon his back on the hillside, and then lay motionless.

His body, motionless midst the rush of the thunderstorm, lay like an uprooted trunk, among the straining gorse and the waving grass. His soul must have been sealed by the central contact with the Being without time and without space, for when Benedetto first regained consciousness he had lost all sense of place and of time. His limbs felt strangely light; he experienced a pleasant sensation of physical exhaustion, and his heart was flooded with infinite sweetness. First upon his face,

then upon his hands, he felt innumerable slight touches, as though loving, animate atoms of the air were gently tickling him; he heard a faint murmur of timid voices round what seemed to be his bed. He sat up and looked about him, dazed, but at peace; forgetful of the where and the when, but perfectly at peace and filled with content by the quiet, inner spring of vague love, which flowed through all his being, and overflowed upon surrounding things, upon the sweet little lives about him, that thus came to love him in turn. Smiling at his own bewilderment, he recognised the where and the how. The when he could not recognise, nor did he desire to do so. Neither did he question whether hours or minutes had passed since his fall, so content was he in the blessed present. The storm had rolled down towards Rome. In the murmur of the rain falling softly, without wind; in the great voice of the Anio, in the restored majesty of the mountains, in the wild odour of the damp rocky slope, in his own heart, Benedetto felt something of the Divine mingling with the creature, a hidden essence of Paradise. He felt that he was mingling with the souls of things, as a small voice mingles with an immense choir, felt that he was one with the sweet-smelling hill, one with the blessed air. And thus submerged in a sea of heavenly sweetness, his hands resting in his lap, his eyes half closed, soothed by the soft, soft rain, he gave himself up to enjoyment, not however, without a vague wish that those who do not believe, those who do not love, might also know such sweetness. As his ecstasy diminished his mind once more recalled the reason of his presence on the lonely hill, in the darkness of night; recalled the uncertainties of the morrow, and Jeanne, and his exile from the monastery. But now his soul anchored in God, was indifferent to uncertainties and doubts, as the motionless Francolano was indifferent to the quiverings of its cloak of leaves. Uncertainties, doubts, memories of the mystic vision, departed from him in his profound self-abandonment to the Divine Will, which might deal with him as it would. The image of Jeanne, which he seemed to contemplate from the summit of an inaccessible tower, awakened only a desire to labour fraternally for her good. Calm reason having fully resumed its sway,

he perceived that the rain had drenched his clothes and that it still continued to fall softly, softly. What should he do? He could not go back to the Ospizio for pilgrims, for the herder would be asleep, and he would not wake him to get in, nor would this, indeed, be easy to accomplish. He determined to seek shelter under the evergreen oaks of the Sacro Speco. He rose wearily, and was seized with dizziness. He waited a short time, and then crept down very, very slowly, towards the path which leads from Santa Scolastica to the arch at the entrance to the grove. Exhausted he let himself sink upon the ground there, in the dark shadow of the great evergreen oaks, bent and spreading upon the hillside, their arms flung wide; there between the dim light on the slope beyond the arch to the right, and the dim light on the slope in front of the grove to the left.

He longed for a little food, but dared not ask it of God, for it would be like asking for a miracle. He was prepared to wait for the dawn. The air was warm, the ground hardly damp; a few great drops fell, here and there, from the leaves of the evergreen oaks. Benedetto sank into a sleep so light that it hardly made him unconscious of his sensations, which it transformed into a dream. He fancied he was in a safe refuge of prayer and peace, in the shadow of holy arms extended above his head; and it seemed to him he must leave this refuge for reasons of which the necessity was evident to him, although he was unaware of their nature. He could go by a door opening on to the road which leads down to the world, or he could go by the opposite door, taking a path which rose towards sacred solitudes. He hesitated, undecided. The falling of a great drop near him made him open his eyes. After the first moment of numbness he recognised the arch on the right, where the road begins which leads down to Santa Scolastica, to Subiaco, to Rome; and on the left the path which rises toward the Sacro Speco. He noticed with astonishment that on both sides, beyond the evergreen oaks, the bare rocks looked much whiter than before; that many little streaks of light were glinting through the foliage above his head. Dawn? Was it dawn? Benedetto had thought it was little past midnight. The hour

struck at Santa Scolastica—one, two, three, four. It was indeed morning, and it would be lighter still—for it no longer rained-were the sky not one heavy cloud from the hills of Subiaco to the hills of Jenne. A step in the distance; some one coming up towards the arch.

It was the herder of Santa Scolastica who, for special reasons, was carrying the milk to the Sacro Speco at that unusually early hour. Benedetto greeted him. The man started violently at the sound of his voice, and nearly let the jug of milk fall.

“Oh, Benedé!” he exclaimed, recognising Benedetto, “are you here?”

Benedetto begged for a drink of milk, for the love of God!

“You can explain to the monks,” said he. “You can say I was exhausted, and asked for a little milk, for the love of God.”

“Yes, yes! It is all right! Take it! Drink!” the man exclaimed, for he believed Benedetto to be a saint. “And have you passed the night out here? You were out in all that rain? Good Lord! how wet you are! You are soaked through like a sponge!” Benedetto drank.

“I thank God,” he said, “for your Madness and for the blessing of the milk.”

He embraced the man, and years afterwards the herder, Nazzareno Mercuri, used to tell that while Benedetto held him in his arms, he, Nazzareno did not seem to be himself; that his blood first turned to ice and then to fire; that his heart beat hard, very hard, as it did the first time he received Christ in the Sacrament; that a terrible headache which had tormented him for two days suddenly disappeared; that then he had realised he was in the arms of a saint, a worker of miracles; and that he had fallen on his knees at his feet! In reality he did not fall on his knees, but stood as one petrified, and Benedetto had to say twice to him: “Now go, Nazzareno; go, my dear son.” Having despatched him thus lovingly on his way to the Sacro Speco, he himself started towards Santa Scholastica.

In the light of day the rocky slope held no spirits either good or evil. The mountains,

the clouds, even the dark walls of the monastery, and the tower itself looked heavy with sleep in the pale dawn. Benedetto entered the Ospizio, and stretching himself on his poor couch, without removing his wet garments, he crossed his arms on his breast, and sank into a deep sleep.

CHAPTER IV. FACE TO FACE

I.

The rumbling of the thunder roused Noemi shortly after two o'clock; she had fallen asleep only a short time before. Her room was next to Jeanne's, and the door between them had been left open. Jeanne immediately called out to her. They had talked until two o'clock, when Noemi, quite exhausted, and after many vain efforts, had finally succeeded in persuading her indefatigable friend to leave her in peace. Now she pretended not to hear. Jeanne called again.

"Noemi! The thunder-storm! I am so frightened!"

"You are not a bit frightened!" Noemi answered irritably. "Be quiet! Go to sleep!"

"I am frightened! I am coming into your room."

"I forbid it!"

"Then you must come in here!"

Noemi's "Will you be quiet?" sounded so resolute that the other was silent.

Only for a moment, however; then the tearful, childish voice, that Noemi knew so well, began again:

"Have you not slept long enough? Can you not talk now? You must have slept three hours!"

Noemi struck a match and looked at her watch, holding which she had previously begged for silence.

“Twenty-two minutes!” she announced. “Be quiet!”

Jeanne was still for a moment, then she uttered those little hm!—hm!—hms!—which are always the prelude to tears in a spoilt child. And the complaining voice went on:

“You do not love me at all! Hm! Hm! For pity’s sake let us talk a little! Hm! Hm! Hm!”

In her mother tongue, Noemi sighed:

“Oh! mon Dieu!”

With another sigh she resigned herself to the inevitable:

“Well, go ahead! But what can you say to me that you have not already said in the last four hours?”

The thunder roared, but Jeanne no longer noticed it.

“To-morrow morning we will go to the monastery,” said she.

“Why yes, of course!”

“Only we two alone?”

“Yes, certainly, that is already settled.”

The tearful voice was silent a moment, and then went on: “You have not yet promised not to tell anything here in the house.”

“I’ve promised at least ten times!”

“You know what you are to say—do you not—if you are questioned about my fainting last night?”

“I know.”

“You must say that the Padre was not he; that I was disappointed, and that was why I fainted.”

“Gracious, Jeanne! This is the twentieth time you have said that!”

“How cruel you are, Noemi! How little you care for me!”

Silence.

Jeanne’s voice began again:

“Tell me what you think. Do you really believe he has forgotten me?”

“I will not answer that again!”

“Oh! please answer! Just one word, then I will let you go to sleep!”

Noemi reflected a moment and then answered drily, hoping to silence Jeanne:

“Well, I think he has. I do not believe he ever loved you.”

“You say that because I myself have said so to you!” Jeanne retorted violently, no longer in a tearful voice.

“You are no judge of that!”

“Bon ça!” Noemi grumbled. “C’est elle qui me l’a dit, et je ne dois pas le savoir!” Silence again.

The tearful voice once more:

“Noemi!”

No answer.

“Noemi, listen!”

Still no answer. Jeanne began to cry, and Noemi yielded.

“For heaven’s sake! what Is it now?”

“Piero cannot know that my husband is dead.”

“Well, and what of that?”

“Then he cannot know that I am free,”

“Well? How stupid you are! You make me angry!”

Silence. Jeanne knew the nature of her anger very well. Her friend’s convictions

were too much like her own, and she longed to have her painful presentiment contradicted, longed for a word of hope.

She laughed a low, forced laugh:

“Noemi, now you are pretending to be offended on purpose not to have to talk.”

Silence.

Jeanne began again, very sweetly:

“Listen. Don’t you believe he suffers temptations?”

Silence.

Jeanne, this time ignoring the fact that Noemi did not answer, exclaimed:

“It would be nice if he had just now stopped suffering from temptations!”

Her sarcasm is so comic, that—although she is greatly shocked—Noemi cannot help laughing; and Jeanne laughs with her. In spite of her mirth, Noemi reproaches Jeanne for saying such intensely foolish things without stopping to reflect. For Noemi knows her friend, and knows that the Jeanne of this hour is not the true Jeanne, self-possessed and mistress of herself; or rather perhaps it is the true Jeanne, but certainly not she who will stand before Piero Maironi, if, by any chance, they meet.

The thunder has ceased, and Jeanne would like to see what the weather is, but she dreads to leave her bed, fearing to feel ill again, fearing to discover she will not be able to go up to the monastery a few hours hence. She also fears the opposition of her hosts, should the weather prove too unpleasant. She is therefore anxious to see how the sky looks. Get up must Noemi, the slave whose acts of rebellion very seldom ended in victory. Noemi rises, opens the window, and examines the darkness, her hand extended. Tiny, frequent drops tickle her palm. The darkness grows less impenetrable as her eyes become accustomed to it. She distinguishes, down below, Santa Maria della Febbre, grey, against a black background. The mass

of heavy mist grows lighter, and the arms of the oak towering on the right show black against it. The tiny, frequent drops continue to tickle her outstretched hand, which she finally withdraws. Jeanne questions.

“Well?” “It is raining.”

She sighs “What a bother,” as if it were going to rain for ever. And the tiny drops acquire a louder voice, fill the room with soft murmurs, and then are hushed once more. Jeanne does not understand the soft murmurs, does not understand that the man of whom her heart is full is lying unconscious, on the lonely, rocky, hillside, down which the rain washes.

Late on the following morning Signora Selva, somewhat anxious because neither of her guests had as yet appeared, entered her sister’s room quietly. Noemi was nearly dressed, and signed to her to be silent. Jeanne had fallen asleep at last. The two sisters left the room together and went to the study where Giovanni was waiting for them. Well? Was Don Clemente really the man? The husband and wife were anxious to know in order to regulate their conduct accordingly. Giovanni no longer doubted, but his wife was not sure even now. Noemi! Noemi must know! Giovanni closed the door, while Maria, interpreting her sister’s silence as confirmation, insisted: “Then it is really he, really he?”

Noemi was silent. She would perhaps have betrayed her friend’s secret in order to conspire with the Selvas for Jeanne’s happiness, had she not been deterred by a doubt of their agreeing with her, and by a sense of wavering in her own mind. Probably, as Catholics, the Selvas would not wish this man who had fled from the world to return to it. She, a Protestant, could not feel thus; at least she should not feel thus. She should rather believe that God is better served out in the world and in the married state. She did feel this, but she could not hide from herself that should Signor Maironi marry Jeanne now, she could feel little respect for him. At any rate it would be wiser to hide the strange truth.

“Well, what is it you think?” said she. “That the priest who was here last night, and who passed in front of us, after all that by-play of yours, was really the former lover? Is he your Don Clemente? Very well then, he is not the man.”

“Ah! Really not?” Giovanni exclaimed, between surprise and incredulity. His wife triumphed.

“There!” said she.

But Giovanni would not yield. He asked Noemi if she were quite sure of what she said, and how she explained Signora Dessalle’s fainting? Noemi answered that there was nothing to explain. Jeanne suffered from anæmia, and was subject to attacks of terrible weakness. Giovanni was silent, but he was not convinced. If this were really so, how could Noemi assert so positively that Don Clemente was not the man? In his sister-in-law’s words, in her manner, in her face, Giovanni perceived something that was not natural. Maria asked how they had passed the night. How had Signora Dessalle rested? She had been uneasy? In what way uneasy?

“She was uneasy! What more can I say?” Noemi exclaimed rather irritably, and went to the open window as if to ascertain the intention of the clouds. Giovanni took a step towards her, determined to conquer her reticence. She had a presentiment of this, and, as an expedient, she asked what his predictions concerning the weather were.

The sky was completely overcast; low, heavy clouds rolled down from the crests of Monte Calvo upon the Cappuccini and the Rocca. The air was warm, the roar of the Anio loud. Far below, the road to Subiaco, like a winding ribbon and almost black with mud, was visible through the foliage of the olives. Giovanni answered;

“Rain.”

Noemi at once asked how far it was from the little villa to the convents. It took twenty minutes to go to Santa Scolastica. But why did she ask? Upon hearing that Jeanne intended going there with Noemi that very morning, Maria protested. In such

weather? You are obliged to walk the last part of the way. Could they not postpone their visit until to-morrow or the next day?

“When did she tell you?” Giovanni asked, almost sharply. Noemi hesitated before answering:

“In the night.”

As soon as she had spoken the words she realised that they would arouse suspicion, especially after that moment of hesitation; she now awaited an attack, undecided whether to resist or surrender.

“Noemi!” Giovanni exclaimed severely.

She looked at him, her face slightly flushed; she was silent, not even saying, “Well, what is it?”

“Do not deny it,” her brother-in-law went on.

“This woman recognised Don Clemente. Do not deny it, rather say so at once; it is a duty which your conscience must surely urge upon you! They must on no account be allowed to meet!”

“What I said is true,” Noemi answered, having now decided on a line of action. In her tone, free from all trace of irritation and almost submissive, there lurked the implied confession that she had not told the whole truth.

“She did not recognise him? But surely you know something more?”

“Yes, I do know something more,” Noemi replied; “but I must not tell you what I know. I can only ask you to warn Don Clemente that Signora Dessalle and I propose visiting the convents this morning. I will say nothing more, and now I am going to see if Jeanne is awake.”

She left the room hastily. The Selvas looked at each other. What was the meaning of her wish to have Don Clemente warned? Maria read in her husband’s thoughts something which displeased her, something she did not wish him to utter,

“You had better write the letter to Don Clemente,” she said.

But Giovanni, before writing, wished to free his mind. There seemed to be only one explanation possible: Don Clemente was really the man. Noemi had promised Signora Dessalle not to say so, but she nevertheless wished to prevent a meeting. Maria exclaimed with some heat: “Oh! Noemi does not tell lies!” and then, crimsoning and smiling, she embraced her husband as if fearful of having offended him. For, once, she had offended him by some thoughtless words concerning the lack of truthfulness in Italians, and now perhaps her exclamation might have the effect of recalling the shadow of that cloud. He was indeed annoyed, more by the embrace than by the protest, and, remembering, he also crimsoned and maintained that in Noemi’s place Maria herself would have denied everything. Maria was silent, and left the study, importunate tears welling up in her eyes. At first Giovanni was glad he had repulsed this offensive tenderness, and he began the note to Don Clemente. Before he had finished it, however, his irritation had turned to remorse, and he rose and went in search of his wife. She was in the corridor, speaking in low tones to Noemi. She turned her face towards him at once; understanding, she smiled, her eyes still wet, and signed to him to come nearer, and to speak softly. What was the matter? The matter was that Jeanne wished to start for Santa Scolastica at once. Noemi explained that she had only just awakened, and that at once meant an hour and a half at least. But they must send to Subiaco for a carriage, for Jeanne was in no condition to walk more than was absolutely necessary—more than the last part of the way. A ring of the bell called Noemi away. Jeanne was waiting for her with impatience.

“What a chatterbox of a maid!” she said, half jestingly and half irritably. “What have you been telling your sister?”

Noemi threatened to leave her. Jeanne clasped her hands in supplication, and asked, looking her straight in the eyes, as though to read her soul:

“How shall I arrange my hair? How shall I dress?”

Noemi answered thoughtlessly:

“Why, just as you please.”

Jeanne stamped her foot angrily. Noemi understood.

“As a peasant girl,” said she.

“You silly creature!”

Noemi laughed.

Jeanne sighed out the usual reproach:

“You do not love me! You do not love me!”

Then Noemi became serious, and asked her if she really wished to entice him back again—her precious Maironi?

“I want to be beautiful!” Jeanne exclaimed. “There!”

She really was beautiful at that moment, in her dressing-gown of a warm yellow tint, with her streaming dark hair down to a hand’s-breadth below her waist. She looked far lovelier and younger than the night before. Her eyes shone with that look of intense animation which, in former days, they had been wont to assume when Maironi entered the room, or even when she heard his step outside.

“I wish I had the toilette I wore at Praglia,” she said. “I should like to appear before him in my green fur-lined cloak, now, in May! I should like him to see at a glance how unchanged I am, and how much I wish to remain unchanged! Oh! my God, my God!”

With a sudden impulse she threw her arms about Noemi’s neck, and pressed her face against her shoulder, stifling a sob and murmuring words Noemi could not distinguish.

“No, no, no!” she cried at last. “I am mad! I am wicked! Let us go away, let us go away!” She raised her tearful face. “Let us go to Rome!” said she.

“Yes, yes!” Noemi answered in great agitation, “we will go to Rome. We will leave at once. Let me go and ask when the next train starts.”

Jeanne immediately seized upon her and held her back. No, no, it was madness. What would her sister say? What would her brother-in-law think? It was madness, an impossibility! And besides, besides, besides—She hid her face, whispering behind her hands that she would be satisfied if she could only see him for one moment; but she could not—no, no—she could not leave without having seen him.

“Enough!” said she, uncovering her face, after a long pause. “Let us dress! I will wear whatever you please; sackcloth, if you wish it, or even haircloth!”

Her face had resumed the aggrieved smile she had worn before.

“Who can tell?” she said. “Perhaps it will do me good to see him in the dress of a peasant!”

“It would cure me at once!” Noemi muttered; then she blushed, for she felt she had spoken a great untruth.

When Signora Selva knocked at the door to say the carriage was waiting, Jeanne, with mock humility, begged Noemi to allow her to wear a certain large Rembrandt hat of which she was very fond. The black, feather-laden brim, drooping over her pale face, above the sombre light in her eyes, above the tall figure wrapped in a dark cloak, seemed to partake of her feelings, gloomy, passionate, and haughty. When she said good morning to Maria Selva she felt the admiration she aroused. She saw it in Giovanni’s eyes also, but it was admiration of a different sort, and not of a sympathetic nature. As soon as she and Noemi had left him and were on their way down to the gate, where the carriage was waiting, Jeanne asked her if she really had not told her brother-in-law anything at all? Upon being reassured she murmured:

“I thought you must have.”

When they had proceeded a few paces she pressed her friend’s arm very hard and exclaimed, much pleased, and as though she had made an unexpected discovery:

“At any rate, I am still beautiful!”

Noemi did not heed her. She was wondering if the name Dessalle had conveyed anything to the monk. Had Maironi ever mentioned it to him? If he had told him of this love, had he not perhaps concealed the woman’s name? At the bottom of her heart there lurked a lively curiosity to see this man who had awakened such a strong passion in Jeanne and had disappeared from the world in such a strange manner. But she would have liked to see him alone. It was terrifying to think of these two meeting without any preparation. If she could only speak to the monk first, to this Don Clemente, to make sure he knew, and to enlighten him if he did not know; if she could only find out from him something of that other man, the state of his mind, his intentions. “But enough!” she said to herself as she entered the carriage. “Providence must provide! And may Providence help this poor creature!” When they left the carriage where the mule-path begins, Jeanne proposed timidly, and as one who expects a refusal and knows it is justified, that she should go up to the convents by herself, a small boy, who had run after the carriage all the way from Subiaco, acting as guide. The refusal came indeed, and was most emphatic. Such a thing was out of the question! What was she thinking of? Then Jeanne begged at least to be left alone with him should she find him. Noemi did not know what to answer.

“What if I went up before you?” said she. “If I asked for Padre Clemente, and tried to find out from him what he is, what he is doing, and what he thinks; this, your—”

Jeanne interrupted her, horrified.

“The Padre? Speak to the Padre?” she exclaimed, pressing both hands to Noemi’s face as though to silence her words. “Woe to you if you speak to the Padre!”

They started slowly up the rocky mule-path, Jeanne often stopping, seized with trembling, and vibrating like a taut cord in the wind. In silence she stretched out her hands that Noemi might feel how cold they were, and smiled. In the sea of clouds

rushing towards the hills the pale eye of the sun appeared; the sun, too, was curious.

Don Clemente said Mass at about seven o'clock, spoke with the Abbot, and then went to the Ospizio where pilgrims were sheltered. He found Benedetto asleep, his arms crossed upon his breast, his lips slightly parted, his face reflecting an inward vision of beatitude. Don Clemente stroked his hair, calling him softly. The young man started, raised his head with a dazed look, and, springing out of bed, grasped and kissed Don Clemente's hand. The monk withdrew it with an impulse of humility, quickly checked by the purity of his soul, by his consciousness of the dignity of his office.

"Well?" he said. "Did the Lord speak to you?"

"I am subject to His will," Benedetto replied, "as a leaf in the wind, a leaf which knows nought."

The monk took his head between his hands, drawing him towards him, and pressed his lips upon his hair, letting them rest there while their souls silently communed.

"You must go to the Abbot," he said. "Afterwards you can come to me."

Benedetto fixed his gaze upon him, questioning him without words: "Why this visit?" Don Clemente's eyes were veiled in silence, and the disciple humbled himself in a mute but visible impulse of obedience.

"At once?" he inquired.

"At once."

"May I first go and wash in the torrent?"

The master smiled:

"Go, wash in the torrent." Bathing in the water which sometimes, after heavy rains, sings in the Pucceia Valley to the east of the monastery, and cuts in rivulets across the road to the Sacro Speco, below Santa Crocella, was the only physical pleasure in which Benedetto allowed himself to indulge. It was still sprinkling; mist smoked

slowly in the deep valley; the trembling shallow waters complained to Benedetto as they hastened across the road, but rested quiet and content in the hollow of his hands; and through his forehead, his eyes, his cheeks, his neck, they infused deep into his heart a sense of the sweet chastity of their soul, a sense of Divine bounty. Benedetto poured the water over his head copiously, and the spirit of the water entered into his thoughts. He felt that the Father was sending him forth upon new paths, but that He would carry him in His mighty hand. He reverently blessed the creature through which so much light of grace had come to him, the most pure water! Then he bent his steps towards the Ospizio. Don Clemente, who was waiting for him in the courtyard, started when he caught sight of him, so transfigured did he appear. Under his thick, damp hair his eyes shone with quiet celestial joy, and the fleshless face, the colour of ivory, wore that expression of occult spirituality which flowed from the brushes of the Quattrocento. How could that face harmonise with peasant's attire? In his heart Don Clemente congratulated himself upon a thought which he had conceived during the night, and had already communicated to the Abbot, namely, to give Benedetto an old lay-brother's habit. Before consenting or refusing the Abbot wished to see Benedetto and speak with him.

The Abbot, while waiting for Benedetto, was strumming with his knuckles a piece of his own composition, accompanying the sound with horrible contortions of lips, nostrils and eyebrows. Upon hearing a gentle knock at the door, he neither answered nor stopped playing. Having finished the piece he began it again, and played it a second time from beginning to end. Then he stopped and listened. Another knock was heard, more gentle than the first. The Abbot exclaimed.

"Seccatore! Some bore!"

After some angry chords he began playing chromatic scales. From chromatic scales he passed to broken chords. Then he listened again for three or four minutes. Hearing nothing more he went to open the door, and perceived Benedetto, who fell

upon his knees.

“Who are you?” he demanded roughly.

“My name is Piero Maironi,” Benedetto answered; “but here at the monastery they call me Benedetto.”

And he made a movement to take the Abbot’s hand and kiss it.

“One moment,” said the Abbot, frowning, withdrawing and raising his hand. “What are you doing here?”

“I work in the kitchen garden,” Benedetto replied.

“Fool!” exclaimed the Abbot. “I ask what you are doing here outside my door?”

“I was coming to see you, Padre.”

“Who told you to come to me?”

“Don Clemente.”

The Abbot was silent, and studied the kneeling man for some time; then he grumbled something incomprehensible, and offered him his hand to kiss.

“Rise!” said he, still sharply. “Come in. Close the door.”

When Benedetto had entered the Abbot appeared to forget him. He put on his glasses and began turning over the leaves of a book and glancing through the papers on his desk. In an attitude of soldierly respect, holding himself very erect, Benedetto stood, waiting for him to speak.

“Maironi of Brescia?” said the Abbot, in the same unfriendly tone as before, and without turning round.

Having received an answer he continued to turn the pages and read. Finally he removed his glasses and turned round.

“What did you come here to Santa Scolastica for?” said he.

“I was a great sinner,” Benedetto answered, “God called me to withdraw from the

world, and I withdrew from It."

The Abbot was silent for a moment, his gaze fixed upon the young man, and then he said with ironical gentleness:

"No, my friend!"

He took out his snuff-box, shook it, repeating "No, no, no," rapidly and almost under his breath; he examined the snuff, dipped his fingers into it, raised his eyes once more to Benedetto's face, and, emphasising each word, said:

"That is not true!"

Grasping the pinch with his thumb, his forefinger, and his middle finger, he raised his hand swiftly, as though about to throw the snuff into the air, and, with his arm suspended, continued to speak.

"It is probably true enough that you were a great sinner, but it is not true that you withdrew from the world. You are neither in it nor out of it."

He took his pinch of snuff with a loud noise, and went on:

"Neither in it nor out of it!"

Benedetto looked at him without answering. In those eyes there was something so serious and so sweet, that the Abbot lowered his to the open snuff-box, once more dipping his fingers into it and toying with the snuff.

"I do not understand you," he said.

"You are of the world, and still you are not of it. You are in the monastery, and still you are not in the monastery. I fear your head serves you no better than your great-grandfather's, your grandfather's, and your father's served them. Fine heads, those!"

Benedetto's ivory face flushed slightly.

"They are souls with God," he said, "better than we are, and your words offend against one of God's commandments."

“Silence!” the Abbot exclaimed. “You say you have renounced the world, and you are full of worldly pride. If you really wished to renounce the world, you should have tried to become a novice! Why did you not attempt this? You wished to come here in villeggiatura, for an outing, that is the truth of the matter. Or perhaps you were under certain obligations at home, there were certain troublesome matters—you know what I mean! Nec nominentur in nobis. And you wished to rid yourself of these troubles, only to get yourself into fresh ones. You tell stories to that simple-minded Don Clemente; you usurp the place of a poor pilgrim; and perhaps—eh?—you hoped with prayers and sacraments to throw dust in the eyes of the monks, which is an easy matter enough, and even in the eyes of the Almighty Himself, which is a far more difficult matter. You do not deny this!”

The slight flush had vanished from the ivory face; the lips, which at one moment had parted, ready to utter, words of calm severity, were now motionless; the penetrating eyes were fixed upon the Abbot with the same sweaty grave look as before. And this calm silence seemed to exasperate the Abbot.

“Speak then!” said he. “Confess! Have you not also boasted of special gifts, of visions, of miracles even, for all I know? You have been a great sinner? Prove that you are one no longer! Exonerate yourself if you can. Say how you have lived; explain this pretension of yours that God has called you; justify yourself for coming here to eat the monk’s bread for nothing; for you did not wish to become a monk, and as to work, you have done little enough of that.”

“Padre,” Benedetto replied (and the severe tone of his voice, the austere dignity of his face, accorded ill with the humble gentleness of his words), “this is good for me, a sinner, who for three years have lived the life of the spirit, in ease and delights, in peace, in the affection of saintly men, in an atmosphere full of God Himself. Your words are good, and sweet unto my soul, they are a blessing from the Lord; their sting has made me feel how much pride there is in me still, of which I was ignorant,

for it was a joy to me to despise myself. But as a servant of holy Truth, I say to you that harshness is not good, even when used towards one who deceives, because gentleness might perhaps bring him to repent of his deceit; and I say also, Padre, that in your words there is not the spirit of our true and; only Father, to whom be all glory!"

At the words "to whom be all glory" Benedetto fell upon his knees, his face glowing with intense fervour.

"Is it for you, miserable sinner, to play the part of teacher?" the Abbot exclaimed.

"You are right, you are right!" Benedetto replied impulsively, with laboured breath and clasped hands. "Now I will confess my sin to you. I desired illicit love; I was happy in the passion of a woman who was not free, as I myself was not free, and I accepted this passion. I abandoned all religious practices and heeded not the scandal I gave. This woman did not believe in God, and I dishonoured God in her company, my faith being dead, and showing myself sensual, selfish, weak, and false. God called me back with the voices of my dead, the voices of my father and mother. Then I left the woman who loved me, but I was without strength of purpose, wavering in my heart between good and evil. Soon I returned to her, all aflame with sin, knowing I should lose myself, even determined to lose myself. There was no longer an atom of grace in my soul when a dying hand, dear and saintly, seized me and saved me."

"Look me in the eyes," said the Abbot, without allowing him to rise. "Have you ever let any one know you were here?"

"I have never let any one know." The Abbot answered drily:

"I do not believe you!"

Benedetto did not flinch.

"You know why I do not believe you?" the Abbot continued.

“I can imagine why,” Benedetto answered, dropping his eyes. “Peccatum meum contra me est semper.”

“Rise!” the Abbot commanded, still inflexible. “I expel you from the monastery. You will now go and take leave of Don Clemente, in his cell, and then you will depart, never to return. Do you understand?”

Benedetto bowed his head in assent, and was about to bend his knee to pay homage in the usual way, when the Abbot stopped him with a gesture.

“Wait,” said he.

Putting on his glasses he took a sheet of paper, upon which he traced some words, standing the while,

“What will you do, when you have left?” he asked still writing.

Benedetto answered softly:

“Does the sleeping child that his father lifts in his arms know what his father will do with him?”

The Abbot made no answer; his writing finished, he placed the paper in an envelope, closed it, and without turning his head, held it out to Benedetto, who was standing behind him.

“Take this to Don Clemente,” he said. Benedetto begged permission to kiss his hand.

“No, no, go away, go away!”

The Abbot’s voice trembled with anger. Benedetto obeyed. Hardly had he reached the corridor when he heard the angry man thundering on the piano.

Before entering Don Clemente’s little cell, Benedetto stopped before the great window at the end of the corridor. Here, a few hours earlier, the master himself had lingered, contemplating the lights of Subiaco, and thinking of the enemy, the creature of beauty, of genius, of natural kindliness, who was perhaps come to strive with him for possession of his spiritual son, to strive with God Himself. Now the

spiritual son felt a mysterious certainty that the woman he had loved so ill, during the time of his blind and ardent leaning towards inferior things, had discovered his presence in the monastery, and would come in search of him. Seeking deep in his own heart for the Spirit which dwelt there, he gained from it a pious sense of the Divine, which was surely in her also, hidden even from herself; and he felt a mystic hope that, by some dark way, she also would one day reach the sea of eternal truth and love, which awaits so many poor wandering souls.

Don Clemente had heard him coming, and had set his door ajar. Benedetto entered, and offered him the Abbot's letter. "I must leave the monastery," he said, very calmly. "At once, and for ever."

Don Clemente did not answer, but opened the letter. When he had read it he observed, smiling, that Benedetto's departure for Jenne had been decided upon the night before. True, but the Abbot had said never to return, Don Clemente's eyes were full of tears, but he still smiled.

"You are glad?" said Benedetto, almost plaintively,

Oh, glad! How could the master explain what he felt? His beloved disciple was leaving him, leaving him for ever, after three years of spiritual union; but then the hidden Will had made itself manifest; God was taking him from the monastery, setting his feet in other ways. Glad! Yes; afflicted and glad, but he could not communicate the cause of his gladness to Benedetto, The Divine Word would have no value for Benedetto did he not interpret it for himself.

"Not glad," he said, "but at peace. We understand each other, do we not? And now prepare yourself to listen to my last words, which I hope you will cherish."

Don Clemente's whole face flushed as he spoke thus, in low tones.

Benedetto bowed his head, and Don Clemente laid his hands upon it with gentle dignity.

"Do you desire to surrender your whole being to Supreme Truth, to His Church,

visible and invisible?" said the low, manly voice.

As though he had expected both the action and the question, Benedetto answered at once, and in a firm voice:

"Yes."

The low voice:

"Do you promise, as from man to man, to remain unwed and poor, until I shall absolve you from your promise?"

The firm voice

"Yes."

The low voice:

"Do you promise to be obedient always to the authority of the Holy Church, administered according to her laws?"

The firm voice:

"Yes."

Don Clemente drew his disciple's head towards him, and said, his lips almost touching Benedetto's forehead:

"I asked the Abbot to allow me to give you the habit of a lay-brother, that on leaving here you might, at least, carry with you the sign of a humble religious office. The Abbot wished to speak with you before deciding."

Here Don Clemente kissed his disciple on the forehead, thus intimating what the Abbot's decision had been after their meeting; and into the kiss he put silent words of praise which his fatherly character and the humility of his disciple would not permit him to utter.

He did not notice that the disciple was trembling from head to foot.

"Here is what the Abbot wrote after talking with you," said he.

He showed Benedetto the sheet of paper, upon which the Abbot had written:

“I consent. Send him away at once, that I may not be tempted to detain him!”

Benedetto embraced his master impulsively, and rested his forehead against his shoulder without speaking. Don Clemente murmured: “Are you glad? Now it is I who ask you!”

He repeated his question twice without obtaining an answer. At last he heard a whisper:

“May I be allowed not to answer? May I pray a moment?”

“Yes, caro, yes!”

Beside the monk’s narrow bed, and high above the kneeling-desk, a great bare cross proclaimed: “Christ is risen; now nail thy soul to me!” In fact some one, perhaps Don Clemente, perhaps one of his predecessors, had written, below it: “Omnes superbiae motus ligno crucis affigat.” Benedetto prostrated himself on the floor, and placed his forehead where the knees should rest. Through the open window of the cell, the pale light of the rainy sky fell obliquely upon the backs of the prostrate man and of the man standing erect, his face raised towards the great cross. The murmur of the rain, the rumble of the deep Anio, would have meant to Jeanne the distressed lament of all that lives and loves in the world; to Don Clemente they meant the pious union of inferior creatures with the creature supplicating the common Father. Benedetto himself did not notice them.

He rose, his face composed, and, in obedience to his master’s gesture, put on the robe of a lay-brother, which was spread out upon the bed, and fastened the leathern girdle. When he was dressed he opened wide his arms and displayed himself, smiling to his master, who was gratified to see how dignified, how spiritually beautiful he was in that habit.

“You did not understand?” said Benedetto. “You were not reminded of something?”

No, Don Clemente had thought that Benedetto's intense emotion had been caused by his humility. Now he understood that he should have recalled something; but what?

"Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Was it perhaps your vision?"

Yes, surely. Benedetto had seen himself dying on the bare ground, in the shade of a great tree, and wearing the habit of the Benedictines; and one argument against believing in the vision—in accordance with the advice of Don Giuseppe Flores and of Don Clemente—had been the seeming contradiction between this detail and his repugnance to the monastic vows, which had been ever increasing since his withdrawal from the world. Now this contradiction seemed to be vanishing, and therefore the credibility of the prophetic nature of the vision was reappearing. Don Clemente was aware of this part of the vision, and should have been able to read in Benedetto's heart, his awe at being once more confronted with a mysterious, divine purpose concerning him, and his fear of falling into the sin of pride. Of this, he had not thought.

"Do not you think of it, either," said he, and he hastened to change the subject. He gave Benedetto some books and a letter for the parish-priest at Jenne, whose guest he would be for the present. Whether or no he should remain at Jenne, and in case he did not, whether he should return to Subiaco or go elsewhere, that Divine Providence must point out to him.

"Padre mio," Benedetto said, "truly I do not think of what may happen to me to-morrow. I think only of the words: 'Magister adest et vocat me!'' but not as being spoken by a supernatural voice. I was wrong not to understand that the Master is always present, and always calling me, you, every one! If only our soul be hushed, we may hear His voice!"

A faint ray of sunshine glinted into the cell. Don Clemente reflected at once that should the rain cease, Signora Dessalle would very probably come to visit the monastery. He said nothing, but his inward anxiety betrayed itself by a slight

shudder, by a glance at the sky which told Benedetto it was time to leave. He begged the privilege of praying, first in the Church of Santa Scolastica, and then at the Sacro Speco. The sun disappeared, and it began to rain again. Master and disciple descended to the church together, and there, kneeling side by side, they lingered in prayer. That was their only farewell. At nine o'clock Benedetto took the road to the Sacro Speco. He left the monastery unobserved, while Fra Antonio was confabulating with Giovanni Selva's messenger. At that moment the rays of the returning sun suddenly lit up the old walls, the road, the hill itself; shrill cries of gladness, swift wings of tiny birds broke through the green on all sides, and to his lips the words rose spontaneously:

"I am coming!"

III.

Jeanne and Noemi reached the monastery at ten o'clock. A few paces from the gate Jeanne was seized with a violent palpitation. She would have liked to visit the garden before the convent, the urchin from Subiaco having told her that the monks of Santa Scolastica had a fine kitchen-garden, and that some people belonging to them worked in it—an old man from Subiaco and a young stranger. Now, it was out of the question. Pale, exhausted, and leaning on Noemi's arm, she, with difficulty, dragged herself as far as the door, where a beggar stood, waiting for his bowl of soup. Fortunately Fra Antonio opened the door before Noemi had time to ring, and she entreated him to bring a chair and a glass of water for her friend, who was feeling unwell. Frightened at the sight of Jeanne, so deathly pale, and drooping against her companion's shoulder, the humble old lay-brother placed the bowl of soup he had brought for the beggar in Noemi's hands, and hastened away in search of the chair and the water. Thanks partly to the droll spectacle the astonished Noemi presented, as she stood holding the bowl of soup, partly to the rest—the water, the sight of the ancient cloister sleeping so peacefully, and the reassertion of her own

will—a few minutes sufficed to restore Jeanne sufficiently. Fra Antonio went to call the Padre foresterario, to act as guide to the visitors.

“Tell him we are the two ladies staying at Signor Selva’s house,” said Noemi.

Don Clemente appeared, blushing in the virginal purity of his soul because Jeanne was unaware that he knew her story, as he might have blushed had he been committing some fraud. He mistook Noemi, who came forward first, for Signora Dessalle. Tall, slim, and elegant, Noemi might well pass for a siren; she did not, however, look a day over five and twenty, and therefore could not be the woman of whose adventures Benedetto had told him. But the Benedictine was incapable of such calculations, and Noemi was anxious to satisfy herself that Fra Antonio had fulfilled his mission faithfully.

“Good morning, Padre,” she said in her pretty voice, to which the foreign accent lent additional charm. “We met last night. You were just leaving Signor Selva’s house.”

Don Clemente bent his head slightly. Noemi had really hardly had a glimpse of him, but she had been struck by his beauty, and had reflected that if he were Signor Maironi she could understand Jeanne’s passion. Conscious of her fresh and youthful appearance, it never entered her head that her twenty-five years could be mistaken for Jeanne’s thirty-two. Jeanne, in the meantime, was wondering how she could turn her dilemma to the best account.

“You were not expected last night,” said Don Clemente to Noemi. “You come from the Veneto, I believe?”

“The Veneto?” Noemi seemed surprised.

“The Selvas told me you lived in the Veneto,” the Padre added.

Then Noemi understood. She smiled, and murmured a monosyllable which was neither “yes” nor “no”; she also was determined to take advantage of her position, and, thanks to this misunderstanding, obtain a private interview with Don Clemente, and warn him if necessary. It was moreover most amusing to talk to this handsome

monk, who believed her to be Jeanne. By a look she cautioned Jeanne, who, much embarrassed, was glancing from her to the monk, doubtful whether to speak or remain silent.

“Of course my friend knows Santa Scolastica already,” she said, “but I have never been here before.”

She turned to Jeanne.

“If the Padre will be kind enough to accompany me, it seems to me you might remain here, as you are not feeling well,” she said.

Jeanne consented so readily that Noemi suspected she had some secret plan, and wondered if she had not made a mistake in proposing this. However, it was too late now. Don Clemente, not over-pleased at having to accompany one lady alone, suggested they should wait; perhaps her friend would feel stronger presently. Jeanne protested. No, they must not wait; she was glad to remain there.

While passing from the first to the second cloister, Noemi once more reminded the Padre of their meeting on the previous night.

“You had a companion?” she said, and immediately felt ashamed of her deceit, and of not having cleared up the mistake under which the monk was labouring. Don Clemente answered almost under his breath:

“Yes, signora, a kitchen-gardener from the monastery.”

Both their faces were crimson, but they did not look at one another, and each was conscious only of his and her own blush.

“Do you know who we are?” Noemi continued.

Don Clemente replied that he believed he knew. They must be the two ladies Signora Selva expected. He thought she had mentioned her sister and Signora Dessalle.

“Oh! you heard of us from my sister?”

At Noemi's words Don Clemente could not refrain from exclaiming:

"Then you are not Signora Dessalle?"

Noemi saw that the man knew. Therefore he had surely taken precautions, and an unexpected meeting was not possible. She breathed freely again, and in her feminine heart curiosity took the place of the anxiety of which she was now relieved.

Don Clemente spoke to her of the tower, of the ancient arcades, of the frescoes near the door of the church, while she wondered how he could be brought to speak of Maironi. When he was showing her the procession of little stone monks, she interrupted him thoughtlessly, to ask if souls, tired of the world, disappointed and desirous of giving themselves to God, often came to the monastery.

"I am a Protestant," she said. "This interests me greatly."

In his heart Don Clemente thought that if this really interested her greatly, it was not on account of her Protestantism, but on account of her friendship for Signora Dessalle.

"Not often," he answered; "sometimes. Such souls usually prefer other Orders. So you are a Protestant? But you will have no objection to entering our church? I do not mean the Catholic Church," he added, smiling and blushing, "I mean the church of our monastery."

And he told her about a Protestant Englishman, who was in love with St. Benedict, and made long stays at Subiaco, frequently visiting Santa Scolastica and the Sacro Speco.

"He has a most beautiful soul," he said.

But Noemi wished to return to the first subject; to know if—urged by a spirit of penitence—any one ever came from the world to serve in the cloister without wearing the habit. She received no answer, for Don Clemente, seeing a colossal monk enter the cloister, begged to be excused one minute, and went to speak to him,

returning presently with his majestic companion, whom he introduced as Don Leone, a guide far superior to himself, both as to the amount and the depths of his knowledge. Then, to her great chagrin, he himself withdrew.

When she was alone Jeanne had another attack of violent palpitation. Dio! how the past came back to her! How Praglia came back! And to think that he came and went through that entrance, through those cloisters, who knows how many times a day; that he must often think of Praglia, of that hour fixed by fate, of that water spilled, of the ecstasy, the tightly clasped hands, under cover of the fur cloak, on the way home. To think he was now free, and she also was free! How feverish she felt, how feverish!

Fra Antonio, who had at first been terrified at finding this breathless woman left there on his hands, was presently amazed by the rapid words and questions with which she suddenly assailed him.—Was there not a kitchen-garden near the monastery?—Yes, very near, on the west side; there was only a narrow lane intervening.—And who cultivated it?—A kitchen-gardener.—Young? Old? From Subiaco? A stranger?—Old. From Subiaco.—And no one else?—Yes, Benedetto.—Benedetto? Who was Benedetto?—A young man from the Padre foresterario's native town.—And what was the Padre foresterario's native town?—Brescia.—And this young man was called Benedetto?—Every one called him Benedetto, but Fra Antonio could not say if that was his real name.—But what sort of man was he?—Ah! that Fra Antonio could say. He was almost more holy than the monks themselves. You could see by his face that he came of a good family, yet he was housed like a dog; he ate only bread, fruit, and herbs; he spent whole nights, in prayer probably, out on the mountains. He tilled the soil, and he also studied in the library with the Padre foresterario. And such a heart! Such a great heart! Many times he had given the scanty dole of food he received from the monastery to the poor.—And where could one find him at this hour?—Oh! surely in the garden; Fra Antonio fancied he would be busy sprinkling the grape vines with

sulphate of copper.

Jeanne's heart beats so violently that her sight becomes dim. She sits silent and motionless. Fra Antonio thinks she has forgotten Benedetto. "Ah! signora," he says, "Santa Scolastica is a fine monastery, but you should see Praglia!" For Fra Antonio passed several years at Praglia in his youth, before the abbey was suppressed, and he speaks of it as of a venerable mother. "Ah! the church at Praglia! The cloisters! The hanging cloister, the refectory!" At these unexpected words Jeanne grows excited. They seem to say to her: "Go, go, go at once!" She starts from her chair.

"And this garden? In which direction is it?"

Fra Antonio, somewhat astonished, answered that it might be reached through the monastery, or by skirting the outside. Jeanne went out; absorbed in her burning thoughts she passed the gate, turned to the right, entered the gallery below the library, where she paused a moment, pressing her hands to her heart, and walked on again.

The herder belonging to the convent, standing at the entrance to the courtyard where the Ospizio, which shelters pilgrims, is located, pointed out the door of the garden on the opposite side of the narrow lane, running between two walls. She asked him if she would find a certain Benedetto in the garden. In spite of her efforts to control herself, her voice trembled in anticipation of an affirmative answer. The herder replied that he did not know, and offered to go and see. Knocking several times, he called: "Benedè! Benedè!"

A step at last! Jeanne was leaning against the door-post to keep herself from falling. O God! if it be Piero, what shall she say to him? The door opens; it is not Piero but an old man. Jeanne breathes freely again, glad for the moment. The old man looks at her, astonished, and says to the herder:

"Benedetto is not here."

Her gladness had already vanished; she felt icy cold; the two men looked at her

curiously, in silence.

“Is this the lady who is looking for Benedetto?” said the old man.

Jeanne did not reply; the herder answered for her, and then he told how Benedetto had spent the night out of doors; that he had found him at daybreak, in the grove of the Sacro Speco, wet to the skin. He had offered him some milk and Benedetto had drunk like a dying man to whom life is returning.

“Listen, Giovacchino,” the herder added, growing suddenly grave. “When he had drunk he embraced me like this. I was feeling ill; I had not slept, my head ached, all my bones ached. Well, as he held me in his arms slight shivers seemed to come from them and creep over me, and then I felt a sort of comforting heat; and I was content, and as comfortable all over as if I had had two mouthfuls of the very best spirits in my stomach! The headache was gone, the pains in the bones were gone, everything was gone. Then I said to myself: ‘By St. Catherine, this man is a saint!’ And a saint he certainly is!”

While he was speaking a poor cripple passed, a beggar from Subiaco. Seeing a lady, he stopped and held out his hat. Jeanne, completely absorbed in what the herder was saying, did not notice him, nor did she hear him when—the herder having ceased speaking—he begged for alms, for the love of God. She asked the gardener where this Benedetto was to be found. The man scratched his head, doubtful how to answer. Then the beggar groaned out in a mournful voice:

“You are seeking Benedetto? He is at the Sacro Speco.”

Jeanne turned eagerly towards him.

“At the Sacro Speco?” said she; and the gardener asked the beggar if he himself had seen him there.

The cripple, more tearful than ever, told how more than an hour ago he had been on the road to the Sacro Speco, beyond the grove of evergreen oaks, only a few steps from the convent. He was carrying a bundle of fagots, and had fallen badly, and

could not rise again with his burden.

“God and St. Benedict sent a monk that way,” he continued. “This monk lifted me up, comforted me, gave me his arm, and took me to the convent, where the other monks restored me. Then I came away, but the monk stayed at the Sacro Speco.”

“And what has all this to do with it?” the gardener exclaimed.

“Simply this, that dressed as he was I did not at once know him; but afterwards I did. It was he.”

“Whom do you mean by he?”

“Benedetto.”

“Who was Benedetto?”

“The monk.”

“You are mad! You idiot!” the two men exclaimed together.

Jeanne gave the cripple a silver piece.

“Think well,” she said. “Tell the truth!”

The cripple overflowed with benedictions, mingling with them such humble expressions as: “Just as you please, just as you please! I may have been mistaken, I may have been mistaken,” and with his string of pious mumblings he took himself off. Jeanne again questioned the herder and the gardener. Was it possible that Benedetto had taken the habit?—Impossible! The beggar was only a poor fool.

Presently the herder left, and Jeanne, entering the kitchen-garden, sat down tinder an olive tree, reflecting that Noemi could easily learn from the door-keeper where to find her. The old gardener, whose curiosity was aroused, asked, with many apologies, if she was a relative of Benedetto’s,

“For it is known that he is a gentleman, a rich man!” said he.

Jeanne did not answer his question. She wished rather to find out why this belief in Piero’s riches prevailed.—Well, you could see by his manners and by his face; he

really had the face of a gentleman.—And he had not become a monk?—Well, no.—And why had he not become a monk?—That was not known for a certainty, There were many tales told. It was even said he had a wife, and that his wife had played him what the gardener called “a mean trick.” Jeanne was silent, and it suddenly struck the gardener that she might be the wife, the woman who had played the “mean trick.” She had perhaps repented, and was come to ask his forgiveness.

“If this story about the wife is true,” he added, “I don’t say she may not have had her reasons; but as far as goodness goes, she surely did not find a better man. You see, signora, these fathers are holy men, that is undeniable; but there is no one so holy as he, either at Santa Scolastica or at the Sacro Speco. That I will swear to! Not even Don Clemente, who is most holy! Still he is not equal to Benedetto. No, no!”

The beggar’s words suddenly sounded in Jeanne’s heart. Benedetto a monk! But why? It was discouraging to have them thus return, without a reason, to her heart. Had not the two men said it was nonsense; that the cripple was a fool? Yes, nonsense, she could see that herself; yes, a fool, he had impressed her as such; but still the stupid words beat and throbbed in her heart, as gruesome as masqueraders in comic masks would be should they knock at your door at any other time save during Carnival!

“If you will wait, signora, in less than half an hour he is sure to be here. Che! What am I saying? In a quarter of an hour. Perhaps he is in the library studying with Don Clemente, or perhaps he is in the church.”

The library, which runs across the narrow lane, communicates directly with the kitchen-garden.

“There he is now!” the old man exclaimed.

Jeanne started to her feet. The door leading from the library to the garden opened slowly. Instead of Piero, Noemi appeared, followed by the big monk. Noemi perceived her friend among the olives, and stopped suddenly, greatly surprised.

Jeanne in the garden? Was it possible that—? No, the old man beside her could not be Maironi, and there was no one else with her. She smiled and shook her finger at her. Don Leone took leave of Noemi upon learning that this was the friend who—as she had told him during the visit to the monastery—had remained at the door-keeper's lodge. Of course the ladies would go up to the other convent, and his great size was no longer adapted to the climb to the Sacro Speco.

It was nearly eleven o'clock; they had ordered the carriage to meet them where they had left it at half-past twelve, for dinner was at one at the Selvas'; if Jeanne wished to see the Sacro Speco there was no time to lose, provided her indisposition had disappeared, as would seem to be the case. Noemi encouraged her going, and did not stop to ask, in the presence of the gardener, why she had left Fra Antonio to run off and explore the garden. She merely whispered: "You were making believe, eh?" Jeanne said that Noemi must certainly start for the Sacro Speco at once, but that she herself intended to wait for her in the garden. Noemi suspected another plot.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, "either you come to the Sacro Speco or—if you do not feel well enough—we will go down to Subiaco at once."

Jeanne objected that it would be useless to go down now, for they would not find the carriage; but Noemi was determined not to yield. They could walk down very slowly, and be ready for the carriage as soon as it arrived. Jeanne refused again, more emphatically than before, having no other argument to set forth. Then Noemi looked searchingly into her eyes, silently trying to read her hidden purpose there. In that moment of silence Jeanne's heart was again assailed by the beggar's words. Impulsively she seized her friend's arm.

"You wish me to go to the Sacro Speco?" she said. "Very well, let us go then. You believe something and you do not know! Let Fate decide!"

But before moving a step she dropped her friend's arm, and while Noemi, completely bewildered, stood watching her she wrote in her notebook: "I am at the

Sacro Speco. For the sake of Don Giuseppe Flores wait for me!" She did not sign her name, but tearing out the tiny page gave it to the gardener. "For that man, should he return." Then once more taking Noemi's arm, she exclaimed:

"Let us go!"

The sun's burning rays, smiting the steaming, rocky hillside, brought out damp odours of herbs and of stone, silvered the puffs of mist creeping along the sides of the narrow, wild valley, as far as the enormous mass resting there, in the background, like a cap on the heights of Jenne, while the mighty voice of the Anio filled the solitude. Jeanne climbed upwards in silence, without replying to Noemi's questions. Noemi was becoming more and more alarmed by her silence, by her pallor, by the nervous twitching of her arm, by the sight of her lips pressed tightly together, to keep back her sobs. Why was she thus moved? During the night and, indeed, until they had reached the entrance to Santa Scolastica, the poor creature had wavered between fear and hope, in a fever of expectancy. Now her fever was of a different nature; at least it seemed so to Noemi. She thought Jeanne must have heard something there in the garden, something of which she did not wish to speak, something painful, frightful! What could it be? The tragic lament of the invisible water, the silent trembling of the blades of grass on the rocky slope, even the burning heat, made the heart shrink. A few paces from the arch which, standing rigid there, holds in check the black crowd of evergreen oaks, Noemi was relieved to hear human voices. They belonged to Dane on horseback and to Marinier and the Abbot on foot, who were coming down together from the Sacro Speco,

Dane showed great pleasure at this meeting; he stopped his horse, presented the ladies to the Abbot, and spoke of the Sacro Speco in enthusiastic language. Jeanne, after exchanging a few words with the Abbot, asked him if any one had recently pronounced the solemn vows or perhaps taken the habit. The Abbot replied that he had been at Santa Scolastica only a few days, and was not, at that moment, in a

position to answer her question; but he did not believe any one had made the solemn profession or assumed the habit of a novice at Santa Scolastica for at least a year. Jeanne was radiant with joy. Now she understood; she had been a fool to believe it possible, even for a single moment, that in twelve hours Piero the peasant had become Piero the monk. She longed to return at once to the garden at Santa Scolastica; but how could she manage it? what pretext could she invent? She pressed forward, anxious to be done with the Sacro Speco as soon as possible. Noemi proposed resting a few minutes in the shade of the evergreen oaks, which, there on the path of those souls agitated by Divine Love, themselves seem twisted by an inward ascetic fury, by a frantic effort to tear themselves from the earth, and to dart their arms into the sky. Jeanne refused impatiently. The colour had returned to her face, and the light to her eyes. She started rapidly up the narrow stair where the short walk comes to an end, and in spite of the protests of Noemi (who could not understand the cause of this change) would not stop to take breath at the head of the stairs where, suddenly, the dark, deep spectacle of the valley reveals itself. High up on the left looms the terrible crag, dear to falcons and crows, bulging out above the dreary walls, pierced by unadorned openings which are incrusted upon the bare slope, running crosswise along its face, and form the monastery of the Sacro Speco. In the depths below the convent hangs the rose garden of St. Benedict, and below the rose garden hang the kitchen-garden and the olive groves, sloping to the open bed of the roaring Anio. The mass of cloud which had rested on the heights of Jenne was rising and invading the sky. A wave of shadow passed over the enormous crag, over the monastery, over the parapet upon which Noemi had rested her elbows, lost in contemplation.

“This is magnificent!” she said. “Let us stop here a few seconds at least, now that it is shady,”

But at that moment the little door of the monastery, not two steps from them, opened and a party of visitors, men and women, came out. The monk who had acted as

guide, seeing Noemi and Jeanne, held the door open, expecting them to enter. Jeanne hastened to do so, and Noemi, much against her will, followed her,

“Thirteenth century frescoes,” said the Benedictine, in the dark entrance-hall, in an indifferent tone, as he passed on. Noemi stopped, curiously regarding the ancient paintings. Jeanne followed the Benedictine, looking neither to right nor left, distracted, tormented by a doubt. What if the Abbot had been mistaken, if the beggar had told the truth? She recalled in fancy the happy meeting in the courtyard at Praglia, the intense pallor of his face, the “Thank you!” which had made her tremble with joy. A shiver ran through her blood, and, as though with a sudden pull at the reins of her imagination, she turned to Noemi: “Come!” she said.

She followed the monk, hearing nothing that he said, observing nothing that he pointed out. Noemi found it difficult to hide her own uneasiness, for she had a presentiment of evil on their return. The dangerous point was the garden at Santa Scolastica, which, judging by what she had said to the old gardener, Jeanne intended to revisit. She no longer wished to see this famous Maironi; she longed only to get Jeanne safely back to the Selvas’, without any meetings, and she intended to tarry as long as possible at the Sacro Speco, that they might not have time to stop at Santa Scolastica. She therefore pretended to take a lively interest in the precious interior of this monastery, which has such a bare and dreary exterior, while all the while her one wish was to revisit it more peacefully with her sister or her brother-in-law.

Upon descending into that mine of holiness, neither of them understood what road they were following, surrounded as they were by the lifeless, cold atmosphere, the mystic shadows, the yellowish lights falling from above, the odours of damp stone, of smoking wicks, of musty draperies; bewildered by visions of chapels, of grottos, of crosses at the foot of dark stairs; losing themselves in their flight down towards the lower caverns, keeping on a level with their own pointed vaults; of marbles the colour of blood, the colour of the night, the colour of snow; of stiff, pious groups

with Byzantine features, crowding the walls, the drums of the arches; of little monks and little friars, standing in the window niches, on the pinnacles of the vaults, along the line of the entablatures, each with his venerable aureole. The visitors did not know what path they were following, and Jeanne hardly felt the reality of it all.

While descending the Scala Santa—the Holy Staircase—the monk leading and Jeanne following closely, while Noemi came last, some five or six steps behind, Jeanne, suddenly throwing out her hands, clutched the guide's shoulder, and then, ashamed of her involuntary action, immediately withdrew them, while the monk, who was greatly astonished, stopped, and turned his head towards her.

"Pardon me!" she said. "Who is that father?"

Between two landings of the Scala, behind a projection of the left wall, a figure, all black in the habit of the Benedictines, stood, erect and still, in the dark corner, its forehead resting against the marble, Jeanne had passed it by four or five steps without having perceived it, then she had chanced to look round, and had seen it, while an instinctive suspicion flashed through her trembling heart.

The monk answered:

"He is not a father, signora."

He bent down to unlock the low gate of a chapel.

"What is the matter?" Noemi inquired, drawing near. "He is not a father?" Jeanne repeated.

Noemi trembled at the strange ring in her friend's voice. She herself had not noticed the figure standing erect in the shadow of the wall.

"Who?" she asked.

The monk, who, in the meantime, had opened the gate, misunderstood her, and thought she referred to something that had been said before.

"No," he answered. "The authentic portrait of St. Francis is not here. Lower down

there is a St. Francis painted by the Cavalier Manente. You will see it presently. Please come in."

"What is it?" Noemi said softly to Jeanne. Her friend having answered in a calmer voice, "Nothing," she passed her, entering the chapel, and listened to the monk's explanations. Then the black figure moved away from the wall. Jeanne saw it slowly mounting in the dim light, under the pointed arches. On the upper landing the figure turned to the right, and disappeared, to reappear almost immediately on an arm of the stair, crossing the slanting background of the scene, and brilliant in the light of an invisible window. The figure mounted slowly, almost wearily. Before it vanished behind the enormous flank of an arch, it bent its head and looked down. Jeanne recognised the face!

On the instant, as if in obedience to a lightning will impelling her, as if borne along by the rush of her destiny, pale, resolute, without knowing what she would say, what she would do, she started upwards. Having crossed the upper landing, she was about to place her foot on the lighter stairway, when she stumbled and fell, remaining for a moment prostrate. Thus Noemi, on leaving the chapel, did not see her, and concluded she had gone down in search of the portrait of St. Francis, Jeanne rose and started forward; she was a poor creature torn by passions, to whom the images of celestial peace, grown rigid on the sacred walls, called in vain. All before her was silence and void. She was following paths unknown to her, swiftly, securely, as one in an hypnotic trance. She passed through dark and narrow places, through light and broad places, never hesitating, never looking to right or left, all her senses sharpened and concentrated in her hearing, following little sounds of distant whisperings, the faint complaining of one door, the breath of wind from another, the brushing of a robe against the frame. Thus, through the wide-open wings of the last door she passed rapidly, and found herself face to face with him.

He also had recognised her, at the last moment, on the Scala Santa. He felt almost

certain he himself had not been recognised, nevertheless he had sought to avoid the path usually followed by visitors. Upon hearing a swift rustle of woman's drapery approaching that mysterious hall, he understood all, and, facing the entrance, he waited. She perceived him and stopped suddenly, in the very act of entering, standing as though turned to stone, between the wings of the door; her eyes fixed on his eyes, which no longer wore the look of Piero Maironi.

He was transfigured. His form, owing perhaps to the black habit, appeared slighter. His pale, fleshless face, his brow, which seemed to have become higher, expressed a dignity, a gravity, a sad sweetness which Jeanne had never known in him. And the eyes were totally different eyes; in them shone a something ineffable and divine, much humility, much power, the power of a transcendent love, springing not from his heart, but from a mystic fount within his heart; a love reaching beyond her heart, but seeking her in the inner, mysterious regions of the soul, regions unknown to her. Slowly, slowly she clasped her hands and sank upon her knees.

Benedetto carried the forefinger of his left hand to his lips, while with his other hand he pointed to the wall facing the balcony, which opens to the hornbeams of the Francolano hill and to the roar of the river far below. In the centre of the wall, showing black and large, was the word

SILENTIUM.

For centuries, ever since the word had been written there, no human voice had been heard in this place. Jeanne did not look, did not see. That finger at Piero's lips was enough to seal her own. But it was not enough to check the sob in her throat. She gazed at him intently, her lips pressed tightly together, while great, silent tears rolled down her face. Immovable, his arms hanging close to his sides, Benedetto slightly bent his head and closed his eyes, absorbed in prayer. The great, black, imperious word, big with shadows and with death, triumphed over these two human souls, while from the shining balcony the fierce souls of the Anio and of the wind roared in

protest.

Suddenly, a few seconds after Benedetto's eyes had closed to her gaze, she was shaken and rent from shoulder to knee by a great sob, a sob bitter with all the bitterness of her fate. He opened his eyes and looked tenderly at her, while she drank in his look thirstily, sobbing twice, as in sorrowful gratitude. And because this man, her beloved, again raised his finger to his lips she bowed her head in assent. Yes, yes, she would be silent, she would be calm! Still in obedience to his gesture, to his look, she rose to her feet and drew back, allowing him to pass out through the open door; then she followed him humbly, her hope dead in her breast, so many sweet phantoms dead in her heart, her love turned to fear and veneration.

She followed him to the chapel which they call the upper church. There, opposite the three small pointed arches inclosing deep shadows through which an altar looms, and where a silver cross shines against the dark phantoms of ancient paintings, Jeanne, upon a sign from him, knelt on the prie-dieu placed on the right side of the great arch, which follows the line of the pointed vault, while he knelt on the one placed on the left. On the drum of the arch a fourteenth century painter had depicted the Great Sorrow. Through a high window on the left, the light fell upon the Mother of Sorrows—the Dolorosa; Benedetto was in the shadow.

His voice murmured in a scarcely audible tone:

"Still without faith?"

Softly, as he himself had spoken, and without turning her head, she answered:

"Yes."

He was silent for a time, then he continued, in the same tone:

"Do you long for it? Could you regulate your actions as if you believed in God?"

"Yes, if I be not forced to lie."

"Will you promise to live for the poor and the afflicted, as if each one of these were

a part of the soul that you love?”

Jeanne did not answer. She was too far-seeing, too honest to declare that she could.

“Will you promise this,” Benedetto continued, “if I promise to call you to my side at a certain hour in the future?”

She did not know of what solemn and not far distant hour he was thinking, as he spoke thus. She answered, quivering:

“Yes, yes!” “In that hour I will call you,” said the voice out of the shadow, “But until I call you, you must never seek to see me again.”

Jeanne pressed her hands to her eyes, and answered “No” in a smothered tone. It seemed to her she was whirling in the vortex of such agonising dreams as accompany a raging fever, Piero had ceased speaking. Two or three minutes slipped by. She withdrew her hands from her tearful eyes, and fixed her gaze upon the cross, which shone there in front of her, beyond the pointed arches, against the dark phantoms of ancient paintings. She murmured:

“Do you know that Don Giuseppe Flores is dead?”

Silence.

Jeanne turned her head. The church was empty.

CHAPTER V. THE SAINT

I. The moon had already set, and in the wind of late evening the Anio discoursed, now noisily, now softly, as one who in animated conversation, from time to time, reminds his interlocutor of something which others must not hear. Perhaps the only person who, in all the lovely shell in which Subiaco lies, was listening to this discourse, was Giovanni Selva. Seated on the terrace, near the parapet, on which he rested his elbows, he was gazing silently into the sounding darkness. Maria and Noemi, who had also come out to enjoy the freshness and the wild odours of the

night wind, stood at a little distance. Maria whispered a word in her sister's ear, and Noemi withdrew. When she was alone, Maria approached her husband very softly, and dropped a kiss upon his hair.

"Giovanni," said she. How often, oppressed by the intensity of her love, had she not given him her soul, her whole being, in that one word, spoken under her breath, all others seeming to her inadequate, or worn by too many lips! Giovanni answered sadly, wearily:

"Maria."

No longer feeling her face on his hair he feared he had spoken coldly to her.

"Dearest!" he said.

She was silent for a moment, then placing both hands on his head, began, caressing it slowly, saying:

"Blessed are they who suffer for Truth's sake."

He turned round, smiling, with a thrill of affection. Having assured himself by a glance that Noemi was no longer present, he raised his arm and drew the dear face down to his lips.

"I need you so much," he said. "I need your strength!"

"That is why I am yours," Maria answered. "I am strong only because you love me."

He took her hand and kissed it reverently.

"Do you understand?" he presently exclaimed, raising his head. "Perhaps you do not know how deep my suffering really is, for it is a dark point even to me, who am old, and yet do not know myself. I was thinking of this just now. I reflected that when we suffer from a wound the cause of our suffering is visible, but when we suffer from a fever the cause is hidden, as in this case, and we never succeed in becoming thoroughly acquainted with it."

A month had not yet elapsed since the meeting at which a league among progressive

Catholics had been talked of. No league had sprung from it, but to nothing else could the origin of a series of strange and unpleasant events be attributed. Professor Dane had been recalled to Ireland by his Archbishop. He had immediately called upon an English Cardinal attached to the Papal Court, in order to acquaint him with the unsatisfactory condition of his health, and to solicit his support of a petition to the Archbishop for an extension of his leave. His Eminence had opened Dane's eyes. The blow had come from Rome, where he was looked upon with the greatest disapproval. Only out of consideration for the Cardinal himself, who was known to be his friend, and above all out of consideration for the English Government, had the authorities refrained from satisfying those who wished to see his writings placed on the Index, and Dane himself constrained to resign his professorship. The Cardinal advised him to leave Rome, where the heat was beginning to be unpleasant, and to become a little more seriously ill at Montecatini or Salsomaggiore, where he would be left in peace. Don Clemente had not again appeared. Giovanni had sought him out at Santa Scolastica, where the monk had signified to him, with tears in his eyes, that their friendship must be buried like a treasure in times of war. Upon Don Paolo Faré, who had been giving a course of religious instruction for adults at Pavia, silence had been enjoined. Young di Leynì had been reached through his family. His excellent and pious mother had besought him with tears and in the name of his dead father, to break with those dangerous acquaintances, the Selvas; and he believed that this step had been suggested by her confessor. He had resisted, but at the cost of his domestic peace. Finally, a clerical periodical had published three articles on Giovanni's complete works, summing up some partial and grudging praise, and some equally partial and biting censure in a very severe judgment on the character of the works themselves, which the critic pronounced rationalistic, and on the intolerable audacity of the author, who, equipped solely with worldly learning, had dared to publish writings in which the lack of theological knowledge was painfully evident. In substance these three articles were a terrible and prohibitive

condemnation of the very book Giovanni was then engaged upon, dealing with the rational foundations of Christian morality, and, in the opinion of the initiated, it predicted the Index for his other works.

“Are you in doubt concerning your own views?” Maria asked.

The question was insincere. Notwithstanding her great love for him, she had a deep and clear knowledge of her husband’s soul. She believed he was, in his heart, suffering from the presentiment of an ecclesiastical condemnation. Giovanni might speak lightly of certain sentences passed by the Congregation of the Index, but his conscience, more respectful towards the authorities than he himself realised, was troubled, so Maria thought, more deeply than he wished it to be by the threatened blow. And Maria, fearing to wound him by the question, “Are you afraid?” had insinuated this other doubt, in order to prepare the way for a spontaneous confession of the truth. Giovanni’s answer astonished her.

“Yes,” said he. “I doubt myself. Not, however, in the way you suppose. I fear I am a purely intellectual being, and that I exaggerate the importance my views may have in the sight of God. I fear I do not live up to my views. I fear my indignation is too great against those who do not share them, against my persecutors, against that Swiss Abbé who came here with Dane, and probably talked of what was then said in our midst as he should not have done, and in places where he should have kept silent. I fear my life is one of too great inactivity, of too great ease, of too much pleasure, for to me study is a delight. I even doubt my love of God, because I feel too lightly the love of my neighbour. I am often reminded that the mystic pleasures may lull my conscience on this point. You, Maria, you live your faith; you visit the sick, work for the poor, you comfort, you instruct. I do nothing.”

“I am one with you,” Maria whispered. “You made me what I am. Besides, you distribute the alms of the intellect.”

“No, no! Those words applied to me are presumptuous!” Maria knew that the loving

sense of human fraternity was not strong in Glovanni. She felt—and she was loath to confess it even to herself—that this deficiency incapacitated her husband for the successful fulfilment of that great religious apostolate which should have resulted from his intellectual powers, and that deep and enlightened faith, which in him was more the fruit of genius, of study, of love of the divine, than of tradition or habit. She reproached herself for having sometimes rejoiced at Giovanni's coldness towards his fellows, for it lent a precious flavour to the treasures of affection he lavished upon herself. Nevertheless he was conscious of the fraternal obligations, and she had never known him turn a deaf ear to an appeal, or seen him insensible to the grief of others. He did not feel, and therefore did not love God in man, which is the most sublime flame of charity; he felt and loved man in God, which is a cold love, as would be the love of one who was kind to his brother solely to please their father. But this last is the temper common to even the best of human hearts. Giovanni's heart was tempered thus; he could not give out that sublime charity of which he humbly and sadly acknowledged himself to be void. Maria, caressing his hair with infinite tenderness, dreamed that sweet, divine, indulgence flowed out upon that head through her heart and her hands.

"Listen," said she. "I am going to propose to you at once an act of charity in which there is much merit. Noemi has received a letter from her friend Jeanne Dessalle, and says she is in need of your help."

"Call her," said he.

Noemi came. A slight cloud had gathered that day between Giovanni and herself. As rarely happened, they had conversed on religion. Noemi clung blindly to her own religion, and disliked discussions. Notwithstanding her tenderness for Maria, and her affectionate respect for Giovanni, she feared she should lean more towards the scepticism of Jeanne than towards the liberal and progressive Catholicism of the Selvas, if she stopped to examine the reasons and nature of her own belief. This

Catholicism appeared to her a hybrid thing, and she had perhaps learned from Jeanne to consider it such; for Jeanne, in moments of nervous irritability, defended her own scepticism with acrimony against that faith which, because it shone with spirituality and truth, might prove formidable to her. Noemi was always suspicious, not of her sister, but of Giovanni, fearing he would attempt to convert her, and her suspicion had that day been apparent when, discussing the confessional, she had several times answered him very sharply. Then Giovanni had reminded her, gently and gravely, that error harboured unconsciously, in the sincere and pure desire of truth, is innocent in the eyes of God, but that if a sentiment foreign to that desire have any part in the repulsion of truth, then sin alone is the outcome. This argument wounded Noemi more deeply still. She had been on the point of asking her brother-in-law by what right he was acting as vice-divine judge. She controlled herself, however, and let the discussion drop.

Upon thinking it over afterwards, she regretted her sullen silence, not so much because Giovanni's words had affected her views, as because she was aware of the sorrow the religious opinions he professed brought him, and because she saw how depressed his spirits were. This was one reason why—when she was called to him, and entreated by her sister to show him much affection—she resolved, for once, to be unfaithful to Jeanne. Of what Jeanne had written to her under the seal of secrecy she had told Maria only as much as was absolutely necessary. Jeanne, still suffering both physically and mentally, had heard of the "Saint of Jenne," who was healing bodies and souls, and she besought Noemi to go to Jenne and see this Saint, and then to write to her about him. Now Noemi could not go to Jenne alone, she must ask Giovanni to accompany her. Her first confidence had stopped here. Now she broke all the seals of secrecy her friend had imposed, and spoke freely.

Poor Jeanne Dessalle was more unhappy than ever. During her short visit at Subiaco she had met her former lover. An exclamation from Giovanni! Then it was Don Clemente, after all? No, it was the man who came to the villa with the Padre the

night of Jeanne's arrival, the under-gardener from Santa Scolastica—he who was no longer at the monastery—of whom all the valley of the Anio was talking, and who was known, even at Rome, as the "Saint of Jenne." Noemi begged them to forgive her for not having told them at the time. Woe to her if Jeanne had discovered her breach of confidence, after her many admonitions. Besides it would have done no good. Giovanni took his wife's hand almost stealthily, and raised it to his lips, Maria understood, and smiled. Then both assailed Noemi with questions.

Yes, Jeanne had recognised him the night of their arrival, and now Maria and Giovanni could understand the reason of the faintness she had experienced. Their meeting had taken place the following day at Sacro Speco. Concerning the meeting Noemi knew only this much, that Jeanne's hopes had been dashed to the ground, that he was clad as a monk, and had spoken as one who has given himself to God for ever; that she had promised him to dedicate her life to good works, and that no direct correspondence between them was any longer possible.

Jeanne now wrote from Villa Diedo, the home in the Veneto where she had gone with her brother from Rome, two days after leaving Subiaco. She wrote in a moment of most bitter despondency. Her brother, surprised at her devoting so much time to the poor, was irritated by this innovation in her mode of thought and of life. She might give money, if she pleased, and as much as she pleased, but to bring a string of beggars into the house, to visit them in their hovels, that he would not allow! It was foolish, it was a bore, it was ridiculous, it was eccentric, it was clerical. There were other difficulties, She would have liked to join the women's charitable associations of the town, but they drew back, shrinking into themselves like sensitive plants at the touch of this woman, who had been the subject of so much gossip on account of Maironi, and who, though she did sometimes go to church of a Sunday, did not fulfil her Easter duties. And finally her habits, which were those of a woman of leisure, were reforming their ranks after the first defeat, and delaying her progress on the new road, ever more successfully as the road became more difficult.

She felt she must succumb if no word of counsel reached her, no help from him. She could not see him, she dared not write, for certainly he had intended to forbid that also; and she would rather die than do anything to displease him, if she could avoid it. She had read an article in the Corriére on the “Saint of Jenne,” in which it was stated that the Saint was young, and had been a day-labourer in the kitchen-garden at Santa Scolastica. Therefore it must be he! She entreated Noemi to go to Jenne, and beg a word of comfort for her, for the sake of charity! Noemi was determined to go. Would Giovanni accompany her? In the humble tone in which she asked this favour, Giovanni heard a tacit petition for forgiveness and peace; he held out his hand:

“With all my heart,” he said.

Maria offered to join them, and they decided to go the following morning, starting on foot, at five o’ clock, in order to avoid the blazing sun on the slope of Jenne. Then they spoke of the Saint.

The whole valley was talking about him. The article Jeanne had seen said that a great number of people were flocking to Jenne to see and hear the Saint; that miraculous cures were being announced as his work; that the Benedictines told with admiration of the life of penance and of prayer he had led for three years at Santa Scolastica, working in the garden. At Subiaco still more wonderful reports were circulating. A certain forester called Torquato, a most worthy man and a relative of the Selvas’ servant, told her he had been to Jenne with a stranger, a sort of poet, who had come all the way from Rome to talk with the Saint. On the way there and back, they had met perhaps fifty people—real ladies and gentlemen they were, too; and on the hillside of Jenne they had met a procession of women singing the litanies. At Jenne he had heard the whole story. One night the parish priest had dreamed that a globe of fire rested on the great cross planted on the summit of the hill; this blazing globe had set the cross itself on fire, and it was burning and glowing without being consumed, while all the mountains and the valley were illumined by it. The next day

there had appeared before him a young man, in the habit of a Benedictine lay-brother, who was the bearer of a letter to him. This letter was from the Abbot of Santa Scolastica, and said: “I send you an angel whose fire burns clear, through whom Jenne will become renowned throughout the universe!” It was also written that this young man was, by birth, a mighty prince, of royal blood, but that in order to serve God, in all humility he had laboured as kitchen-gardener at Santa Scolastica for three years. The parish priest had gone half crazy from the emotion caused by the fire seen in his dream, and the fire that had come to him, and had been seized by a raging fever. The next day was a festa—a holy-day—and of the two other priests who live at Jenne, one was ill, and the other had gone to Filettino two days before to see his sick mother. In the village the priest’s servant had told all about this Benedictine, all about the dream, had told, in fact, the whole story. The villagers flocked to church, to hear the Benedictine say Mass; for they had seen him enter, and would not believe he was not going to officiate. They demanded that he should preach, at least, although he assured them he had no right to preach in church; and, keeping him in their midst, they pressed him so hard, that he finally signed to them with his hand to leave the church, promising those nearest him to speak outside. And he had spoken outside! What he had really said the servant could not tell Maria, nor could Maria herself gather much from Torquatof; but by dint of much questioning, and with the aid of her own imagination, she succeeded in reconstructing his discourse somewhat as follows:

Are you fit to enter the church? Are you at peace with your neighbour? Do you know what the Lord Jesus means, when He says to you that no man may approach the altar if he be not at peace with his neighbour? Do you know that you may not enter the church if you have sinned against charity or justice, and have not made amends, or have not repented when it was impossible to make amends? Do you know that you may not enter the church, not only if you bear ill-will against your neighbour, but also if you have injured him in any manner whatsoever, either in your

dealings with him, or in his honour, if you have slandered him, or harbour in your heart wicked desires against his body or his soul? Do you know that all the Masses, all the Benedictions, all the Rosaries, and all the Litanies, count for less than nothing, if you do not first purify your hearts, according to the word of Jesus? Are you unclean with hatred, or with any impurity whatsoever? Then go! Jesus will not have you in the church! “Ma che!” said Torquato, “The discourse was nothing, it was the face, the voice, the eyes!”

The worthy man spoke as if he himself had been present, telling how the crowd had thrown themselves upon their knees and wept, and how certain women, who were enemies, had embraced each other. In fact there had been only women and old men present, for the men of Jenne are all shepherds at Nettuno and Anzio, and do not return to the hills before the end of June. The Saint seeing them so penitent, had said: “Enter and kneel. God is within you. Worship Him in silence.” Then the crowd had entered, a perfect multitude! They had fallen upon their knees, all of them, and for a quarter of an hour—according to Torquato—you could have heard a fly winging in the great church. The Saint had then intoned the “Our Father” in a loud voice, and, the crowd lifting their voices and joining in, he had gone through it, stopping at each verse. Torquato told how the parish priest, having heard all this, kissed his guest, and as he kissed him he was cured of his fever! Then the people came to the canonica—the priest’s house—bringing the sick, that the Saint might bless and heal them. He would not do this, but all those who succeeded in touching his habit, even by stealth were healed. And many had come to him for advice. Then there had been a great miracle concerning a mule, which turned ugly on the steep path down the slope, and which was about to throw its rider upon the rocks. The Saint, who was present, being on his way up from the Infernillo with water, had stretched out his hand, and the mule had become quiet on the instant!

Maria told the story as she had heard it from the forester.

“I wonder if it is all as true as the part about the prince of royal blood!” said Noemi.

“To-morrow we shall know,” Giovanni answered, rising.

II. They started at about six o’clock; the sky was cloudy; and a cool breeze was blowing, fragrant with the odours of the woods and the hills, alive with the tiny, gay voices of birds, purifying to the soul itself. At the Baths of Nero they took the mule-path which leads into the narrow, green ravine, winding upwards on the right of the Anio. High up on the left they saw Santa Scolastica, the Sacro Speco, and the House of the Blessed Lawrence, all white below the rocks, which are the colour of iron. They left the bridge of the Scalilla on the right—only a log, thrown across to the wild left bank of the turbulent little torrent. On the way they talked much of the strange Saint. Giovanni wondered that Don Clemente had never in the past told him anything of the character of this under-gardener. He approved of the little sermon in the open air. He had once mentioned the subject of it to Don Clemente, pointing out to Mm that those words of Christ are neither properly observed, nor taught; even the best of Christians apply them only to the use of the sacraments. If the faithful realised that they must not enter the church, bringing an impure heart, the Christian peoples would indeed become examples to the world, and no one would then dare affirm that morality is much the same everywhere, and has nothing to do with religious beliefs.

He also highly approved of thus reciting “Our Father” in church, but he did not approve of the miracles. He suspected weakness in a man who did not know how to break resolutely with popular superstition when it was flattering to himself.

What could Noemi say about this man’s character? What opinion had she formed of him from Jeanne’s confidences? Noemi was embarrassed. All that Jeanne had told her about him convinced her that Maironi had behaved very badly to her friend, that he had never really loved her and at the same time awoke in Noemi an intellectual curiosity, which, though she struggled against it, was always returning—a curiosity

to know if that man would have loved her better than Jeanne. She replied that Maironi's character was an enigma to her. And his intellect? His culture? She could say nothing concerning either his intellect or his culture, but if such a woman as Jeanne Dessalle had loved him so devotedly, he must certainly be both intelligent and cultured. And his former religious views? To this last question Noemi's answer was that from some facts Jeanne had mentioned, from the decisive influence which the religious traditions of his family had had upon him at a crisis in their love, she judged him to have been a Catholic of the old school, not a Catholic like—Here Noemi broke off blushing and smiling. Giovanni smiled also, but Maria looked slightly annoyed. The subject was at once dropped.

They proceeded for some time in silence, exchanging only now and then a word of greeting with some mountaineer on his way down to the mills at Subiaco, mounted on his mule, laden with grain.

They stopped to rest in the field of San Giovanni, which divides the territory of Subiaco from that of Jenne. The Blessed Lawrence, now left far behind, all white under the rocks which are the colour of iron, looked down upon them from on high. Rays of sunshine, breaking through the clouds, gilded the hills, and the little party, remembering the arid hillside of Jenne, had just started forward again, when they met the doctor from Jenne, who recognised Maria, having seen her some time before at the house of his colleague at Subiaco. He bowed, and smiling, reined in his mule.

"You are on the way to Jenne? Are you going to see the Saint? You will find many people there to-day." Many people! This was disappointing to Noemi, who feared she would not be able to speak quietly with Maironi. The Selvas were curious to know all about it. Why so many people? Because they want the Saint at Filettino, they want him at Vallepietra, they want him at Trevi, and the women of Jenne intend to keep him for themselves.

"And all to give me a rest!" the doctor added. "And to give the chemist a rest also,

for now the Benedictine is the doctor, and his tunic is the chemist!"

He told them that to-day people were coming from Filettino, from Vallepietra, and from Trevi, to treat with Jenne concerning some means of dividing the Saint among all those towns, "Who knows but what they may come to blows!" At any rate the carabinieri were already stationed at Jenne.

"You call him 'the Saint' also?" said Maria.

"Oh, yes!" the doctor answered, laughing. "They all call him that, all save those who call him 'the Devil,' for at Jenne some do so already!"

How astonishing! This was news to them! Who called him "the Devil," and why?

"Ah!" and the doctor put on the knowing look of one who is well informed, but does not intend to tell all he knows. "Well," said he, "there are two priests from Rome staying at Jenne for a holiday, two priests, two priests—! They are very clever! They have not told me what they think of the Saint, but, at any rate, the parish priest's ardour has cooled considerably, and it has been the same with others. Those priests are workers. You do not see it, but they are at work all the time. They are insects—I say it without intending to speak ill of them, indeed in this case their action may even be praiseworthy! They are insects, which, when they wish to kill a plant, do not touch the fruit, the flowers, the leaves, or the roots I may even say, for there a poisonous draught might reach them, or a spade reveal their presence, and they do not wish to be reached, do not wish to be seen. They bore into the marrow. These two have already reached the marrow. Perhaps it may not be for a month, perhaps not for two months; but the plant is doomed to wither, and wither it must!"

"But what do you yourself think about it?" Maria inquired. "Does this man really pretend to be a saint? Is he pleased that these superstitious people quarrel about him in this way? Is it true he has healed the sick?"

The doctor continued to laugh while she was speaking.

"I laugh," he answered. "It is a ease of contagious, mystic psychopathy! But you

must excuse me now, for I am due at Subiaco at eight o'clock. I hope you will enjoy yourselves. May your visit divert you,"

With this malicious thrust, he shook the reins on the mule's neck, and rode on, fearing he might be obliged to give proofs of what he asserted. Noemi, who was the most agitated of the party at the prospect of seeing the man Jeanne loved, began to feel weary. They halted a second time at the foot of the slope of Jenne, on the gravel across which shallow rivulets streak, flowing down to the river from the grotto of the Infernillo. Someone was approaching them from behind. What a surprise! What a pleasure! Don Clemente! The Padre's fine face lit up also. He loved and respected Giovanni for a true Christian, and sometimes had to struggle against the temptation to judge his superior, the Abbot, who had forbidden him to visit Giovanni, to struggle against the temptation to appeal to Someone greater than abbots, greater than pontiffs, in his own soul. This Someone was saying to him now: "The meeting is My gift!" and so the monk joined his friends joyfully. Maria presented him to Noemi, and he blushed again on recognising the woman he had mistaken for Benedetto's temptress.

"And your friend?" he inquired, trembling lest he be informed of her presence there. Upon being reassured a look of relief flashed across his face. Noemi smiled at this, and he, noticing her smile, was greatly embarrassed. The others smiled also, but no one spoke. Giovanni was the first to break the silence. Surely Don Clemente was, like themselves, on his way to Jenne? Perhaps he was going there for the same purpose, to see the same person, the gardener, eh? the gardener of that famous evening? Ah! Don Clemente, Don Clemente! Yes, Don Clemente was also going to Jenne, was going to see Benedetto. And as to the gardener, there had been no deception, only a desire to bring the two souls together in the most natural way, without violence, without recommendations and previous explanations.

They started up the hill together, talking of Benedetto.

Noemi, forgetting her weariness, hung upon the Padre's lips, and the Padre, precisely on this account, said so little and was so circumspect that she trembled with impatience, and presently felt tired again. She took Maria's arm, and allowed Don Clemente to go on with her brother-in-law. Then Don Clemente confided to Giovanni that his mission at Jenne was of a painful nature. It seemed some one at Jenne had written to Rome, speaking in hostile language of Benedetto, accusing him of preaching what was not perfectly orthodox, of pretending to be a miracle worker, and of wearing a religious habit to which he had no right: this greatly enhancing the gravity of the scandal. Certainly they had written to the Abbot from Rome, for he had ordered Don Clemente to go to Jenne, and demand of Benedetto the restitution of the habit. Don Clemente had tried in vain to dissuade the old abbot, who had waved the matter aside with a jest. "Read the Gospel—the Passion according to St. Mark. He who follows Christ after all others have forsaken Him must part with his cloak. It is a mark of holiness." Therefore, as some one must carry this message to Jenne, Don Clemente preferred to do it himself. He had, moreover, received a strange letter from the parish priest of Jenne. This priest, a good man, but timid, had written that Benedetto was, to his mind, a most pious Christian, but that he talked too much of religion to the people, and that his discourses sometimes had a flavour of quietism and of rationalism, that there were those who accused him of employing a demoniacal power for the furtherance of his not over-orthodox views, that this accusation was certainly false, but that, nevertheless, prudence forbade the writer to keep Benedetto with him any longer. Perhaps the wisest course for him would be to retire to some town where he was not known, and to live quietly there.

Their conversation was here interrupted by a call from Maria. Noemi, overpowered by the heat of the burning sun, and seized with palpitations, must rest again. The sisters had seated themselves in the shadow of a rock.

Don Clemente took leave of them. They would meet later at Jenne. Maria was greatly distressed about her sister, and secretly reproached herself for having

allowed her to come on foot. She and Giovanni stood silently watching Noemi, who, though very pale, smiled at them bravely. Upon that wilderness of mountains, devoid of beauty, upon those sun-baked rocks, the silence hung with a mortal weight! It was a relief to all three to hear the voices of some wayfarers who were coming up. There were six or seven in the party, and they had two mules with them. As they toiled upwards they sang the Rosary. When the procession had drawn nearer, a girl and a man could be seen riding the mules; both were emaciated and almost cadaverous in appearance. The girl opened her eyes wide on perceiving the Selvas, but the man kept his closed. The others looked at them with a rapt expression, continuing their prayers. The monotonous chant and the beat of the mule's hoofs grew fainter, and at last died away among the heights above. Soon after this sad procession had passed, a party of young men from the city appeared, laughing merrily, and talking of Quirites who were on the lookout rather for Sabine women than for saints. On perceiving Giovanni and his companions they became silent, but when they had passed them they again began to laugh and jest; they jested about Giovanni, who, they said, might be the Saint between two temptresses.

A great cloud with silver edges, the first of a whole fleet, sailing towards the west, hid the sun. Noemi, greatly refreshed, proposed that they should take advantage of the shade, and go forward. A few steps below the cross of which, according to Torquato, the parish priest had dreamed, they met a bourgeons dressed in black, who was coming down, riding a mule.

"I beg your pardon," he said, addressing the ladles and reining in his mule, "but is either of you Her Excellency the Duchess di Civitella?"

On receiving an answer he apologised, saying that a friend of his—a, senator—had recommended this duchess to his care; that he himself did not know her, but that she was coming to Jenne to see the Saint.

"Indeed, perhaps you, gentlemen, have come for the same purpose!" he said smiling.

“Everyone comes for that now. Once upon a time they came to see a pope! Certainly! There was a pope at Jenne once—Alexander IV, You will see the inscription: ‘Colores æstivos vitandi caussa.‘ Now they come for a saint. He ought to be more than a pope, but I fear he is less. Did you see the two sick people? did you see the students from Rome? Ah! you will see other astonishing things, other astonishing things! But, after all, I am afraid he is less than a pope! A pleasant journey to you!”

Beyond the cross, they ascended with the open sky before them, between the green ridges, which slope downward, forming the lonely hollow of Jenne, which is crowned on the opposite side with that wretched herd of poor dwellings, dominated by the campanile. Giovanni had been to Jenne before, but it did not seem to him in any way changed because a saint now lived there, and miracles were performed there. It impressed his wife, who now saw it for the first time, as a spot which might inspire religious contemplation, by that sense of altitude, not suggested by distant views, by that deep sky behind the village, by its solitude, its silence. Noemi was thinking with profound pity of poor far-away Jeanne.

III. The innkeeper at Jenne was a worthy, gravely courteous man, in spectacles, who, having been to America, could be said to know the world, but who seemed to have escaped its corrupting influences. To the new-comers he spoke of Benedetto favourably, on the whole, but with a certain diplomatic reserve. He did not call him “the Saint,” he called him “Fra Benedetto.” The Selvas learned from him that Benedetto occupied a cabin belonging to the innkeeper himself, in payment of which he tilled a small piece of ground. Those who wished to see him must wait until eleven o’clock. Now he was mowing the grass. His life was regulated in the following manner: At dawn he went to hear the parish priest say Mass, then he worked until eleven. He ate only bread, herbs, and fruit and drank only water. In the afternoon he worked in the fields of widows and orphans. In the evening, seated before his door, he talked of religion.

At half-past eleven, the Selvas and Noemi accompanied by the innkeeper's wife—a fine, big woman, very neat, very simple, and gay in a quiet way—went to visit Sant' Andrea, the church of Jenne. Coming out into the open square from the maze of narrow lanes, where stands the inn, they found a large assemblage of women, strangers, so the hostess said. She could distinguish them by their corselets, their fustian skirts, their foot-gear. Those were from Trevi, those from Filettino, and those others from Vallepietra. The hostess went into a bakehouse on the right of the church, where several women of Jenne were having their stiacciati 1 baked, each having brought her own.

1 (return) [Stiacciati a sort of very large, round cake, common in all parts of Italy. It is made of cornflour, of wheatflour, or of chestnut-flour, and in some places of vegetables. It is mixed with, oil, and baked in a flat pan.—Translators Note.]

"Strangers, who wish to talk with our Saint," she said to Maria. She did not, like her husband, say "Fra Benedetto," she called him "the Saint."

"But not to his face," she declared, crimsoning, "because it vexes him." "No, he does not really get angry, because he is a saint, but he begs very earnestly not to be called thus."

In the large, dilapidated church—which, "one Sunday or another, will crush us all, like so many rats," the hostess said—there were only the two invalids and their party. The sick man and girl had been laid on the floor exactly in the centre of the church, with two pillows under their heads. Their companions, on their knees, were singing psalms, and, without looking at the new-comers, continued their devotions. "Probably they have brought them to be blessed by the Saint," said the hostess under her breath. "That is painful to him; he does not wish it. Perhaps they will try to touch his habit by stealth, but even that is difficult now."

The poor people stopped singing, and a woman came to ask the hostess if it had already struck eleven o'clock? Maria answered, telling her it was only a quarter to

eleven, and then inquired about the two sick ones. The man had been ill with fever for two years, and the girl, his sister, had heart disease. They had come from the lowlands of Arcinazzo, a journey of several hours, to be healed by the Saint of Jenne. A woman from Arcinazzo, who had heart disease, had been cured some days before by simply touching his habit. Maria and Noemi spoke to the sufferers. The girl was confident, but the man, who was shaking with fever, seemed to have come simply to satisfy his people, to give this a trial also. He had suffered greatly on the journey.

“These roads lead me into the next world,” he said. “I shall be healed in that way.”

A woman, his mother perhaps, burst into tears, and besought him to pray, to commend himself to Jesus, to Mary. The two sisters withdrew, in obedience to a summons from Giovanni; for a quarrel had broken out in the square, between the women and the students who had passed the Selvas on the Jenne hillside. The students had probably jested broadly concerning the devotion of the women to the Saint, and this had enraged them. The women of Jenne came rushing out of the bakehouse, while the plumes of a couple of carabinieri appeared in the opposite direction. Noemi and Maria mingled with the women, trying to pacify them. Giovanni harangued the students, who swaggered and laughed, and might possibly do worse. Chanting was heard in the church, muffled at first and then loud, as the door was thrown open:

“Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis.”

The two sufferers appeared. The girl, supported on either side, was walking; the man, as limp as a corpse, was being borne along, some women carrying his shoulders, others his feet; and the bearers were also chanting, with solemn faces:

“Sancta Virgo virginum, ora pro nobis.”

The women in the square all fell on their knees, the astonished carabinieri standing in their midst. The students were silent, while a party of ladies and gentlemen, about

to enter the square from the Val d'Aniene mule-path, stopped their mules. First Maria, then Noemi, knelt, drawn towards the earth by an impulse which made them tremble with emotion. Giovanni hesitated. This was not his faith. It seemed to him an offence to the Creator, the Giver of reason, to allow a sick man to journey a long distance on a mule, that he might be miraculously healed by an image, a relic, or a man. Still it was faith. It was—enclosed in a rough envelope of frail ignorance—that sense denied, to proud minds, of the hidden truth which is life; that mysterious radium within the mass of impure ore. It was faith, it was guiltless error, it was love, it was suffering, it was a visible something belonging to the union of the highest mysteries of the Universe. The ground itself, the great sad face of the church, and the small humble faces of the little houses surrounding the square, seem to understand, to reverence it. In his mind's eye Giovanni saw the image of a dead woman who had been dear to him, and who had believed thus; a cold wave flowed through his blood, his knees bent under him. The little band with the sufferers passed on, singing, their faces uplifted:

"Mater Christi." The kneeling women answered with bowed heads:

"Ora pro nobis."

Then they rose, and followed the procession, while three or four women of Jenne said aloud:

"He does not wish it, he does not wish it!"

One of them explained to Maria that the Saint did not wish the sick brought to him. Their words were not heeded, so they also joined the procession, anxious to see what would happen.

Maria and Giovanni also, who, at first, had been loath to do so, started on, following the eager Noemi. Behind them, at a proper distance to indicate that they were spectators and not participants, came the students. Alone, and at a much greater distance, walked the carabinieri, forming the end of this winding, snake-like line of

people, which slipped into a crack between the dilapidated houses, huddled together opposite the church, and disappeared.

It disappeared, writhing through dark lanes, with pompous names, which lead to another side of the village, the most miserable, the most deformed part. Here, on the steep and rocky hillside, loosely fastened to projections, to slabs of rock, the hovels, piled one above the other, slide downwards among the stones. The small black windows, like empty sockets in a skull, stare into the silence of the deep and narrow valley. The doors pour out crazy flights of stairs upon the slope, most of them reduced to three or four splintered steps, while some of the doors are entirely widowed of their steps. When one has, with difficulty, succeeded in climbing in at one of these doors, one finds a cave without light or air.

“So mali passi, vigoli cattivi! [Bad walking, bad lanes!]” said a smiling old woman, standing in her doorway, as the ladies passed.

One of these caves, so difficult of access, was Benedetto’s abode. Two streams of people—the crowd had split coming down the hill—met below the open door. Some women came out of a neighbouring bakehouse to say that Benedetto was not there. The crowd surged round the invalids, and groans were heard. Anxious questions were asked, rumours were carried up through the two streams of people, to the very end of the procession, where the cause of those groans was not understood, and all, eager to see, were struggling downwards. Perhaps the sufferers had become worse, there in the blazing sun. Three students slid down among the women, and were received with grunts and imprecations. Now a woman of the town has spoken:

“Take the poor creatures inside.”

Yes, yes! Inside, inside! Into the Saint’s house!

The crowd already expects a miracle from the walls between which he dwells, from the floor his foot presses, from all these objects saturated with his holiness. On the Saint’s bed! On the Saint’s bed! Some boards are laid upon the broken slabs of stone

which lead up to Benedetto's door, and the two invalids are half pushed, half carried up, by the surging crowd. There they lie, crosswise upon the Saint's pallet. The crowd fills the cave. All fall upon their knees in prayer.

It is indeed a cave. One whole side of it is a wall of yellowish rock, hewn obliquely. The bare, uneven earth forms the floor. Near the couch, raised about two spans, is a fireplace. There are no windows, but a ray of sunshine, falling through the chimney, strikes—like a celestial flame—on the stones of the hearth where there is no trace of ashes. A brown blanket is spread over the couch. A cross is roughly carved on the face of the rock, near the entrance. In one corner appear—the only luxuries—a large pail full of water, a green basin, a bottle, and a glass. Some books are piled on a rickety cane-seated chair; and a second chair bears a plate of beans and some bread. The place indicates extreme poverty, but is clean and orderly.

The feverish man complains of the cold, of the dampness, of the dark. He says he is worse, that they have brought him here to die. They beseech him to calm himself, to hope. But his young sister, with the diseased heart, begins to feel relief almost as soon as they have placed her on the bed. She proclaims this at once, announces that she is being healed. Pressing around her they laugh and cry, and praise the Lord all at the same moment. They kiss her garments, as if she herself had become holy; the news is shouted to those outside. Joyous voices answer, more people press into the den, with glowing faces, with eager eyes. But at that moment some one who has gone farther down the hill in search of the Saint, cries from afar: "The Saint is coming! The Saint is coming!" Then the cave pours out a stream of people upon the slope; a din of voices and a rush of feet flow downwards, and in a second the Selvas and the three or four students stand alone, below the door of the cabin. Many of the women of Jenne have gone back to their work in the bakehouse, while others are looking on from the doorway. Maria exchanges a few words with the latter. Are they all strangers, those who have gone down? Eh, si! Not all, but most of them. People from Vallepietra, for the most part. It would be better if water came to us from

Vallepietra. And what do they want? To take the Saint away from Jenne with them? Yes, they have said that; they talked about doing great things. And you of Jenne? We of Jenne know he does not wish to go. And besides—Her companions call out something from within; the woman turns away; a quarrel is going on. Giovanni, Maria, and the students go in to see the girl who has been miraculously healed. Noemi remains outside. She is impatient to see Benedetto; she trembles, without knowing why; in her heart she calls herself a fool; but she does not move.

Two Benedictine habits are crossing the small field in the distance below. Above the second the blade of a scythe flashes from time to time. Hearing the hubbub of voices, and steps descending from above, Benedetto turned to his companion with a smile:

“Padre mio!”

Upon reaching Jenne, Don Clemente had immediately joined Benedetto in the small field he was mowing. He had given him the painful message, and after a long discussion, had promised to say certain things which Benedetto wished said, to those who called him a saint. He also heard the hubbub of the crowd which was coming down; the cry of “The Saint! The Saint!” And when Benedetto said to him, smiling: “Padre mio!” his face paled, but he made a gesture of acquiescence, and stepped forward. Benedetto dropped his scythe and went a few steps away from the path. He sat down behind a rock and a great apple tree covered with blossoms, which hid him from those who were approaching. Don Clemente faced the crowd alone.

On perceiving him they stopped. Several voices said. “It is not he!” Other voices answered “He is behind!” While others in the rear-guard called out “Press forward!” The column moved on.

Then Don Clemente raised his hand and said:

“Listen!”

This man who could not speak to two strangers without blushing was now very pale.

His soft, sweet voice hardly made itself heard, but the gesture was seen. The beautiful, peaceful face, the tall figure, inspired reverence.

“You seek Benedetto,” said he. “You call him a saint. By this you cause him great grief. Since the day of his arrival at Jenne he has repeatedly stated that he was a great sinner, brought by the grace of God to repentance. Now he wishes me to confirm this to you. I do confirm it; it is the truth. He was a great sinner. To-morrow he may fall again. If he believed you, for one moment only, when you call him a saint, God would depart from him. Do not again call him thus, and above all do not ask him to perform miracles.”

“Padre!” Coming forward, his arms spread wide, an old man, tall, thin, toothless, with the profile of the eagle, interrupted him in a solemn voice. “Padre, we do not ask for a miracle, the miracle is already performed. The woman was healed when she touched the man’s dwelling, and we say to you that the man is saintly, and that if there are those in Jenne who speak differently, they are worthy to burn in the very bottom of hell! Padre, we kiss your hands, but we say this.”

“There is another to be healed, another to be healed!” ten, twenty voices cried. “Let the Saint come!”

Among the students forming the rear-guard voices shouted: “Bring the Saint forward! Let the Saint speak!”

“What actions are these?” the old man exclaimed, turning round with the indignation of the popular orator who finds himself deposed. “What actions are these?”

A rumble of angry voices drowned his words, and the students continued to shout louder than ever:

“The Saint! Let the Saint speak! Away with the priest! Away with him!”

The women turned threateningly:

“Away with you, yourselves! Away with you!”

Up above, among the hovels perched on the hillside, the plumes of the carabinieri appeared. Then Benedetto rose, and came out into the open.

As soon as the people perceived him, they greeted him with a great, joyous clamour. The Selvas went to the door of the cave and looked down. Noemi ran swiftly down the hill. In a second Benedetto found himself surrounded by people kissing his habit, and pouring out blessings upon him. Many were weeping, on their knees. Noemi, who had rushed down alone behind the students, pressed forward, and saw the man, at last!

Jeanne had shown her several photographs of him, telling her at the same time that no one of them was entirely satisfactory. In Piero Maironi's winning face Noemi had noticed a shade of sadness; Benedetto's face shone with extraordinary vivacity. Two days before he had had his hair and beard shaved, because he had heard a woman murmur: "He is as beautiful as Jesus Himself!" The expression of the dominating soul in him had become more marked; the nose had grown more prominent through his increased fleshlessness, there were great dark rings under his eyes. The eyes had an ineffable fascination. They still wore an expression of sadness, but of sweet sadness, full of vigour, of peace, and of mystic devotion. Standing there, under the little white cloud of the flowering apple tree, in the midst of the prostrate crowd, surrounded by sunshine and moving shadows he seemed an apparition such as visited the old masters. Noemi stood as if turned to stone, a great sob in her throat. Near her, several women were weeping for the joy of having seen him, and influenced by reciprocal hypnotism. One, who was ill and weary, had seated herself on the edge of the path, where she could not see the Saint, and was weeping from excitement, without knowing why. Some late arrivals came forward, an old man and three women from Vallepietra. The three women immediately mistook Don Clemente for Benedetto, and burst out sobbing and exclaiming: "How beautiful he is, how beautiful!"

In the meantime Benedetto, standing under the little white cloud of the flowering apple tree, had succeeded, with words of sorrow, of supplication, of reproach, in repulsing the assault of the adoring throng, and in bringing the people to their feet. A cry went up from the group of students: “Speak!” Just at that moment the bells of Jenne, far up above them, solemnly announced the hour of noon to the village, to the solitudes, to Monte Leo, to Monte Sant’ Antonio, to Monte Altuino, and to the clouds, sailing westwards. Benedetto laid his finger on his lips, the bells alone spoke. He glanced at Don Clemente, and his look seemed to convey a tacit invitation. Don Clemente bared his head, and began to recite the Angelus Domini. Benedetto, erect, his hands clasped, said it with him, and, as long as the bells continued to ring, kept his gaze fixed on the young man who had shouted to him to speak; his eyes were full of sadness, of mystic sweetness. That ineffable look, the pealing of the solemn-voiced bells, the trembling of the grass, the gentle waving in the breeze of the flowery branches, the rapt expression of so many tearful faces, all turned towards this one face, were blended for Noemi into a single word, which thrilled her while it evaded her, as the soul is tormented by the longing for that occult word which underlies a tragic procession of harmonious chords. The bells ceased, and Benedetto said gently to those nearest him:

“Who are you, and what has happened that you come to me as if I were that which I am not?”

Several voices answered at once; he was informed of the miracle, and of how he was wanted in this village and in that.

“You exalt me,” said he, “because you are blind. If this girl is healed, not I have healed her, but her faith has made her whole. This power of faith, which has caused her to rise up and walk, is in God’s world, everywhere and always, like the power of terror, which causes us to tremble and fall down. It is a power in the soul, like the powers which are in water, and in fire. Therefore, if the girl is healed, it is because

God has put this great power into His world; praise God for it, and not me. And now listen! You offend God by believing His strength and bounty to be greater in miracles. His strength and bounty are everywhere, and always infinite. It is difficult to understand how faith can heal, but it is impossible to understand how these flowers can grow. The Lord would be no less powerful, no less good, if this girl had not been healed. It is well to pray for health, but pray still more fervently to understand this great thing of which I have just told you; pray to be able to adore the Lord's will, when it gives you death, as when it gives you life. There are men in the world who think they do not believe in God, and when sickness comes to their homes they say: 'It is the law, it is nature, it is the economy of the Universe; we bow our heads, we accept without a murmur, we march on in the path of duty.' Have a care that such men do not pass before you in the kingdom of Heaven! And reflect also on the manner of miracles you demand. You come to be healed of the ills of the body, and for this you wish me to visit your villages. Have faith, and you will be healed without me. But remember that your faith may be used to better purpose, according to the will of God. Are you, all of you, perfectly healthy in your souls? No, you are not; and what can it profit you that the skin be whole, if the wine be spoiled? You love yourselves and your families better than truth, better than justice, better than divine law. You are always dwelling upon what is due to you and yours, and you seldom dwell upon what is due to others. You believe your souls will be saved by the great number of your prayers, and you do not even know how to pray. You pray in the same manner to the saints, who are the servants, and to God, who is the Master; when you do not do still worse! You do not reflect that the Master cares little for many words. He desires rather that you serve Him faithfully in silence, your minds fixed always on His will. And you do not understand the nature of your own ills; you are like the dying man who says: 'I am well!' Perhaps some one of you is thinking at this moment. 'If I do not understand that I am doing wrong, then God will not condemn me.' But the Lord does not judge as do the judges of this world.

He who takes poison unwittingly must fall, as he who takes it wittingly must fall. He who is without the white robe may not come to the Lord's supper, though he be not aware the robe is necessary. He who loves himself above all things, be he ignorant of conscious of his sin, cannot pass through the gate of the kingdom of Heaven; as the bride's finger, if it be doubled up, cannot pass through the ring the bridegroom offers. Know the infirmities of your souls, and pray with faith to be freed from them. In the name of Christ, I say to you, that you will be freed from them. The healing of your body is good for you, for your family, for the animals and plants you tend; but the healing of your soul—believe this, though you do not understand it!—the healing of your soul is good for all the poor souls of the living, which are being tossed between good and evil, is good for all the poor souls of the dead, which by toil and suffering are being purified, as the victory of a soldier is good for the whole nation. It is also good for the angels, who, Jesus has told us, feel immense joy at the healing of a soul. Joy enhances their power; and do you think their power is for the darkness or for the light, for death or for life? Ask with faith, first for the healing of the soul, and then for the healing of the body!" From the steep hillside a sea of faces looked down on him; those highest up, where only the sound of his voice could be heard, were eager, and tear-stained. Of those nearest him, some were astonished, some enthusiastic, some doubtful. The tears were pouring down Noemi's pale face also. The students had put off their air of raillery. When Benedetto ceased, one of them came forward to speak, resolute and serious. At the same moment the old man exclaimed:

"Heal our souls, heal our souls!"

Other voices repeated anxiously:

"Heal our souls, heal our souls!"

In an instant the contagion had spread throughout the vanguard; they flung themselves on their knees, stretching out imploring arms:

“Heal our souls, heal our souls!”

Benedetto sprang forward, his hands clenched in his hair, exclaiming:

“What are you doing again? What are you doing again?”

A shout rang out from above: “La miracolata! The girl who is healed!” The girl who had felt health returning to her, as she lay on Benedetto’s bed, was coming down in search of him, leaning on the arm of an elder sister. He heeded neither the cry nor the movement among those up above, who parted, allowing the two women to pass. Being unable to persuade the crowd to rise, he himself fell upon his knees. Then those around him rose, and the excited movement and the cry of “La miracolata, la miracolata!” having reached them, they forced him to rise also; he did not seem to have heard. “La miracolata!” each one repeated to him. “La miracolata!” And they searched his face for a trace of satisfaction at the miracle, with eyes that called out “She is coming to you! You have healed her!” They acted as if he had not spoken to them only a few minutes before.

The young girl was coming down, as pale and sallow as the stony, sun-baked path, her gentle, sad, little face, resting against her sister’s arm. And the sister looked sad also. The crowd parted before them, and Benedetto, stepping aside sought refuge behind Don Clemente; an involuntary action, which however, seemed premeditated. Every one was trembling and smiling, in the anticipation of another miracle. The two women were not deceived; they passed Don Clemente without so much as a glance, turned to Benedetto, and the elder said firmly:

“Holy man of God! You have healed this one, now heal the other also!”

Benedetto replied, almost under his breath, trembling violently:

“I am not a holy man; I did not heal this one, and for the other one of whom you speak, I can only pray.”

When they had told him that the sick man was their brother, that he was in the hut, stretched on the bed, and suffering greatly, Benedetto said to Don Clemente: “Let us

go and care for him!”

And he started forward with his master. Behind them the divided stream of people flowed together again, noisily. Benedetto turned, and forbade them to follow him; he ordered the women to attend to the young girl, who must not climb the steep hill on foot, under the burning rays of the sun. He ordered them to take her to the inn, put her to bed and refresh her with food and wine. Those who were following stopped, and the others stepped aside, allowing him to pass. The student who had once before asked to speak, approached him respectfully, and inquired if he and some of his friends might speak a few words with him alone, later on.

“Oh yes!” Benedetto answered, consenting with manly warmth and eagerness. Noemi, who was standing near, took heart.

“I also must ask for five minutes,” she said in French, blushing; and then it immediately occurred to her she had thus shown that she knew him to be a man of culture; her face was aflame, as she repeated her petition in Italian.

Almost involuntarily Don Clemente pressed Benedetto’s arm gently. Benedetto replied courteously, but somewhat drily:

“Do you wish to do a kind action? Care for that poor girl.”

And he passed on.

He and Don Clemente entered the hovel alone. No one had followed them. An old woman, the sick man’s mother, seeing him enter, threw herself weeping at his feet, repeating her daughter’s words:

“Are you the holy man? Are you he? You have healed one of my children, now heal this one also.”

At first, coming from the sunlight into that darkness, Benedetto could not distinguish anything, but presently he saw the man stretched on the bed; he was breathing hard, groaning and crying, and cursing the Saints, women, the village of Jenne, and his

own unhappy fate. On her knees beside the bed, Maria Selva was wiping the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief. There was no one else in the cave. Near the luminous entrance the great cross, carved unevenly on the wall of yellowish stone, was repeating at that moment a dark and solemn word.

“Hope in God!” Benedetto answered the old woman gently. He went to the bed, bent over the sick man and felt his pulse. The old woman stopped crying, the sufferer stopped cursing and groaning. The buzzing of flies in the light fireplace could be heard.

“Have you sent for the doctor?” Benedetto whispered.

The old woman began to sob again,

“You heal him! You heal him! in the name of Jesus and Mary!”

Again the sick man’s groans were heard. Maria Selva said softly to Benedetto:

“The doctor is in Subiaco. Signor Selva, whom you perhaps know, has gone to the chemist’s. I am his wife.”

At this point Giovanni returned, out of breath and worried. The chemist’s shop was closed, the chemist absent. The parish priest had given him some Marsala, and some tourists from Rome, who had brought plenty of provisions, had given him brandy and coffee. Benedetto beckoned Don Clemente to his side, and whispered to him to bring the parish priest, for the man was dying. He would go for him himself, but it seemed cruel to the poor mother to leave them. Don Clemente went out without a word. A few steps from the hut, the party of smart people who had come from Rome out of curiosity about the Saint of Jenne, were holding a consultation; the party consisted of three ladies and four gentlemen, and was under the guidance of the citizen of Jenne, whom the Selvas had met on the hillside. On perceiving the Benedictine they spoke together rapidly, in an undertone, and then one of their number, a very fashionably dressed young man, screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and came towards Don Clemente, at whom the ladies were looking with admiration,

and also with disappointment, their guide having informed them that he was not the Saint.

These people also wished for an interview with Benedetto. The ladies were especially anxious to speak with him. The young man added, with a derisive smile, that for his part, he did not consider himself worthy, Don Clemente answered very shortly, that for the present it was impossible to speak with Benedetto and he walked away. The young man informed the ladies that the Saint was in the tabernacle, under lock and key!

In the meantime Benedetto—although the distracted mother implored him not to use medicines, but to perform a miracle—was comforting the prostrate man with a few mouthfuls of the cordial Giovanni Selva had brought, but still more comforting were his gentle caresses, and the promise of other saving words, which would soon be brought to him. And the pitying voice, tender and grave, worked a miracle of peace. The sick man breathed with great difficulty, and still groaned, but he no longer cursed. The mother, wild with hope, murmured tearfully, with clasped hands.

“The miracle, the miracle, the miracle!”

“Caro [dear one],” Benedetto said, “you are in God’s hand, and you feel its might. Give yourself up to Him, and you will feel its gentleness. Let His hand place you once more in the ocean of life, or place you in heaven, or place you where it will, but give yourself up, do not think of that. When you were a little child your mother carried you, and you asked neither how, nor when, nor why; you were in her arms, you were in her love, you asked nothing more. It is the same now, caro. I, who speak to you, have done much evil in my life, perhaps you also have done a little evil; perhaps you remember it. Weep, weep, resting thus on the bosom of the Father who is calling you, who longs to pardon, who longs to forget it all. Presently the priest will come, and you will tell him everything, all the evil you have done, just as you remember it, without anguish. And then, do you know who will come to you in the

great mystery? Do you know, caro, what love, what pity, what joy, what life will come?"

Struggling in the shadow of death, his glassy eyes fixed on Benedetto, eyes which shone with an intense longing, and with the fear of being unable to express it, the poor young man who had misunderstood Benedetto's words, and thought he must confess to him, began telling him of his sins. The mother, who, while Benedetto had been speaking, had flung herself on her knees in front of the wall of rock, and kept her lips pressed to the cross expecting a miracle, started up at the strange ring in that voice, sprang to the bedside and—understanding—gave a cry of despair, flinging her hands towards heaven, while Benedetto, terrified, exclaimed: "No, caro, not to me, not to me!" But the sick man did not hear; he put his arm round Benedetto's neck, drawing him to him, and continued his sorrowful confession, Benedetto repeating over and over again "My God, my God!" and making a mighty effort not to hear, but lacking the courage to tear himself away from the dying man's embrace. And, in fact, he did not hear, nor would it have been easy to do so, for the words came so slowly, so brokenly, so confusedly. Still the parish priest did not appear, and Don Clemente did not return. Subdued voices and steps could be heard outside, and, sometimes a curious face peered in at the door, but no one entered. The dying man's words lost themselves in a confusion of weak sounds, and at last he was silent.

"Is there any one outside?" Benedetto inquired. "Let some one go to the parish priest, and bid him hasten."

Giovanni and Maria were attending to the mother, who, quite beside herself, was tossed between grief and anger. After having believed in the miracle, she would not now believe that her son had been reduced to this desperate condition by natural causes; at one moment she wept for him, and at the next cursed the medicines Benedetto had given him, although the Selvas assured her they were not medicines.

Maria had put her arms round her, partly to comfort her and partly to hold her. She signed to Giovanni to go for the priest and Giovanni hurried away. The glistening eyes of the dying man were full of supplication. Benedetto said to him:

"My son, do you long for Christ?"

With an indescribable groan, he bowed his head feebly in assent. Benedetto kissed him and kissed him again, tenderly.

"Christ tells me that your sins are forgiven, and that you may depart in peace."

The glistening eyes lighted up with joy. Benedetto called the mother, who, escaping from Maria's open arms, threw herself upon her son. At that moment Don Clemente entered, looking exhausted; Giovanni and the parish priest were with him.

At the priest's house Don Clemente had found an ecclesiastic whom he did not know, arguing with the parish priest. According to what he said, a crowd of fanatics were about to carry the girl who had been healed by a miracle to the church of Sant' Andrea, to return thanks to God. It was the priest's duty to prevent such a scandal. If the healing of this girl were not an imposture, neither was it a fact. The would-be miracle-worker had also preached much rank heresy concerning miracles and eternal salvation. He had spoken of faith as being a natural virtue; he had even criticised Christ, who healed the sick. At present he was preparing another miracle with a second unfortunate victim. A stop must be put to this! Put a stop to it, indeed! The poor priest who already perceived the odour of the Holy Office, reflected that it was easy enough to say "put a stop to it," but how was it to be accomplished? Don Clemente's arrival at that point gave him a moment of relief. "Now," he told himself, "he will help me." But, on the contrary, things were worse than ever. When he had heard Don Clemente's sad message the strange priest exclaimed:

"You see! That is how these miracles end. You must not enter that heretic's house with the holy viaticum, unless he has first left it, and left it never to return."

Don Clemente's face flushed.

“He is not a heretic,” said he. “He is a man of God!”

“You say so!” the other retorted.

“And you, consider well!” he added, turning to the parish priest. “But, after all, you are free to act as you please. It is none of my business. A rivederla!”

Having bowed to Don Clemente, he slipped out of the room, without another word.

“And now? And now?” groaned the unhappy priest, pressing his hands to his temples. “That is a terrible man, but I must not betray the Almighty! Tell me what to do! Tell me what to do!”

Indeed the parish priest had a holy fear of God, but he was also not without a certain fear (half holy, half human), of Don Clemente, of the austere conscience which would judge him. At that decisive moment the wisest course to pursue became suddenly clear to Don Clemente.

“Arrange for the viaticum,” said he, “and come with me at once, to hear this poor young man’s confession. Benedetto will show whether he be a heretic or a man of God!”

The servant came to say a gentleman begged the priest to make haste, for the sick man was dying.

Don Clemente, much exhausted, entered the hut, with Giovanni and the parish priest. He called Benedetto to him, standing near the door and spoke to him in an undertone. The rattling had begun in the sick man’s throat. Benedetto listened with bowed head to the painful words which demanded of him a saintly humiliation; he knelt, without answering, before the cross he had carved on the rock and kissed it eagerly at the point where the tragic arms meet, as if to draw into himself from the furrow in the stone, the symbol of sacrifice, its love, its blessedness, its strength its life and then, rising, he went forth for ever.

The sun was disappearing in a whirling mass of smoke-like clouds rising, in the

north, behind the village. The places which, only a short time before, had been astir with people, were now colourless and deserted. From the turnings of stony lanes, from behind half-open doors, round the corners of poor houses, women were peering. When Benedetto came in sight they all withdrew. He felt that Jenne knew of the agony of the sick man who had come to him in search of health, he felt that the hour of triumph had come for his adversaries. Don Clemente, the Master, the friend, had first asked him to lay aside his habit, and now asked him to go forth from his house, to go forth from Jenne. It is true he had asked in grief and love, still he had asked. Partly because of the bitterness of it all, partly because of his long fast, he had not been able to eat his mid-day meal of beans and bread—he felt ready to faint, and his sight was troubled. He sank down on the decayed threshold of a small, closed door, at the entrance to the little lane called della Corte. A long peal of thunder sounded above his head.

Little by little, as he rested, he recovered. He thought of the man who was dying in the desire of Christ, and a wave of sweetness swept his soul. He was filled with remorse that he had, for a few moments forgotten the Lord’s great gift; that he had ceased to love the cross, as soon as he had drawn life and joy from it. He hid his face in his hands and wept silently. A slight noise above of a shutter being opened; something soft fell upon his head. With a start, he removed his hands from his eyes; at his feet lay a tiny wild rose. He shivered! For several days—either on returning to his hut at night, or on leaving it in the morning—he had found flowers on his threshold. He had never removed them. He simply placed them on one side upon a stone, that they might not be stepped on, that was all. Neither had he ever tried to discover what hand laid them there. Surely this tiny wild rose had fallen from the same hand. He did not raise his head, but he understood that even if he did not lift the rose, or make any movement towards it, he must, nevertheless, leave the spot. He tried to rise, but his limbs could, as yet, hardly support him, and he tarried a moment before moving away. The thunder rumbled again louder and longer. A

small door was pushed open, and a young girl, dressed in black, looked out. She was fair, and as white as wax; her blue eyes were full of despair and of tears. Benedetto could not help turning his face towards her. He recognised the village schoolmistress, whom he had once seen for a moment at the priest's house. He was already moving away without greeting her, when she moaned softly: "Hear me!" Stepping back into the passage she fell upon her knees, stretched out beseeching hands to him, and dropped her head upon her breast.

Benedetto stopped. He hesitated a moment and then said, with dignified gravity:

"What do you want of me?"

It had become almost dark. The lightning flashed, the noise of the thunder filled the miserable little lane, and prevented the two from hearing each other. Benedetto approached the door.

"I have been told," the young girl answered, without raising her head, and pausing when the thunder crashed forth, "that you will perhaps be obliged to leave Jenne. A word spoken by you has given me life, but your departure will kill me. Repeat that word to me; say it for me, for me alone."

"What word?"

"You were with the Signor Arciprete, the parish priest, I was in the next room with the servant, and the door was open. You said that a man may deny the existence of God without really being an atheist or deserving eternal death, if that God, whose existence he denies, be placed before him in a shape repugnant to his intellect, and if he love Truth, Virtue, and his fellow-men, and by his life give proof of his love."

Benedetto was silent. Yes, he had said this, but to a priest, and not knowing another person (perhaps one not capable of understanding) was listening. She guessed the cause of his silence.

"I am not the person in question," she said. "I believe; I am a Catholic. It was my father, who lived and died thus; and—only think of it—they have persuaded even

my mother that he cannot be saved."

While she was speaking, amidst the lightning and the thunder, large, slow drops began to beat upon the road, making great spots in the dust, hissing through the air, lashing against the walls. But Benedetto did not seek shelter inside the door, nor did she invite him to do so; and this was the only confession on her part, of the profound sentiment, which covered itself with a cloak of mysticism and filial piety.

"Tell me, tell me!" she begged, raising her eyes at last. "Say that my father is saved, that I shall meet him in Paradise!"

Benedetto answered:

"Pray!"

"My God! Only that?"

"Do we pray for the pardon of such as may not be pardoned? Pray!"

"Oh! Thank you!—Are you ill?" These last words were whispered so softly that it was possible Benedetto did not hear them. He made a gesture of farewell, and started on, in the driving rain, that lashed and pushed the little dead, wild rose away, into the mud.

Either from a window, or from the door of the inn, where she was, with the sick girl of Arcinazzo, Noemi saw him pass. She borrowed an umbrella from the innkeeper, and followed him, braving the wind and the rain.

She followed him, distressed at seeing him bareheaded and without an umbrella, and reflecting that if he were not a Saint, one would think him insane. On entering the square where the church stands, she saw a door on the right open a little way; a tall, thin priest looked out. She believed the priest would invite Benedetto to come in, but, to Noemi's great vexation, when Benedetto was quite near him, the priest closed the door noisily. Benedetto entered the church of Sant' Andrea; she went in also. He approached the high altar and knelt down, while she remained near the door. The

sacristan, who was dozing, seated on the steps of an altar, heard them enter, and, rising, went towards Benedetto. But he belonged to the Roman priest's party, and, recognising the heretic, turned back, and asked the foreign signorina if she could tell him anything about the sick man from Arcinazzo, who had been brought to the church that morning, when the sacristan had also seen her there. He added that his reason for inquiring was, that he had been ordered to wait for the parish priest, who was going to carry the viaticum to the man. Noemi knew that the young man from Arcinazzo was dying, but that was all.

"I see," said the sacristan, raising his voice intentionally. "He probably does not wish for Christ. These are their fine miracles! Thank God for the thunder and lightning, for had it not been for the storm, they would have brought the girl here!"

Then he went back to rest and doze on the steps.

Noemi could not turn her eyes away from Benedetto. It was not a fascination in the true sense of the word, nor was it the passionate sentiment of the young schoolmistress. She saw him sway, rest his hands on the steps and then turn with difficulty and sit down; and she did not ask herself if he were suffering. She gazed at him, but was more absorbed in herself than in him, absorbed in a gradual change which was taking place within her, and which was making her different, making her irrecognisable to herself; a still confused and blind sense of immense truth, which was being borne in upon her, in mysterious ways, and which strained painfully at the innermost fibres of her heart. Her brother-in-law's religious arguments might have troubled her mind, but they had never touched her heart. Why was it touched now? And how? What had that pale, emaciated man said, after all? Ah I but the look, the voice, the-what else? Something it was impossible to grasp. Perhaps a presentiment—But of what? Ma! Chi sá? Who knows? A presentiment of some future bond between this man and herself. She had followed him, had entered the church that she might not lose the opportunity of speaking to him, and now she was

almost afraid of him. And then to talk to him of Jeanne! Had Jeanne understood him? How had Jeanne, loving him, been able to resist the current of higher thought which was in him, which perhaps, at that time, was latent, but which a Jeanne should have felt? What had she loved? The lower man? If she, Noemi, spoke with him, she would speak not only of Jeanne, but of religion also. She would ask him what his own religion really was. And then what if he should answer something foolish, something commonplace? For this reason she was almost afraid to speak to him.

A dash of rain splashed through a broken window upon the pavement. It seemed to Noemi she could never forget that hour, that great empty church, that dark sky, that dash of rain like falling tears, that world's outcast on the steps of the high altar, absorbed in what sublime thoughts God alone knew, and the sacristan, his enemy, who had gone to sleep on the steps of another altar, with the easy familiarity of a colleague of the Almighty. Some time elapsed, perhaps an hour, perhaps more. The church grew lighter; the rain seemed to be stopping. It struck four o'clock. Don Clemente entered the church, followed by Maria and Giovanni who were glad to find Noemi there, for they had not known where she was. The sacristan, who knew Don Clemente, came forward.

"Dunque? The viaticum?"

The viaticum? Alas, the man was dead; they had thought of the viaticum too late! The Padre inquired for Benedetto, and Noemi pointed to where he sat. They spoke of the interview which Noemi desired. Don Clemente blushed and hesitated, but could not refuse to ask for it, and he went to join Benedetto.

While the two conversed, Giovanni and Maria related to Noemi all that had taken place. After the arrival of the parish priest, the sick man had not spoken again. Confession had not been possible. Meanwhile the storm had burst with such violence as to render it impossible for the priest to go for the holy oil. They had thought the sick man would live some hours longer, but at three o'clock he had

expired. As soon as the torrents of rain would permit, Don Clemente and the priest had gone out, but Giovanni and Maria had remained with the mother until the arrival of the dead man's elder sister; the mother seemed to have quite lost her senses. Then they also had left, to go in search of Noemi. Not finding her at the inn, they had started for the church. In the square they had met the Padre, coming out of one of the best houses. They did not know what errand had taken him there. Maria spoke enthusiastically of Benedetto, of his spiritual ministrations to the dying man. She and her husband were very indignant at the war which had been waged against him by people who would now find no difficulty in turning the whole town against him. They censured the parish priest's weakness, and were not satisfied with Don Clemente himself. He should not have aided in driving his disciple away. Why had he been the one to tell him to leave, when the parish priest came? His first mistake had been in bringing the Abbot's message. Noemi knew nothing of this message. When she heard that Benedetto was to be deprived of his habit her indignation burst forth: Benedetto must not obey.

Meanwhile the Padre and his disciple were approaching the door. Benedetto stood apart while the Padre came to tell the Selvas and Noemi that as several persons wished to speak with Benedetto, he had arranged that they should see him at the house of a gentleman of the town. He must now take Benedetto there, but in a few minutes he would return to the church for them.

The gentleman was the same person the Selvas had met on the hillside of Jenne, where he was awaiting the Duchess di Civitella. The Duchess had arrived shortly after, with two other ladies and several gentlemen, among them a journalist, and the young man of the eye-glass. The citizen, of Jenne was beside himself with satisfaction; on that day he was in a truly ducal state of graciousness and magnificence! Therefore, when Don Clemente—following the parish priest's advice—appealed to him, he had no difficulty in obtaining from him the promise of an old suit of black, a black tie, and a broad brimmed black hat, for Benedetto.

In the room where the secular clothes were spread out, the disciple, having removed his habit, began to put them on in silence, and his master, who was standing at the window, could not repress a sob. Presently Benedetto called softly to him.

“Padre mio,” said he, “look at me!”

Arrayed in the new clothes, which were too long and too large for him, he smiled, showing himself at peace. The Padre seized his hand, intending to kiss it, but Benedetto caught it hastily away, and opening his arms, pressed to his breast the man who now seemed the younger, the son, the penitent instrument of shameful human persecutions, which, upon that heart, beating with divine fire, turned to dust, to ashes, and vanished! They stood a long time thus, locked in a silent embrace.

“I did it, for your sake,” Don Clemente murmured at last. “I myself brought the humiliating message, that I might see the grace of the Lord shine, in this humble dress, even brighter than in the habit.”

Benedetto interrupted him. “No, no!” said he. “Do not tempt me, do not tempt me! Let us rather thank God, who is chastening me for that presumptuous joy I experienced at Santa Scolastica, when you offered me the Benedictine habit, and I reflected that in my vision, I had seen myself dying in that dress. My heart was uplifted as if crying out: ‘I am beloved indeed of God!’ And now—”

“Ah! but—!” the Padre exclaimed, and then stopped suddenly, his face suffused with colour. Benedetto believed he understood what was in his mind: “It is not said that you may not sometime resume the habit you have just laid aside! It is not said that the vision may not yet come true!” He had not wished to utter this thought, either from prudence, or in order not to allude to Benedetto’s death. He smiled and embraced his master. The Padre hastened to speak of other things; he apologised for the parish priest, who was much grieved by what was happening, and would not have sent Benedetto away, had he not feared his superiors. He was not a Don Abbondio; he did not fear for himself, but dreaded scandal of a conflict with the

authorities.

[Footnote: Don Abbondio-a priest in Mazzoni's work I Promessi Sposi. (Translator's Note.)]

"I forgive him," said Benedetto, "and I pray God to forgive him, but this lack of moral courage is a great evil in the Church. Many, rather than contend against their superiors, will contend against God Himself. And they rid themselves of all responsibility by substituting their superiors' conscience to their own wherein God speaks. They do not comprehend that by striving against what is good, or by refraining from striving against what is evil, in obedience to superiors, they give scandal to the world, they stain the Christian character in the eyes of the world. They do not comprehend that both their duty toward God and their duty toward their superiors may be fulfilled, by never striving against what is good, by never refraining from striving against what is evil, by never judging their superiors, by obeying them with perfect obedience in everything that is neither opposed to what is good nor in favour of what is evil, by laying even life itself at their feet, but not their conscience; their conscience, never! Thus the Inferior, stripped of everything save conscience and just obedience, becomes a pure grain of the salt of the earth, and where many such grains are united, that to which they adhere will be saved from corruption, and that to which they do not adhere, will rot and fall to pieces!"

As he talked Benedetto became transfigured. With the last words he rose to his feet. His eyes flashed, his brow shone with the august light of the spirit of Truth. He placed his hands on Don Clemente's shoulders.

"Dear Master," he said, his face softening, "I am leaving the roof, the bread, the habit which were offered me, but while I have life, I will not cease telling of Christ, who is the Truth! I go forth, but not to remain silent. Do you remember giving me the letter to read, that St. Peter Damian wrote to a layman, who preached? That man preached in the church. I will not preach in the church, but if Christ wish me to

speak in the dwellings of the poor, I will speak in the dwellings of the poor; if He wish me to speak in the palace, I will speak in the palace; if He wish me to speak in the cubicles, I will speak in the cubicles; if He wish me to speak on the housetops, I will speak on the housetops. Think of the man who laboured in Christ's name, and was forbidden to do so by the disciples. Christ said: 'Forbid him not.' Shall we obey the disciple or shall we obey Christ?"

"You are right about the man in the Gospel, caro," Don Clemente replied, "but remember that one may mistake what is really Christ's will."

Don Clemente's heart did not speak precisely thus, but the heart's imprudent, undisciplined words were not allowed to pass his lips.

"After all, Padre mio," Benedetto continued, "believe me, I am not banished because I preached the Gospel to the people. There are two things you must know. The first is this. A proposal was made to me here in Jenne by a person whom I never saw again after that interview, to take holy orders, that I might become a missionary. I replied that I did not feel called to that work. The second incident is this. On one of the first days after my arrival at Jenne, while talking religion with the parish priest, I spoke of the eternal vitality of Catholic doctrine, of the power which the soul of Catholic doctrine possesses, of continually transforming its own body, increasing its strength and beauty unlimitedly. You know Padre mio, from whom—through you—these thoughts came to me. The parish priest must have repeated my words, which pleased him. The next day he asked me whether I had met Selva at Subiaco, and had read his books. He said he had not read them himself, but he knew they were to be avoided. Padre mio, you will understand now. It is on account of Signor Selva, and of your friendship for him, that I am leaving Jenne thus. I have never loved you as I love you now. I do not know whither I shall wander, but wherever the Lord may send me, be it far or near, do not let your soul forsake me!"

As he spoke these words, his voice shaking with sorrow and love, Benedetto again

threw himself into the arms of his master, who—himself torn by a tempest of conflicting emotions—knew not whether to ask his forgiveness, or promise him glory, the true glory, and could only say, with laboured breath:

"You do not know it, but I, too, have need that your soul should not forsake me!"

Touching it with careful, reverent hands; Don Clemente made the habit his disciple had laid aside into a bundle. When it was folded he told Benedetto that he could not offer him the hospitality of Santa Scolastica; he had intended asking Signor Selva to take him in, but he now doubted if it would be opportune and in the interests of his mission for Benedetto to put himself so openly under the protection of Signor Giovanni.

Benedetto smiled.

"Oh! certainly not!" said he. "Shall we fear the darkness more than we love the light? But I must pray God to make His will known to me, if it be possible. Perhaps He desires that, perhaps something else. And now will you send me some food and a little wine? And then let those come in, who wish to speak with me."

Don Clemente was secretly astonished that Benedetto should ask him for wine, but he did not allow his astonishment to appear. He said he would also send him the young girl who was with the Selvas. Benedetto looked at him questioningly. He remembered that when the girl, whom he had seen later in the church, had asked for an interview, Don Clemente had pressed his arm, as if silently warning him to be on his guard. Don Clemente grew very red while he explained his action. He had seen the young girl at Santa Scolastica with another person. His movement had been involuntary. The other person was now far away. "We shall not meet again," said he, "because as soon as I have sent you the food, and spoken to these people, I must start for Santa Scolastica."

In speaking of going to Subiaco or elsewhere, Benedetto had said "perhaps that, perhaps something else," with an accent so full of meaning that, when Don

Clemente bade him farewell, he murmured:

“Are you thinking of Rome?”

Instead of answering, Benedetto gently took from his hands the bundle containing the poor tunic, which had been bestowed and then withdrawn, and with trembling hands raised it to his lips, pressing them to it; he let them rest there a long time.

Was it regret for the days of peace, of labour, of prayer, of gospel words? Was it the anticipation of a luminous hour in the future?

He gave the bundle back into his master’s hands.

“Farewell!” said he.

Don Clemente hastened away.

The room the master of the house had set apart for Benedetto’s use contained a large sofa, a small square table, covered with a yellowish cloth; over which a blue floral pattern sprawled; a few shaky chairs; one or two armchairs, their stuffing showing through the rents in the old and faded leather; and two portraits of bewigged ancestors in tarnished frames. It had two windows, one almost blinded by a grey wall, the other open to the fields, to a lovely, peaceful hill, to the sky. Before receiving his visitors Benedetto approached this window to take a last farewell of the fields, the hill, and the poor town itself. Seized with sudden weakness, he leaned against the sill. It was a gentle, pleasant weakness. He was hardly conscious of the weight of his body, and his heart was flooded with mystic beatitude. Little by little, as his thoughts became vague and objectless he was moved by a sense of the quiet, innocent, external life; the drops falling from the roofs, the air laden with odours of the hills, stirring mysteriously at that hour and in that place. The memory of distant hours of his early youth came back to him, of a time when he was still unmarried and had no thought of marriage. He recalled the close of a thunder storm in the upper Valsolda on the crest of the Pian Biscagno. How different his fate would have been had his parents lived thirty or even twenty years longer! At least one of them!

In his mind's eye he saw the stone in the cemetery at Oria:

TO FRANCO IN GOD HIS LUISA;

and his eyes filled with tears. Then came the violent reaction of his will against this soft langour of the intellect, this temptation of weakness.

"No, no, no!" he murmured, half aloud. A voice behind him answered:

"You do not wish to listen to us?"

Benedetto turned round, surprised. Three young men stood before him. He had not heard them enter. The one who appeared to be the eldest, a fine-looking young fellow, short of stature, dark, with eyes speaking knowledge of many things, asked him boldly why he had laid aside the clerical dress. Benedetto did not reply.

"You do not wish to say?" the other exclaimed.

"It does not matter, but listen to us. We are students from the University of Rome, men of little faith, that I confess openly and at once. We are enjoying and making the most of our youth, that I will also confess at once."

One of his companions pulled a fold of the spokesman's coat.

"Be quiet!" said the leader. "It is true there is one among us who, though he has no great faith in the saints, is very pure. He, however, is not here before you. There are others missing also, who are playing cards at the tavern. The 'Most Pure' would not come with us. He says he will find a way of speaking with you alone. We are what I have told you. We came from Rome for an excursion, and, if possible, to witness a miracle; in fact, we came to have some fun!"

His companions interrupted him, protesting. "Yes, yes!" he repeated, "to have some fun! Excuse me, I speak frankly. Indeed our fun came near costing us too dear. We joked a little and they wanted to knock us down, you know; and all to your honour and glory! But then we heard the little speech you made to that crowd of fanatics. 'By the Lord Harry,' we thought, 'this is a new style of language for a priestly or

half-priestly mouth! This is a saint who suits us better than the others!’ Forgive my familiarity! So we at once decided to ask you for an interview; because even if we be rather sceptical, and fond of worldly pleasures, we are also more or less intellectual, and certain religious truths interest us. I myself, for instance, shall perhaps very shortly become a Neo-Buddhist.”

His companions laughed, and he turned upon them angrily.

“Yes indeed! I shall not be a practical Buddhist, but Buddhism interests me more than Christianity!”

Then ensued an altercation among the three students, on account of this inopportune sally, and a second spokesman, tall, thin, and wearing spectacles, took the place of the first. This man spoke nervously, with frequent spasmodic movements of the head and stiff forearms. His discourse was to the following effect. He and his companions had often discussed the question of the vitality of Catholicism. They were all convinced that it was exhausted, and that speedy death could be prevented only by radical reform. Some considered such a reform possible, while others did not. They were anxious to have the opinion of an intelligent and modern-spirited Catholic such as Benedetto had shown himself. They had many questions to ask him.

At this point the third ambassador of the party of students, feeling that his turn had come, poured out upon Benedetto a disordered stream of questions.

Did he feel disposed to become the champion of a reform in the Church? Did he believe in the infallibility of the Pope, of the Council? Did he approve of the worship of the Virgin Mary and of the saints in its present form? Was he a Christian Democrat? What were his views concerning the desired reform? They had seen Giovanni Selva at Jenne. Was Benedetto acquainted with his works? Did he approve of cardinals being forbidden to go out on foot, and of priests not being allowed to ride a bicycle? What was his opinion of the Bible, and what did he believe concerning its inspiration?

Before answering, Benedetto looked steadily and severely at his young interlocutor.

“A physician,” he began at last, “was reputed to be able to cure all diseases. A man, who did not believe in medicine, went to him out of curiosity, to question him about his art, his studies, his opinions. The physician let him talk on for some time; then he took his wrist, thus.” Benedetto took the wrist of the one who had spoken first, and continued.

“He took it, and held it a moment in silence; then he said to him, ‘My friend, your heart is affected. I read it first in your face, and now I feel the hammering of the carpenter who is making your coffin!”

The young man whose pulse he was pressing could not refrain from wincing.

“I do not mean you,” said Benedetto. “The physician was speaking to the man who does not believe in medicine. And he continued, thus: ‘Do you come to me for health and life? I will give you both. Are you not come for that? Then I have no time for you!’ The man, who had always believed himself to be well, turned pale, and said. ‘Master, I place myself in your hands; give me life!’”

The three students stood for a moment dum-founded. When they showed signs of coming to their senses, and of wishing to answer, Benedetto continued:

“If three blind men ask me for my lamp of truth what shall I reply? I shall reply, ‘First go and prepare your eyes for it, because, should I give it unto your hands now, you would receive no light from it, and you would only break it.’”

“I hope,” said the tall, lean, bespectacled student, “that in order to see your lamp of truth it may not be necessary to shut out the light of the sun. But, after all, I can easily understand that you do not wish to explain yourself to us, whom you believe to be reporters. To-day we are not—or at least I am not—in the state of mind you desire. I may be blind, but I do not feel inclined to ask the Pope for light, or a Luther either. Nevertheless, if you come to Rome, you will find young men better disposed than I am, than we are. Come, speak, let us also listen to you! To-day it is curiosity

with us, to-morrow, who knows? we may feel the right spirit. Come to Rome!”

“Give me your name,” said Benedetto.

The other offered him his card. His name was Elia Viterbo. Benedetto looked at him curiously.

“Yes, indeed,” he said, “I am a Jew; but these two baptised ones are no better Christians than I am. I have, moreover, no religious prejudices.”

The interview was over. As they were leaving, the youngest of the party, the man of the stream of questions, made a last onslaught.

“Tell us, at least, if you believe Catholics should vote on political questions?”

Benedetto was silent. The other insisted:

“Will you not answer even that question?”

Benedetto smiled.

“Non expedit,” said he.

There were steps in the ante-room; two gentle taps at the door; the Selvas entered with Noemi. Maria Selva came in first, and seeing Benedetto dressed thus, could not restrain a movement of indignation, of regret, and a soft laugh; then she blushed and wished to speak a word of protest, but could not find the right one. The tears came to Noemi’s eyes. All four were silent for a moment and understood each other. Then Giovanni murmured:

“‘Non fu dal vel del cuor giawmai disciolto’”[*1*];

and pressed the hand of him who in his awkward garments still appeared august to him.

“But you must not wear these things!” exclaimed Maria, less mystic than her husband.

Benedetto made a gesture which said, “Let us not speak of that,” and looked at the master of his master with eyes full of longing and reverence.

“Are you aware,” said he, “how much truth and how much good have come to me from you?”

Giovanni did not know how strongly he had influenced this man through Don Clemente. He supposed he had read his books. He was moved, and in his heart thanked God, who was thus gently showing him that he had worked some real good in a soul.

“How happy I should have been,” Benedetto continued, “to have worked in your garden,

[FN 1: “Of the heart’s veil she never was divested.” DANTE’S Paradiso, Canto iii. (Longfellow’s translation)] have sometimes seen you, to have heard you speak!”

A stifled exclamation escaped Noemi when reminded of that evening full of memories she could not express. Giovanni took this opportunity of offering hospitality to Benedetto, Don Clemente having told him he intended leaving Jenne that night. They could leave together, if he wished, after the interview which he was going to grant Giovanni’s sister-in-law. Noemi, very pale, looked fixedly at Benedetto for the first time, awaiting his answer.

“I thank you,” said he. “If I knock at your door, you will throw it open to me. I can say no more at present.”

Giovanni and his wife prepared to leave. Benedetto begged them to remain. Surely the Signorina had no secrets from them; at least not from her sister, if perhaps from her brother-in-law. Even this indirect appeal to Maria was of no avail, for Noemi remarked, with much embarrassment, that these secrets were not her own. The Selvas withdrew.

Benedetto remained standing, and did not invite Noemi to be seated. He was aware that a friend of Jeanne’s stood before him, and he foresaw what was coming—a message from Jeanne.

“Signorina?” said he.

His manner was not discourteous, but signified clearly, “The quicker the better.”

Noemi understood. She would have been offended had another person acted thus; but with Benedetto she was not offended. With him she felt humble.

“I have been requested to ask you,” she began, “whether you know anything about a person with whom you must have been intimately acquainted, whom, I believe, you also loved very dearly? I am not sure I pronounce the name correctly, I am not an Italian. It is Don Giuseppe Flores.”

Benedetto started. He had not expected this.

“No!” he exclaimed anxiously, “I know nothing.”

Nomei gazed at him a moment in silence. Before continuing she would have liked to ask his forgiveness for the pain she was about to cause him. She said sadly and in a low tone:

“Some one has written to me to tell you that he is no longer of this world.”

Benedetto bowed his head, and hid his face in his hands. Don Giuseppe, dear Don Giuseppe; dear, great, pure soul; dear luminous brow, dear eyes, full of God, dear, kind voice! Softly came two tears, which Noemi did not see; then he heard Don Giuseppe’s voice saying within him, “Do you not feel that I am here, that I am with you, that I am in your heart?”

After a long silence Noemi said softly:

“Forgive me! I am sorry I was obliged to cause you so much pain.”

Benedetto raised his head.

“Pain, and still not pain,” said he. Noemi maintained a reverent silence. Benedetto asked if she knew when this person had passed away.

Towards the end of April, she believed. She was absent from Italy at the time. She was in Belgium, at Bruges, with a friend to whom the news had been sent. She had understood from her friend that that person—a sense of delicacy prevented Noemi

from pronouncing the name—had died a very holy death. She had also been asked to say that his papers had been entrusted to the bishop of the city. Benedetto made a gesture of approval which might also serve to close the interview. Noemi did not move.

“I have not yet finished,” she said, and hastened to add:

“I have a Catholic friend—I myself am not a Catholic, I am a Protestant—who has lost her faith in God. She has been advised to devote herself to deeds of charity. She lives with her brother, who is very hostile to all religions. This innovation, the fact that his sister interests herself in charities, that she associates with people who promote good works from religious principles, is most displeasing to him. At present he is ill; he becomes irritated, excited, protests against these virtuous bigots, does not wish his sister to visit the poor, to protect young girls, or to provide for abandoned children. He says all these things are clericalism, are utopianism, that the world wags in its own way, and that it must be allowed to wag in its own way, that all this associating with the lower classes only serves to put false and dangerous ideas into their heads. Now, my friend has been told that she must either leave her brother, or lie to him, by doing secretly what she has hitherto done openly. She is in sore need of sound advice! She writes to me to ask you for it. She has read in the newspapers that you are helping so many here in these hills, and she hopes you will not refuse.”

“As her brother is ill, both bodily and mentally,” Benedetto answered, “does she not find deeds of charity to perform in her own house? Will she arrive at a knowledge of God by becoming a bad sister? Let her give up her works of charity and devote herself to her brother; let her attend to his bodily ills, and to his moral ills, with all the affection”—he was going to say “which she bears him,” but he corrected himself, that he might not thus clearly admit a knowledge of the person—“with all the affection of which she is capable; let her make herself precious to him; let her

win him by degrees, without sermons, by her goodness alone. It will do her much good also, this striving to incarnate in herself true goodness, active, untiring, patient, prudent goodness. And she will win him, little by little, without words; she will persuade him that all she does is well done. Then she can take up her works of charity again, take them up alone, and she will succeed better. Now she performs them because she has been advised to do so, and perhaps she does not succeed very well. Then she will be prompted by the habit of goodness, acquired with her brother, and she will have better success."

"I thank you!" said Noemi. "I thank you for my friend, and also for myself, for I am much pleased with what you have said. And may I repeat your advice, your words of encouragement, in your name?"

The question seemed superfluous, because the words of encouragement and advice had been spoken by Benedetto in direct answer to the friend. But Benedetto was troubled. It was an explicit message which Noemi asked of him for Jeanne.

"Who am I?" he said. "What authority do I possess? Tell her I will pray!"

Noemi was trembling inwardly. It would have been so easy now to speak to him of religion! And she did not dare. Ah! but to lose such an opportunity! No, she must speak; but she could not reflect a quarter of an hour upon what she should say. She said the first thing that came into her head.

"I beg your pardon, but as you speak of praying, I should like to ask you if you really approve of all my brother-in-law's religious views?"

As soon as she had uttered the question, it seemed to her so impertinent, so awkward, that she was ashamed. She hastened to add, conscious she was saying something still more foolish, but, nevertheless, feeling impelled to say it. "Because my brother-in-law is a Catholic, and I am a Protestant, and I should like to know what to believe."

"Signorina," Benedetto answered, "the day will come when all shall worship the

Father in spirit and in truth, upon the hilltops; to-day it is best to worship Him in the shadows, in figures, from deep Valleys. Many there are who can rise, some higher than others, towards the spirit and the truth; but many cannot. There are plants which bear no fruit above a certain altitude, and if carried still higher, they die. It would be folly to remove them from the climate which suits them. I do not know you, and I cannot say if your brother-in-law's religious views, planted without preparation in you, would bear good fruit. But I advise you to study Catholicism carefully, with Signor Selva's help; for there is not one conscientious Protestant who knows it well."

"You will not come to Subiaco?" Noemi inquired timidly.

A note of hidden melancholy rang in her voice, and aroused in Benedetto's heart a sense of sweet pain, which at once turned to fear, so new was it.

"No," said he, "I think not."

Noemi wished, and still did not wish to say she was sorry. She pronounced some confused words.

They heard some one in the ante-room. Noemi bowed, and Benedetto doing the same, the interview came to an end, without any further leave taking.

The Duchess also was anxious to speak with Benedetto. She brought her companions, both male and female, with her. No longer young, but still frivolous, half superstitious, half sceptical, egotistical but not heartless, she was devoted to the consumptive daughter of her old coachman, Having heard of the Saint of Jenne and his miracles, she had arranged this excursion, partly for amusement, partly to satisfy her curiosity, and she wished to ascertain if it would be wiser to have the Saint come to Rome, or to send the girl to him. At the house of a cardinal, her cousin, she had become acquainted with one of the priests now staying at Jenne, This man, having met her, had given her his own opinion of the Saint, announcing the downfall of his reputation. But, as the Duchess had little confidence in any priest, and was curious

to know a man to whom such a romantic past was attributed, and as her companions—one woman in particular—shared her curiosity she resolved, at any cost, to find a means of approaching him.

An elderly, English gentlewoman was of her party; a lady famous for her wealth and her peculiar toilettes, for her theosophic and Christian mysticism, metaphysically in love with the Pope and also with the Duchess who laughed at her friends. These friends, on beholding Benedetto in that strange outfit, exchanged glances and smiles which very nearly became giggles; but the elderly Englishwoman forestalling them all constituted herself their spokeswoman. She said, in bad French, that she was aware she was speaking to a man of culture, that she, with her friends, of both sexes and of all nationalities, was working to unite all Christian Churches under the Pope, reforming Catholicism in certain particulars which were really too absurd, and which no one honestly believed were of any further use, such particulars as ecclesiastical celibacy and the dogma of hell. She needed a saint to accomplish these reforms. Benedetto would be that saint, because a spirit (she herself was not a spiritualist, but a friend of hers was), the Spirit of the Countess Blavatzky herself, had revealed this fact. It was therefore necessary that he should come to Rome, and there his saintly gifts would also enable him to render a service to the Duchess di Civitella, here present. She ended her discourse thus:

“Nous vous attendons absolument, monsieur! Quittez ce vilain trou! Quittez-le bientôt! Bientôt!”

Having let his stern gaze wander rapidly round the circle of mocking or stolid faces, from the Duchess’s lorgnon to the journalist’s eye-glass, Benedetto replied:

“À l’instant, madame!”

And he left the room.

He left the room and the house, crossed the square, walking awkwardly in his ill-fitting clothes, and, without looking to right or left, took the road leading down

the slope, impelled by his spirit rather than by the weakened powers of his body. He intended to pass the night under some tree, and, on the morrow, go to Subiaco; from there, with Don Clemente's aid, he would go to Tivoli, where he knew a good old priest, who was in the habit of coming to Santa Scolastica from time to time. He no longer thought of accepting the Selvas' hospitality, which would have been precious to him. His heart was pure and at peace, but he could not forget that the young foreign girl's sweet voice, and the tone of sadness in which she had said "You will not come to Subiaco?" had awakened strange echoes within him, and that in that one second the thought had flashed across his mind: "Had Jeanne been like this, I should not have left her!" The mystics were right; penance and fasting were of no avail. But it had all disappeared now. Only the humiliating sense of a frailty essentially human remained, which, though it may have come forth triumphant from hard trials, may also reappear unexpectedly, and be overthrown by a breath. The little town was deserted. The storm over, the people from Trevi, Filettino, and Vallepietra had started homeward, discussing the events of the morning, the case of doubtful healing, and that in which the healing had not been effected, the warnings which had been swiftly sown by hidden hands against the corrupter of the people, the false Catholic. On leaving the town Benedetto was seen by two or three women of Jenne. The secular garments filled them with amazement; they concluded he had been excommunicated and allowed him to pass in silence.

A few steps beyond, some one who was running overtook him. It was a slender, fair lad, with blue eyes full of intelligence.

"Are you going to Rome, Signor Maironi?" he said.

"I beg you not to call me by that name!" Benedetto answered, ill-pleased to find that his name, who knows by what means, had been revealed. "I do not yet know whether I go to Rome."

"I shall follow you," the young man said, impulsively.

“You will follow me? But why should you follow me?”

In reply the young man took his hand, and, in spite of Benedetto’s resistance and protests, raised it to his lips.

“Why?” said he. “Because I am sick of the world, and could not find God, and to-day it Seems to me that, through you, I have been born to happiness! Please, please, let me follow you!

“Caro [dear one];” Benedetto replied, greatly moved, “I myself do not know whither I shall go!”

The young man entreated him to say, at least, when he should see him again, and exclaimed, seeing Benedetto really did not know what to answer:

“Oh! I shall see you in Rome! You will surely go to Rome!”

Benedetto smiled:

“In Rome? And how will you find me there?”

The lad answered that he would certainly be talked of in Rome, that every one would know where to find him.

“If it be God’s will!” said Benedetto, with an affectionate gesture of farewell.

The lad detained him a moment, holding his hand.

“I am a Lombard also,” said he. “I am Alberti, from Milan. Do not forget me!”

And his intense gaze followed Benedetto until he disappeared at a bend of the mule-path.

At sight of the cross with its great arms, rising on the brow of the hill, Benedetto suddenly shuddered with emotion, and was obliged to stop. When he once more started forward he was seized with giddiness. Swaying, he stepped aside a few yards, leaving the way free for passers-by, and sank upon the grass, In a hollow of the field. Then, closing his eyes, he realised that this was no passing disturbance, but something far more serious. He did not become entirely unconscious, but he lost the

sense of hearing and of touch, his memory, and all account of time. When he first recovered his senses, the feeling on the backs of his hands, of the coarse cloth, different from that of his usual habit, filled him with a curiosity, rather amused than troubled, concerning his own identity. He felt his breast, the buttons, the button-holes, without understanding. He thought. A boy from Jenne, who passed near him in the field, ran to the town and reported excitedly that the Saint was lying dead on the grass, near the cross.

Benedetto reflected, with that shade of cloudy reason which governs us when we sleep and when we first awake. These were not his clothes. They were Piero Maironi's clothes. He was still Piero Maironi. This thought terrified him, and he recovered his senses completely. He rose to a sitting posture, looked at himself, looked about him at the field and the hills, veiled in the shades of evening. At sight of the great cross, his mind regained its composure. He felt ill, very ill. He tried to rise to his feet, but found it difficult to do so. Directing his steps towards the mulepath, he asked himself what he should do in that condition. Some one coming swiftly down the path from Jenne stopped before him; he heard the exclamation: "Oh! my God! it is you!" He recognised the voice of the woman who had spoken so passionately to him while the storm was raging. She alone of all those at Jenne who had heard the boy's story had come to him. The others had either not believed or not wished to believe. She had come running, and mad with grief. Now she had stopped suddenly, and stood speechless, not two steps from him. He, not suspecting she had come on his account, wished her good-night and passed on. She did not return his salutation, for, after the first moment of joy, she was distressed to see him walk with such difficulty, and she did not dare to follow him. She saw him stop and speak to a man riding a mule, who was coming up. She rushed forward to hear what was said. The man was a muleteer, sent by the Selvas to look for Benedetto. The Selvas, with two mules for the ladies, had left Jenne soon after him, thinking to overtake him on the hillside. Reaching the Anio without having seen him, they questioned a

passer-by coming from Sublaco. He could give them no news of Benedetto. Noemi, who was to take the last train for Tivoli, went on with Giovanni, hiding her disappointment. The muleteer had been sent back to Jenne to look for Benedetto, and to fetch a parasol which had been forgotten at the inn. Maria was awaiting his return among the rocks of the Infernillo. The young school-mistress heard Benedetto ask the muleteer to bring him a little water from Jenne, for the sake of charity. The two men were still talking, but she sped away, without waiting to hear more.

After a brief consultation with the muleteer, Benedetto had consented to ride down to where Signora Selva was waiting. Left alone, he seated himself near the cross, and waited for the man to return with the water and the parasol. The crescent moon was rising, gilding the bright sky, above the hills of Arcinazzo; the evening was warm and breathless. Benedetto felt his temples throb and burn; his breath came quick and short, but he suffered no pain. The sweet-scented grass of the field, the scattered trees, the great shadowy hills, all, to him, was alive, was filled with religion; all was sweet with a mystery of adoring love which bent even the crescent moon towards the heights in the opalescent sky. Don Giuseppe Flores whispered in his heart that it would be sweet to die thus with the day, praying in unison with the innocent things.

Hurried steps were heard in the direction of Jenne. They stopped a short distance from him. A little girl came towards Benedetto, timidly offered him a bottle of water and a glass, and then turned and fled. Benedetto, astonished, called her to him. She came slowly, shyly, and did not answer when he asked her name, her parents' name. A voice said:

"She is the innkeeper's child."

Benedetto recognised the voice and the person also, though the moonlight was pale; she had remained at a distance, prompted by the same sense of delicacy which had moved her to bring the child with her.

“I thank you,” said he. She came a little nearer, holding the child by the hand, and asked softly:

“Do you know the priests have been talking to the dead man’s mother? Do you know the woman now accuses you of killing her son?”

Benedetto replied with some severity in his tone:

“Why do you tell me this?”

She saw she had displeased him by repeating this accusation, and exclaimed in distress;

“Oh! forgive me!”

Presently she added:

“May I ask you a question?”

“Speak.”

“Shall you never return to Jenne?”

“Never.”

The woman was silent. They could hear steps approaching in the distance; it was the muleteer and his mule. She said in a lower tone:

“For pity’s sake, one word more! How do you picture to yourself the future life? Do you believe we shall meet those we have known in this life?”

If the moonlight had not been so pale, Benedetto would have seen two great tears rolling down the young girl’s face.

“I believe,” he replied, “that until the death of our planet, our future life will be one of labour upon it, and that all those minds which aspire to truth, to unity, will meet there, and labour together.” The muleteer’s hobnailed shoes, which grated among the pebbles, could be heard very near them. The woman said:

“Addio! Farewell!”

The tears sounded in her voice now. Benedetto answered:

“A Dio! God be with you!”

Mounted on the mule, he goes down into the shadows of the valley. He is burning with fever. He is going to Casa Selva, after all. He knows, for the muleteer has told him, that he will not see Noemi there; but that is indifferent to him, he does not fear her, does not even remember the moment of gentle emotion. Another feverish thought is stirring in his soul. There is a whirl of words spoken by Don Clemente, by the lad Alberti, by the elderly Englishwoman, while fragments of the Vision flash like pictures before his mind’s eye. Yes, he will go to Casa Selva, but only for a short time. As he ascends, the mighty voice of the Anio roars louder, ever louder, out of the depths:

“Rome! Rome! Rome!”

CHAPTER VI. THREE LETTERS

JEANNE TO NOEMI. VENA DI FONTE ALTA, July 4,——

Forgive me if I write to you in pencil. I have just reread your letter here, at a point half an hour distant from the hotel, seated on the edge of a stone basin where the flocks come to drink. The tiny stream of water which trickles into the basin from a small wooden pipe reminds me, with its gentle voice, of something which makes my heart ache; a walk with him across fields and through woods in the mist; a halt by this very spring, painful words, a few tears, something written in the water, a moment of happiness—the last. I made a great sacrifice for Carlino’s sake when I returned to Vena after an absence of three years. I have always loved him, but the message from Jenne would make me face far greater sacrifices than this for him, make me face them willingly, though conscious of having lost all merit in them.

I am not satisfied with your letters; I will tell you why sometime, but not now. It is too difficult to write here. The mist is rolling down from the uplands high above the

spring, and a cold west wind is blowing. I must be careful of my health on Carlino's account, and this is another sacrifice, for I hate my health!

Later.

Noemi, could you not contrive to let the enclosed half-sheet of paper, upon which I have written in pencil, fall into his hands? You hesitate to tell him how obedient I am; could you not, at least, help me to let him know it in this way?

I am not satisfied with your letters, first of all because they are too short. You know how eager I am to hear all about him. He is a guest in the same house with you; at Subiaco he can surely not know how to employ his time, and you sum up everything in two or three words!—He is better. He reads a great deal. He has been working in the kitchen-garden. Perhaps he will spend the summer with us. He writes.—And you have never yet told me what malady he is really suffering from, what he reads, where he will go if he does not spend the summer with you, whether he writes letters or books, and what you talk about together, for it is not possible that you never talk together. Do not repeat your excuse that the less you speak of him, the better it is for me. That is a convenient excuse you have invented, but it is foolish, because, whether you talk to me of him or not, it is all the same. My hopes are quite dead; they will not revive. Then write me long letters, I am sure he wishes to convert you, that you have very serious talks together, and that is why you tell me so little about him. It would not be a very glorious achievement to convert you, for you are sentimental in matters of religion; you do not possess that clear, cold, and positive insight which is, unfortunately, natural to me, and which I wish I did not possess.

When do you intend to return to Belgium? Do not your affairs there need your attention? You once mentioned an agent in whom you had little confidence. We shall probably travel in August. At least, that is what Carlino says at present, but he changes his mind very easily. I should like to visit Holland with you, in September. Good-bye! Please write. If he reads much you might get him to lend you a book, and

leave the half-sheet of paper in it as a book-mark, At any rate, find some way. That or something else; you are a woman! Contrive some means, if you love me! But I really believe you no longer love me at all! You would confess it if you told the truth! However, there is a lady at this hotel who is in love with me! Laugh, if you like, but it is true. She lives in Rome. Her husband is Under-Secretary of State. She is determined that I shall spend next winter in Rome. It will depend upon Carlino. This lady lays siege to him; he lets himself be besieged, and neither resists nor capitulates. Good-bye. Write, write, and again write!

NOEMI TO JEANNE (from the French)

I did still better! In my presence, my brother-in-law cited from memory a Latin passage which impressed him, concerning certain monks of ancient times, before Christ. He begged Giovanni to write it down for him. We were in the olive-grove above the villetta, seated on the grass. I immediately passed a pencil to Giovanni, and the half-sheet of paper, with the blank side uppermost. He wrote, and Maironi took the paper, read the Latin passage, and put the sheet into his pocket, without looking at the other side. It was an act of treason, and I have been guilty of treason for love of you. Will you ever doubt me again?

What can I tell you about his illness which I have not told you already? He was troubled with fever for about two weeks. One day the physician would pronounce it typhoid, and the next he would say it was not. At last the fever left him, but his strength has not returned completely; he is very thin; he seems to have some persistent, internal ailment; the doctor is very particular about the quality of his food; he has changed his way of living, eats meat and drinks a little wine. Yesterday a friend of Giovanni’s came from Rome to see him; the famous Professor Mayda, Giovanni begged him to examine Maironi, and to advise him. He recommended some waters, which Maironi will certainly not take. I feel I know him well enough to be sure of that. However, during the last week he has improved rapidly. In the

morning and evening he works a little in the kitchen-garden. This morning he rose very early, and what should he do but take it into his head to wash down the stairs! Yesterday Maria scolded the old servant because the stairs were not clean. When the old woman, who sleeps at Subiaco, arrived at seven o'clock, she found Maironi had done the work for her. My sister and my brother-in-law reproached him; Giovanni was almost severe, perhaps because he is so different from Maironi, and would never think of touching a broom, even if he lived in a cloud of cobwebs! What does Maironi read? He has never but once spoken to me of what he reads, and then only for a moment, as I shall tell you later. I wrote you that perhaps he would spend the summer with us, for I know Maria and Giovanni wish it. I now have a presentiment that he will not stay, but will go to Rome. This, however, is only my impression; I have no positive knowledge.

As to his wishing to convert me, I do not know whether it would be an easy task or not, or whether Maironi thinks anything about it. You will notice that I call him Maironi in writing to you; in speaking to him I call him simply Benedetto, for that is his wish. I am sure Giovanni once thought of converting me. He found it so easy that he never speaks of it to me now. I should not think the same of Maironi. I believe that to him Christianity means, above all things, actions and life according to the spirit of Christ, of the risen Christ who lives for ever among us, of whom we have, as he puts it, the experience. It seems to me that the object of his religious mission is, not the placing of the creed of one Christian Church before another, although there is no doubt the holiness of the life he leads is strictly Catholic. Whenever I have heard him speak of dogmas, with Giovanni, it has never been to discuss the difference between Church and Church, but rather to expound certain formulas of faith, and to show what a strong light emanates from them when they are expounded in a certain way. Giovanni himself is past-master at this, but when Giovanni speaks you are impressed above all, by the immense store of knowledge his mind contains; when Maironi speaks you feel that the living Christ is in his heart, the risen Christ,

and he fires you! In order to be perfectly, scrupulously sincere, I will tell you that although I do not think he intends to convert me, still I am not very sure of this. One day we were in the olive-grove. He and Giovanni were discussing a German book on the essence of Christianity, which, it seems, has made a stir, and was written by a Protestant theologian. Maironi observed that, when this Protestant speaks of Catholicism, he does so with a most honest intention of being impartial, but that, in reality, he does not know the Catholic religion. His opinion is that no Protestant does really know it; they are all of them full of prejudices, and believe certain external and remediable abuses in its practices to be essential to Catholicism. There was a basket of apricots standing near, and he chose one which had been very fine, but which was beginning to rot. “Here,” said he, “is an apricot, which is slightly rotten. If I offer this apricot to one who does not know, but who wishes to be amiable, he will tell me that part of it is indeed firm and good, but that, unfortunately, part of it is diseased, and therefore, though he much regrets it, he cannot accept it. Thus this illustrious Protestant speaks of Catholicism. But if I offer my apricot to one who knows, he will accept it even if it be entirely rotten; and he will plant the immortal seed in his own garden, in the hope of raising fine, healthy fruit.” These remarks he addressed to Giovanni, but his eyes sought mine continually. I must add that at Jenne also, he told me to learn to understand Catholicism. At any rate, if I remain a Protestant, it will not be because I do or do not understand, but rather in obedience to my most sacred feelings.

My dear Jeanne, there is something else I must tell you plainly. I have a suspicion that you are jealous, I believe you do not realise the inexpressible grief you would cause me, if this were really the case. I fear you do not realise the immense gravity of the offence it would be, first to him and then to me. Now I am going to open my heart to you. I should reproach myself if I did not do so, dear friend, reproach myself on your account, on his, and on my own. As to him, he is kind and gentle to all with whom he comes in contact, especially to the humble, and you might even be jealous

of the old woman who comes from Subiaco to do the rough work in the house. With Maria and myself he shows his kindness and gentleness silently rather than in words. With us he is quiet, simple, and affable; he does not appear to wish to avoid us, but it has never happened that he has remained alone with either of us. In his eyes I am a soul, and souls are to him exactly what the tiniest plants in my father's great garden were to him; he would have liked to protect them from frost with the warmth of his own heart, and make then grow and flower by communicating his own vitality to them. But I am a soul like any other soul, the only difference perhaps being, that he deems me further removed from the truth, and consequently more exposed to frost. But this is not apparent in his bearing.

As to myself, dearest, I certainly have a deep feeling for him, but it would be abominable to say that this feeling in the least resembles what men call by the familiar name. This sentiment is one of reverence, of a kind of devout fear, of awe; I feel his person is surrounded by something like a magic circle, into which I should never dare to penetrate. My heart beats no faster in his presence. I think, indeed, it beats more slowly but of this I am not sure. Dear Jeanne, I could not possibly speak more honestly than I have done, therefore I beg you, I entreat you, not to imagine anything different!

For the present I am not thinking of going to Belgium. I may possibly go there for a short time, later on. My kind regards to your brother. I should like to know if he has sent the old priest and the young woman to Formalhaut at last! I myself sometimes think of his Formalhaut! Tell him that if you and he come to Rome this winter, we will make music together. Good-bye I embrace you!

BENEDETTO TO DON CLEMENTE

(Never sent)

Padre mio, the Lord has departed from my soul, not, indeed, giving me up to sin, but He has taken from me all sense of His presence, and the despairing cry of Jesus

Christ on the cross thrills, at times, through my whole being. If I strive to concentrate all my thoughts in the one thought of the Divine Presence, all my senses in an act of submission to the Divine Will, I derive only pain and discouragement from it. I feel like the beast of burden which falls under its load, and which, at the first cut of the whip, makes an effort to rise, and falls again; at a second blow, at a third, or a fourth, it only shivers, and does not attempt to rise. If I open the Gospels or the Imitation, I find no flavour in them. If I recite prayers, weariness overpowers me, and I am silent. If I prostrate myself upon the ground, the ground freezes me. If I make complaint to God at being treated thus, His silence seems to grow more hostile. If, on the authority of the great mystics, I say to myself that I am wrong to feel such affection for spiritual joys, to suffer thus when deprived of them, I answer myself that the mystics err, that in the state of conscious grace one walks safely, but that in this starless night of spiritual darkness one cannot see the way; there is no other rule than to withdraw one's foot when it touches the soft grass, and that is not sufficient, for there is also the danger of setting the foot in empty space. Father, Padre mio, open your arms to me, that I may feel the warmth of your breast, filled with God! There are a hundred reasons why I should not go to Santa Scolastica, and in any case I should prefer to write. You are here present with me more than in the body; I can become one with you, can mingle with you more easily than if you stood before me; and I need to mingle with you in thought, I need to force my soul into yours. Perhaps I shall send you this letter, but perhaps I shall not send it. Father, father! it does me more good to write to you than to speak to you! I could not speak with the fire which now rushes to my pen, and which would not rush to my lips. Writing, I speak, I cry out to the immortal in you, I divest you of all that is mortal even in your soul, and which in your presence would extinguish my fire. I divest you of the mortality of an incomplete knowledge of things, of prudence, which would prompt you to veil your thoughts. No, I will not send this letter, but nevertheless it will reach you. I will burn it, but still it will reach you; for it is not possible that my

silent cry should not come to you, perhaps now, in the darkness of the night, while you sleep, perhaps in two hours' time, still in the darkness of the night, while you pray with the brothers, in the dear church, where we worshipped so often together.

I know why I am wretched, I know why God has forsaken me. Always when God forsakes me, when all the living springs of my soul are dry, and the living germs are parched, and my heart becomes as a dead sea, I know the reason why. It is because I have heard sweet music behind me, and have looked back; or because the wind has brought me the scent of blossoming fields beside my path, and I have paused; or because the mist has risen before me, and I have been afraid; or because a thorn has pierced my foot, and I have felt vexation. Moments, flashes, but in that moment the door opens, an evil breath enters! It is always thus: an earnest glance, a word of praise enjoyed, an image lingered over, an offence recalled, any one of these suffices; the evil breath has time to enter.

And now all of these causes are joined together! Darkness descended upon my path; I set my foot in the soft grass, I felt it; I withdrew my foot, but not at once. Why do I speak in figures? Write, write the naked truth, cowardly hand! Write that this house is a nest of ease, and that, if I have enjoyed the soft bed, the fine linen, the odour of lavender, I have delighted still more in the conversation of Giovanni Selva, in the readings, which have filled me with the joys of the intellect, in the presence of two young and pure women, cultured and full of grace, in their secret admiration, in the perfume of a sentiment which I believe one of them harbours, in the vision of a life of retirement in this nest, with these beings, far from all that is vulgar, all that is low, unclean, and loathsome.

I have felt the sin of the world with the repulsion which shrinks from it, and not with the fiery sorrow which braves it and wrests souls from its clutches. Moments, flashes; I took refuge, as in times past, in the embrace of the cross; but, little by little, the cross turned to unfeeling, dead wood in my arms, and this was not as in

times past! I told myself, “Spirits of evil, strong and cunning powers of the air, are conspiring against me, against my mission.” I answered myself, “Pride, be gone!” And then the first idea took possession of me once more. In this sad manner I rocked to and fro, every day, and all day long. And because I did not allow any part of all this to transpire, because I understood that Signor Giovanni and the ladies did not doubt I was inwardly as calm, as pure as I was externally; I despised myself at certain moments for a hypocrite, only to tell myself the next moment that, on the contrary, my pure and calm exterior helped me to live—I allude to the spiritual life—that by appearing strong, I was forced to be strong. I compared myself to a tree whose marrow has been destroyed by worms, whose wood is rotten, but which still lives through its bark, by means of which it produces leaves and flowers, and can spread welcome shade. Then I told myself that this was good reasoning before men; but was it good reasoning before God, before God? And again I told myself that God could heal me, for though the tree may not be healed yet a man may be made whole. Again my mind was tormented, because I was incapable of doing what God would demand of me, in order that my will might once more work in unison with His. He would order me to flee, to flee! God is in the voice of the Anio, which, since the evening of my departure from Jenne, has been saying: “Rome, Rome, Rome!” And God is also in the strength of the invisible worms, which have gnawed the vital virtues of my body. Am I then to blame? Am I then to blame? Lord, hear my groan, which asks for justice!

I have said many times that I will leave as soon as I am strong enough, but they wish to keep me here, and how can I say to them “My friends, you are my enemies?” Behold my cowardice! Why can I not say so? Why should I not say so?

One day I read in the young Protestant girl’s glance the question: “If you go, what will become of my soul? Should you not desire to lead me to your faith? I will not yet allow myself to be led.” No, I cannot, I must not write all. How can I write the meaning of a glance, the accent of a word, commonplace in itself? They are not such

glances as drove St. Jerome to plunge into icy water, or at least my emotion does not resemble his. Icy water is of no avail against a glance which is all sweet purity. Only fire can prevail against it, the fire of the Supreme Love! Ah! who will free me from my mortal heart, whose faintest throb thrills all the fibres of my body? Who will set free the immortal heart which is within it, like the germ of a fruit, preparing for itself a celestial body? I cannot, I must not write all, but this, indeed, I will write: The Lord seeks to ensnare me, to entrap me! When I shall have fallen, He will deride me! Why did it happen that I wrote the Latin quotation about those who live and do penance between the Dead Sea and the desert, “Sine pecunia, sine ulla femina, omni venere abdicata socia palmarum,” on that piece of paper, which on the other side bore words from J. D., words still hot concerning my past sin and hers, words reminding me of the most terrible moments? How did a person so timid dare to force a secret communication upon me?

The wind has blown my window open. Oh! Anio, Anio! will you never tire of your commanding? I must start now, at once? Impossible, the doors are locked. Moreover, it would be shame to leave thus. I should be dishonouring God; they would say “what ungrateful, what mad servants has the Lord!” Come, spirit of my master, come, come! Speak to me; I will listen. What have you to say to me? What have you to say to me? Ah! you smile at my tempest; you tell me to leave, yes, but to leave honourably, to announce that the Lord Himself commands my departure. You tell me to obey the voice of God in the Anio. Now the wind is ceasing; as if satisfied, it seems to be growing quiet. Yes, yes, yes, with tears! To-morrow, to-morrow morning! I will announce it. And I know to whom I shall go in Rome. Oh! light, oh! peace, oh! springs burst forth again in my soul: oh! dead sea, swelling with a wave of warmth! Yes, yes, yes, with tears! I return thanks! I return thanks! Glory be to Thee, our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come: Thy will be done!

CHAPTER VII. IN THE WHIRLPOOL OF THE WORLD

It was already growing dark when a private carriage stopped at the door of a house in Via della Vite in Rome. Two ladies alighted, and quickly disappeared within the gloomy entrance, while the carriage drove away. Presently another carriage arrived, deposited two more ladies before the same gloomy door, and in its turn rolled away. Thus, within a quarter of an hour, five carriages drove up, and no less than twelve female figures were engulfed by the dark portal. The narrow street then relapsed into its usual quiet. In about half an hour groups of men began to appear, coming from the Corso. They paused before the same door, read the number by the light of a neighbouring street-lamp, and then entered. In this manner about forty persons more were engulfed by the gloomy portal The last arrivals were two priests. The one who tried to read the number was near-sighted, and could not make it out. His companion said to him, laughing:

“Go in, go in! There is an odour of Luther in the air; it must be here!” The first priest entered the evil-smelling darkness. By a black and dirty stair they mounted up, up, towards a small oil lamp, burning on the fourth floor. On reaching the third floor they struck a match to read the names upon the door-plates. A voice called out from above:

“Here, gentlemen, here!”

An affable young man in a dark morning suit came down to meet them. He showed them great deference, said the others were waiting for them, and conducted them through an ante-room and a passage almost as dark as the stairway itself, to a large room, full of people, and dimly lighted by four candles and two old oil lamps. The young man apologised for the darkness, saying his parents would tolerate neither the electric light, nor gas, nor petroleum. All the men who had arrived in groups were assembled here. Three or four wore clerical dress. The others, with the exception of an old man with a red face and a white beard, seemed to be students. There were no

women present. All were standing save the old man, who was evidently an important personage. Conversation was being carried on in low tones. The room was full of whisperings, like the murmur of tiny rivulets and falling drops in a cave. When the two priests had entered the young host said:

“We are ready!”

Those forming, the central group fell back in a circle, and Benedetto appeared in their midst. A small table with two candles upon it, and a chair, had been prepared for his use. He begged that the candles might be removed. Then he was dissatisfied with the table. Saying he was weary, he asked to be allowed to speak seated on the sofa, beside the old man with the flushed face and the white beard. Benedetto was dressed in black, and was paler and thinner than at Jenne. His hair had receded from his forehead, which had acquired something of the solemn aspect of the brow of Don Giuseppe Flores. His eyes had become a still brighter blue. Many of the faces turned eagerly towards him seemed more fascinated by those eyes and that brow than anxious to hear his words. Making no gestures, his hands resting on his knees, be began speaking as follows:

“I must first state to whom I speak, for not all here present are of one mind concerning Christ and the Church. I do not address my remarks to the ecclesiastics; I believe and hope they are not in need of my words. Neither do I speak to this gentleman seated beside me, for I know he does not need my words. I speak to no one who is firmly grounded in the Catholic faith. I address myself solely to those young men who wrote to me in the following terms.”

He took out a letter and read:

“‘We were educated in the Catholic faith, and on attaining manhood we—by an act of our own free will—accepted its most arduous mysteries; we have laboured in the faith, both in the administrative and social field; but now another mystery rises in our way, and our faith falters before it. The Catholic Church, calling herself the

fountain of truth, to-day opposes the research of truth, when her foundations, the sacred books, the formulae of her dogmas, her alleged infallibility, become objects of research. To us this signifies that she no longer has faith in herself. The Catholic Church, which proclaims herself the channel of life, to-day chains and stifles all that lives youthfully within her, to-day seeks to prop all that is tottering and aged within her, To us these things mean death, distant, but inevitable death. The Catholic Church, claiming to wish to renew all things through Christ, is hostile to us, who strive to wrest the direction of social progress from the enemies of Christ. This fact, with many others, signifies to us, that she has Christ on her lips but not in her heart. Such is the Catholic Church to-day. Can God desire our obedience to her to continue? We come to you with this question. What shall we do? You who profess to be a Catholic, who preach Catholicism, who have the reputation——‘”

Here Benedetto broke off, saying;

“Only some unimportant words follow.”

And he continued his discourse.

“I answer those who wrote to me, thus: Tell me, why have you appealed to me who profess to be a Catholic? Do you perhaps think me a superior of the superiors in the Church? Will you, perhaps for that reason, rest in peace upon my word, if my word be different from what you call the word of the Church? Listen to this allegory. Thirsty pilgrims draw near to a famous fountain. They find its basin full of stagnant water, disgusting to the taste. The living spring is at the bottom of the basin; they do not find it. Sadly they turn for aid to a quarryman, working in a neighbouring quarry. The quarryman offers them living water. They inquire the name of the spring. ‘It is the same as the water in the basin,’ he replies. ‘Underground it is all one and the same stream. He who digs will find it.’ You are the thirsty pilgrims, I am the humble quarryman, and Catholic truth is the hidden, underground current. The basin is not the Church; the Church is the whole field through which the living waters flow. You

have appealed to me because you unconsciously recognise that the Church is not the hierarchy alone, but the universal assemblage of all the faithful, gens sancta; that from the bottom of any Christian heart the living waters of the spring itself, of truth itself, may rush forth. Unconscious recognition, for were it not unconscious you would not say, the Church opposes this, the Church stifles that, the Church is growing old, the Church has Christ on her lips and not in her heart.

"Understand me well. I do not pass judgment upon the hierarchy; I respect the authority of the hierarchy; I simply say that the Church does not consist of the hierarchy alone. Listen to another example. In the thoughts of every man there is a species of hierarchy. Take the upright man. With him certain ideas, certain aims, are dominant thoughts, and control his actions. They are these: to fulfil his religious, moral, and civil duties. To these various duties he gives the traditional interpretations which have been taught him. Yet this hierarchy of firmly grounded opinions does not constitute the whole man. Below it there are in him a multitude of other thoughts, a multitude of other ideas, which are continually being changed and modified by the impressions and experiences of life. And below these thoughts there is another region of the soul, there is the subconsciousness, where occult faculties work at an occult task, where the mysterious contact with God comes to pass. The dominant ideas exercise authority over the will of the upright man, but all that other world of thought is of vast importance as well, because it is continually deriving truth from the experience of what is real externally, and from the experience of what is Divine internally, and therefore seems to rectify the superior ideas, the dominant ideas, in that in which their traditional element is not in perfect harmony with truth. And to them, it is a perennial fountain of fresh life which renews them, a source of legitimate authority, derived rather from the nature of things, from the true value of ideas, than from the decrees of men. The Church is the whole man, not one separate group of exalted and dominant ideas; the Church is the hierarchy, with its traditional views, and the laity, with its continual derivations from reality, its continual reaction

upon tradition; the Church is official theology, and she is the inexhaustible treasure of Divine Truth, which reacts upon official theology; the Church does not die; the Church does not grow old; the Church has the living Christ in her heart rather than on her lips; the Church is a laboratory of truth, which is in continual action, and God commands you to remain in the Church, to become the Church fountains of living water."

Like a gust of wind, a feeling of emotion and of admiration swept over the audience. Benedetto, whose voice had been growing louder and louder, rose to his feet.

"But what manner of faith is yours!" he exclaimed excitedly, "if you talk of deserting the Church because you are displeased with certain antiquated doctrines of her rulers, with certain decrees of the Roman congregations, with certain tendencies in the government of a Pontiff? What manner of sons are you who talk of denying your mother because her dress is not to your taste? Can a dress change the maternal bosom? When resting there, you tearfully confess your infirmities to Christ, and Christ heals you, do you speculate concerning the authenticity of a passage in St. John, the true author of the Fourth Gospel, or the two Isaiahs? When, gathered there, you unite yourselves to Christ in the sacrament, are you disturbed by the decrees of the Index, or of the Holy Office? When, lying there, you pass into the shadows of death, is the peace it sheds about you any less sweet because a Pope is opposed to Christian Democracy?

"My friends, you say 'We have rested in the shade of this tree, but now its bark is splitting, is being dried up, the tree will die; let us seek another tree.' The tree will not die. If you had ears you would hear the movement of the new bark which is forming, which will have its span of life, which will crack, will be dried up in its turn only to be replaced by another coat of bark. The tree does not perish, the tree grows."

Benedetto sat down, exhausted, and was silent. There was a movement among the

audience like the shuddering of waves surging towards him. Raising his hands, he stopped them.

“Friends,” he said, in a weary, sweet voice, “listen to me once more. Scribes and Pharisees, elders and princes among priests, have striven in all times against innovations, as they strive to-day. It is not for me to speak to you of them; God will judge them. We pray for all those who know not what they do. But perhaps those of the other Catholic camp, the militant camp, are not entirely without sin. In the other camp they are intoxicated with the idea of modernity. Modernity is good, but the eternal is better. I fear that there they do not esteem the eternal at its just value. It is expected that the Church of Christ will derive much strength from united Catholic action in the fields of administration and politics, action resulting in strife, through which the Father will suffer insult at the hands of men, while not enough reliance is placed on the strength to be derived from the light shed by the good deeds of each individual Christian, through which light the Father is glorified. The supreme object of humanity is to glorify the Father. Now men glorify the Father of such as possess the spirit of charity, of peace, of wisdom, of purity, of fortitude, who give their vital strength for the good of others. One such just man, who professes and practises Catholicism, contributes more largely to the glory of the Father, of Christ, of the Church, than many congresses, many clubs, many Catholic victories in politics.

“A moment ago I heard some one murmur: ‘And what about the social action?’ The social action, my friends, is certainly salutary, as a work of justice, of fraternisation; but like the Socialists, some Catholics put upon it the seal of their own religious and political opinions, and refuse to admit well-intentioned men, if they do not accept that seal; they repulse the good Samaritan, and this is an abomination in the eyes of God. They also set the seal of Catholicism upon works which are instruments of gain, and this again is an abomination in the eyes of God. They preach the just distribution of riches, and that is well; but they too often forget to preach also poverty of the heart, and if they are deterred from doing this by mercenary motives,

then this is another abomination in the eyes of God. Purge your actions of these abominations. Call all well-intentioned men to help, especially in works of justice and of love, satisfied yourselves to have initiated these labours. By your words and by your example preach poverty of the heart to rich and poor alike."

The audience swayed confusedly, drawn in different directions. Benedetto covered his face with his hands, while he collected his thoughts.

"You ask me what you are to do?" he said uncovering his face.

He reflected a moment longer and then continued:

"I see, In the future, Catholic laymen striving zealously for Christ and for truth, and finding a means of instituting unions different from those of the present. They will one day take arms as knights of the Holy Spirit, banding together for the united defence of God and of Christian morality in the scientific, artistic, civil, and social fields; for the united defence of legitimate liberty in the religious field. They shall be under certain special obligations, not however of community of living, or of celibacy, integrating the office of the Catholic clergy, to which they will not belong as an Order but only as persons, in the individual practice of Catholicism. Pray that God's will may be made manifest concerning this work in the souls of those who contemplate it. Pray that these souls may willingly strip themselves of all pride in having conceived this work, and of all hope of witnessing its completion, should God manifest disapproval of it. If God manifest His approval of it, then pray that men may be taught to organise its every detail to His greater glory, and to the greater glory of the Church. Amen!"

He had finished, but no one moved. All eyes were fixed upon him, anxious and eager for other words to follow these last, unexpected ones, which had sounded so mysterious and grand. Many would have liked to break the silence, but no one ventured to do so. When Benedetto rose, and all gathered round him in a respectful circle, the old gentleman with the red face and the white hair rose also, and said, his

voice shaking with emotion.

“You will suffer insult and blows; you will be crowned with thorns and given gall to drink; you will be derided by the Pharisees and the heathen; you will not see the future you long for, but the future is yours; the disciples of your disciples will see it!”

He embraced Benedetto and kissed him on the brow. Two or three of those nearest him clapped their hands timidly, and then a burst of applause swept through the room. Benedetto, greatly agitated, signed to a fair-haired young man, who had come to the house with him, and who now hastened to his side, his face radiant with emotion and joy. Some one whispered:

“A disciple!”

Some one else added, softly:

“Yes, and the favourite!”

The master of the house almost prostrated himself before Benedetto, pouring out words of deference and gratitude. Then one of the priests ventured to come forward, and said in a tremulous voice:

“Master, have you no word of counsel for us?”

“Do not call me master!” Benedetto replied, still much agitated. “Pray that light may be shed upon these young men, upon our shepherds, and also upon me!”

When he had left the room, a crackle of voices arose, some resonant, others short and hoarse, for astonishment still held these agitated minds in check. Presently, here and there, the intense excitement burst forth, and spread in every direction. Exclamations of admiration broke from all lips, some praising this or that expression the speaker had used, this or that thought he had uttered, while others remarked upon his glance, his accent, or marvelled at the spirit of holiness which shone in his face, and which seemed to emanate from his very hands. Soon, however, the master of the

house dismissed the guests, and though his apologies were profuse, and his words very gracious, still his haste was such as to be almost discourteous. As soon as he was alone he unlocked the door, and, pushing it open, stood bowing on the threshold.

“Ladies!” said he, and threw the door wide open.

A swarm of ladies fluttered into the empty hall. A middle-aged spinster literally flung herself towards the young man, and, clasping her hands, exclaimed:

“Oh! how grateful we are to you! Oh! what a saint! I don’t know what prevented us from rushing in and embracing him!”

“Cara! My good creature!” said another with the quiet irony of the Venetian, her fine large eyes sparkling. “It was probably because the door was locked, fortunately for him!”

The ladies were twelve in number. The master of the house, Professor Guarnacci, son of the general-agent of one of them—the Marchesa Fermi, a Roman—had spoken to her about the meeting which was to take place at his house, and had mentioned the discourse to be pronounced by that strange personage about whom all Rome was already talking, knowing him as an enthusiastic religious agitator and miracle worker, most popular in the Testaccio district. The Marchesa was determined to hear him without being seen. She had arranged everything with Guarnacci, and had admitted three or four friends into the conspiracy, each in her turn obtaining permission to introduce others. They appeared a strangely assorted company. Many were in evening toilettes, two were dressed precisely like Friends, while only one lady wore black.

The two Friends, who were foreigners, seemed quite beside themselves with enthusiasm, and were highly incensed against the Marchesa, a sceptical, very sarcastic old woman, who remarked calmly:

“Yes, yes, he spoke very well; but I should have liked to see his face while he was

speaking.”

Declaring she could judge men far better by their faces than by their words, the old Marchesa reproached Guarnacci for not having made a hole in the door, or at least left the key in the lock.

“You are too holy,” she said. “You do not understand women!”

Guarnacci laughed, apologising with all the consideration due to his father’s employer, and assured her that Benedetto was as beautiful as an angel. A rather insipid young woman who had come, “Goodness only knows why!” the two Friends thought angrily, announced, in quiet tones, that she had seen him twice, and that he was ugly.

“That is, of course, according to your idea of beauty, signora!” one of the Friends remarked sourly, while the other added in a low tone, intended to enhance its sting, a poisonous “Naturellement!”

The insipid young woman, her colour deepening with embarrassment and vexation, replied that he was pale and thin, and the two Friends exchanged glances and smiles of tacit contempt. But where had she seen him? Two other insipid young women were curious to know this.

“Why, on both occasions in my sister-in-law’s garden,” she answered.

“He is always in the garden!” the Marchesa exclaimed. “Does the angel grow in a flower-bed or in a pot?”

The insipid young woman laughed, and the Friends shot furious glances at the Marchesa.

Tea, which had been included in Guarnacci’s invitation, was then brought in.

“A delightful conversation, is it not?” Signora Albacina, wife of the Honourable Albacina, Undersecretary of the Home Office, said softly to the lady in black, who had not once spoken. She now smiled sadly without answering.

Tea was served by the Professor and his sister, and put an end to conversation for a few moments. It soon burst forth again, however, the topic being Benedetto's discourse. There ensued such a confusion of senseless remarks, of worthless opinions, of would-be wise sayings devoid of wisdom that the lady in black proposed to Signora Albacina, in whose company she had come, that they should take their departure. But at that point the Marchesa Fermi, having discovered a small bell on the mantel-shelf, began ringing it, to obtain silence. "I should like to hear about this garden," she said.

The Friends and the middle-aged spinster, engaged in a warm discussion of Benedetto's Catholic orthodoxy, would not have left off for ten bells, had not the spinster's curiosity been roused by the word "garden." It now burst forth unchecked! Garden indeed! The Professor must tell them all he knew about this Father Hecker, who was an Italian and a layman. Partly to display her knowledge, partly from thoughtlessness, she had already bestowed this title upon Benedetto. The insipid young woman consulted her watch. Her carriage must be at the door. Little Signorina Guarnacci said there were already four or five carriages at the door. The insipid young woman was anxious to reach the Valle in time for the third act of the comedy, and two other ladies, who had engagements, left at the same time. The Marchesa Fermi remained.

"Make haste, Professor," she said, "for my daughter is expecting me this evening, with those other ladies whose shoulders are on view!"

"Do make haste, then!" said the middle-aged spinster, contemptuously. "Afterwards you can speak for the benefit of the poor creatures who do not show their shoulders!"

A fair-haired, extremely handsome foreigner, in a very low gown, cast a withering glance at the poor, lean, carefully covered little shoulders of the contemptuous spinster, who, greatly vexed, grew as red as a lobster.

"Well, then," the Professor began, "as the Marchesa, and probably the other ladies who are in such a hurry, already know as much as I do myself about the Saint of Jenne, before he left Jenne, I will omit that part of the story. A month ago, then, in October, I did not even remember having read in the papers, in June or July, about this Benedetto, who was preaching and performing miracles at Jenne. Well, one day, coming out of San Marcello, I met a certain Porretti, who used to write for the Osservatore, but does so no longer. This Porretti walked on with me, and we spoke of the condemnation of Giovanni Selva's works which is expected from day to day, and which—by the way—has not yet been pronounced. Porretti told me there was a friend of Selva's in Rome at present who would be even more talked of than Selva himself. 'Who is he?' I inquired. 'The Saint of Jenne,' he replied, and proceeded to tell me the following story. Two priests, well known in Rome as terrible Pharisees, caused this man to be driven away from Jenne. He retired to Subiaco, stayed with the Selvas, who were spending the summer there, and fell seriously ill. Upon his recovery he came to Rome—about the middle of July. Professor Mayda, another friend of Selva's, engaged him as under-gardener at the villa which he built two years ago on the Aventine, below Sant' Anselmo. The new under-gardener, who wished to be called simply Benedetto, as at Jenne, soon became popular in the whole Testaccio quarter. He distributes his bread among the poor, comforts the sick, and, it seems, has really healed one or two by the laying on of hands and by prayer. He has, in fact, become so popular that Professor Mayda's daughter-in-law, notwithstanding her faith and piety, would gladly dismiss him, on account of the annoyance his many visitors cause. But her father-in-law treats him with the greatest consideration. If he allows him to rake the paths and water the flowers, it is only because he respects his saintly ideals, and he limits the hours of work, making them as short as possible. He wishes to leave him perfectly free to fulfil his religious mission. Mayda himself often goes into the garden to talk of religion with his under-gardener. To please him Benedetto has abandoned the diet he observed at Jenne, where he ate nothing but

bread and herbs, and drank only water; he now eats meat and drinks wine. To please Benedetto, the Professor distributes these things in large quantities among the sick of the district. Many people laugh at Benedetto and insult him, but the populace venerates him as did the people of Jenne in the beginning. His deeds of charity to the soul are even greater than his deeds of charity to the body. He has freed certain families from moral disorders, and for this his life was threatened by a woman of evil repute; he has persuaded some to go to church who, since their childhood, have never set foot inside a church. The Benedictines of Sant' Anselmo are well aware of these things. Then, two or three times a week, in the evening, he speaks in the Catacombs."

The middle-aged spinister gasped!

"In the Catacombs?"

She leaned, shuddering, towards the speaker, while one of the Friends murmured: "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" and another voice, laden with reverent surprise, said:

"How terrifying!"

"Well," the young man continued, smiling, "Porretti said 'in the Catacombs,' but he meant in a secret place, known to few. At present I myself know its whereabouts."

"Ah!" ejaculated the spinister. "You know? Where is it?"

Guarnacci did not answer, and, perceiving her indiscretion, she added hastily.

"I beg your pardon! I beg your pardon!"

"We shall find out, we shall find out!" said the Marchesa. "But tell me, my dear boy, is not this saint of yours, who preaches in secret, a kind of heresiarch? What do the priests say to him?"

"To-night you might have seen three or four here who went away perfectly satisfied."

"They must be very unpriestly priests, badly baked priests, counterfeit priests. But

what do the others say? Mark my words, sooner or later, the others will apply the torcibudella, the ‘entrail twister,’ to him.”

With this pleasing prophecy the Marchesa departed, followed by all the bare shoulders.

The middle-aged spinister and the Friends, glad to be rid of that contemptible, mundane bevy, assailed the Professor with questions. Must he really not tell where the modern Catacombs were? How many people met there? Women also? What were the subjects of his discourses? What did the monks of Sant’ Anselmo say? And was anything known concerning this man’s previous career? The Professor parried the questions as best he might, and simply repeated to them the words of one of the fathers at Sant’ Anselmo: “If there were a Benedetto for every parish in Rome, Rome would indeed become the Holy City.” But when—all the others having left—he found himself alone with Signora Albacina and the silent lady, who were waiting for their carriage, he intimated to the former—to whom he was bound by ties of friendship—that he would willingly tell more, but that he was embarrassed by the presence of a stranger, and he begged to be presented to her. Signora Albacina had forgotten to perform this ceremony. “Professor Guarnacci,” said she, “Signora Dessalle, a dear friend of mine.”

The “Catacombs” meant the very hall they were in at the present moment. At first the meetings had been held at the Selvas’ apartment, in Via Arenula. There were several reasons why that place had not seemed quite suitable. Guarnacci, becoming a disciple, had offered his own house. The meetings were held there twice a week. Among those who attended them were the Selvas, Signora Selva’s sister, a few priests, the Venetian lady who had just left, some young men—among these he might mention a certain Alberti, a favourite with the Master, who this evening had come and gone with him, and a Jew, whose name was Viterbo, and who was soon to become a Catholic; of him the Master expected great things. Besides these a

journeyman printer, several artists, and even two members of Parliament came regularly. The object of these meetings was to acquaint such as are drawn to Christ, but who shrink from Catholicism, with what Catholicism really is, the vital and indestructible essence of the Catholic religion, and to show the purely human character of those different forms, which are what render it repugnant to many, but which are changeable, are changing, and will continue to change, through the elaboration of the inner, divine element, combined with the external influences, the influences of science and of the public conscience. Benedetto was very particular about granting admission to the meetings, for no one was more skilled than he in the delicate task of dealing with souls, respecting their purity, bringing himself down to the small ones, soaring with the high ones, and using with timid souls that careful language which instructs without troubling.

“The Marchesa,” continued the Professor, “says he must be an heresiarch, and the priests who follow him heretics. No, With Benedetto there is no danger of heresies or schisms. At the very last meeting he demonstrated that schisms and heresies, besides being blameworthy in themselves, are fatal to the Church, not only because they deprive her of souls, but because they deprive her of elements of progress as well; for if the innovators remained subject to the Church, their errors would perish, and that element of truth, that element of goodness, which—in a certain measure—is nearly always united to error would become vital in the body of the Church.”

Signora Albacina observed that all this was very beautiful, and if that was how matters really stood, certainly the Marchesa’s prophecy would not be fulfilled.

“The prophecy about the tordbudella, the ‘entrail twister?’ Ah no!” said the Professor, laughing. “Such things are not done now, and I do not believe they ever were done. It is all calumny! Only the Marchesa and certain others like her in Rome believe these things. A Roman priest, a priest, you understand, dared to warn Benedetto, to advise him to be cautious. But Benedetto let him see he must not

speak to him of caution again. Therefore it will not be the torcibudella—no—but persecution it will be! Yes, indeed!—Those two Roman priests who were at Jenne have not been asleep. I did not wish to say so before, because the Marchesa is not the person to tell such things to, but there is much trouble brewing. Benedetto's every step has been watched; Professor Mayda's daughter-in-law has been made use of, through the confessional, to obtain information concerning his language, and they have found out about the meetings. The presence of Selva is enough to give them the character these people abhor, and as they are powerless against a layman, it seems they are trying to obtain the help of the civil law against Benedetto; they are appealing to the police and to the judges. You are surprised? But it is so. As yet nothing has been decided, nothing has been done, but they are plotting. We were informed of this by a foreign ecclesiastic, who chattered foolishly on a former occasion; but this time he has chattered to good purpose. Materials for a penal action are being prepared and invented."

The silent lady shuddered, and opened her lips at last.

"How can that be possible?" she said.

"My dear lady," said the Professor, "you little know of what some of these intransigenti, these non-concessionists in priestly robes, are capable. The secular non-concessionists are lambs compared to them. They are going to make use of an unfortunate accident which took place at Jenne. Now, however, we are greatly encouraged by a fresh incident, of which it would not be wise to speak to many, without discriminating, but which is most important."

The Professor paused a moment, enjoying the lively curiosity he had awakened, and which, though they did not speak, shone in the eager eyes of the two ladies.

"The other day," he continued, "Cardinal——'s secretary, a young German priest, went to Sant' Anselmo to confer with the monks. In consequence of this visit Benedetto was summoned to Sant' Anselmo, where the Benedictines hold him in

great affection and esteem. He was asked if he did not intend to pay homage to His Holiness, and beg for an audience. He replied that he had come to Rome with this desire in his heart; that he had waited for a sign from Divine Providence, and that now the sign had come. Then he was informed that His Holiness would certainly receive him most willingly, and he asked for an audience. This was disclosed to Giovanni Selva by a German Benedictine."

"And when is he to go?" Signora Albacina asked.

"The day after to-morrow in the evening."

The Professor added that the Vatican was maintaining the strictest secrecy in regard to this matter, that Benedetto had been forbidden to mention it to any one, and that nothing would have transpired had it not been for the German monk's indiscretion. Benedetto's friends hoped much good would come of this visit. Signora Albacina asked what Benedetto intended to say to the Pontiff. The Professor smiled. Benedetto had not taken any one into his confidence, and no one had ventured to question him. The Professor fancied he would speak in favour of Selva, would beg that his books might not be placed on the Index.

"That would be very little," said Signora Albacina in a low tone.

Jeanne uttered a low murmur of assent.

"Very little indeed!" she exclaimed, almost as if the Professor were to blame. He appeared much surprised at this sudden outburst, after such a long silence. He apologised, saying he had not intended to assert that Benedetto would not speak to the Pope of other matters. He had simply meant to say that he believed he would certainly mention that subject. Signora Albacina could not understand this desire of the Pope's to see Benedetto. How did his friends explain it? What did Selva think about it? Ah! no one could explain it, neither Selva nor any one else.

"I can explain it!" said Jeanne eagerly, pleased to be able to understand what puzzled all others. "Was not the Pope once Bishop of Brescia?"

Guarnacci's smile was half admiring, half ironical, as he answered. Ah! the Signora was well informed concerning Benedetto's past. The Signora knew certain things to be facts, things which were whispered in Rome, but which nevertheless, were doubted by many. Of one fact, however, she was ignorant. The Pope had never been Bishop of Brescia. He had occupied two episcopal chairs in the south. Jeanne did not answer; she was vexed with herself, and mortified at having so nearly betrayed her secret. Signora Albacina wished to know what opinion Benedetto had of the Pope.

"Oh, in the Pope he sees and venerates the office alone," said the Professor. "At least, I believe so. I have never heard him speak of the man, but I have heard him speak of the office. He made it the subject of a magnificent discourse one evening, comparing Catholicism and Protestantism, and exposing his ideal of the government of the Church: a principality and just liberty. As to the new Pope, little is known of him as yet. He is said to be saintly, intelligent, sickly, and weak."

While accompanying the ladies down the dark stairs to their carriage, the Professor remarked:

"What is greatly feared is that Benedetto will not live. Mayda at least fears this."

Signora Albacina, who was descending the stairs leaning on the Professor's arm, exclaimed, without pausing:

"Oh! poor fellow! What is the matter with him?" "Ma! Who can say?" the Professor replied. "Some incurable disease, it would seem, the consequence of typhoid fever, which he had at Subiaco, but above all, of the life of hardship he led, a life of penance and fasting."

And they continued their long descent in silence.

It was only on reaching the foot of the stairs that they perceived their companion had remained behind. The Professor hastily retraced his steps, and found Jeanne standing on the second landing, clinging to the banisters. At first she neither spoke nor moved; but presently she murmured:

“I cannot see!”

Guarnacci, not knowing, did not notice that moment of silence, or the low and uncertain tone of her voice. He offered her his arm, and led her down, apologising for the darkness, and explaining that the proprietor’s avarice was to blame for it. Jeanne entered Signora Albacina’s carriage, which was to take her to the Grand Hôtel. On the way Signora Albacina spoke with regret of what Guarnacci had just told her. Jeanne did not open her lips. Her silence troubled her friend.

“Were you not pleased with the discourse?” she said. She was in complete ignorance of Jeanne’s religious opinions.

“Yes,” her companion answered. “Why?”

“Oh, nothing! I thought you seemed dissatisfied. Then you are not sorry you came?”

Signora Albacina was greatly astonished when Jeanne seized her hand and replied: “I am so grateful to you!”

The voice was low and quiet, the pressure of the hand almost violent.

“Indeed! indeed!” thought Signora Albacina. “This is one of the future ‘Ladies of the Holy Spirit’!”

“For my part,” she said aloud, “I am sure I shall keep to my old religion, the religion of the non-concessionists. They may be Pharisees or anything else you like, but I fear that if this old religion is subjected to so much retouching and restoring, it will tumble down, and nothing will be left standing. Besides, if we followed these Benedettos, too many things would have to be changed. No, no! However, the man interests me extremely. Now we must try to see him. We must see him! Especially as he seems doomed to speedy death. Don’t you think so? How can we manage it? Let us think!”

“I have no wish to see him,” Jeanne said hastily.

“Really?” her friend exclaimed. “But how is that? Explain this riddle!”

“It is quite simple. I have no desire to see him.”

“Curious!” thought Signora Albacina. The carriage drew up before the entrance to the Grand Hôtel.

In the hall Jeanne met Noemi and her brother-in-law, who were coming out. “At last!” said Noemi. “Run, make haste, Your brother is furious with this Jeanne, who stays away so long! We have just left him, because the doctor has arrived.”

The Dessalles had been in Rome a fortnight. Cold, damp weather at the beginning of October, a projected essay on Bernini, which had succeeded the projected novel, had persuaded Carlino to satisfy Signora Albacina sooner than he had intended, by leaving Villa Diedo before winter set in for the milder climate of Rome. This to the great joy of his sister. Two or three days after his arrival he had a slight attack of bronchitis. He declared he was in consumption, shut himself up in his room, with the intention of remaining there all winter, wished to see the doctor twice a day, and tyrannised over Jeanne with merciless egotism, even numbering her moments of freedom. She made herself his slave; she seemed to delight in this unreasonable extra burden, of sacrifice which overflowed the measure of her sisterly affection. In her heart she offered it, with sweet eagerness, to Benedetto. She often saw the Selvas and Noemi; not at their home, but at the Grand Hôtel. The Selvas themselves were captivated by the fascination of this woman, so superior, so beautiful, so gentle and sad. All she had heard from Guarnacci concerning Benedetto she had already heard from Noemi. But she had not been aware of Professor Mayda’s sad opinion. Partly from kindness, but partly also that her own emotion might not be revealed, Noemi had hidden it from her,

Carlino received her unkindly. The doctor, who had found his pulse rather frequent, concluded at once that it was an angry pulse. He jested a few minutes about the serious nature of the illness, and then took his departure. Carlino inquired roughly where Jeanne had been, so long, and she did not hesitate to tell him. She did not,

however, mention Benedetto's real name.

"Were you not ashamed," said he, "to be eavesdropping like that?"

Without giving her time to answer, he began protesting against the new tendencies he had discovered in her.

"Tomorrow you will be going to confession, and the day after you will be reciting the rosary!"

Underneath his usually tolerant and courteous language, and the liking he displayed for not a few priests, lurked a real anti-religious mania. The idea that his sister might, some day, draw near to the priests, to faith, to acts of piety, nearly drove him out of his senses.

Jeanne did not answer, but meekly asked if she should read to him, as she was in the habit of doing in the evening. Carlino declared shortly that he did not wish to be read to, and, pretending to feel draughts, kept her for at least a quarter of an hour, inspecting the doors, the windows, the walls, and the floor itself, with a lighted candle in her hand. Then he sent her to bed.

But when Jeanne reached her own room she thought neither of sleeping nor of undressing. She put out the light, and sat down on the bed.

Carriages rumbled in the street, steps sounded, and women's dresses rustled in the corridor; sitting motionless there in the dark she did not hear. She had put out the light that she might think, that she might see only her own thoughts, only that idea which had taken possession of her while coming down-stairs at Casa Guarnacci leaning on the Professor's arm, after she had heard those terrible words: "We fear he will not live!" and had almost lost consciousness. In the carriage with Signora Albacina, in the room with her brother, even while obliged to talk with one or the other, to pay attention to so many different things, this idea, this proposal, which the burning heart was making to the will, had been continually flashing within her. Now it flashed no longer. Jeanne contemplated it lying quiet within her. In that figure

sitting motionless on the bed, in the darkness, two souls were confronting each other in silence. A humble Jeanne, passionate, sure of being able to sacrifice all to love, was measuring her strength against a Jeanne unconsciously haughty, and sure of possessing a hard and cold truth. The rumbling of the carriages was dying out in the street; the steps and the rustlings were less frequent in the corridor. Suddenly the two Jeannes seemed to mingle once more and become one, who thought:

"When they announce his death to me, I shall be able to say to myself: At least, you did that!"

She rose, turned on the light, seated herself at the writing-table, chose a sheet of paper, and wrote:

"To Piero Maironi, the night of October 29,——

"I believe.

"JEANNE DESSALLE."

When she had written, she gazed a long, long time at the solemn words.

The longer she gazed, the farther the two Jeannes seemed to draw apart. The unconsciously proud Jeanne overpowered and crushed the other almost without a struggle. Filled with a mortal bitterness, she tore the sheet, stained with the word it was impossible to maintain, impossible even to write honestly. The light once more extinguished, she accused the Almighty—if, indeed, He existed—of cruelty, and wept in this darkness of her own making, wept unrestrainedly.

The clock of St. Peter's struck eight. Benedetto left a little group of people at the corner of Via di Porta Angelica, and turned, alone, into Bernini's colonnade, his steps directed towards the bronze portal. He paused to listen to the roar of the fountains, to gaze at the clustered lights of the four candelabra round the obelisk, and—tremulous, opaque against the moon's face—the mighty jet of the fountain on the left. In five minutes, or, perhaps, in fifteen minutes, he would find himself in the presence of the Pope. His mind was concentrated on this culminating point, and

vibrated there as did the sparkling, ever-rising water at the apex of the mighty jet. The square was empty. No one would see him enter the Vatican save that spectral diadem of saints standing rigid over there on the summit of the opposite colonnade. The saints and the fountains were saying to him with one voice, that he believed he was passing through a solemn hour, but that this atom of time, he himself and the Pontiff, would soon pass away, would be lost for ever in the kingdom of forgetfulness, while the fountains continued their monotonous lament, and the saints their silent contemplation. But he, on the contrary, felt that the word of truth is the word of eternal life, and, concentrating his thoughts once more within himself, he closed his eyes and prayed with intense fervour, as for two days he had prayed that the Spirit might awaken this word in his breast, might bring it to his lips when he should stand before the Pope.

He had expected some one between eight o'clock and a quarter past. The quarter had already struck, and no one had appeared. He turned and gazed at the bronze portal. Only one wing of it was open, and he could see lights beyond. From time to time small groups of dwarfish figures passed into it, as tiny, heedless moths might fly into the yawning jaws of a lion. At last a priest approached the portal from within and beckoned. Benedetto drew near. The priest said:

"You have come about Sant' Anselmo?"

That was the question which had been agreed upon. When Benedetto had assented, the priest signed to him to enter.

"Please come this way," said he.

Benedetto followed him. They passed between the pontifical guards, who gave the priest the military salute. Turning to the right they mounted the Scala Pia. At the entrance to the courtyard of San Damaso there were other guards, other salutes, and an order given by the priest in a low tone; Benedetto did not hear it. They crossed the courtyard, leaving the entrance to the library on their left and on their right the

door by which the Pope's apartments are reached. High above them the glass of the Logge shone in the moonlight. Benedetto, recalling an audience the late Pontiff had granted him, was astonished at being conducted by this strange way. Having crossed the courtyard in a straight line, the priest entered the narrow passage leading to the small stairway called "dei Mosaici," and stopped before the door opening on the right, where the stairway called "del Triangolo" descends. "Are you acquainted with the Vatican?" he inquired.

"I am acquainted with the Museums and the Logge," Benedetto replied. "The predecessor of the present Pontiff once received me in his private apartment; but I am not acquainted with any other parts."

"You have never been here?"

"Never."

The priest preceded him up the stair, which was dimly illuminated by small electric lights. Suddenly, where the first flight reaches a landing, the lights went out. Benedetto, pausing with one foot on the landing, heard his guide run rapidly up some stairs on the right. Then all was silence. He supposed the light had gone out by accident, and that the priest had gone to turn it on again. He waited. No light, no footfall, no voice. He stepped on to the landing; stretching out his hands in the darkness, he touched a wall on the left; he went forward towards the right, feeling his way. By touching them with his foot he became aware of two flights of stairs which branched from the landing. He waited again, never doubting the priest would return.

Five minutes, ten minutes passed and the priest did not come. What could have happened. Had they wished to deceive him, to make sport of him? But why? Benedetto would not allow himself to dwell upon a suspicion about which it was useless to speculate. He reflected rather upon what it was best to do. It did not seem reasonable to wait any longer. Had he better turn back? Had he better go up still

higher? In that case, which stair should he choose? He looked into himself, questioning the Ever-Present One.

No, he would not turn back. The idea was displeasing to him. He started up one of the flights, without choosing—the one leading to the servants' rooms. It was short; presently Benedetto found himself on another landing. Now, he had heard the priest run up many stairs rapidly and without stopping, and the noise of his steps had been lost far, far above. He came down again, and tried the other flight. It was longer. The priest must have mounted this one. He decided to follow the priest.

On reaching the top he passed through a low door, and found himself upon the Loggia, illumined by the moon. He looked about him. Near at hand, on the right, a gateway divided this Loggia from another one, the two meeting there and forming a right angle. Far away, on the left, the Loggia terminated at a closed door. The full moon shone through the great, glazed spaces, upon the pavement; showed the sides of the courtyard of San Damaso: and in the background, between the two enormous black wings of the Palace, humble roofs, the trees of Villa Cesi and the lights of Sant' Onofrio were visible. Both the door on the left, and the gateway on the right appeared to be closed. Again and again Benedetto looked from right to left. Little by little he began to recall former impressions. Yes, he had been in that Loggia before, he had seen that gateway when on his way to visit the Gallery of Inscriptions—the Via Appia of the Vatican—with an acquaintance of his, a reader in the "Vaticana." Yes, now he remembered quite well. The door on the left at the end of the Loggia, must lead to the apartments of the Cardinal Secretary of State. The Loggia beyond the gateway was that of Giovanni da Udine; the great barred windows opening on to it were the windows of the Borgia apartment, and the entrance to the Gallery of Inscriptions must be precisely in the angle. On that former occasion a Swiss guard had stood by the gate. Now there was no one there. The place was quite deserted; on the right and on the left silence reigned.

To try the door of the Cardinal Secretary of State's apartment was not to be thought of. Benedetto pushed the gate. It was open. He paused, finding himself before the entrance to the Gallery of Inscriptions. Again he listened. Profound silence. An inward voice seemed to say to him: "Mount the steps. Enter!" Fearlessly he mounted the five steps.

The Via Appia of the Vatican, as broad, perhaps, as the ancient way, contained not a single lamp. At regular intervals pale streaks of light lay across the pavement, falling through the windows, which, from among the tombstones, the cippi, and the pagan sarcophagi, look down upon Rome. No light fell through the windows of the Christian wall, which overlook the courtyard of the Belvedere. The distant end of the Gallery, towards the Chiaramonti Museum, was shrouded in complete darkness. Then, realising that he was in the very heart of the immense Vatican, Benedetto was seized with a terror mingled with awe. He approached a great window, from whence he could see Castel Sant' Angelo and the innumerable tiny lights dotted over the lower city, while higher up, and more brilliant, those of the Quirinal shone against the horizon. Not the sight of illumined Rome, but the sight of a low and narrow bench, running along below the cippi and the sarcophagi, calmed his spirit. Then, in the dim light, he distinguished a canopy, which was already half demolished. What could it mean? Along the opposite wall ran a second bench, exactly like the first. Proceeding, he stumbled against something which proved to be a large armchair. Now terror had given place to a fixed purpose. The imperious, inward voice, which had already commanded him to enter, said to him, "Go forward!" The voice was so clear, so loud, that a sudden flash illumined his memory.

He smote his forehead. In the Vision he had seen himself in conversation with the Pope. This he had never been able to forget. But he had forgotten—and now the memory of it had flashed back to him—that a spirit had led him through the Vatican to the Pope. He moved along the left-hand wall, near which he had stumbled against the great chair. He was convinced that at the end of the Gallery he should find an

exit, and light at last. He did remember that, at the end, was the gateway leading to the Chiaramonti Museum. He went on, often pressing his hand against the wall, against the tombstones. Suddenly he became aware that what he was touching was neither marble nor stone. Gently, he beat upon the wall with his fist. It was wood—a door! Involuntarily he stopped and waited. He heard a step behind the door; a key turned in the lock; a blade of light slanted across the Gallery and broadened; a black figure appeared; the priest who had abandoned Benedetto on the stairs! He came out, moving rapidly, closed the door behind him, and said to Benedetto, as if nothing strange had taken place:

“You are about to find yourself in the presence of His Holiness.”

He signed to Benedetto to enter, and again closed the door, he himself remaining outside.

On entering, Benedetto could distinguish only a small table, a little lamp with a green shade, and a white figure seated behind the table, and, facing him. He sank upon his knees.

The white figure stretched out its arm, and said: “Rise. How did you come?”

The singularly sweet face, framed in grey hair, wore an expression of astonishment. The voice, with its southern ring, betrayed emotion:

Benedetto rose, and answered:

“From the bronze portal as far as a spot which I cannot locate, I was accompanied by the priest who was here with Your Holiness; from thence I came alone.”

“Were you familiar with the Vatican? Did they tell you, you would find me here?”

When Benedetto had answered that, years ago, he had paid a single visit to the museums of the Vatican, the Logge, and the Gallery of Inscriptions; that on that occasion he had not reached the Logge from the courtyard of San Damaso; that he had had no idea where he should find the Sovereign Pontiff, the Pope was silent for

a moment; absorbed in thought. Presently he said, tenderly, affectionately, pointing to a chair opposite him:

“Be seated, my son.”

Had Benedetto not been absorbed in contemplation of the Pope’s ascetic and gentle face, he would have looked about him not without surprise, while his august interlocutor was engaged in gathering together some papers which were scattered upon the little table. This was indeed a strange reception-room, a dusty chaos of old pictures, old books, old furniture. One would have pronounced it the ante-room of some library, of some museum, which was being rearranged. But he was lost in contemplation of the Pope’s face, that thin, waxen face, which wore an ineffable expression of purity and of kindliness. He drew nearer, bent his knee, and kissed the hand which the Holy Father extended to him, saying, with sweet dignity:

“Non mihi, sed Petro.”

Then Benedetto sat down. The Pope passed him a sheet of paper, and pushed the little lamp nearer to him.

“Look,” said he. “Do you know that writing?”

Benedetto looked and shuddered, and could not check an exclamation of reverent sorrow.

“Yes,” he replied. “It is the writing of a holy priest, whom I dearly loved, who is dead, and whose name was Don Giuseppe Flores.”

His Holiness continued:

“Now read. Read aloud.”

Benedetto read:

“Monsignore,—

“I entrust to my Bishop the sealed packet enclosed, with this note, in an envelope bearing your address. It was left with me, to be opened after his death, by Signor

Piero Maironi, who was well known to you before his disappearance from the world. I know not if he be still alive or if he no longer be among the living, and I have no means of ascertaining. I believe the packet contains an account of a vision of a supernatural nature which visited Maironi when he returned to God out of the fire of a sinful passion. I hoped at that time that the Almighty had chosen him as the instrument of some special work of His own. I hoped that the holiness of the work would be confirmed, after Maironi's death, by the perusal of this document, which might come to be looked upon in the light of a prophecy. I hoped this, although I was at great pains to prudently hide my secret hopes from Maironi.

"Two years have elapsed since the day of his disappearance, and nothing has since been heard of him. Monsignore, when you read these words, I also shall have disappeared. I beg you to take my place in this pious stewardship. You will act as your conscience may dictate, as you may deem best.

"And pray for the soul of

Your poor

DON GIUSEPPE FLORES."

Benedetto laid the paper down, and gazed into the Pontiff's face, waiting.

"Are you Piero Maironi?" he said.

"Yes, your Holiness."

The Pontiff smiled pleasantly.

"First of all, I am glad you are alive," he said. "That Bishop believed you were dead; he opened the packet, and deemed it his duty to entrust it to the Vicar of Christ. This happened about six months ago, while my saintly predecessor was still living. He mentioned it to several cardinals and to me also. Then it was discovered that you were still alive, and we knew where you lived and how. Now I must ask you a few questions, and I exhort you to answer with perfect truth."

The Pontiff looked with serious eyes into Benedetto's eyes; Benedetto bowed his head slightly. "You have written here," the Pontiff began, "that when you were in that little church in the Veneto, you had a vision of yourself in the Vatican, conversing with the Pope. What can you recall concerning that part of your vision?"

"My vision," Benedetto answered, "grew more and more indistinct in my memory during the time I spent at Santa Scolastica—about three years—partly because my spiritual director there, as well as poor Don Giuseppe Flores, always counselled me not to dwell upon it. Certain parts remained clear to me, others became indistinct. The fact that I had seen myself in the Vatican, face to face with the Sovereign Pontiff, remained fixed in my mind; but only the bare fact. A few moments ago, however, there in the dark gallery from whence I entered this room, I suddenly remembered that in the vision I was guided to the Pontiff by a spirit. I recalled this when I found myself alone in the night, in the darkness, in a place unknown to me, or practically unknown, for I had been there only once, many years before, when, having no idea what direction to take, I was about to retrace my steps, and an inward voice, very clear, very loud, commanded me to press forward."

"And when you knocked at the door," the Pope inquired, "did you know you would find me here? Did you know you were knocking at the door of the library?"

"No, Your Holiness. I did not even intend to knock. I was in the dark; I could see nothing, I was simply touching, the wall with my hand."

The Pope was silent for some time, lost in thought; then he remarked that the manuscript contained the words: "At first a man dressed in black guided me." Benedetto did not remember this.

"You know," the Pope continued, "that prophecy alone is not sufficient proof of saintliness. You know there are such things (such cases have been met with) as prophetic visions which were the work of-well, perhaps not of malign spirits, we know too little of these matters to assert that—but of occult powers, of powers

innate in human nature, or of powers superior to human nature, but which most certainly have nothing to do with holiness. Can you describe to me the state of your soul when you had the vision?"

"I was feeling most bitter sorrow at having drawn away from God, at having been deaf to His calls, an infinite gratitude for His patient kindness, and an infinite desire of Christ. In my mind I had just seen, really seen, shining clear and white against a dark background, those words of the Gospel, which long ago, in the time of goodness had been so dear to me: 'Magister adest et vocat te.' Don Giuseppe Flores was officiating, and Mass was nearly over, when, as I prayed, my face buried in my hands, the vision came to me. It was instantaneous; like a flash!"

Benedetto's chest heaved, so violent was this revulsion of memory.

"It may have been a delusion," he said; "but it was not the work of malign spirits."

"The evil spirits," the Pontiff said, "do sometimes masquerade as angels of light. Perhaps, at that time, they were striving against the spirit of goodness which was within you. Did you take pride in this vision, later on?"

Benedetto bowed his head, and reflected for some time.

"Perhaps—on one occasion," said he, "for one moment, at Santa Scolastica, when my master, in the Abbot's name, offered me the habit of a lay-brother, that habit which was afterwards taken from me at Jenne. Then I thought for a moment that this unexpected offer confirmed the last part of my vision, and I felt a wave of satisfaction, deeming myself the object of divine favour. I immediately entreated God to pardon me, as I now entreat Your Holiness to pardon me."

The Pontiff did not speak, but he raised his hand with wide-spread fingers, and lowered it again, in an act of absolution.

Then he began to examine the different papers lying on the little table, seeming to consult more than one attentively, as he turned them over. He laid them down, arranged them in a packet, which he pushed aside, and once more broke the silence:

“My son,” he said, “I must ask you other questions. You have mentioned Jenne. I was not even aware of the existence of this Jenne. It has been described to me. To tell the truth, I cannot understand why you ever went to Jenne.”

Benedetto smiled quietly, but did not attempt to justify himself, not wishing to interrupt the Pope, who continued:

“It was an unfortunate idea, for who can say what is really going on at Jenne? Do you know there are those up there, who look on you with little favour?”

In reply Benedetto only prayed His Holiness not to oblige him to answer.

“I understand,” the Pope said, “and, I must confess, your prayer is most Christian. You need not speak; but I cannot hide the fact that you have been accused of many things. Are you aware of this?”

Benedetto was aware of, or rather suspected, one accusation only. The Pope seemed the more embarrassed. He himself was calm.

“You are accused of having pretended at Jenne to be a miracle-worker, and by this boasting of yours, to have caused the death in your own house of an unfortunate man. They even assert that he died of certain drinks you gave him. You are accused of having preached to the people more as a Protestant than as a Catholic, and also——”

The Holy Father hesitated. His virginal purity recoiled from alluding to certain things.

“Of having been over-intimate with the village schoolmistress. What can you answer, my son?”

“Holy Father,” Benedetto said calmly, “the Spirit is answering for me in your heart.”

The Pontiff fixed his eyes on him, in great astonishment; but he was not only astonished, he was also much troubled; for it was as if Benedetto had read in his soul. A slight flush coloured his face.

“Explain your meaning,” he said.

“God has allowed me to read in your heart that you do not believe any of these accusations.”

At these words of Benedetto’s, the Pope knit his brows slightly.

“Now Your Holiness is thinking that I arrogate to myself a miraculous clairvoyance. No. It I is something which I see in your face, which I hear in your voice; poor, common, man that I am!”

“Perhaps you know who has recently visited me?” the Pope exclaimed.

He had summoned to Rome the parish priest of Jenne, and had questioned him concerning Benedetto. The priest, finding a Pope to his liking, a Pope who differed vastly from those two zealots who had intimidated him at Jenne, had seized the opportunity of thus easily making his peace with his own conscience, and had shown his remorse by praising and re-praising. Benedetto knew naught of this.

“No,” he answered, “I do not know.”

The Pontiff was silent; but his face, his hands, his whole person betrayed lively anxiety. Presently he leaned back in his great chair, let his head sink upon his breast, stretched out his arms, and rested his hands, side by side, on the little table. He was reflecting.

While he reflected, sitting motionless there, his eyes staring into space, the flame of the tiny petroleum lamp rose, red and smoky, in the tube. He did not notice it at once. When he did, he regulated it, and then broke the silence.

“Do you believe,” said he, “that you really have a mission?”

Benedetto answered with, an expression of humble fervour.

“Yes, I do believe it.”

“And why do you believe it?”

“Holy Father, because every one comes into the world with a mission written in his

nature. Had I never had this vision, or received other extraordinary signs, my nature, which is eminently religious, would still have made religious action incumbent upon me. How can I say it? But I will say it"—here Benedetto's voice trembled with emotion—"as I have said it to no one else, I believe, I know that God is the Father of us all; but I feel His paternity in my nature. Mine is hardly a sense of duty, it is a sense of sonship."

"And do you believe it is your duty to exercise the religious action here and now?"

Benedetto clasped his hands, as if already imploring attention.

"Yes," said he, "here also, and now."

When he had spoken he fell upon his knees, his hands still clasped.

"Rise," said the Holy Father. "Utter freely what the Spirit shall dictate."

Benedetto did not rise.

"Forgive me," he said, "my message is to the Pontiff alone, and here I am not heard by the Pontiff only."

The Pope started, and gave him a questioning glance, full of severity.

Benedetto, looking towards a door behind the Pope, raised his eyebrows, and slightly lifted his chin.

His Holiness seized a silver bell which stood on the table, commanded Benedetto by a gesture to rise, and then rang the bell. The same priest as before appeared at the door of the Gallery. The Pope ordered him to summon Don Teofilo to the Gallery; Don Teofilo was the faithful valet whom he had brought with him from his archbishopric in the South. Upon his arrival the priest himself was to await His Holiness in the halls of the Library. "You will pass through this room, on your way back," he said.

Several minutes elapsed. They awaited the priest's return in silence. The Pontiff, lost in thought, never raised his eyes from the little table. Benedetto, standing, kept his

eyes closed. He opened them when the priest reappeared. When he had passed out through the suspicious door, the Pope made a sign with his hand, and Benedetto spoke in a low voice. The Pontiff listened, grasping the arms of his chair, his body bent forward, his head bowed.

“Holy Father,” Benedetto said, “the Church is diseased. Four evil spirits have entered into her body, to wage war against the Holy Spirit. One is the spirit of falsehood. And the spirit of falsehood has transformed itself into an angel of light, and many shepherds, many teachers in the Church, many pious and virtuous ones among the faithful, listen devoutly to this spirit of falsehood, believing they are listening to an angel. Christ said: ‘I am the Truth.’ But many in the Church, even good and pious souls, separate truth in their hearts, have no reverence for that truth which they do not call ‘religious,’ fear that truth will destroy truth; they oppose God to God, prefer darkness to light, and thus also do they train men. They call themselves the faithful, and do not understand how weak, how cowardly is their faith, how foreign to them is the spirit of the apostle, which probes all things. Worshippers of the letter, they wish to force grown men to exist upon a diet fit for infants, which diet grown men refuse. They do not understand that though God be infinite and unchangeable, man’s conception, of Him grows ever grander from century to century, and that the same may be said of all Divine Truth. They are responsible for a fatal perversion of the Faith which corrupts the entire religious life; for the Christian, who by an effort, has bent his will to accept what they accept, to refuse what they refuse, believes he has accomplished the greatest thing in God’s service, whereas he has I accomplished less than nothing, and it remains for him to live his faith in the word of Christ, in the teachings of Christ; it remains for him to live the ‘fiat voluntas tua’’ which is everything. Holy Father, to-day few Christians know that religion does not consist chiefly in the clinging of the intellect to formulas of truth, but rather in actions, and a manner of life in conformity with this truth, and that the fulfilment of negative religious duties, and the recognition of obligations

towards the ecclesiastical authority, do not alone correspond to true Faith. And those who know this, those who do not separate truth in their hearts, those who worship the God of truth, who are on fire with a fearless faith in Christ, in the Church and in truth—I know such men, Holy Father—those are striven against with acrimony, are branded as heretics, are forced to remain silent, and all this is the work of the spirit of falsehood, which for centuries has been weaving, in the Church, a web of traditional deceit, by means of which those who to-day are its servants believe they are serving God, as did those who first persecuted the Christians. Your Holiness—"

Here Benedetto sank upon one knee. The Pope did not move. His head seemed to have drooped still lower. The white skull-cap was almost entirely within the radius of the little lamp.

"I have read this very day, great words you spoke to your former parishioners concerning the many revelations of the God of truth in Faith, and in Science and also directly and mysteriously in the human soul. Holy Father the hearts of many, of very many, priests and laymen belong to the Holy Spirit; the spirit of falsehood has not been able to enter into them, not even in the garb of an angel. Speak one word, Holy Father, perform one action which shall lift up those hearts, devoted to the Holy See of the Roman Pontiff! Before the whole Church honour some of these men, some of these ecclesiastics, against whom the spirit of falsehood is striving. Raise some to the episcopal chair, some to the Holy College! This also, Holy Father! If it be necessary, counsel expounders and theologians to advance prudently, for science, in order to progress, must be prudent; but do not allow the Index or the Holy Office to condemn, because they are bold to excess, men who are an honour to the Church, whose minds are full of truth, whose hearts are full of Christ, who fight in defence of the Catholic faith! And as Your Holiness has said that God reveals His truths even in the secret souls of men, do not allow external devotions to multiply, their number is already sufficient, but recommend to the pastors the practice and teaching of inward prayer!"

Benedetto paused a moment, exhausted. The Pope raised his head, and looked at the kneeling man, who was gazing fixedly at him with sorrowful, luminous eyes, under knitted brows, the trembling of his hands betraying the effort of the spirit. The Pope's face bore traces of intense emotion. He wished to tell Benedetto to rise; but he would not speak, fearing his very voice would reveal his emotion. He insisted by gestures, and at last Benedetto rose. Drawing the chair towards him, he rested his hands, still tightly clasped, on its back, and once more began to speak.

"If the clergy neglect to teach the people to pray inwardly—and this is as salutary to the soul as certain superstitions are contaminating to it—it is the work of the second spirit of evil, disguised as an angel of light, which infests the Church. This is the spirit of domination of the clergy. Those priests who have the spirit of domination are ill-pleased when souls communicate directly and in the natural way with God, going to Him for counsel and direction. Their aim is righteous! Thus does the evil one deceive their conscience, which in its turn deceives; their aim is righteous. But they themselves wish to direct these souls, in the character of mediator, and the souls grow weary, timid, servile. Perhaps there are not many such; the worst crimes of the spirit of domination are of a different nature. It has suppressed the ancient and holy Catholic liberty. It seeks to place obedience first among the virtues, even where it is not exacted by the laws. It desires to impose submission even where it is not obligatory, retractions which offend the conscience; wherever a group of men assemble for good works, it wishes to take the command, and if they decline to submit to this command, all support is withdrawn from them. It even strives to carry religious authority outside the sphere of religion. Holy Father, Italy knows this! But what is Italy? It is not for her that I speak, but for the whole Catholic world. Holy Father, you may not yet have experienced it, but this spirit of domination will strive to exert its influence over you, yourself. Do not yield, Holy Father! You are the Governor of the Church; do not allow others to govern you; do not allow your power to become as a glove for the invisible hands of others. Have public counsellors; let

the bishops be summoned often to national councils; let the people take part in the elections of bishops, choosing men who are beloved and respected by the people; and let the bishops mingle with the masses, not only to pass tinder triumphal arches, to be saluted by clanging bells, but to become acquainted with the masses, to encourage them in the imitation of Christ. Let them do these things rather than shut themselves up in the episcopal palaces, like princes of the Orient, as so many now do. And give them all the authority which is compatible with that of Peter.

“May I continue, Your Holiness?”

The Pope, who while Benedetto had been speaking had kept his eyes fixed on his face, now bowed his head slightly, in answer.

“The third evil spirit which is corrupting the Church does not disguise itself as an angel of light, for it well knows it cannot deceive; it is satisfied with the garb of common, human honesty. This is the spirit of avarice. The Vicar of Christ dwells in this royal palace as he dwelt in his episcopal palace, with the pure heart of poverty. Many venerable pastors dwell in the Church with the same heart, but the spirit of poverty is not preached sufficiently, not preached as Christ preached it. The lips of Christ’s ministers are too often over-complaisant to those who seek riches. There are those among them who bow the head respectfully before the man who has much, simply because he has much; there are those who let their tongues flatter the greedy, and too many preachers of the word and of the example of Christ deem it just for them to revel in the pomp and honours attending on riches, to cleave with their souls to the luxury riches bring. Father, exhort the clergy to show those greedy for gain, be they rich or poor, more of that charity which admonishes, which threatens, which rebukes. Holy Father!——”

Benedetto ceased speaking. There was an expression, of fervent appeal in the gaze fixed upon the Pope.

“Well?” the Pontiff murmured.

Benedetto spread wide his arms, and continued:

“The Spirit urges me to say more. It is not the work of a day, but let us prepare for the day—not leaving this task to the enemies of God and of the Church—let us prepare for the day on which the priests of Christ shall set the example of true poverty; when it shall be their duty to live in poverty, as it is their duty to live in chastity; and let the words of Christ to the Seventy-two serve them as a guide in this. Then the Lord will surround the least of them with such honours, with such reverence as does not to-day exist in the hearts of the people for the princes of the Church. They will be few in number, but they will be the light of the world. Holy Father, are they that to-day? Some among them are, but the majority shed neither light nor darkness.”

At this point the Pontiff for the first time bowed his head in sorrowful acquiescence.

“The fourth spirit of evil,” Benedetto continued “is the spirit of immobility. This is disguised as an angel of light. Catholics, both ecclesiastics and laymen, who are dominated by the spirit of immobility believe they are pleasing God, as did those zealous Jews who caused Christ to be crucified. All the clericals, Your Holiness, all the religious men even, who to-day oppose progressive Catholicism, would, in all good faith, have caused Christ to be crucified in Moses’ name. They are worshippers of the past; they wish everything to remain unalterable in the Church, even to the style of the pontifical language, even to the great fans of peacocks’ feathers which offend Your Holiness’ priestly heart, even to those senseless traditions which forbid a cardinal to go out on foot, and make it scandalous for him to visit the poor in their houses. It is the spirit of immobility which, by straining to preserve what it is impossible to preserve, exposes us to the derision of unbelievers; and this is a great sin in the eyes of God.”

The oil in the lamp was almost exhausted, the ring of shadows was closing in, was growing deeper around and above the small circle of light in which the two figures

were outlined, confronting each other: the white figure of the Pontiff in his chair, and Benedetto's dark figure standing erect.

"In opposition to this spirit of immobility," said Benedetto, "I entreat you not to allow Giovanni Selva's books to be placed on the Index."

Then, pushing the chair aside, he once more fell upon his knees, and stretching out his hands towards the Pontiff, spoke more eagerly, more excitedly.

"Vicar of Christ, I ask for something else. I am a sinner, unworthy to be compared to the saints, but the Spirit of God may speak even through the vilest mouth. As a woman once conjured the Pope to come to Rome, so I now conjure Your Holiness to come forth from the Vatican. Come forth, Holy Father; but the first time, at least the first time, come forth on an errand connected with your office. Lazarus suffers and dies day by day; go and visit Lazarus! Christ calls out for succour in all poor, suffering human beings. From the Gallery of Inscriptions I saw the lights shining before another palace here in Rome. If human suffering call out in the name of Christ, there they may perhaps answer: 'nay,' but they go. From the Vatican the answer to Christ is: 'yea,' but they do not go. What will Christ say at the terrible hour, Holy Father? These words of mine, could the world hear them, would bring vituperation upon me, from those who profess the greatest devotion to the Vatican; but though they hurl vituperation and thunderbolts against me, not until the hour of my death will I cease crying aloud: What will Christ say? What will Christ say? To Him I appeal!"

The lamp's tiny flame grew smaller and smaller; in the narrow circle of pale light upon which the shadows were creeping little of Benedetto was visible save his outstretched hands, little of the Pope was visible save his right hand grasping the silver bell. As soon as Benedetto ceased, the Holy Father ordered him to rise; then he rang the bell twice. The door of the Gallery was thrown open; the trusted valet entered who had already become popular in the Vatican, and was known as Don

Teofilo.

“Teofilo,” said the Pope, “is the light turned on once more in the Gallery?”

“Yes, Your Holiness.”

“Then go into the library, where you will find Monsignore. Request him to come in here, and wait for me. And see that another lamp is brought.”

When he had finished speaking, His Holiness rose. He moved towards the door of the Gallery, signing to Benedetto to follow him. Don Teofilo passed out by the opposite door. Sad omen! In the dark room, where so many flaming words, inspired by the Spirit, had flashed, only the little dying lamp remained.

That part of the Gallery of Inscriptions where the Pope and Benedetto now found themselves was in semi-darkness. But at one end a great lamp, with a reflector, shed its light upon the commemorative inscription on the right of the door leading to the Loggia of Giovanni da Udine. Between the long lines of inscriptions, which ran from one end of the gallery to the other, and watched this dark conflict of two living souls, like dumb witnesses well acquainted with the mysteries of that which is beyond the grave and of the last judgment, the Pope advanced slowly, silently, Benedetto following on his left, but a few paces behind him. He paused a moment near the torso representing the river Orontes, and gazed out of the window. Benedetto wondered if he were looking at the lights of the Quirinal, and his heart beat faster as he waited for a word. The word did not come. The Pope continued his slow, silent walk, his hands clasped behind his back and his chin resting on his breast. He paused again near the end of the gallery, in the light of the great lamp, and seemed undecided whether to turn back or to proceed. On the left of the lamp the door of the gallery opened upon a background of night, of moonlight, columns, glass, and marble pavement. The Pope turned in this direction, and descended the five steps. The moonlight fell slanting upon the pavement, streaked with the black shadows of the columns, and upon the end of the Loggia, cut off by the oblique

profile of the deeper shadow, within which the bust of Giovanni was barely distinguishable.

The Pope walked on till he reached this shadow and paused in it, while Benedetto, who had stopped several paces behind that he might not seem to press him irreverently in his anxiety for an answer, was gazing at the moon, sailing midst the great clouds above Rome. As he gazed thus at the orb he asked himself, asked some Invisible One who might be near him, asked even the grave, sad face of the moon herself, whether he had dared too much, dared in the wrong way. But he repented of this doubt immediately. Was it he himself who had spoken? No, the words had come unsought to his lips, the Spirit had spoken. He closed his eyes in an effort of silent prayer, his face still raised towards the moon, as a blind man lifts his sightless eyes towards the silver splendour he divines.

A hand touched him gently on the shoulder. He started and opened his eyes. It was the Pope, and the expression of his face told him that at last words had matured in his mind which satisfied it. Benedetto bent his head respectfully, ready to listen.

“My son,” His Holiness began, “many of these things the Lord had spoken of in my heart long ago. You—God bless you—have to deal with the Lord alone; I have to deal also with the men the Lord has placed around me, among whom I have to steer my course according to charity and prudence, and above all, I must adapt my counsels, my commands, to the different capacities, the different states of mind, of so many millions of men. I am like a poor schoolmaster who, out of seventy scholars, has twenty who are below the average, forty of ordinary ability, and only ten who are really brilliant. He cannot carry on the school for the benefit of the ten brilliant pupils alone, and I cannot govern the Church for you alone and for those who are like you. Consider this for instance. Christ paid tribute to the State, and I—not as the Pontiff, but as a citizen—would gladly pay my tribute of homage, there in that palace whose lights you saw shining, did I not fear by so doing to offend the

sixty scholars, to lose even one of those souls which are as precious to me as the others. And it would be the same if I caused certain books to be removed from the Index, if I called to the Sacred College certain men who have the reputation of not being strictly orthodox, if, during an epidemic, I should go—ex abrupto—to visit the hospitals of Rome."

"Oh, Your Holiness!" Benedetto exclaimed, "forgive me, but it is not certain that those souls, so ready to be scandalised by the Vicar of Christ for such causes as these, will be saved at last, whereas it is certain that very many other souls would be secured which otherwise cannot be won over."

"And then," the Pope continued, as if he had not heard him, "I am old; I am weary; the cardinals do not know whom they have placed here. I did not wish it. I am ill also, and I know by certain signs that I must soon appear before my Judge. I feel, my son, that you are moved by the right spirit; but the Lord cannot exact of a poor old man like me the things you have spoken of, things which even a young and vigorous Pontiff could not accomplish! Still, there are some which even I, with His help, may be able to bring about; if not the great things, at least the lesser ones. Let us pray God to raise up at the right moment one capable of dealing with the weightier matters, and those who may be able to help him in the work. My son, if I were to begin to-night to transform and rebuild the Vatican, where should I find a Raphael to adorn it with his paintings? or even a Giovanni? Still, I do not say I can do nothing."

Benedetto was about to reply, but the Pontiff, perhaps not wishing to give any further explanations, afforded him neither time nor opportunity to do so, and at once asked him a very welcome question.

"You know Selva?" said he. "What manner of man is he in private life?"

"He is a just man!" Benedetto hastened to answer. "A most just man. His books have been denounced to the Congregation of the Index. They may, perhaps, contain some bold opinions, but there is no comparison between the deep, burning piety of

Selva's works and the cold and meagre formalism of certain other books, which are more often found in the hands of the clergy than the Gospels themselves. Holy Father, the condemnation of Selva would be a blow directed against the most active and vital energies of Catholicism. The Church tolerates thousands of stupid, ascetic books which unworthily diminish the idea of God in the human mind; let her not condemn those which magnify it!" The hour struck in the distance; half-past nine. Silently His Holiness took Benedetto's hand, held it between his own, and communicated to him through that mute pressure an understanding and approval which his prudent lips might not utter.

He pressed the hand, shook it, caressed it, and pressed it again. At last he said, in a stifled voice:

"Pray for me, pray that the Lord may enlighten me!"

A tear trembled in each of the beautiful, gentle eyes of the old man, who had never wilfully soiled himself with an impure thought, who was full of the sweetness of charity. Benedetto was so deeply moved that he could not speak.

"Come again," the Pope said, "We must converse together again."

"When, Your Holiness?"

"Soon, I will summon you."

Meanwhile the advancing shadows had engulfed the white figure and the black one. His Holiness placed his hand on Benedetto's shoulder and asked him softly, almost hesitatingly:

"Do you remember the end of your vision?"

Benedetto, bowing his head, answered, also in a low tone:

"Nescio diem, neque horam."

"The words are not in the manuscript," His Holiness continued; "but do you remember?"

Benedetto murmured:

“In the Benedictine habit, on the bare earth, in the shade of a tree.” “Should it happen thus,” the Holy Father said gently, “I would wish to bless you in that moment. Then I shall be awaiting you in Heaven.”

Benedetto knelt down. The Pope’s voice sounded very solemn in the darkness:

“Benedico te in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.”

The Pontiff rapidly ascended the five steps, and disappeared.

Benedetto remained upon his knees, wrapt in that benediction which, it seemed to him, had come from Christ Himself. On hearing steps in the gallery he rose. A few moments later he was returning to the bronze portal, accompanied by Don Teofilo.

III.

The room on the fourth floor was hardly decent. An iron bedstead, a pedestal, a writing-desk, with a few torn and dilapidated books, a deal chest of drawers, an iron washstand, and a few straw-bottomed chairs, were all it contained. A suit of grey clothes was hanging from one nail, a broad-brimmed black hat from another. Frequent flashes of lightning could be seen through the open window; breaths of the dark, stormy night blew in, causing the flame of the petroleum lamp on the pedestal to flare and the light and the shadows to tremble, as they fell upon the not too clean sheets, the two fleshless hands, the cluster of roses lying loose between them, on the flannel shirt of the sick man, who had pulled himself up into a sitting position, and on his deeply lined, thin face, greyish with a month-old beard. On the other side of the poor bed in the gloaming stood Benedetto. The sick man gazed at the flowers in silence. His hands and his lips trembled.

He had been a monk. At thirty he had thrown off the cowl and married. A man of little culture, of few talents, he had managed to make a poor living for his wife and two daughters, working as a copyist. The wife was dead, the daughters had been led astray, and now he himself was dying slowly, there in that fourth-floor room, in Via

della Marmorata, near the corner of Via Manuzio, wasted by misery, by disease, by the bitterness of his soul.

A sob he could not check broke from his lips. He opened his arms, encircled Benedetto's neck, and drew his head towards him in an embrace. Then, suddenly, he pushed him away, and covered his face with his hands.

"I am not worthy! I am not worthy!" said he.

But now Benedetto in his turn encircled the man's neck, kissed him, and answered:

"Nor am I worthy of this blessing the Lord has sent me!"

"What blessing?" the sufferer inquired.

"That you weep with me!"

Having spoken these words, Benedetto drew away from the embrace, but his gaze lingered affectionately on the old man, who stared at him in astonishment as if asking the question: "You know all?" Benedetto silently and gently bowed his head in assent.

The man had no suspicion that the story of his past life was known. He had lived here three years. A neighbour, older than he, a poor little hunchbacked woman, very charitable and pious, rendered him many services, tended him in illness, and managed to assist him out of the pension of two lire a day which was all she possessed. She had learned from the concierge that the man was an unfrocked monk, and seeing how sad, humble, and grateful he was, she prayed night and morning to the Madonna and to all the Saints of Paradise, that they might intercede with Jesus on his behalf, that this man might be pardoned and brought back into the fold of the Church. She told her hopes and her fears to other pious old women, saying:

"I myself do not dare to pray to Jesus for him; that unhappy man has committed too great a sin against Him. He needs the prayers of some powerful personage!"

That day the old man had said to her several times that he would be so happy if he

could have a few roses. Then the little hunchback had thought:

“There is the holy man of whom every one is talking,—he works as a gardener. I will go to him and tell him the whole story. I will ask him to bring some roses, and who knows what may come of it!” Such were her thoughts, but at once she said to herself:

“If that thought did not come to me from the Madonna, it certainly came from St. Anthony!”

In her simple, pure heart she had felt a wave of sweetness and joy. Without losing any time she had started for Villa Mayda, the elegant Pompeian villa, standing out white on the Aventine, among the beautiful palms, almost opposite the window of the old unfrocked monk. Benedetto was about to go to bed, in obedience to the orders of the Professor, who had found him feverish. It was the low, insidious fever which, for several weeks, had been consuming his strength without otherwise causing any suffering. When he had heard what the cripple had to tell, he had come at once with the roses.

The old man still kept his face hidden, for he was ashamed. Presently, without looking at Benedetto, he spoke of the roses, and explained his longing for them. He was the son of a gardener and had himself intended to become a gardener; but he was also fond of going to church, and all his toys had been copies of sacred objects: little altars, candelabra, small busts of bishops wearing mitres. His employers—very religious people—had intimated to his parents that, if he showed a vocation for the ecclesiastical career, they would have him educated at their own expense. Thereupon his parents had promptly determined that he should adopt that career. He soon discovered that his strength was not sufficient to enable him to remain faithful to the priestly vows, but he lacked the courage to take a step which would have caused his family the greatest distress. Instead of that he imagined he might be safe if he withdrew completely from the world, and so, listening to imprudent

counsellors, he entered the monastery from which he was to come forth again later in disgrace. In after years he would sometimes allude to his order, when jesting covertly with his friends, and say “When I was in the regiment!” but he did not repeat that now. As a boy he had loved flowers, but, after entering the seminary, he had thought no more about them—thought no more about them for forty years. The night before Benedetto’s visit he had dreamed of the big rose garden in which his childhood had been spent. The white roses were all bending towards him, and gazing at him in the dream-world, as pious souls gaze with curiosity on a pilgrim in the world of shadows. They said to him: “Where are you going? where are you going, poor friend? Why do you not return to us?” On waking he had felt a longing for roses, a tender longing that moved him to tears. And how many roses now lay on his bed, all through the kindness of a saintly person, how many beautiful, sweet-smelling roses! He was silent, gazing fixedly at Benedetto, his lips parted, his eyes shining with a painful question: “You know, you understand, what do you think of me? Do you believe there is hope of pardon for me?”

Benedetto, bending over the sick man, began to talk to him and caress him. The stream of gentle words flowed on and on in a varying tone, sometimes of joy, sometimes of pain. Now the old man seemed comforted, now anxious questions broke from his lips; then, all of a sudden, the gentle stream of words restored the happy look to his face. Meanwhile, the little crippled woman came and went between her own room and her neighbour’s door, clasping her rosary, and divided between her anxiety at that decisive moment to get in as many Ave Marias as possible, and the desire to hear if they were talking in there and what they were saying.

But down below, in the street, a crowd had begun to gather of people who, regardless of the bad weather, were anxious to see the Saint of Jenne. A woman who kept a little shop had seen him enter with his roses, accompanied by the little hunchback. In an instant about fifty persons were standing around the door, women

for the most part, some wishing only to see him, others eager for a word from him. They waited patiently, speaking in low tones as if they had been in church; speaking of Benedetto, of the miracles he performed, of the blessings they were going to implore him to grant. A cyclist rode up, got off his machine, and, having inquired why these people were assembled there, made them tell him exactly where the Saint of Jenne was. Then he mounted his bicycle once more and started off at full speed. Shortly afterwards a close carriage—a so-called "botte"—followed by the same cyclist, stopped before the door. A gentleman got out, pushed his way through the crowd, and entered the house. The cyclist remained near the carriage. The gentleman exchanged a few words with the concierge, whom he desired to accompany him as far as the door, where the little hunchback stood, trembling, and clasping her rosary. He knocked, regardless of her silent gesticulations, as she implored the Madonna to send this intruder away. It was Benedetto who came to open the door.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger, politely, "are you Signor Maironi?"

"I no longer bear that name," Benedetto replied, quietly, "but I once bore it."

"I am sorry to trouble you. I should be greatly obliged if you would kindly come with me. I will tell you where presently."

The sick man heard the stranger's words, and groaned:

"No, holy man, for the love of God, do not go away!"

Benedetto replied:

"Please tell me your name, and why you wish me to go with you."

The other seemed embarrassed.

"Well," said he, "I am a delegato, an officer of the police." The invalid exclaimed "Gesummaria!" while the terrified hunchback dropped her rosary and stared at Benedetto, who had not been able to check a movement of surprise.

The police officer hastened to add, smiling, that his visit was not of a terrible nature,

that he was not come to arrest any one, that he was not giving an order, but simply an invitation.

The invitations of the police being of a special nature, Benedetto did not think of refusing this one. He asked to be allowed to remain alone with the sick man and the woman for five minutes, whispered something to the man, who appeared to consent with tears in his voice, and then taking the little hunchback aside, he told her the invalid was now willing to see a priest, but that he could not tell when he himself would be free to bring one to him. The poor little creature was trembling from head to foot, partly with fear, partly with joy, and she could only repeat over and over again: “Blessed Jesus! Holy Virgin!” Benedetto sought to reassure her, promised to return as soon as possible, and, having said good-bye, went down-stairs with the delegato.

In the street the crowd had increased in size, and the people were pressing noisily and threateningly round the cyclist, who had remained near the carriage, and in whom they had recognised a policeman in plain clothes. He would not tell them why he had come first to gather information, and had then returned with the other individual. They tried to force the cabman to drive away, and even talked of unharnessing the horse. When the delegato appeared with Benedetto they surrounded him, crying: “Away with the ruffian!—Away with him!—Down with him!—Leave that man alone!—Look out for the thieves, per Dio! You take God’s servants, and let the thieves run free!—Away with you!—Down with you!” Benedetto came forward, motioned to them with both hands to be quiet, and begged them over and over again to go away peacefully, for no one wished to hurt him; he had not been arrested, but was going with this gentleman of his own free-will. At the same moment thunder pealed in the sky, a heavy shower began to beat on the pavement. The crowd swayed, and rapidly dispersed. The delegato gave an order to the cyclist, and entered the carriage with Benedetto.

They started in the direction of the Tiber, in the midst of thunder, lightning, and heavy rain. Very quietly Benedetto asked the delegato what was wanted of him at the police station. He replied that it was not a question of the station. The person who wished to speak with Signor Maironi was a far more important functionary than the chief of police.

“Perhaps I should not have told you that,” he added, “but at any rate he himself will tell you so.”

Then he informed Benedetto that he had sought for him in vain at Villa Mayda, and said how vexed he would have been not to have found him soon. Benedetto ventured to inquire if he knew the reason of this call. In reality the delegate did not know, but he feigned a diplomatic silence, and drew back into his corner as if to avoid the gusts of rain. A street lamp showed Benedetto the yellow river, the great black barges of Ripagrande; another showed him the temple of Vesta. Beyond that he could no longer see where they were going; it seemed as if they were passing through an unknown necropolis, a maze of funereal streets, where sepulchral lamps were burning. At last the carriage rattled into a courtyard, and drew up at the foot of a broad and dark stairway, flanked with columns. Benedetto went up with the delegato as far as the second landing, on to which two doors opened. The one on the left was closed, the one on the right looked down on the stairs through a shining bull’s-eye window. The delegato pushed it open, and he and Benedetto entered a stuffy den, evidently a sort of anteroom. An usher, who was dozing there, rose wearily. The delegato left Benedetto, and went into the next room. Then the usher bent down as if to pick up something, and said to Benedetto, offering him a letter:

“See! you have dropped this paper!”

Benedetto was astonished and the usher insisted:

“You have come from the Testaccio, have you not? Well, you will find that this belongs to you. Make haste.”

Make haste? Benedetto stared at the man, who had resumed his seat. He stared back and confirmed his advice with a short nod which meant: You suspect there is a mystery here, and indeed there is!

Benedetto examined the envelope. It bore the following address:

“For the Under-Gardener at Villa Mayda.” And below, in larger letters:

“IMMEDIATE.”

It was in a woman’s hand, but Benedetto did not recognize it. He opened the letter and read:

“This is to inform you that the Director-General of Police will do his best to induce you to leave Rome of your own free-will. Refuse. You can read what follows at your leisure.”

Benedetto hurriedly replaced the letter, but as no one appeared, and everything around him seemed to be asleep, he took it out again and read on. It ran thus:

“Since your visits to the Vatican there has been much dissatisfaction with the Holy Father. Among other things, he has withdrawn the Selva affair from the Congregation of the Index. You can have no idea of the intrigues which are being set on foot against you, of the calumnies concerning you which are communicated even to your friends, and all with the object of compelling you to leave Rome and preventing you from seeing the Pontiff again. This conspiracy has obtained the support of the Government by means of a promise, in return, not to ratify the proposed nomination to the Archiepiscopal See of Turin of a person very obnoxious to the Quirinal. Do not yield. Do not abandon the Holy Father and your mission. The threat concerning the affair at Jenne is not serious; it would not be possible to proceed against you, and they know it. The person who may not write to you discovered all this, and has asked me to write this note; she will make sure that it reaches you.

“NOEMI D’ARXEL.”

Involuntarily Benedetto looked towards the usher, as if he had suspected him of knowing the contents of this letter which had passed through his hands. But the usher was dozing again, and was only roused by the return of the delegato, who ordered him to conduct Benedetto to the Signor Commendatore. [Footnote: Commendatore: a title borne by those upon whom certain Italian orders have been conferred.—Translator's Note.]

Benedetto was introduced into a spacious apartment, all dark save in one corner, where a gentleman about fifty years of age sat reading the Tribuna by the light of an electric lamp, which shone upon his bald head, upon the newspaper, and upon the table, littered with documents. Above him, in the dim light, a large portrait of the King was dimly visible.

He did not at once raise his head—heavy with conscious power—from the newspaper. He raised it when he felt inclined to do so, and looked carelessly at this atom of the people who stood before him.

"Be seated," he said in a frigid tone.

Benedetto obeyed.

"You are Signor Maironi?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am sorry to have troubled you, but it was necessary."

There was harshness and sarcasm underlying the Signor Commendatore's courteous words.

"By the way," he said, "why are you not called by your real name?"

Benedetto did not answer this unexpected question at once.

"Well, well," his interlocutor continued. "It is not of much importance at present. We are not in a court of justice. I hold that if one is going to do good, it is best to do it in one's own name. But then I do not go to church, and my views differ from

yours. However, as I said before, it is of no importance. Do you know who I am? Did the delegato tell you?"

"No, sir."

"Very well, then; I am a functionary of the State, who takes some interest in the public security, and who has a certain amount of power—yes, a certain amount of power. Now I am going to prove to you that I take an interest in you also. I regret to say, you are in a critical position, my dear Signor Maironi, or Signor Benedetto, at your choice. An accusation of a really serious nature has been lodged against you with the judicial authorities, and I see that not only your reputation for saintliness is in danger, but also your personal liberty, and hence your preaching, at least for several years."

A flame spread over Benedetto's face, and his eyes flashed.

"Leave the saintliness and the reputation alone," said he.

The august functionary of the State continued, unmoved:

"I have wounded you. But you must know that your reputation for saintliness is threatened by other dangers. Other things are said about you which have nothing to do with the penal code,—you may be quite easy on that score—but which are not in perfect harmony with Catholic morals. I assure you these things are believed by many. I am simply stating the facts; it is really no business of mine. After all, saintliness is never a reality; it is always more or less an idealisation of the image by the mirror. If there is saintliness anywhere, it is in the mirror, in the people who believe in the saints. I myself do not believe in them. But let us come to serious matters. I was obliged to say some unpleasant things to you, I even wounded you; now I will apply the remedy. I am not a believer, but, nevertheless, I appreciate the religious principle as an element of public order, and this is also the view taken by my superiors and the view taken by the Government itself. Therefore the Government cannot approve of proceedings of such a scandalous nature against one

whom the people regard as a saint, proceedings which might possibly stir up disorder. But that is not all! We know that you stand in high favour with the Pope, who sees you often. Now the ‘powers that be’ have no desire to cause the Pope any personal annoyance. They have the good intention to spare him this unpleasantness if possible. And it will be possible on one condition. Here in Rome you have active enemies—not on our side, not on the Liberal side, you know!—who are scheming to ruin you completely, to rob you of your reputation and everything. If you wish to know my opinion exactly, I will tell you that I think, from a Catholic point of view, they are right. I modify somewhat, for my use and for theirs, the famous motto of the Jesuits, ‘Aut sint ut sunt,’’ and I make it, ‘Aut non erunt.‘ They tell me you are a Liberal Catholic. That simply means that you are not a Catholic. But let us proceed. Your enemies have denounced you to the Public Prosecutor, and it would be our duty to send the carabinieri to arrest Signor Pietro Maironi, condemned, in his absence, by the Assize Court at Brescia, for having failed to serve on a jury when summoned. But that is a slight matter. You imagine you healed some people at Jenne, and you are accused not only of practising medicine unlawfully, but even of having poisoned a patient—nothing less! Now we have the means of saving you. We will manage to hush up this accusation. But if you remain in Rome, your enemies here will make so much noise that it will be impossible for us to feign deafness. You must go away to some distant place, and go at once! It would be better to go out of Italy. Try France, where there is a famine of saintliness. Or, at least—do you not own a house on Lake Lugano? There are some sisters in it now, are there not? Sisters and saints go extremely well together. Join the sisters, and let this storm blow over.”

The Commendatore spoke very slowly, very seriously, hiding his irony under an indifference which was even more insolent.

Benedetto rose, resolute and severe.

“I was with a sick man,” he said, “who needed my illegal medicine. It would have been better to leave me at my post. You and the Government are my worst enemies if you offer me the means to fly from justice. Perform your duty by sending the carabinieri to arrest me for not serving on the jury. I will prove that it was impossible for me to have received the summons. Let the Public Prosecutor do his duty by proceeding against me on the strength of the affair at Jenne; you will always find me at Villa Mayda. Tell your superiors this: tell them that I shall not stir from Rome, that I fear only one Judge, and let them fear Him also in their false hearts, for He will be more terrible against falseness of heart than against honest violence!”

The Commendatore, who had not been prepared for this blow, grew livid with impotent rage, and was about to burst into a torrent of angry words when the dull rumble of a carriage was heard entering the courtyard. He looked away from Benedetto and listened. Benedetto grasped the back of his chair that he might not be tempted to turn his back on him. The other man roused himself; the angry light, which for a moment had died down, blazed forth again in his eyes. He threw aside the newspaper which he had held in his hand all the time, and bringing his fist down heavily upon the table, he exclaimed:

“What are you doing? Do not dare to move!”

The two men looked at each other fixedly for a few seconds in silence, one with a look of majestic authority, the other stern and forbidding. The official continued violently:

“Shall I have you arrested here?”

Benedetto was still looking at him in silence; at length he answered:

“I am waiting. Do as you please.”

An usher, who had knocked several times in vain, now appeared on the threshold and bowed to the Commendatore without speaking. The Commendatore answered at once: “I am coming,” and, rising hastily, left the room with a strange expression on

his face, where anger was disappearing, and obsequiousness was dawning.

The usher returned immediately, and told Benedetto to wait.

A quarter of an hour passed. Benedetto, shivering, his heart in a tumult, his head on fire, excited and exhausted by fever, had once more sunk upon his chair, while the most disconnected thoughts whirled through his brain. May God forgive this man! Forgive them all! What joy if the Pontiff should forbid the condemnation of Selva! How does the person who may not write to me know? And now, why are they keeping me waiting? What more can they want with me? Oh! what if with this fever I should no longer be master of my thoughts or of my words? How terrible! My God, my God, do not permit that! But what horrible baseness there is in the world, what shameful, hidden fornication between these people of the Church and of the State, who hate each other, who despise each other! Why, why dost Thou permit it, Lord? Still no one comes! This fever! My God, my God! let me remain master of my thoughts, of my words. God of Truth! Thy servant is in the hands of his conspiring enemies: give him strength to glorify Thee, even in the burning fire! Those two persons are thinking of me now. I must not think of them! They are not sleeping, but thinking of me! I am not ungrateful, not ungrateful; but I must not think of them! I will think of thee, venerable Saint of the Vatican, who sleepest and knowest not! Ah! those narrow stairs which I shall never more ascend! That sweet face, full of the Holy Spirit, I shall never see again! Still—God be praised!—I did not behold it in vain! What am I doing here? Why do I not go away? But could I go away? Oh! this fever!

He rose, and tried to read the hour on the round face of a clock which showed white in the darkness. It was five minutes to eleven. Outside, the thunder-storm still raged. The power of the maddened elements, the power of time which was pushing the tiny hands there on the face of the clock, seemed friendly to Benedetto, in their indifferent predominance over the human power, in whose stronghold he was, and

which held him at its mercy. But the fever, the ever-increasing fever! He was burning with thirst. If only he could open a window, hold out his mouth to the waters of heaven!

An electric bell sounded, and at last he hears steps in the anteroom. Here is the Commendatore, in his hat and overcoat. He closes the door behind him, gathers up the papers lying on the table, and says to Benedetto, with a disdainful air:

“Mark this. We give you three days in which to leave Rome. Do you understand?” Without even waiting for an answer, he pressed a bell. The usher entered, and he commanded:

“Show him out!”

On reaching the great stairway with his guide, Benedetto, believing himself free to descend, begged for a little water.

“Water?” the usher replied. “I cannot go for it now. His Excellency is waiting. Please step this way.”

To Benedetto’s’ great astonishment, he invited him to enter the lift.

“Both their Excellencies,” said the usher, correcting himself, and, as the lift ascended to the second floor, he looked at Benedetto as at one about to receive a great honour which he does not appear to deserve. When they reached the second floor, the two traversed an immense hall dimly lighted. From this hall Benedetto was shown into an apartment so brilliantly illumined as to cause him discomfort and suffering, and he was nearly blinded.

Two men, seated in the two corners of a large sofa, were waiting for him, each in a different attitude, the younger with his hands in his pockets, his legs crossed, and his head leaning against the back of the couch; the elder with his body bent forward, and continuously stroking his grey beard, first with one hand and then with the other. The first individual had a sarcastic expression, the second a searching, melancholy, kindly one. The latter, who evidently possessed the greater authority of the two,

invited Benedetto to be seated in an easy-chair, opposite to him.

“You must not think, dear Signor Maironi,” said he in a voice both harmonious and deep, and which seemed, in a way, to correspond with the melancholy look in his eyes, “you must not think that we are here as two powerful arms of the State. We are here, at the present moment, as two individuals of a very rare species, two statesmen who know their business well, and who despise it still more. We are two great idealists, who know how to lie in a most ideal manner to those who deserve nothing better, and who also know how to adore Truth; two democrats, but nevertheless two adorers of that recondite Truth which has never been touched by the dirty hands of old Demos.”

Having spoken thus, the man of the flowing grey beard once more began to stroke it, first with one hand, then with the other, and, puckering his eyes, which sparkled with a shrewd smile, for he was pleased with his own words, watched for surprise on Benedetto’s face.

“We are, moreover, believers also,” he continued.

The other personage, without raising his head from the back of the couch, lifted his open hands, and said, almost solemnly:

“Steady!” “Let the word pass, my dear friend,” the first speaker said, without looking towards him. “We are both believers, but in different ways. I believe in God with all my might, and my might is great, and I shall have Him with me always, You believe in God, with all your weaknesses, and they are few, and you will not have Him with you until you are upon your death-bed.”

Another shrewd and self-complacent smile, another pause. The friend shook his head, raising his eyebrows as if he had heard a jest deserving only of commiseration, but not of an answer.

“I, for my part,” the deep and harmonious voice went on, “am also a Christian. Not a Catholic, but a Christian. Indeed, because I am a Christian am an anti-Catholic. My

heart is Christian, and my brain is Protestant. It is with joy that I see in Catholicism signs, not of decrepitude, but of putrefaction. Charity is being dissolved in the most sincerely Catholic hearts into a dark mud, full of the worms of hatred. I see Catholicism cracking in many places, and I see the ancient idolatry upon which it has raised itself bursting forth through the cracks. What few youthful, healthy, and vital energies appear within it, all tend to separate from it. I know that you are a radical Catholic, that you are the friend of a man who is really sound and strong, and who calls himself a Catholic, but who is pronounced a heretic by true Catholics; and a heretic he certainly is. I have been told you are a pupil of this noble heretic, who labours for reforms and who, at the same time, tries to influence the Pontiff. Now, I myself am looking for a great reformer, but he must be an antipope; not antipope in the narrow, historical sense, but an antipope in the Lutheran sense of the word. Curiosity pricks us to know in what way you believe it possible to rejuvenate this poor old Papacy, of which we laymen are ahead not only in the conquest of civilisation, but also in the science of God, even in the science of Christ, this Papacy which follows us at a great distance, panting and stopping by the way every now and then, hanging back like an animal which smells the shambles, and then, when it is pulled very hard, jumping forward, only to stop again until the rope is twitched once more. Explain your idea of Catholic reform to us. Let us hear it."

Benedetto remained silent.

"Speak," continued the unknown deity who appeared to reign in that place. "My friend is not Herod, nor am I Pilate. We might perhaps both become apostles of your idea."

His friend once more extended his wide-open hands, without raising his head from the sofa-back, and said again, with a stronger accent on the first syllable:

"Steady!"

Benedetto was silent.

"It appears to me, caro mio," said the friend, turning his head alone towards his colleague, "that this promises to be the first time your eloquence has failed you. Here the model of the nihil respondit is taken very seriously."

Benedetto shuddered, horrified at this allusion to the Divine Master, and the fear of seeming a presumptuous imitator. At that moment he ceased to feel his illness—the fever, the thirst, the heaviness of his head.

"Oh, no!" he exclaimed, "now I will answer! You say you are not Pilate. But the truth is that I am the least of Christ's servants, because I have been unfaithful to Him, and you repeat to me Pilate's very words:—Quid est veritas? Now you are not disposed to receive truth, as Pilate was not disposed to receive it."

"Oh!" his interlocutor exclaimed. "And why not?"

His friend laughed noisily.

"Because," Benedetto replied, "he who performs deeds of darkness is surrounded by darkness, and the light cannot reach him. You perform deeds of darkness. It is not difficult to understand; you are the Minister of the Interior—I know you by reputation. You were not born to perform deeds of darkness; there has been much light in some of your deeds, there is much light in your soul, much light of truth and of kindness; but at this moment you are performing a deed of darkness. I am here to-night because you have entered into a shameful bargain. You say you adore Truth, and you ask a brother if he possess Truth, while you hide the fact that you have already sold him!"

During Benedetto's speech, the Minister's friend—himself an Excellency, but of lower rank—had raised his head from the couch at last. He seemed to be only now beginning to consider the man and what he was saying worthy of attention. He also seemed amused at the lesson his chief had received. He admired his friend's great genius, but scoffed in his heart at his passing fits of idealism. The chief was at first amazed; then he started to his feet, shouting like a madman:

"You are a liar! You are insolent! You do not deserve my kindness! I have not sold you, you are not worth anything; I will give you away! Go! Go away!"

He looked for the button of the electric bell, and not finding it in the blindness of his rage, he shrieked:

"Usher! Usher!"

The Under-Secretary of State, who was used to these scenes—they were nothing worse than "fires of straw," for the Minister had a heart of gold—at first laughed in his sleeve. When, however, he heard his friend call the usher in that tone, knowing well the indiscretion of ushers and how much dangerous gossip might arise from this incident, reflecting ridicule also on himself, he resolutely restrained the Minister, almost commanding him to calm himself. Then he said sharply to Benedetto:

"Go, at once!" The Minister began to walk up and down the room in silence, his head bowed, with short, hurried steps, struggling to conquer the child in him, which would have liked to stamp its feet.

Benedetto did not obey. Erect and severe, glowing with the invisible rays of a dominating spirit, which kept the Under-Secretary of State at a distance, he forced the other, through this magnetic power, to turn towards him, to stop and to look him in the face.

"Signor Ministro," he said. "I am about to leave not only this palace, but very soon, I believe, this world also. I shall not see you again; listen to me for the last time. You are not now disposed to receive the Truth; nevertheless, the Truth is at your door, and the hour will come—it is not far distant, for your life is on the wane—when night will fall upon you, upon all your power, all your honours, all your ambitions. Then you will hear Truth calling out in the night. You can answer 'Begone'—and you will never meet her again. You can answer 'Enter'—and you will see her appear, veiled, and breathing sweetness through her veil. You do not now know what you will answer, nor do I know, nor does any one in the world. Prepare

yourself, by good works, to give the right answer. Whatever your errors may be there is religion in your soul. God has given you much power in this world; use it to good purpose. You who were born a Catholic say you are a Protestant. Perhaps you do not know Catholicism well enough to understand that Protestantism is being shattered upon the dead Christ, while Catholicism evolves by virtue of the living Christ. But now I speak to the statesman, not, indeed, to implore him to protect the Catholic Church, which would be a misfortune, but to tell him that though the State may not be either Catholic or Protestant, neither may it ignore God, and you dare to ignore Him in more than one of your schools, in those you call high, and this in the name of freedom of science, which you confound with freedom of thought and of speech; for thought and speech are free to deny God, but the negation of God neither partakes nor can partake of the nature of science, and you are bound to teach science alone. You are well acquainted with that petty statesmanship which forces you to a private compromise with your conscience, in order to obtain in secret some favour from the Vatican, in which you do not believe, but you are ill acquainted with that grand statesmanship which upholds the authority of Him who is the eternal principle of all justice. You work harder to destroy it than the atheistic professors themselves; for, after all, the atheistic professors have but little power; you statesmen, who sometimes talk of your belief in God, you undermine His authority far more deeply than those professors, by the bad example of your practical atheism. You who imagine you believe in the Godhead of Christ are, in reality, prophets and priests of the false gods. You serve them, as the idolatrous Hebrew princes served them, in high places, in the presence of the people. You serve, in the high places, the gods of all earthly lusts."

"Bravo!" interrupted the Minister, who was well known for the austerity of his life, his domestic virtues, and his carelessness concerning money. "You amuse me!"

And he added, turning to his friend:

“It was really not worth while.”

“Understand me well!” Benedetto continued. “Yes, you also are one of these priests. Do I then speak of ordinary revellers? I speak of you and of others like you, who esteem yourselves honest men because you do not plunge your hands into the coffers of the State, who esteem yourselves moral men because you do not give yourselves up to the pleasures of the senses. I will tell you two things: All the while you are worshipping pleasures which are still more sinful. You make false gods of yourselves unto yourselves; you worship the pleasure of contemplating yourselves in all your power, in all your honours, in the admiration of the world. To your false gods you wickedly sacrifice many human victims, and the integrity of your own character. There is a compact among you by which each is bound to respect his colleague’s false god, and promote its worship. The purest among you are at least guilty of this complicity. You look away when there is a suggestion of foul conspiracies with vile aims, or of the shameful intrigues of factions which crawl in the dark, letting them go by in silence. You regard yourselves as incorrupt, and you corrupt others! You distribute the public money regularly to people who sell you their honour and the probity of their consciences. You despise and you nurture this infamy, which goes on under the shadow of your authority. It is more sinful to buy votes and flattery than to sell them! You are the most corrupt of all! Your second sin is that you consider lying a necessity of your position; you lie as you would drink water. You lie to the people, lie to the Parliament, lie to the Crown, lie to your adversaries, lie to your friends. I know—some of you do not personally indulge in the general prevarication, but you tolerate it in your colleagues. Many of you shrink from assuming this on entering the seat of government, as, upon entering a mine, we put on a dirty dress to protect our own and, on coming out, lay it down joyfully. But can these, who are the best, call themselves faithful servants of Truth? You believe in God, and perhaps on your death-bed you will believe you have offended God most seriously, as statesmen, by your acts of violence against the Church, in the

name of the State. No, these will not be your greatest sins. If men go into Parliament, and through Parliament into the Government, who profess, as philosophers, not to know God, but who rise up in the name of Truth against this arbitrary tyranny of Untruth, they are serving God better than you and will be more pleasing to God than you, who believe in Him as an idol and not as the Spirit of Truth, than you who dare to talk of the putrefaction of Catholicism, you who stink of falsity. Yes, who stink of it! You make the air of the heights so impure, so contrary to what it should be, that it is difficult to breathe it. You have a devout heart, Signor Ministro; do not tell me that in this palace one cannot serve God."

"Do you know—" the Minister exclaimed angrily, crossing his arms upon his breast, while the Under-Secretary of State extended his hand graciously towards him to check the indignant words.

"Gently, gently, gently!" said he. "Allow me. I find this most entertaining."

The Under-Secretary of State was short and round, and full of respect for his own secretaryship, like an egg in the conscious possession of a sacred chick. As a man he was far inferior to the Minister, and very unlike him. He had none of the intellectual curiosity of his superior, and had consented to be present at this interview simply to please him. His superior, possessed of a keen wit, was in the habit of throwing his own light now on one, now on another of the persons who revolved around him, and, at such moments, lie was apt to believe that they shone of themselves, as perhaps the sun may believe is the case with the orbs that pay their court to it. The Under-Secretary of State reflected light upon the Minister, and the Minister reflected admiration upon the Under-Secretary of State. The Minister had desired his presence at this interview, not comprehending that this little Mercury of his planetary system, having resolved in his youth to free himself from the supernatural, which hampered the most spontaneous movements of his selfish nature, had come to hate the supernatural with much the same hatred which the sick conceive for the man who,

they know, has gloomily diagnosed their illness. As these unfortunates seek to persuade themselves that the prophet is not worthy of faith, and, whilst his prophecy is gradually being fulfilled, become more and more impatient, and struggle ever harder to overthrow that threatening authority, so this man, the more he felt his youthful vigour declining, felt materialistic dogmas losing credit, and from time to time perceived in his heart certain stabbing apprehensions of a formidable truth which, wakened by degrees, became the more embittered in his hatred hidden beneath careless irony.

“Look here, my good sir,” said he, when he had, by his words and gesture, made room for himself in the conversation. “You talk a great deal about false and true gods. I don’t know whether yours be false or true. He may be true, but He is certainly unreasonable. A God who made the world as he chose, in such a way that it must wag as it does, and then comes and tells us that we must make it wag in a different way—well now, you know! He is certainly not a reasonable God! You have taken the liberty to empty out a whole bagful of abuse, a bagful of accusations against statesmen; they are calumnies, especially if you apply them to that gentleman over there, or to me; but I am willing to admit that politics are not a suitable business for saints. He who made the world did not intend that they should be! He is to blame for that. Nevertheless, some one must attend to politics. At present we are doing this, and if we ourselves be not saints, at least you see how patiently we deal with saints. And listen,”

The Under-Secretary looked at his watch.

“It is getting late,” he said, “and saintliness may encounter some dangers, at such a late hour, in the streets of Rome. You had better go, now.”

He stretched out his hand towards the electric bell, meaning to summon the usher.

“Signor Ministro!” Benedetto exclaimed, with such vehemence that the Under-Secretary remained motionless, his arm extended, as though frozen in the act.

“You fear for the State, for the Monarchy, for liberty, you fear the socialists and the anarchists, but you should be far more afraid of your colleagues, who scoff at God! for socialism and anarchism are merely fevers, while scoffing is even as gangrene! As for you,” he added, turning to the Under-Secretary, “you deride One who is silent. Fear His silence!”

Before either of the two potentates could speak a word, or move, Benedetto had left the room.

He descended the great stairway, all quivering with the reflex action of the words which had burst from his heart, and with the feverish fire in his blood. His legs shook and bent under him. He was once or twice obliged to seize the banisters and stop. On reaching the last column, he leaned his throbbing forehead against it, seeking its coolness. But immediately he drew away, with a feeling of repugnance for the very stones of this palace, as if they were infected by treason, were accomplices of the atrociously vile bargain which had been struck there between ministers of Christ and ministers of the State. He sat down on one of the lower steps, quite exhausted, without noticing the lighted lamps of a carriage which was waiting close to him, doubtless the Minister’s carriage, and not caring who might see him. He breathed more freely; his indignation was beginning to cool down and turn to sorrow, and a desire to weep for the sad blindness of the world. Then he began to feel so lonely, so bitterly lonely. Only she, the partner of his past errors, had watched, had discovered, had acted. Only through her had he been able to hold his own with the Minister, knowing what manner of language to use with him. His other friends, the friends devoted to his religious ideas, had slept, and were still sleeping. The bitter thought that they no longer cared for him was pleasing to him. It was pleasant to give himself up, for once at least, to pity for his own fate, for once to drain the cup to the dregs, to picture his fate even more painful and bitter than it really was. All were against him, all were in league against him! Alone, alone, alone! And was he really strong at heart? That man up there, that Minister who

possessed genius and personal kindliness—what if he were right, after all? What if Catholicism were really past healing? Lo! the Lord Himself, the Lord he had served, the Lord who had struck down his body, and delivered him into the power of his enemies, now was abandoning his soul. Anguish, mortal anguish! He longed to die on that very spot and to be at peace.

Above him he heard the voices of the Minister and the Under-Secretary, who were coming down. Benedetto rose with an effort, and dragged himself into the street. On the left, a few paces beyond the door, he saw another carriage waiting. A servant in livery stood on the sidewalk talking with the coachman. When Benedetto appeared the servant hastened towards him. In the gaslight, Benedetto recognised the old Roman from Villa Diedo, the footman of the Dessalles. It suddenly flashed across his troubled brain that Jeanne was there in the carriage, waiting for him, and he started back a step.

“No,” said he. Meanwhile the carriage had moved forward; Benedetto imagined he saw Jeanne, that he was being forced to get into the carriage with her, and that he had not the strength to resist. Seized with giddiness he staggered back again, and would have fallen had the footman not caught him in his arms. He found himself in the carriage without knowing how he had got there, with an unpleasant bright light opposite to him, and a loud buzzing in his ears. Little by little he understood. He was alone; an acetylene lamp was shining in his face. The door on his right was open and the footman was speaking to him. What was he saying? Where should they drive? To Villa Mayda? Yes, certainly, to Villa Mayda. Could not that light be extinguished? The servant put it out, and spoke of a paper. What paper? A paper the Signora had placed in the inside pocket of the coupé, ordering him to give it to the gentleman. Benedetto did not understand, or see. The footman took the paper and slipped it into Benedetto’s pocket. Then he inquired about the gentleman’s health, as his masters—this time he said ‘his masters’—had ordered him to do. If he had seen him lying dead this scrupulous individual would have carried out the order just the

same. Instead of answering, Benedetto begged that a little water might be brought to him. The footman fetched some from a neighbouring café and Benedetto drank it eagerly, experiencing great relief. As he took the empty cup from him, the footman thought it best to complete his message:

"The Signora ordered me to tell you, if you inquired, that they sent the carriage because they knew you were not well, and they thought that in this place and at this hour it would be impossible for you to find one."

The coupé had excellent springs and rubber tires. What a rest it was for Benedetto to roll along thus, silently, alone in a dark soft carriage, in the heart of the night! From time to time vistas of bright streets loomed on the right and on the left, and this was painful to him, as if those long rows of lights had been his enemies. But immediately there came back the darkness of the narrow streets and the flight, on footpaths and houses, of the unsteady lights of the coupé. The coachman set the horse to a walking pace, and Benedetto looked out into the darkness. It seemed to him they had just begun to ascend the Aventine Hill. He felt better; the fever, intensified by the physical and moral strain of that night of strife, was now rapidly decreasing. Then, for the first time, he perceived the subtle perfume of the coupé, the perfume Jeanne always used, and there rushed upon him the vivid memory of the return from Praglia with her, of the moment when, having left her at the foot of the hill leading to Villa Diedo, he had gone on alone in the victoria which was still filled with her warmth and her perfume, alone, and intoxicated with his love secret. Terrified at the vividness of these memories he pressed his arms to his breast, and strove to withdraw himself from his senses and his memory, into the very centre of his being. He gasped, with parted lips, unable to banish that image from his inner vision. And others flashed through his mind, leaving his unyielding will unconquered, but causing it to tremble like a tightly drawn rope. Now it was the idea that only Jeanne really loved him, that only Jeanne suffered through his suffering. Now it was her voice, complaining that her love was not returned, her voice asking for love, in the

tones of a little song by Saint-Saens, so sweet, so sad, and familiar to them both, and concerning which he had once said to her at Villa Diedo that he could never refuse anything to one who prayed thus. Now it was the idea of fleeing far, far away and for ever, from this pagan and pharisaical Rome. Again it was a vision of peace and pure converse with the woman whom he would win over to the faith at last. It was an ardent desire to say to the Lord:—"The world is too sad, let me adore Thee thus." Then there came the thought that in all this there was no sin, there was no sin in abandoning his mission in the presence of so many enemies. He began to doubt whether he really had any mission at all, whether he had not rather yielded to deceitful suggestions, believed in the reality of phantoms, and been deceived by chance appearances. He saw the spiritual and moral features of his friends and disciples, deformed as in a convex mirror; he felt a disheartening certainty that all he had hoped of them was vain. Then again that sad, tender little song returned, no longer beseeching but full of pity, of a pity comprehending all his bitter struggle, the sorrowing pity of some unknown spirit that was also suffering and complaining of God, but humbly, gently, pleading for all that suffers and loves in the world.

The carriage stopped at a cross-way, and the footman got down from the box and approached the window. It seemed that neither he nor the coachman knew exactly where this Villa Mayda was. On the right, a narrow lane sloped down between two walls. Behind the higher one, on the left, huge black trees rustled loudly in the west wind, which had torn the clouds asunder. In the background, the Janiculum and St. Peter's loomed black in the pale starlight. It was a narrow footpath. Was that where the Signore must get out to go to Villa Mayda? No, but the Signore was determined to get out at any cost, to quit that poisoned carriage. He dragged himself as far as Sant' Anselmo, struggling with his poor weak body and with the wind. Exhausted once more, he thought of asking the monks for hospitality, but did not do so. He went down, skirting the great silent refuge of peace belonging to the Benedictines, passed, sighing, before the closed door, which said in vain quieti et amicis, and at

last reached the gate of Villa Mayda.

The gardener came, half dressed, to open the gate, and was greatly astonished to see him. He said he had believed he was in prison, because a delegato and a policeman had been there to look for him at about nine o'clock. Indeed the Signora, the Professor's daughter-in-law, had at once ordered the servants not to admit him if he returned, but the order had been angrily countermanded by the Professor himself, to the great joy of the gardener, who was as fond of Benedetto and of the master as he was averse to the Signora. Upon hearing this Benedetto would have departed at once had his strength allowed him. But he was not in a condition to go a hundred paces.

"It will be for this one night only," he said.

He occupied a small room in the gardener's little house. He had hoped, on entering it, to find the peace of the heart, but it was not to be. They were driving him away even from here: that was what he said in his heart to his poor little bed, to the poor furniture, to the few books, to the smoky tallow-candle. Fixing his eyes on the Crucifix, which hung above a footstool at the side of the bed, he groaned, with an effort of his will: "How can I complain so bitterly of my crosses, Lord?"

In vain; his spirit had no living sense either of Christ or of the Cross. He sat down in despair, not wishing to go to bed in this mood, waiting for a drop of sweetness, which did not come. A gust of wind made him turn his head towards the window, which had burst open. He saw a great planet tip there in the brilliant sky, above the black battlements of Porta San Paolo, and the black summit of the pyramid of Cestio, above the tops of the cypresses which surround the tomb of Shelley. The wind howled around the little house. Oh! that night in the asylum, where his wife was dying, and the shrieks of the violent patients, and the great planet!

Bending his head, heavy with grief, he happened to notice the paper which the footman had placed in his pocket. It was a large black-edged envelope. He opened it, and read the name and titles of his poor old mother-in-law, the Marchesa Nene

Seremin, and the simple words that followed:

“IN PEACE.”

He was as one turned to stone, holding the open, sheet in his hand, his eyes fixed on the words. Then his hands began to tremble, and from his hands trembling rose to his breast, growing more and more violent till a storm of tears burst from his eyes.

He wept as many memories came to his mind, some sad, some sweet, brought back to him by the poor dead woman. He wept with his eyes fixed upon the crucifix, upon Christ, to whom in her last moments she surely yielded herself up with the fullest confidence, like that other dear one, like his Elisa; he wept in gratitude to her, who even from that unknown world was kind to him, and softened his heart. He recalled the last words he had heard her speak: “Then shall we never meet again?” In his prophetic soul he smiled, turned to the open window, and gazed upon the great planet.

CHAPTER VIII. JEANNE

A small band of workmen was coming towards Via della Marmorata, It was about noon, and they had been at work on a house in course of construction in Via Galvani. Seeing little groups of people standing under the trees, other little groups at the doors, and people also at the windows of the two last houses on the right and left, a workman, who was following the others at a short distance, called out in a loud voice to his companions:

“What a lot of fools for one knave!”

A big, bearded man, who was standing on the threshold of a small shop, heard this, and, coming forward, accosted him threateningly.

“What’s that you say?”

The other stopped and stared at him, answering mockingly:

"Get out! Just what I please!"

The big man struck him a blow, and then the other workmen fell upon the big man in defence of their comrade. Cries, oaths, the flashing of knives, the shrieks of women from the windows, people rushing up from the avenue, policemen and guards hurrying to the spot; in an instant the whole street was in a black ferment, while the surging, howling mob was pitching from right to left and from left to right, as if the street were a ship in an angry sea. Two yards from the spot where the guards and the workmen were struggling, it would have been difficult to ascertain what had happened. The crowd was blind in its fury against those who had insulted the Saint. Who these were they did not know; a hundred discordant voices called for the blood of the big man, of the workmen, of the guards, of one who had laughed, of one who had tried to make peace, and of one who was using his elbows to work his way forward, as well as of one who was trying to elbow his way out. The driver of a tram on the San Paolo line, passing Via Galvani, saw the tumult, and amused himself by calling out to a group of women, a hundred yards beyond, that the Saint of Jenne had been discovered in Via Galvani. The rumour ran along the avenues, full of chattering groups and isolated onlookers, as fire along a trail of powder. The groups broke up, the people rushed towards Via Galvani, questioning one another as they ran. The isolated onlookers followed more slowly, more cautiously, and presently saw many vexed faces returning. The Saint indeed! It was only one of the usual false alarms. Some one saw people coming down in haste from Sant' Anselmo. Another report went round: they are from Villa Mayda, they are sure to know! And people come from right and left, all hastening towards the mouth of Via di Santa Sabina, as pigeons hasten towards a handful of corn. The isolated onlookers follow, more slowly, more cautiously. Che! Nonsense! At Villa Mayda nothing is known, and they will not even answer any more questions, for they are exasperated by the procession of people ringing the bell. A squad of carabinieri comes upon the scene, and charges down Via Galvani in serried ranks. Hisses are heard, and angry

cries: “They know! They took him away!” “No” shouts a woman who sells fruit, and who was one of a group on the corner of Via Alessandro Volta. “It was a delegato! It was the police!” The members of that group are less enraged with the delegato and the policemen than with the stupid bystanders, who might easily have thrown delegato, policemen, cab, horse and driver into the river, and, instead, had allowed themselves to be dispersed by a few words and a few drops of water! The little old woman who had brought Benedetto to the unfrocked monk was there also. They stop her as she is coming out of the bakers’ shop, and now she is telling for the hundredth time the story of the arrest, and crying, also for the hundredth time, as she tells of the roses, of the pious words, and describes how very ill the Saint looked. Her audience is moved also, and mumbles praises of the Saint. One relates a miraculous cure he has effected, another tells of a second cure; one mentions his way of speaking, which goes to the heart; another praises his face, which is as good as a sermon; one speaks of his poverty, and another tells of his charities, which are many, in spite of his poverty. There they come from Via Galvani, carabinieri, policemen, prisoners, and the crowd. One of the solitary onlookers, moved by curiosity, approaches another spectator, and inquired what has occurred in the district. The other is in complete ignorance. The two join company, and question a citizen, who appears to have had enough of it; to be about to leave. The citizen replies that up there at a villa near Sant’ Anselmo lives a holy man, who is adored by the whole quarter, because he visits the sick, healing many, and talking of religion better than the priests themselves: so they call him “the Saint”; or rather, “the Saint of Jenne,” because he performed many miracles in a town in the hills, called Jenne. Why, even the newspapers talked of him! Last night, while he was ministering to a poor sick man, the police carried him off, no one knows why. It was reported that he had been set free again, and had returned to the villa, where he was gardener, but at the villa they deny that he is still there, and will give no explanation. The people are excited, they want——

A tram was approaching. Some of the passengers made signs to the people, who shouted and rushed towards the next stopping-place. The citizen forsook his two questioners and also ran towards the spot, where a crowd was rapidly gathering round the tram. The slow train of curious spectators moved forward in the wake of the crowd; the two learned that the tram had brought six citizens of the district, who—motu proprio—had been to see the Chief of Police. The six alighted among the crowd, which was impatient to hear, to know. They did not seem happy, and answered the storm of questions by recommending the people to be calm. They promised to speak presently, to tell all, but not there in the open street. Many were already protesting, insults trembled on many lips. He who appeared to be the leader of the six—a tobacconist—had himself raised on the shoulders of his colleagues, and briefly harangued the crowd.

"We have brought news," he said. "We can assure you at once that the Saint is not in prison."

Applause burst forth, and cries of viva and bravo.

"But we do not know exactly where he is," the orator continued.

Howls and hisses! The orator was much dismayed, and, after a weak attempt to speak, bent before the storm, and slid down from his living rostrum. But another of the six, braver and more daring, climbed up and retorted with violence. Then the howls and invectives were redoubled, "They have fooled you!" the people shouted. "Idiots that you are! They have put him in prison! In prison!" The cry spread; those at a distance heard it, who had heard nothing else, and those who could hear neither the cry nor anything else felt the dark, magnetic waves of wrath pierce their breasts. Many howled "Abbasso! Down with him!" without knowing whose fall they desired. And here are the carabinieri's big hats again, and the policemen. In vain the six protest, shouting themselves hoarse; the yells of "Down with him!" and "Death to him!" drown their voices. A delegato orders the bugler to sound the "disperse." At

the third blast there is a general stampede. The deputation, led by the tobacconist, flees also; but each member manages to drag after him in his flight one or other of the less violent citizens, promising further information, impossible to give in the open street, when they shall have reached a fitting place. They take refuge in a yard, where building material is stored, and which is surrounded by a wooden fence. Several people follow them, filtering, one by one, through the opening in the fence. Then the tobacconist, conscious that he hides in his breast things fit to cause the downfall of the world, speaks, in the presence of the pyramid of Caio Cestio, rising there indifferent, and waiting for silence, for ruin, for the coming of the wild forests, when the centuries shall have rolled away. The tobacconist speaks in measured tones, surrounded by some thirty eager faces. He says the Saint of Jenne Is certainly not in prison, that they do not know where he is, but that they do, alas! know other things! Then he relates the other things! If he had told them to the mob on leaving the tram, they would have torn him to pieces. At the police-station they laugh at the Saint, and at those who believe in him. They say he has a mistress, a very wealthy lady; that he was examined by the Director-General of Police during the night on some not over-pleasant matters, and that after the interview he drove away from the ministry with his mistress, who was waiting for him in a carriage.

“I would not believe this,” the tobacconist concluded, “but then—well, now let him tell Ms story!”

One of the six, a man who kept a tavern at Santa Sabina, immediately began to relate that his wife had heard a carriage stop near the tavern, in the middle of the night; she had gone to the window, and had seen a private carriage, with coachman and footman in tall hats. The footman, standing at the carriage door, was helping some one to alight. The person who got out had then walked past the window, going towards Sant’ Anselmo, and she had recognised in him the Saint of Jenne. The tavern-keeper added that he had not believed she had really recognised him, for there was no moon, and it had rained until after eleven o’clock, so the night must

have been quite dark; therefore he had not spoken. But when he had heard this story at the police-station, he had been convinced. Besides, his wife could tell something more. She had risen at six. Between seven and eight a cab had passed, going in the direction of Sant' Anselmo. Shortly afterwards the cab had returned, and this time his wife had seen the Saint of Jenne inside it. She was ready to swear to this.

At this point several of those present slipped out of the enclosure, and hastened to whisper the news in the district. Thus it happened that while the tobacconist, the tavern-keeper, and their friends were still in the enclosure, people began to gather on the road to Santa Sabina, and a large group started in the direction of the tavern, two policemen following.

They entered the courtyard. The hostess was gossiping with a client, under the pergola. They questioned her, and she related the story she had told her husband. They cross-examined her, wishing to know this and that, with many details. The woman ended by saying she did not remember anything more. She would go and fetch something to drink, something to refresh their throats and her memory. Che! Nonsense! They had not come to drink, and they told her so, rudely. Two railway men, sitting at a table under the neighbouring pergola, were annoyed by this cross-examination. One of them called the hostess, and said to her, in a loud voice:

"What is it they want to know? I myself saw the man they are after. He left this morning at eight o'clock, with a girl, by the Pisa line."

The crowd turned to him, questioning him now, and he swore, angrily, that he was telling the truth. Their Saint had started at eight o'clock, in a second-class carriage, with a handsome fair girl, who was very well known! Then the people slowly slunk away. When they were all gone, a policeman in plain clothes approached the railway man, and, in his turn, asked him if he were quite sure of what he had said.

"I?" the man replied. "Sure? Curse them! I know nothing about it, but I have quieted them, anyway; and they may go to the devil for all I care, the silly fools! Now they

will run as far as Civitavecchia at least, and may the sea swallow them and their Saint too!"

"But then, where has he gone?" the hostess exclaimed.

"Go and look for him in the cellar," the man answered. "The flask is empty, and we are still thirsty."

II. "If you go on like this," Carlino exclaimed, hearing Jeanne order her maid to bring her hat, gloves, and fur, "if you leave me alone all day long, I swear to you we will return to Villa Diedo. There, at least, you will not know where to go." "I have arranged to send Chieco to you," she said. "To-day at two he is to play for the Queen, and then he will come to you. Good-bye."

And she went out without giving her brother time to reply. Her coupé was waiting for her. She gave the footman the address of the Under-Secretary of the Interior, and entered the carriage.

It was Saturday. For several days Jeanne had not slept and had eaten little. On Tuesday evening she had learned from Signora Albacina of the plot against Piero, and how her husband, the Under-Secretary of State, had been invited by the Minister to join him at the Ministry of the Interior, where an interview was to take place with this man so greatly feared and hated at the court of the Sovereign Pontiff, by that non-concessionist faction which wished to rule at the Vatican. She hastened to Noemi, got her to write the letter, and then telephoned to a young secretary, her friend and admirer, begging him to come to the Grand Hôtel. She charged him to find some one to deliver the letter, for it was probably too late to send it to Villa Mayda. She knew also, for Noemi had told her so, that Piero was feverish. She determined to send her carriage to wait for him at the door of the Ministry of the Interior, with the footman who had known Maironi at Villa Diedo. It was imprudent, but what did it matter? Nothing mattered save that dear life. The announcement of the death of Marchesa Nene had reached her that very evening by the last post. She

wished Piero to have it immediately, that he might at once pray for the poor dead woman. It was strange, but nevertheless true, that she could merge herself in him, forget herself, her own incredulity, could feel that which he with his faith must feel and desire. That same night the footman gave her an account of his errand. He described Maironi as a ghost, a corpse. She was in despair. She knew of the conflict between Professor Mayda and his daughter-in-law, knew the Professor was often called away from Rome; she considered him a great surgeon, but not a great doctor; she believed that daring these absences the young lady would take no care of the sick man, would show him no attentions. And she also knew about the three days the Director-General had allowed him. Oh! it was not possible to leave Piero at Villa Mayda! He must be removed! A hiding-place must be found, where neither the police nor the carabinieri would be able to unearth him; where he would be well nursed, have every attention, and be in the hands of a skilful physician.

She did not think of consulting the Selvas. Neither did she communicate to Noemi her intention of sending the carriage to the Ministry of the Interior. It did occur to her to propose that they take Piero to their house, but the idea did not please her; the terms upon which Piero and Giovanni Selva stood were too well known for his house to be a safe hiding-place. Within this prudent consideration lurked a secret jealousy of Noemi, a jealousy of a special nature, neither violent nor burning, for Noemi did not love Piero with a love like hers, but perhaps—for this very reason—even more painful, because she understood that Piero might accept Noemi’s mystic sentiment; because she herself was incapable of such a sentiment, and because she had no just cause of complaint against her friend, no reason to reproach her, to give way to this feeling.

Another possible hiding-place occurred to her, the house of an elderly senator with whom she was acquainted, and who had been an intimate friend of her father’s. He was very religious, and full of affectionate admiration for Maironi. She held fast to this idea. But if she intended appealing to the Senator, asking of him no less a favour

than to take into his house a sick man threatened with arrest, she must at least offer some explanation of her zeal. She did not figure among Piero's disciples, and the Senator was in complete ignorance of the past. But he knew Noemi, for he was the old gentleman with the white hair and the red face who had been present at the meeting in Via della Vite, and Noemi and he often met in the "Catacombs." Jeanne wrote to him at once, stating that she did so in the name of her friend Noemi, who did not dare to come forward. She described the state of Maironi's health, and the circumstances which, for this reason, rendered it advisable to remove him from Villa Mayda; she did not, however, allude to the danger of arrest. She explained her friend's request to him, and added that the invalid's condition rendered the matter most urgent. Should the Senator consent, she begged him to give the bearer of her note his card, with a word or two of invitation for Maironi. She ended by asking him to grant her an interview at the Senate sometime during the day, and by requesting him, in the meantime, not to mention the matter to any one. Then she wrote to Noemi, informing her of what she had done in her name, and charging her to persuade her brother-in-law—in case the Senator sent his card—to take a carriage and carry the invitation to Villa Mayda at once. He must persuade Maironi to accept the offer, and the Professor to allow him to go, laying before them the political reasons for taking this step. When she had written these two letters she had an attack of prostration, with symptoms of such a serious nature that the maid was alarmed. She did not, however, call Carlino, for Jeanne found strength to forbid this absolutely, but she sent for the doctor without telling her mistress she had done so. The doctor himself was alarmed. During his visits to Carlino he had noticed that she was highly strung, but he had never before seen her in such a condition. She was livid, perfectly stiff, and unable to speak. The attack lasted until six o'clock in the morning, the first sign of improvement being when Jeanne inquired what time it was. The maid, accustomed to these attacks whispered to the doctor: "It is passing," and then said aloud:

“Six o’clock, Signora.”

The words seemed to have a miraculous effect. Jeanne, whom they had placed on the bed without undressing her, sat up, rather dazed it is true, but quite mistress of her limbs and her voice. She inquired for Carlino immediately and anxiously. Carlino was asleep; he had not heard anything, and knew nothing of the attack. She breathed more freely, and said to the doctor, with a smile:

“Now I shall drive you away.”

She was not satisfied until the doctor had departed. Then the maid prepared to undress her, whereupon Jeanne first called her a stupid, and then apologised almost tearfully.

“Oh!” said the girl. “You wish to send off those letters first! Yes, yes, do send them off, those horrid letters which did you so much harm!”

Jeanne gave her a kiss. The girl adored her, and she herself was fond of her, treating her sometimes like a dear, silly little sister.

She sealed the two letters, sent the maid to call the footman, and gave him his instructions. He was to take a cab and drive to senator——‘s house, 40 Via della Polveriera, present the letter addressed to the Senator, and wait for an answer. If they told him there was no answer he was to return to the Grand Hôtel and report; but if the Senator gave him a note, he was to take it to Casa Selva, in Via Arenula, with the other letter. An hour later the servant returned, and reported that he had executed the orders. Two hours later a note from the Senator announced to Jeanne that Benedetto was already at his house. Later on in the forenoon Noemi came. Jeanne was sleeping at last. Noemi waited for her to awake, and then told her that her brother-in-law had gone to Villa Mayda without delay. He had not found the Professor, who had left for Naples the night before at half-past twelve. Maironi had accepted the Senator’s invitation at once. Knowing her temperament, Giovanni had judged it wiser not to let young Signora Mayda know what was going on. He had

found Maironi very weak, not feverish, however, so he felt sure the drive from the Aventine to Via della Polveriera had not harmed him. Besides, that kind gardener, his eyes full of tears, had wrapped him up warmly in a heavy blanket. Perhaps Jeanne was mistaken, but it seemed to her that although Noemi displayed much interest in speaking of Piero, much consideration for Jeanne's feelings, she spoke to her in a tone differing from her former tone; as a friend who has not changed her language, but whose heart has become estranged. Had she perhaps wished Piero to go to Casa Selva? Probably.

Ever since that Wednesday morning she had been constantly rushing about. At Palazza Madama they smiled at a certain much respected colleague with white hair and a red face, who received daily visits in the sala dei telegrammi from a lady, both handsome and fashionable. From the Senate Jeanne would rush to the Grand Hôtel to give Carlino his medicine; from the Grand Hôtel she would hasten to Via Arenula to give or receive news, or to Via Tre Pile to see the Senator's doctor, who was attending Piero. Errands in the daytime, and tears at night! Tears of anguish for him who was being wasted by a hidden incurable disease, and again consumed by fever after four-and-twenty hours of perfect freedom from it. Other tears also, other bitter tears for the accusations which had been spread among Piero's friends and disciples, and which not all of them had rejected. Noemi told her these things. The accusations concerning the presumed love affairs of Piero at Jenne were not credited, but on the other hand there were many who believed he had secret relations with a married woman in Rome, with whose name, however, no one was acquainted. It was not believed that these relations were of the guilty nature implied by the slanderers. The most faithful—and they were few in number, did not even credit the existence of an ideal bond. Once when Noemi was relating to Jeanne certain defections, certain acts of coldness, she suddenly burst into tears. Jeanne shuddered and frowned; but presently she saw in her friend's eyes a look so full of despair, of supplication, that, passing from angry jealousy to an impulse of unheard of affection, she opened her

arms to her, and clasped her to her heart. This had happened on the Friday evening the last of the three days by the end of which Maironi was to leave Rome. Towards noon on Saturday Jeanne received a note from Signora Albacina. The wife of the Under-Secretary of State was expecting Jeanne at her own home at two o'clock. It was in consequence of this invitation that Jeanne drove away shortly before two, regardless of Carlino's protests.

As soon as the carriage had started Jeanne raised her veil and took the note from her muff, bending her lovely pale face over it, gazing at it, but not reading it or studying the sense, clear and simple enough, of the words it contained. She was wondering what Signora Albacina could have to tell her; imagining all sorts of impossible things. Had they decided to leave Maironi alone? Or had the police discovered his dwelling-place and were they about to arrest him?

"It will surely be the worst!" Jeanne said to herself. "Ah, Dio!"

And, forgetting herself for a moment, she raised her muff to her face, and pressed it to her forehead. Ah, perhaps not! Perhaps not! Raising her head quickly she looked out to see if any one had noticed her. The carriage was moving rapidly, silently, on its rubber tires. She returned to her conjectures, losing herself in them to such an extent that she did not notice that the carriage had stopped until the footman opened the door.

Signora Albacina met her on the stairs, ready to go out. Jeanne must come with her at once. At once? And where were they to go? Yes, at once, at once, and in Jeanne's carriage, because Signora Albacina could not have her own at the present moment. She herself gave the address to the coachman, an address with which Jeanne was not familiar. She would explain on the way. The carriage started off once more.

Ah! Signora Albacina had forgotten her visiting-cards! She stopped the carriage, but, looking at her watch, saw they would lose too much time. Drive on! Jeanne was trembling with impatience. Well? Well? Where were they going? Ecco! They were

going to see Cardinal——! Jeanne shuddered. To see Cardinal——? This Cardinal had the reputation of being one of the fiercest non-concessionists. Signora Albacina really must see him, and a quarter of an hour later she might not find him. Ah, what a complicated affair! She could not explain everything in a few words. The object of the visit was, of course, still that for which Donna Rosetta Albacina had laboured for three days, her ostensible reason for so doing being the interest she took in the ideas and the person of the Saint of Jenne; her real reason being the pleasure she took in managing an intrigue, without scruples of conscience. She had taken a fancy to Jeanne at Vena di Fonte Alta, but knew nothing of her past. She suspected her of being in love with the Saint, but believed hers to be a mystic love, born on hearing him speak in the “Catacombs” of Via della Vite. She was convinced that Jeanne had had a hand in his disappearance from Villa Mayda, that she knew his hiding-place, and did not wish to disclose it, having promised secrecy to his friends. But Jeanne had little confidence in the lady, who seemed to her frivolous, and who was—this she could not forget—the wife of a powerful enemy, and she had repeatedly assured her that she did not know. Jeanne’s want of confidence offended her a little because really she, Donna Rosetta, wife of an Excellency, was risking much; but after all her vanity was staked on this game, in which the winnings were the permanent freedom of the Saint of Jenne in Rome, and she was determined to go on with it.

A truly complicated affair then! In the meantime, up to Friday night the police had not discovered the Saint’s place of refuge. Ah, yes! they believed he was in Rome. Here Donna Rosetta paused, hoping Jeanne would speak. Not a word. She admitted, continuing her discourse, that her husband might have some suspicion of the intrigue which she was concealing from him, that, perhaps, he was not perfectly sincere with her. This, however, was not likely. When her husband was not speaking quite sincerely to her, she, Donna Rosetta, could feel it in the air. As to that, she understood the others also. Donna Rosetta was for once mistaken concerning her husband. Ever since Wednesday night they had known at Palazzo Braschi where

Maironi was, but he would not tell her so, for the Under-Secretary of State had still less confidence in his wife than Jeanne herself.

But the most important news came from the Vatican. The Pope had been informed of what had taken place in Via della Marmorata, and His Holiness was much irritated against the Government, for they had given him to understand that the Government had lent itself, in this matter, to the hatred of the Freemasons against a man esteemed by the Pope himself. There was disunion among those about the Pope. The more fanatical of the non-concessionists, opponents of the Cardinal Secretary of State, warmly supported the nomination to the archepiscopal see of Turin, so displeasing to the Quirinal, and disapproved of the secret intrigues with the Italian Government. According to their leader, who was the very eminent personage Donna Rosetta now proposed calling upon, other measures should be adopted to liberate the Holy Father from the pestiferous influence of a rationalist varnished over with mysticism. These things Donna Rosetta had learned from the Abbé Marinier, who smiled knowingly about them in her salon. It was inconceivable how many poisonous accusations were being sown broadcast with the greatest cunning by the non-concessionists all united against this poor devil of a mystical rationalist, at whom the Abbé smiled no less than at his enemies!

There was news also from the Ministry of the Interior. What news? Donna Rosetta was about to answer when the carriage stopped before a large convent, The Cardinal lived here. Donna Rosetta alighted alone. Jeanne’s presence was not necessary at this interview; indeed, it would be inopportune. It would be necessary somewhere else. Jeanne waited in the carriage, distressed at not having as yet discovered the object of this visit, in spite of Donna Rosetta’s flow of words. Five minutes, ten minutes, passed. Jeanne drew herself up out of the corner where she had leaned, absorbed in her thoughts. She watched the entrance to the convent to see if Donna Rosetta were not coming. Rare wayfarers, passing slowly along the quiet street, looked into the carriage. It seemed to Jeanne almost an offence that there were

people who could be so calm. Ah, God! The doctor had promised to send her a bulletin to the Grand Hôtel at seven o'clock. It was not yet three. More than four hours to wait. And what would the bulletin say? She bit her lips, stifling a sob in her throat. Ah! here is Donna Rosetta at last. The footman opens the door, she gives him an order:

"Palazzo Braschi!" As she enters the carriage she casts a little book at her feet, and, instead of speaking, rubs her lips vehemently with her perfumed handkerchief. Finally she says, with a shudder, that she was obliged to kiss the Cardinal's hand, and that it was anything but clean. But at any rate the visit was successful. Ah, if her husband only knew! She had played a really horrible part. The Cardinal was the very one who had once met Giovanni Selva in the library of Santa Scolastica at Subiaco, and had assailed him, telling him he was a profaner of the sacred walls, and promising him that he would most certainly go to hell, or even further down! Donna Rosetta had fanned his fire, in order to break up the secret accord between the Vatican and Palazzo Braschi. She had told him that the religious haute of Turin much desired the man chosen by the Vatican, and obnoxious to the Quirinal. The wily Cardinal—whom she had once met in the salon of a French prelate—had at first answered only, with that accent of his, neither French nor Italian:

"C'est vous qui me dites ça? C'est vous qui me dites ça?"

In fact, Donna Rosetta had replied, laughing:

"Oh c'est énorme, je le sais!"

It was a speech which might cost her husband his title of Excellency. But then "the most eminent one" had as good as promised her that the desires of the Turin haute should be satisfied.

"Ce sera lui, ce sera lui!" Finally he had said to her:

"Comment donc, madame, avez-vous épousé un francmaçon? Un des pires, aussi! Un des pires! Faites lui lire cela!"

And he had given her a little book on the doctrines of hell and the inevitable damnation of Freemasons. It was this little book she had cast at her feet on entering the carriage.

“Fancy my husband reading that rubbish!” she said.

But what was all this to Jeanne? Jeanne was impatient to hear the news from the Ministry of the Interior. And now, whom were they going to see? The Minister, or the Under-Secretary of State?

They were going to see the Under-Secretary of State, going to see Donna Rosetta’s husband. Up to the present moment Donna Rosetta had kept silent concerning the purpose and object of this visit, in order that Jeanne might not have time to draw back or to prepare herself too carefully. The Right Honourable Albacina was aware of his wife’s friendship for Signora Dessalle as well as of Signora Dessalle’s friendship for the Selvas, who in their turn were so devoted to Maironi. He had told his wife that he wished to speak with this lady, for reasons of his own, which he did not intend to reveal. He should expect her at the Ministry of the Interior soon after three o’clock. She, his wife, might come with her if she liked, but she could not be present at the interview. Jeanne’s first movement on hearing this was an exclamation of refusal. Donna Rosetta, however, had little difficulty in persuading her to change her mind. She could not tell what projects her husband had in his mind, she did not know; but in her opinion it would be madness not to go, not to listen, because there could be no danger, and Jeanne need not commit herself in any way. Jeanne yielded, although the silence Signora Albacina had maintained up to the last moment in a matter of such importance made her tremble. She felt like an invalid to whom after much frivolous talk the visit of a celebrated surgeon is announced, who is coming to examine the patient.

“I would not advise you to go alone,” Signora Albacina concluded, smiling. “The ushers saw many things in the times of certain ministers and their deputies! But I am

going with you, and I am well known at the Ministry of the Interior! Besides, the things that used to happen do not happen now!”

The Right Honourable Albacina was with the Minister. A deputy, who had just been requested to enter, recognised Donna Rosetta, and offered to announce her to her husband. He had only a word or two to say, and would come out at once. Indeed, in about five minutes the deputy reappeared with Albacina, who begged Jeanne to enter the Minister’s room with him. The two ladies had not expected this, and Donna Rosetta asked her husband if it were not he himself who wished to speak with Jeanne. His Excellency did not allow himself to be disturbed for so little; he dismissed his wife in a summary manner, and hurried Signora Dessalle, taken by surprise, into the Minister’s presence. When he presented her to his superior, she was embarrassed and almost angry.

The Minister received her with the most respectful courtesy, with the manner of a stern man, who honours woman, but keeps her at a distance. He had known the banker Dessalle, Jeanne’s father, and immediately spoke of him:

“A man,” he said, “who had much gold in his coffers, but the purest gold of all in his conscience!” He added that the memory of this man had encouraged him to speak with her about a very delicate matter. When he had spoken those words, or rather while he was speaking them, Jeanne felt sure that this man knew the past. She could not refrain from glancing stealthily at the Under-Secretary. She read the same knowledge in his eyes, but the Under-Secretary’s expression troubled her and irritated her, while the Minister’s gaze seemed to open a paternal heart to her. The Minister introduced the topic by speaking of Giovanni Selva, whom he freely praised. He expressed regret that he had no personal acquaintance with him. He said he was aware that Jeanne was a friend of the Selvas. He must beg her to persuade her friends to undertake a most important mission to another person. And then he spoke of Maironi, always careful to place the Selvas between Maironi and Jeanne,

and careful to avoid allusion to any possible direct communication between them. Jeanne listened, striving to pay close attention to his words, to prepare a prudent and pertinent answer, and ever conscious of the discomfort the presence of this little Mephistopheles of an Albacina caused her. The Minister's discourse did not prove to be what she had expected; more favourable perhaps, but more embarrassing. He told her he was not speaking as the Minister, but as a friend; that he did not wish to hide things from her; that certain shadows had had absolutely no substance; that neither ministers, nor magistrates, nor police-agents, had any right to interfere with Signor Maironi, who was perfectly free to do as he liked, and had nothing to fear from the laws of his country. He was, he said, convinced of the inanity of certain accusations which had been brought against him out of religious animosity. He felt much sympathy for Signor Maironi's religious views, and much esteem for his proposed apostolate, but Signor Selva must really convince him of the wisdom of leaving Rome for some time at least, and this in the interest of his apostolate itself; for his religious antagonists in Rome were waging war against him so violently, dealing him such slanderous blows, that very soon he must inevitably find himself entirely without disciples. Here the Minister, thinking to please Jeanne, assured her of his own interest in religion. What a tragic illusion! she thought, bitterly. He trusted that in the near future Signor Maironi would be able to exert his influence freely in a very high place; there were many signs of an imminent transformation, of an imminent misfortune to befall the non-concessionists; but, for the moment, it would be more prudent for him to disappear. This was the friendly but pressing advice which they desired to convey to him through his distinguished friend. Would Signora Dessalle consent to speak to that distinguished friend?

Jeanne trembled. Could she trust him? Would she be revealing things which perhaps these two did not know, and were trying to find out from her? Involuntarily she glanced at the Undersecretary, and her eyes spoke so plainly that he could not avoid taking a decisive step.

“Signora,” he said, with his habitual sarcastic smile, “I see that you do not want rue here. My presence is not necessary, and I will go, in obedience to your wish; it is a just wish, and one easily explained.”

Jeanne blushed, and he noticed it, and was pleased at having succeeded in wounding her by the covert allusion contained in his last words, and, above all, in his malicious smile.

“Nevertheless,” he added, still smiling in the same way, “I cannot leave without assuring you, on my honour, that my wife is a most loyal friend to you; that she has never uttered an indiscreet word to me concerning you, as I myself have never been guilty of indiscretion when discussing the same subject with my wife.”

Having thus taken his revenge, the little man departed, leaving Jeanne greatly agitated. Good God! Did they really intend to oblige her to speak to Piero? Did they suppose she saw him? Did these men also believe that Piero’s saintliness was a lie? By an effort she composed herself, seeking help in the Minister’s grave, sad, and respectful gaze.

“I will speak to Signor Giovanni” she said. “But I believe,” she added hesitatingly, “that Signor Maironi is ill, and not able to travel.”

When she uttered Maironi’s name flames rushed to her face. She felt them far hotter than they appeared, but the Minister noticed them, and came to her aid.

“Perhaps, Signora,” he said, “you fear to compromise your friends the Selvas. Do not fear this. I once more repeat that Signor Maironi has nothing to fear from any quarter, and I will add that we know all about him. We know he is in Rome, that he is staying—but only for a few hours longer—in the house of a senator in Via della Polveriera. We know he is ill, but that he is able to travel. You may even tell Signor Selva that, if he desire it, I will request my colleague, the Minister of Public Works, to place a reserved compartment at Signor Maironi’s service.”

Jeanne, trembling violently, was about to interrupt him, to exclaim, “Only for a few

hours longer?" but, controlling herself with difficulty, she took leave of the Minister, anxious to hasten to the Senate, to know!

As he accompanied her to the door the Minister said:

"Perhaps Signor Selva is unaware that the Senator is expecting visitors, relations I believe, and so will not be able to keep Signor Maironi any longer. He much regrets this. What a fine man he is! We are old friends."

Jeanne shuddered, fearing to have guessed the truth. They had been scheming to oblige the Senator to send Piero away; they were indeed pushing him out of Rome! But was it possible the Senator had allowed himself to be persuaded? To drive out an invalid in his condition! She entered her coupé and drove to Palazza Madama, where she inquired for the Senator. He was not there. The usher who gave her this answer appeared rather embarrassed. Was he acting under orders? Not daring to insist, she left her card, with a request that the Senator would call at the Grand Hôtel before dinner. She herself started for the Grand Hôtel, her heart quivering and groaning, the point of her shoe beating upon the little book against Freemasonry, which Donna Rosetta had forgotten. She would have liked the two sorrels to fly. It was a quarter to five, and at half-past four it was daily her duty to prepare Carlino's medicine.

III.

Half an hour before she reached the Grand Hôtel Giovanni and Maria Selva arrived there. Young di Leynì arrived at the same time. He also had come to inquire for Signora Dessalle, and expressed his satisfaction at this meeting; but he was far from cheerful.

Upon learning that Signora Dessalle was out, the three visitors asked to be allowed to wait for her in the parlour. The Selvas seemed even less cheerful than di Leynì.

After a brief silence Maria observed that it was already a quarter past four, therefore Jeanne would not be long, for every day at half-past four she was engaged with her

brother. Di Leynì begged that they would present him to her on her arrival. He had a message for her, but was not acquainted with her. The message, indeed, concerned all of Benedetto's friends, therefore concerned the Selvas also. Maria trembled.

"A message from him?" she asked eagerly. "A message from Benedetto?"

Di Leynì looked at her, astonished at her eagerness, and hesitated slightly before answering. No, it was not from Benedetto, but it concerned him. As Signora Dessalle might come in at any moment, and as the matter was rather lengthy, rather complicated, he judged it as well not to begin discussing it until she arrived. Then he inquired, innocently, how this Signora Dessalle had come to take such an interest in Benedetto's fate. She had never been seen at the meetings in Via della Vite, and he had never even heard her name mentioned.

"But what makes you think she does take an interest in his fate?" said Maria.

"Because, you see," di Leyni answered, "I have a message for her which is about him."

Di Leyni, whose devotion to Benedetto was boundless, had never credited the scandalous rumours which had been spread concerning him; he had repulsed them with passionate indignation. He would not admit that his master could harbour either a guilty or an ideal love. In asking that question, he could have had no idea that a relation of a shameful nature had existed between Jeanne and Benedetto. Giovanni changed the subject by remarking that Signora Dessalle might not come in for some time, and that, therefore, di Leyni had better speak.

Di Leyni spoke.

He had been to see Benedetto. On reaching Via della Polveriera from San Pietro in Vincoli, he had recognised two policemen in plain clothes, who were walking up and down. He might have been mistaken, or this might have happened by chance. At any rate it was something to take note of. As soon as he entered the house the Senator had sent to beg him to come into his study. There, speaking with much

affability but with manifest embarrassment, he had told him that he was glad to see a friend of his dear guest's at that special moment; that Benedetto was fortunately free from fever, and, in his opinion, on the road to recovery. A telegram, he said, had just announced to him that his old sister was to arrive very shortly, that his apartment contained only one bedroom besides his own and the one occupied by the servant; that he could not possibly send his sister to an hotel, neither could he telegraph her to delay her visit, for she had already started; therefore—

The Senator had allowed di Leynì to complete the sentence for himself. Di Leynì who, with a few other faithful ones, was aware of the secret plots against Benedetto, was amazed. What should he answer? That the Senator alone was master in his own house? That was, perhaps, the only answer possible. Di Leynì had ventured, with much circumspection, to express his fear that a move might prove fatal to the sick man. The Senator was convinced of the contrary. He believed a change of air would greatly benefit him. He had not as yet been able to consult the doctor, but he had no doubt of this. He suggested Sorrento. As di Leynì did not know what to say, and did not move, the Senator had dismissed him, begging him to go, in his name, to the Grand Hôtel, and see Signora Dessalle, at whose request he had received Benedetto into his house, and desire her to arrange matters, for his sister would arrive that same evening before eleven o'clock.

Then di Leynì had gone in to see Benedetto. Good God! in what a state he had found him! Without fever, perhaps, but with the appearance of a dying man.

The young man's eyes were full of tears as he told of it. Benedetto did not know he would be obliged to leave. He had spoken of it to him as of something not yet certain but possible. Benedetto had looked at him in silence, as if to read in his soul, and then had questioned, with a smile: "Must I go to prison?" Then di Leynì repented of not having at once told the whole truth to a man so strong and serene in God, and he repeated to him all the Senator had said.

“He took my hand,” the young man continued, his voice broken with emotion, “and while he held it and caressed it, he said these precise words: ‘I will not leave Rome. Do you wish me to come and die in your house?’ I was so deeply moved that I had not the strength to answer, for indeed I am not sure that he is not really in danger of arrest; perhaps this incredible act of the Senator’s may be a pretext to prevent the arrest taking place in his house. And how could he be carried to another place of safety, with the police watching for him? I embraced him, murmured a few meaningless words, and hastened away; hastened here to speak to this Signora Dessalle. Perhaps she will come and persuade the Senator.”

The Selvas had often interrupted di Leyni with exclamations of surprise and indignation. When he had finished his recital, they were speechless and amazed. The first to break the silence was Signora Maria.

“If Jeanne would only come!” she said softly.

She made an imperceptible sign to her husband, and proposed that they both go and see if by any chance she had returned and they had not been informed. While they were crossing the Jardin d’Hiver she said she thought di Leyni should be told who Jeanne really was. Signora Dessalle had not yet returned. Giovanni took the young man aside, and spoke to him in a low tone. Maria, who was watching him, saw him tremble and turn pale, his eyes dilate; saw him, in his turn, speak, asking something. Jeanne Dessalle entered hurriedly, smiling.

The porter had given her a note from a doctor. It said:

“I do not expect to be able to come back. This morning he was without fever. Let us hope the attack may not return.”

Jeanne saw at once that there was no question of removing the patient. She embraced Maria and shook hands with Selva, who presented di Leyni. Then she apologised to them all because she was obliged to leave them for five minutes. Her brother was waiting for her. As soon as she had left the room, promising to return at

once, di Leynì drew Selva aside once more. Maria saw the look of anxiety he had worn before reappear on his face, saw that he was asking many questions, and that her husband's answers seemed to be calming him. At last she saw her husband place his hands on the young man's shoulders, and say something to him, she believed she knew what; it was something secret, not yet known to Jeanne. She saw emotion and profound reverence in the young man's eyes.

A waiter came to say that Signora Dessalle was waiting for them in her apartment. There was much movement in the hotel. The rustling of long skirts, the muffled beat of footsteps mingled on the carpets of the corridors; subdued foreign voices, gay, plaintive, flattering or indifferent, came and went; the lifts were being taken by storm. Each member of the little silent group experienced the same bitter sense of all this indifferent worldliness. Jeanne was in her salon next to Carlino's room, where he was accompanying Chieco's violoncello on the piano. She came forward to meet her friends with a smile that, combined with the music—antique Italian music, simple and peaceful—made their hearts ache. She seemed rather surprised to see di Leynì, from whom she had not expected a visit. She had really asked them to come up stairs that they might speak more freely, but she told them she had wished to offer them a little of Chieco's music, and now he would not allow the door to remain open. However, one could hear very well with the door closed. Giovanni at once informed her that the Cavaliere di Leynì had a message for her from, the Senator.

"While you are speaking together we will listen to the music," he said.

He and his wife stepped aside from Jeanne, who had turned pale, and who, in spite of her violent effort to do so, could not entirely conceal her impatience to hear this message. Di Leynì sat down beside her, and began to speak in a low tone.

The violoncello and the piano were jesting together on a pastoral theme, full of caresses and of simple and lively tenderness. Maria could not refrain from murmuring, "Dio! Poor woman!" and her husband could not refrain from following,

on Jeanne's face, the painful words her companion was speaking to the sound of this tender and lively music. He watched the young man's face also, who, while speaking to the lady, often looked towards him as if to express his grief and to ask for advice. Jeanne listened to him, her eyes fixed on the ground. When he had finished she raised to the Selvas those great eyes of hers, so full of pitiful distress. She looked from one to the other saying mutely, involuntarily, "You know?" The sad eyes of both husband and wife replied, "Yes, we know!" There came a loud outburst of joyous music. Maria took advantage of this to murmur to her husband:

"Do you think he told her what he said about wishing to die in Rome?"

Her husband answered that it would be best for her to know, that he hoped he had told her. Jeanne let her gaze rest on the door whence came the sound of the music. She waited a moment, and then signed to the Selvas to approach. She said, her voice quite firm, that she felt the Senator should have informed them, that she did not understand why he had appealed to her. They must now arrange what was to be done.

The music ceased. They could hear Carlino and Chieco talking. Di Leynì, who occupied bachelor's quarters on the Sant' Onofrio hillside, offered them eagerly. But what about the warrant? What if they were only waiting to serve it until Benedetto should have left the Senator's house?

Jeanne calmly denied the possibility of an arrest. The Selvas looked at her, full of admiration for that forced calm. For some time past Jeanne had suspected that they were acquainted with Benedetto's real name. Was it then possible that Noemi (though, indeed, she had admonished her often enough) should never have allowed a word to escape her? A moment before, when they had exchanged those silent and sorrowful glances, the Selvas and Jeanne had understood one another, Giovanni and his wife saw that if Jeanne were thus heroically controlling herself it was not on their account, but on di Leynì's account. And now, after Giovanni's words, di Leynì

himself knew everything! It seemed to them they had almost been guilty of treason.

They were convinced that Jeanne must have reasons of which they were ignorant for saying she did not believe in the possibility of an arrest. They remarked that Benedetto might now accept their proffered hospitality. Jeanne was quick to remind them that Benedetto himself had expressed a desire, and that the Sant' Onofrio hillside would seem more suitable than the Via Arenula as the residence of an invalid who needed quiet. Nevertheless, it was her opinion that they could not possibly allow him to be moved without the doctor's express permission. All were of one mind on this point. The Selvas charged di Leynì to inform the Senator that Benedetto's friends would find him another place of refuge, but only on condition that the physician in attendance gave a written permission to remove him. While Giovanni was talking, a noisy allegro burst from the piano in the next room, an allegro all sobs and cries. He ceased speaking, not wishing to raise his voice too high, and let the rush of sad music pass. And sad was the word which his eyes and the young man's eyes uttered to each other, while their lips were silent.

Di Leynì had no time to lose, and so took his leave. He disliked going alone; he could have wished to appear before the Senator with some one of Benedetto's friends whose presence would intimidate him a little, for his conduct was inexplicable.

Giovanni muttered something about the vice-presidency of the Senate, to which that old man aspired, and which he would not obtain. It is a bitter grief to discover such sordid motives where they are least expected! Maria rose and offered to accompany di Leynì.

"You will stay?" Jeanne asked Giovanni anxiously. Her tone said, "You must stay!" Selva said that he had, indeed, intended to remain, and the expression of his voice, of his face, was such as to acquaint Jeanne with the fact that sad words, not yet spoken, were weighing on his heart. Oh! thought Jeanne, what if Chieco should

leave now, and Carlino call? Then it would not be possible for us to speak together! For she also had something to say to Selva. She must repeat the Minister's discourse to him. The two musicians had once more ceased playing, and were talking. Jeanne knocked softly on the door, and blew a few gay words against it:

"Bravi! Have you finished already?"

"No, pretty one," Chieco answered from the other side. "So much the worse for you if you are bored!"

He sent forth a fiendish whistle, fit to pierce a hole in the door. Jeanne clapped her hands. The piano and the violoncello attacked a solemn andante.

She turned to Selva, who was coming in again after having accompanied his wife into the corridor, in order to tell her to telegraph to Don Clemente. She went towards him with clasped hands, her eyes full of tears.

"Selva," she murmured in a stifled voice, "you know everything now. I cannot hide my feelings from you. Is there something worse? Tell me the truth."

Selva took her hands and pressed them in silence, while the violoncello answered for him, bitterly and sadly: "Weep, weep, for there is no fate like thy fate of love and of grief." He pressed the poor icy hands, unable to speak. He saw clearly di Leynì had not dared to repeat the terrible words to her—"I will come and die in your house." It was his lot to deal her the first blow.

"My dear," he said, gently and paternally, "did he not tell you at the Sacro Speco that he would call you to him in a solemn hour? The hour is come, he calls you."

Jeanne started violently. She did not believe she had heard aright.

"Oh, how is this? No!" she exclaimed.

Then, as Selva continued silent, with the same pity in his eyes, a flash shot through her heart. "Ah!" she cried, and her whole being went out in mute and agonized questioning. Selva pressed her hands still harder, his tightly closed lips twitched, and

a suppressed sob wrung his breast. She said never a word, but would have fallen had not his hands upheld her. He supported her, and then led her to a seat,

“At once?” she said. “At once? Is it imminent?”

“No. No. He wishes to see you to-morrow. He believes it will be to-morrow, but he may be mistaken. Let us hope he is mistaken,”

“My God, Selva! But the doctor writes that he has no fever!”

Selva made the gesture of one who is obliged to admit the presence of a misfortune without understanding it. The music was silent, he spoke in subdued tones. Benedetto had written to him. The doctor had found him free from fever, but he himself foresaw a fresh attack, after which the end would come. God was granting him the blessing of a sweet and peaceful respite. He had a favour to ask of Selva. He was aware that Signora Dessalle, a friend of Signorina Noemi’s, was in Rome. He had promised this lady, before an alter at the Sacro Speco, to call her to him before his death, that they might speak together. Probably Signorina Noemi would be able to explain the reason of this to him.

Selva paused; he had the letter in his pocket, and began searching for it. Jeanne saw his movement, and was seized with convulsive shuddering. “No, no,” said he. “I repeat he may be mistaken.”

He waited for her to become calm, and then, instead of taking the letter from his pocket, he repeated the last part of it by heart:

“The attack will return this evening or in the night; to-morrow night, or the day after to-morrow in the morning, the end will come. I wish to see Signora Dessalle to-morrow, to speak a word to her in the name of the Lord, to whom I am going. I asked the Senator, a few moments ago, to arrange this meeting for me, but he found excuses for not doing so. Therefore I appeal to you.”

Jeanne had covered her face with her hands and was speechless. Selva thought it best to say something hopeful. Perhaps the attack would not return; perhaps the

fever was checked. She shook her head violently, and he did not dare to insist. Suddenly she fancied she heard Chieco saying good-bye. She shuddered, and removed her hands from her face, which was ghostly, under her disordered hair. But, instead, the first gay notes of the Curricolo Napoletano burst forth; that was the piece Chieco always played last. She started to her feet, and spoke convulsively, tearlessly.

“Selva, I know Piero is dying, I know he is not mistaken. If possible make him stay where he is. Bring his friends to him—swear to me that you will bring his friends to him, that he may have that comfort! Tell them about me, all about me; tell them the truth. Tell them how pure, how holy Piero really is! I will wait here, I will not stir. When he calls me I will come, as you shall direct me. I am strong. See, I am no longer crying! Telegraph to Don Clemente that his disciple is dying, and that he must come. Let us do all we can. It is late. Go now. You, in one way or another, will see Piero to-night. Tell him——”

At this point a spasm of grief checked her words. Chieco came in, whistling, and beating one hand against the other in his own peculiar fashion, Selva slipped out through the door. Jeanne ran after him into the dark corridor. She seized one of his hands and pressed a wild kiss upon it.

A few hours later, towards ten o’clock, Jeanne was reading the Figaro to Carlino, who was—buried in an easy-chair, his legs enveloped in a rug, a large cup of milk, which he was holding with both hands, resting upon his knee. Jeanne read so badly, was so heedless of commas and of full-stops, that her brother was continually interrupting her, and was growing impatient. She had been reading about five minutes when her maid entered and announced that Signorina Noemi was there. Jeanne threw the paper aside, and was out of the room in a flash. Noemi related hurriedly, standing the while—for she was anxious to leave again on account of the lateness of the hour—that while Giovanni and Maria were at the Grand Hôtel,

Professor Mayda, just back from Naples, had come to their house, perfectly furious, and demanding an explanation of Benedetto's disappearance from his house. Then she had told him everything, and Mayda had gone directly to Via della Polveriera. There he had found Maria, di Leynì, the Senator, and the doctor, whose opinion was that Benedetto could be moved. A discussion had arisen between Mayda and the doctor on this point, to which Mayda had finally put an end by saying: "Well, rather than leave him here, I will carry him away again myself!" In an hour's time he was back again with a carriage full of pillows and rugs, and had indeed carried him off. It seemed the journey had been accomplished successfully.

When she had heard the story, Jeanne embraced her friend in silence, clasping her close. And her friend, trembling and full of tears, whispered to her:

"Listen, Jeanne! Will you pray for tomorrow?"

"Yes," Jeanne replied.

She was silent, struggling against a rising tempest of tears. When she had conquered it she went on, in a low tone:

"I do not know how to pray to God. Do you know to whom I pray? To Don Giuseppe Flores."

Noemi buried her face on Jeanne's shoulder, and said in a stifled voice: "How I wish that, afterwards, he might see us working together for his faith."

Jeanne did not answer, and Noemi went away.

Jeanne returned to Carlino to continue the reading, but he received her roughly. He declared he was tired of this sort of life, and that she was to prepare to leave with him to-morrow for Naples, Jeanne replied that this was folly, and that she would not leave. Then Carlino fired up, caught, her wrists, and shook her so that he really hurt her. She must absolutely go! Now that she tried to resist, the moment had come to tell her that he was acquainted with the reasons of her windings and twistings, of her mysteries, her red eyes, her bad reading, and also of her not wishing to leave Rome.

He had been informed of these things by anonymous letters. Woe to her if she did not break with that madman! Woe to her if she sacrificed her convictions to him, if she allowed herself to be won over to superstition, to bigotry, to the religion of the priests! He would never look on her face again. He would disown her as a sister, he who wished to live and die a free-thinker. No, no, she must break, break! They would go to Naples, to Palermo, to Africa if necessary!

“A free-thinker? Certainly. And what about my liberty?” Jeanne said without anger, simply reminding him of a right, but without the intention of taking advantage of it. Carlino thought, on the contrary, that she intended taking advantage of it in the way he feared, and lost his head completely. Jeanne grew faint as she listened to the abuse which this man poured forth with so much bitterness, this man whom she had known to be nervous, but had believed to be good and kind. She spoke no word in reply, but withdrew to her own room, trembling violently. She wrote him a few lines telling him that her dignity would not permit her to remain with him unless he apologised for his insults; that she was going away, and that if he wished to send her a word, he would find her at Casa Selva. She took only a small bag with her, and, leaving the letter on the writing-desk, went out accompanied by her maid.

She could not see any cabs near the hotel, so she started towards the Esedro intending to take the tram there. The west wind was blowing. The evergreen oaks along the avenue were writhing and groaning. It was dark, and hard walking on the uneven soil. The frightened maid exclaimed:

“Gesummaria, Signora! Where are we going?”

Jeanne, her head aflame, her heart and her pulse in a tumult, went on without answering. It seemed to her she was being borne through the darkness towards him, on the tide of an unknown sea.

Towards him, towards him. Towards his God also? The mighty wind confused her, roaring above and around her. Noemi’s words, Carlino’s words were rending her

soul in a violent struggle. Towards his God also? Ah! how could she tell? In the meantime, towards him!

CHAPTER IX. IN THE WHIRLWIND OF GOD

I. At two o'clock on the following day Jeanne, with Maria and Noemi, was waiting at Casa Selva for news from Villa Mayda, her thoughts dwelling, from time to time, on the persistent silence at the Grand Hôtel. Giovanni had gone to Villa Mayda before seven o'clock. He had returned at nine. He had not been able to see Benedetto. Professor Mayda would not allow him or any one else to enter. He knew that the sick man had received the Sacraments, but more as an act of devotion than because he was in immediate danger. However, in the night a trace of fever had reappeared. It was hoped the attack might be conquered or checked. Perhaps, in making this report to Jeanne, Giovanni had slightly coloured it with optimism. Benedetto was in the Professor's own room. Giovanni said it would not be possible to describe how full of exquisite, womanly tenderness were the attentions lavished upon him by this terrible Mayda, who was believed by many to be harsh and proud. Giovanni had gone back again after lunch about mid-day. From Carlino nothing had come, neither a written word, nor a message. Notwithstanding her other great sorrow, Jeanne could not help thinking of him also. What if his grief, his anger, had really made him ill? Her friends reassured her. Either the maid or the footman would have come to tell her. She had little confidence in the intelligence of these servants. What was to be done? Jeanne was about to beg that some one might be sent to inquire, when, at a quarter-past two, hurried steps were heard in the hall, and Giovanni entered, in his great-coat, his hat in his hand. Jeanne glanced at his face, and understood that the moment was come. She rose, as white as death. Silently and immediately Maria and Noemi rose also, Maria watching Jeanne, while Noemi gazed at her brother-in-law, who, confronted by Jeanne's ghostly face, could find no

words. Five or six terrible seconds passed, but not more. Then Maria said, in a hushed voice:

“Are we to go?”

Her husband answered:

“We had better go.”

Nothing more was said.

The three ladies went to put on their cloaks and hats, Jeanne into one room, Maria and Noemi into another. Giovanni followed his wife and Noemi. Well? The fever had greatly increased, and the Professor no longer hoped. Noemi, hearing this, put on her hat quickly, and went to the other room, where Jeanne was dressing. She turned, saw that Noemi was coming to kiss her, and checked her, with a gesture placing her finger on her lips. Noemi understood. It was a time for fortitude; Jeanne would have neither kisses, nor words, nor tears. She did not ask for particulars, asked no questions. They all met presently, and Maria told her husband, in a low tone, to send for two closed cabs, for the sky had become overcast, and one of the thunderstorms of the Roman winter was threatening. No cabs would be necessary, for Giovanni had come in the landau, belonging to Casa Mayda. They entered the landau, which was closed. Then Jeanne noticed that her companions had on dark dresses, while she was wearing a gray dress, too light and too fashionable. She started slightly, and the others looked at her questioningly. She hesitated a moment, but reflected that she had neither the time nor the means to make a change, and answered:

“It is nothing.”

The carriage moved on. No one spoke again.

Upon turning into Via del Pianto the carriage was stopped by an obstruction. It had grown darker still and was thundering. The horses were frightened, and Maria looked anxiously out of the window. Jeanne, seated opposite Giovanni, asked him in

a low tone if he had telegraphed to Don Clemente. Giovanni answered that Don Clemente had been at Villa Mayda ever since half-past ten. The carriage started forward. When they reached Piazza Montanara it began to rain. The horses were trotting rapidly. When at last the coachman brought them down to a walk Maria looked at her husband—Is not this the Aventine? We must be near. This was said with the eyes, not with the lips. Jeanne had never passed that way, but she also felt that they would soon reach their destination. Holding herself very straight, she stared at the wall, which passed before her eyes. She stared at it attentively, as if striving to count the chinks between the stones. The horses broke into a trot. Beyond Sant' Anselmo the road leads downwards. People standing on the right and on the left looked into the carriage. Involuntarily Giovanni Selva murmured:

"Here we are."

Then Jeanne started violently, and covered her face with her hands. Maria, who sat next to her, put her arm round her neck, and, bending close to her, whispered:

"Courage!"

But Jeanne drew back, avoiding her as much as possible, while Noemi shook her head, signing to her sister not to insist. Maria sighed, and the carriage, turning to the left, between two dense lines of people, passed through a gateway. The wheels grated on the gravel and then stopped. A servant came to the door. The Professor desired them to come into the villa. Not until then did Giovanni Selva tell his companions that Benedetto was no longer in the villa, that he had begged to be carried to his little old room in the gardener's house. The carriage moved forward a few yards, and the four friends alighted before a flight of white marble steps, between two groups of palms. It was still raining, but not heavily, and no one thought about it, neither the populace crowding round the gate, nor a group of people who were watching the new arrivals, from the avenue bordered by orange trees, which ran parallel with the inclosing wall down to the gardener's little house.

Some one left the group. It was di Leynì, who mounted the marble steps behind Selva, and, stopping him under the arch of the Pompeian vestibule, spoke to him in a low tone, without so much as a glance at the magnificent scene which was spread out before them between the two groups of palms: the river of begonias, tumbling down the slope of the Aventine, between two banks of musae; the black and stormy sky, striped with white down above the battlements of Porta San Paolo, above the pyramid of Caio Cestio, and above the little grove of cypress which springs from the heart of Shelley.

Selva entered the vestibule, and reappeared a moment later with his wife. They went down the steps with di Leynì, and turned in the direction of the people, who seemed to be expecting them in the avenue of orange-trees. At that moment a volley of angry voices rang out at the gate. The road was full of people. They had been waiting for hours, ever since the rumour spread in the Testaccio quarter that the Saint of Jenne had returned to Villa Mayda, but was ill. So far they had asked only for news. Now they demanded that a deputation be allowed to enter, and to see him. The servants refused to take the message, and an exchange of angry words was the result, which, however, suddenly stopped as the tall, dark figure of Professor Mayda appeared, coming from the orange-grove. The men took off their hats. He ordered the gate to be opened, told the people that all should see Benedetto later, but not now. In the meantime they might come into the garden. “Of course, poor things!”

And the people entered, slowly, respectfully, some gathering around the Professor and asking, with tears in their eyes:

“Is it true, Signor Professore? Is it true he is dying? Tell us!”

And behind them others pressed, anxiously awaiting the answer. The answer was only:

“Alas! What can I say to you?”

But the sad, manly face said more than the words and the crowd moved away

mournfully, along the green slopes, which had taken on a livid hue under the black sky streaked with white and formed a mystic symbol of death, of the dark passage from terrestrial shadows to the upper regions of infinite brightness.

II.

Benedetto loved Professor Mayda. When, at the Senator's house, he heard that the Professor had decided to carry him away to Villa Mayda, he showed great pleasure, He loved this man, who was perhaps, as yet, incapable of faith, but was profoundly convinced that there are enigmas which science cannot solve; who was generous, haughty with the great, but gentle with the humble. He loved the garden also, the trees, the flowers, and the grass, whose friend and servant he had been, as he had been the friend and servant of the Professor. Everything in this garden was full of sweet, innocent souls, in whose company he had adored God in certain moments of spiritual ecstasy, placing his lips on the tiny beings, on a flower, on a leaf, on a stem, in a breath of green coolness. He was happy in the thought of dying amidst them. Sometimes, under one of those pine-trees, its canopy, full of wind and of sound, turned towards the Coelian Hill, he had thought of the last scene in his vision, and had imagined himself stretched there on the grass, in the Benedictine habit, pale and calm, and surrounded by mournful faces, while the pine-tree above him sang the mysterious song of Heaven. Each time he had stifled in his heart this sense of pleasure, which was not unmixed with selfish, human vanity, and not entirely controlled and suppressed in submission to the Divine Will. But he had not been able to tear out its roots. Therefore he stretched out his arms gratefully to the Professor. But immediately he was assailed by scruples. His intelligence and his Christian sentiment were in a state of contradiction. He was aware that he was not liked by the lady who had married the Professor's son, a naval officer, now in the East; he saw that his return to Villa Mayda would be displeasing to her, and a source of discord between her father-in-law and herself. But how could he say so now, without implying a want of justice and of charity in a person whom, from the very

fact that she was his enemy, he was especially bound to love? He entreated the Professor to let him go to Sant' Onofrio. The change was so sudden that it surprised Mayda. He thought a moment, understood, and then said, knitting his brows:

"Do you wish me never to forgive some one for something?"

Benedetto offered no further opposition. Only when that night the moment came to go down to the carriage, and he realised that he could not stand alone, he said to the Professor, smiling, and placing his hand on his friend's arm:

"You know that, if I continue thus, you will have a dead man in your house to-morrow or the day after?"

The Professor replied that he would not lie to him, that this was possible, but not certain.

"You know," Benedetto continued, no longer smiling, "that first you will have—"

"I understand what you mean," the Professor interrupted him. "Come in peace, dear friend. I am not a believer, as you are, but I wish I were; and I will throw my doors open respectfully to all whom you may wish me to see. Meanwhile shall we not take this with us?"

From the wall he took the Crucifix which Benedetto had brought with him, and then lifted the sick man in his powerful arms.

The journey was accomplished without accident. Stretched across the landau, upon a bank of cushions, Benedetto, who seemed to have shrunk in stature, answered the Professor's frequent questions more often with a smile than with his feeble voice. The Professor kept his finger continually on Benedetto's pulse, and from time to time gave him a cordial. At the entrance to the villa, either from emotion or from fatigue, the sick man's poor, fleshless face blanched, and was covered with sweat, and he closed his great, shining eyes. Mayda carried him to his own bed, and thus it happened that when Benedetto regained consciousness he was quite bewildered.

In his state of extreme weakness he did not regain consciousness without passing through shadows of vain imaginings. He thought he was dead, and lying on the ever-dark face of the moon, in the centre of a funnel, formed by the solar rays, which streaked away to the infinite; and at the dark bottom of this funnel he saw the flaming eyes of the stars. Little by little be realised he was on an enormous bed which stood in darkness, but was surrounded by a pale light, so dim that the walls were hardly visible. Great shadows were moving about him. Opposite him was a blue, open space, all strewn with specks of light. His heart beat faster. Were they not, indeed, stars? He was obliged to remind himself of the feeling of the bed, and that he was alive, in order to convince himself that they were stars, but that he was not lying on the moon. Where was he, then? He gave himself up to a sense of sweetness which was coming over him, the sweetness of hardly feeling his body any longer, but of feeling God in his soul, so near, so tender, so warm. He was where God wished him to be.

A hand was laid on his forehead, an electric light dazzled his eyes, and an affectionate, strong voice said:

“Well, how do you feel?”

He recognised Mayda. Then he asked him where he was, why he was not in his little old room? Before the Professor could answer, Benedetto was assailed by a painful doubt. The Crucifix? The dear Crucifix? Had it been left at the Senator’s house? The Crucifix was standing on the table by his side. The Professor showed it to him.

“Do you not remember,” he said, using the affectionate “thou”, “that we brought it with us?”

Benedetto looked at him, pleased at the new word of affection, and stretched out his hand in search of Mayda’s; the Professor took it tenderly between his own.

At the same time he felt humiliated by his own forgetfulness. Was he about to lose his reason? All the previous day he had thought about the words he should speak to

his friends, and to the person who had made her invisible presence so keenly felt. But if he lost his reason? The Professor began to saturate him with quinine. At first Benedetto accepted these painful injections and bitter doses willingly, in his desire to grow a little stronger, and thus to ward off the darkening of his spirit, and also because he wished to suffer. Oh yes! to suffer, to suffer! During the preceding days he had suffered greatly, not from any local pain, not from any acute pain, but his was an inexpressible suffering, which extended from the roots of his hair to the soles of his feet. It had been a beatitude for his soul to be able, in such moments, to associate his own will with the Divine Will, to accept from this Love all the pain which he was destined to suffer, without revealing to him the mysterious reason, a reason hidden in the designs of the Universe, certainly a reason bringing good; bringing good not only to him who suffered, but universal good; a good radiating from his poor body, and without known limits, like the movement of a vibrating atom of the world. Oh! to suffer great things, like Christ, humbly, to continue the redemption, as a sinner may, making amends by his own pain for the ills of others. There on that lonely path leading to the Sacro Speco, In the roaring of the Anio, among the everlasting hills, Don Clemente had spoken thus to him.

And now that mortal suffering was past. When the quinine began to ring in his head, he felt discouraged. These remedies were stupefying him. He called the Professor; a sister answered him. He begged that a priest might be sent for from Bocca della Verità.

The Professor, who had gone to rest for an hour, came to reassure him, and judged it best to tell him what he had before concealed. Don Clemente had telegraphed to Selva that he would reach Rome the next morning at ten o’clock. This was a great joy to Benedetto.

“But will it not be too late?” he said. “Will it not be too late?”

No, it would not be too late. At present he was not in immediate danger. It would be

a question of life and death if the fever should return, but even in the worst event many hours would elapse. Mayda feared he had spoken too plainly, and whispered to him.

“But you will recover.”

He left the room. Benedetto, thinking of Don Clemente, passed from the quiet of his contentment into a light sleep, into dreams, whither the spirits of evil descended, and conjured up for him a deceitful vision, suggested by the Professor’s last words. He saw himself confronted by a colossal marble wall, crowned with rich balustrades, which shone white in the moonlight. Up there, behind the balustrades, a dense forest swayed in the wind. Six flights of stairs, these also flanked by balustrades, slanted down, across the face of the great wall, three on the left, and three on the right, and terminated upon six landings, jutting out from the wall. The upper balustrades were divided by small pilasters, supporting urns. And now, between the urns, six beautiful maidens appeared; they seemed to be dancing and all came forward at the same time, with the same graceful motion of the head. They were all dressed alike, in pale blue robes, which left their shoulders bare. With the same harmonious movement of their bare arms, bending their bodies forward, they offered him from their elevation, six shining silver goblets. Then, at the same moment, all withdrew from the balustrade, to reappear again simultaneously, on the six flights of stairs, down which they came with uniform swiftness, and reaching the landings they again offered him the six shining goblets, bending their bodies forward gracefully, and gazing at him with a strange gravity. No word fell from their lips, but nevertheless he knew that the six maidens were offering him, in those six silver goblets, an elixir of life, of health, of pleasure.

He felt a distressing, mortal fear of them; still he could not remove his glance from the shining goblets, from the lovely, grave faces bending over them. He strove to close his eyes, and could not; strove to cry out to God, and could not. At last the six

dancing-girls inclined the goblets towards him, and six flowing ribbons of liquor streamed through the air. “Just as I did, at Praglia!” the sleeper thought, confusing persons in his clouded, mind. Then everything disappeared, and he saw Jeanne before him. Holding herself erect, wrapped in her green cloak lined with fur, her face shadowed by the great black hat, she gazed at him as she had done at Praglia, at the moment of their first meeting. But this time the sleeper perceived a resemblance between the gravity of that look and the gravity of the dancing-girls’ faces. In his spirit he read the silent word of the seven souls: Unhappy man, you now recognise your grievous error; you now know that God is not! The gravity of the glances was only the sadness of pity. The goblets of life, of health, of pleasure, were offered him discreetly, and without joy, as to one in mourning, who has lost all he held dearest; offered as the only poor comfort left him. Thus Jeanne offered her love. And the sleeper was filled with what seemed to him fresh evidence that God is not! It was, indeed, a real physical sensation, a chill creeping over all his limbs, moving slowly to the heart. He began to tremble violently, and awoke. Mayda was bending over him, the thermometer in his hand. Benedetto murmured, with straining eyes: “Father!—Father!—Father!” The sister suggested, “Our Father who art in Heaven,” and would have gone on in her unfortunately colourless voice, had not the Professor checked her sharply. He applied the thermometer to Benedetto, who hardly noticed what was being done. He was absorbed in the effort to detach from his innermost self the images of those tempting figures, and of their horrible words; in the effort to cast himself, soul and conscience, upon the Father’s breast, to cling to Him with his whole being, to lose himself in the Father. Slowly the images began to give way, their assaults becoming each time more brief, less violent. His face was so transfigured in this mystic tension of the soul, that Mayda, watching him, was as one turned to stone, and forgot to look at his watch, until the features, which had been contracted in that anxious prayer, finally began to relax into a peaceful composure. Then he remembered, and removed the thermometer. The sister, standing behind

him, held up the electric lamp, trying to see also. He could not at first distinguish the points, and during those few seconds of fixed attention neither of them noticed that the invalid had turned upon his side, and was looking at the Professor. At last Mayda gave the instrument a shake. How many points had it marked? The sister did not dare to inquire, and the Professor's face was impenetrable. Without his noticing the motion, the sick man stretched out his hand and touched him gently on the arm, Mayda turned towards him, and read in his smiling eyes the question, "Well?" He did not speak, but answered with that undulating movement of open hands which meant neither good, nor bad. Then he sat down beside the bed, still silent, impenetrable, looking at Benedetto, who had sunk upon his back once more, and no longer looked at him, but was gazing at the specks of light in the immense expanse of blue.

"Professor," he said, "what time is it?"

"Three o'clock."

"At five you must send for the priest from Bocca della Verità."

"Very well."

"Will it be too late?"

This last question the Professor answered with a loud and ringing "No." After a moment of silence he added, in a lower tone, another "no" as if in answer to his own thoughts. The thermometer had gone up to thirty-seven point five; more than one degree since the evening before. Should the fever increase, should there be danger of delirium, he would send at once, to Bocca della Verità, even before five o'clock. It did not seem probable the fever would increase rapidly, although that thirty-seven point five had a black look.

He asked the invalid if the electric light troubled him. Benedetto replied that materially it did not trouble him, but that spiritually it did, because it prevented his seeing the sky, the starry night. "Illuminatio mea," said he, softly.

The Professor did not understand, and made him repeat the words. Then he asked him what his light was, and the feeble voice murmured,

“Nox.”

Mayda was not familiar with the Psalms, with the profound word of that ancient Hebrew, to whom our little sun seemed dark, the sun which conceals the higher world. He understood, without understanding. He remained reverently silent.

Benedetto sought the stars with his eyes. His own conscience was passing in those stars, which gazed upon him so austerely, knowing he was about to review—before the threatening hour of death—the whole moral history of his life, to tell it in words which would be a first judgment, pronounced in the name of the God of Justice, impelled by the God of Love; in words that would not be lost, because no movement is lost; which would appear—who knows how, who knows where, who knows when?—to the glory of Christ, as the supreme testimony of a spirit to moral Truth, directed against itself. Thus the silent stars spoke to him, animated by his own thoughts. And his life was pictured in his mind from beginning to end, the external, salient outline less strongly marked than the inner moral substance. He saw all the first part of it dominated by a religious conception in which egotism prevailed, and so ordered as to make the love of God and the love of man converge into an individual well-being, the aim being personal perfection, and reward. He was grieved that he had thus obeyed in words only the law which places the love of God before the love of self; and it was a gentle grief, not because it was easy to find excuses for this error, to impute it to teachers, but because it was sweet to feel his own minuteness in the wave of grace which enveloped him. And he felt his own minuteness in that past, spoiled by imperfect beliefs, influenced by the uprising of the senses, in the central depression of his life, which had been one vast tissue of sensuality, of weakness, of contradictions, of lies. He felt his own minuteness in his life after his conversion, the impulse and work of an inner Will, which had prevailed

against his own will, and during this last period it seemed to him, he himself had weighted the scales against the good impulse. He longed to drop off this "self" which held him back like a heavy garment. He saw that the affection for the Vision was part of this burdensome "self." He aspired to Divine Truth in all its mystery, whatever it might be, and gave himself to Divine Truth with such violence of desire that the spasm of it nearly rent him asunder. And the stars shone forth upon him such a lively sense of the immeasurable vastness of Divine Truth as compared with his own and his friends' religious conceptions, and at the same time such a firm faith that he was travelling towards that vastness, that he suddenly raised his head from the pillow exclaiming:

"Ah!"

The sister was dozing, not so the Professor.

"What is it?" said he. "Do you see something?"

Benedetto did not reply immediately. The Professor raised the lamp, and bent over him. Then Benedetto turned his face and looked at Mayda with an expression of intense desire, and after gazing at him a long time, sighed:

"Ah, Professor! Indeed you must come where I am going!"

"But do you know where you are going?" Mayda said.

"I know," Benedetto replied, "that I am parting with all that is corruptible, all that is burdensome."

He then inquired if some one had gone to the parish church. Not yet: only a quarter of an hour had passed. He apologised. It had seemed a century to him. He entreated the Professor to retire, to take some rest, and once more he fell to watching the celestial lights. Then he closed his eyes, longing for Jesus, for two human arms which should lift him up, should encircle him; longed for a human breast, incarnate of the Divine, in which to hide his head, as he entered the vast mystery.

At six o'clock he received the Sacraments. The thermometer had risen a few points. At nine Benedetto asked for Giovanni Selva, He learned that he had been there, and had gone away again, but that di Leynì was waiting. He insisted upon seeing him, notwithstanding the Professor's opposition. He told him he wished to greet at least some of his friends of the Catacombs. Di Leynì knew of this desire, for Selva had mentioned it to him. He could announce to Benedetto that they were to meet at Villa Mayda about one o'clock. The nursing sister who had come shortly before to relieve her companion indiscreetly remarked that many of the common people were asking for news. Benedetto said nothing at the moment, but when di Leynì was gone he sent for the Professor. The Professor was not in, he had been obliged to go to the University. The sister's words had made Benedetto form a definite resolution, which he had been thinking about ever since the first light of day had shown him the walls of the room, decorated with mythological subjects, in the style of the House of Livia. He longed with an intense longing for his little old room. There he would see his friends, the common people, who wished to visit him, and that other person, if she came. He begged to speak with the gardener, with the servants, and he told them of his wish. When they refused to move him, he besought them for the love of God to do so, and he so worked upon their feelings that they finally consented, at the risk of being dismissed from service. "These are indeed the ideas of a Saint!" thought the sister. Benedetto made the journey in the arms of the gardener and of one of the men-servants; he was wrapped in blankets, and held the Crucifix in his hands. His delight at once more finding himself in his poor little room was so great that all thought he was improving. But still the thermometer rose.

After one o'clock the thermometer registered thirty-nine. Don Clemente had arrived at half-past ten.

III.

The Selvas and di Leyni joined the group of people who were waiting for them in

the avenue of orange-trees. They were all laymen save one, a young priest from the Abruzzo. He was short, with skin of an olive hue, and his black eyes were deep, and fiery. The student Elia Viterbo was also there. He was a Christian now, and had been baptized by the young priest. There was the fair-haired Lombard youth, the master's favourite. There was a very handsome young workman, with the face of an apostle, who was also from the Abruzzo, and was a friend of the priest's. There was that same Andrea Minucci, who had been at the religious meeting at Subiaco. There were, also, a naval officer, who had a post in the Naval Department, a painter, and some others. All of them were men who would have sacrificed any earthly affection to their affection for Benedetto. Not one of them had believed any of the slanderous reports which had been spread concerning him. They had defended him with fierce indignation, against their more diffident companions. It may be said of them, one day, that they were put to the proof by Providence, and then appointed to carry on the master's work, Di Leynì belonged to their ranks. In Giovanni Selva they admired and respected the man admired and respected by their master, but they stood in awe of him. They had now been waiting some time in the avenue of orange-trees, expecting him, for they were ready to go to the master's room, as soon as Signor Giovanni should arrive. The eyes of many of them were full of tears. As the Selvas approached, all took off their hats in silence. Giovanni started towards the small house, followed by the whole group. His wife came last. One of the young men motioned to her to pass on in front, but she would not, and he did not insist. It was neither the place nor the hour for ceremony. Maria felt that these men were called before her, to continue Benedetto's work, after his death. They walked in silence, and with bare heads, although it was raining; Selva as the others. Mayda received them on the threshold. On his return from the University he had heard the news of Benedetto's removal to the small house, with an outburst of wrath. He would not admit it to the sister, to the gardener, or to the servants, but when he looked at the list of temperatures, taken every half-hour, he was bound to admit, in his heart that

this act of folly had had no sensible effect upon the course of the fever. Upon being asked if they should stay in the room only a short time, and endeavour to have the sick man speak as little as possible, he answered:

“Do whatever he wishes. It is the feast of a condemned man!”

He went up the wooden stairs before them.

“Your friends,” he said, entering the room. He allowed them all to come in, and then closed the door. His hands clasped behind him, he leaned against the doorpost, watching Benedetto, and the tall, dark figure never moved from that spot during all the time that Benedetto kept his followers with him.

Benedetto’s face was flushed, his eyes glittered, and his breathing was quick. He greeted his friends with a “Thank you!” which quivered with happy and intense excitement, and which made some one sob. Then he lifted his hand as if begging them to be quiet. After receiving the Viaticum, his one prayer had been to be able to speak with his favourite disciples, and that God would give him words of truth, with the strength to pronounce them. Now he felt that the Spirit filled his breast.

“Come near to me,” he said.

The fair-haired youth, his face stained with silent tears, passed before the others, and knelt beside the bed. The master placed his hand on the youth’s head, and continued:

“Remain united.”

The painful unspoken words wrung their hearts still more cruelly, but each one felt that Benedetto was about to give forth a last flicker of instruction, of counsel, and they all checked their sobs. Benedetto’s voice sounded; amidst the deepest silence:

“Pray without ceasing, and teach others to pray without ceasing. This is the fundamental principle. When a man really loves a human being, or an idea of his own mind, his secret thoughts are ever clinging to his love, while he is attending to the many various occupations of his life, be it the life of a servant, or the life of a

king; and this does not prevent his attending carefully to his work, for he has no need to speak many words to his love. Men who are of the world may carry thus in their hearts some human being, some ideal of truth, or of beauty. Do you always carry in your breasts the Father whom you have not seen, but whom you have felt as a Spirit of love, breathing within you; a Spirit which filled you with the sweetest desire to live for Him. If you will do this your labours will be all alive with the spirit of Truth."

He rested a moment, and looked with a smile, at Don Clemente, seated beside the bed.

"Your words, spoken at dear Santa Scolastica," he said, and continued: "Be pure in your lives, for otherwise you will dishonour Christ before the world. Be pure in your thoughts, for otherwise you will dishonour Christ before the spirits of good, and the spirits of evil, which strive together in the souls of all living beings."

When he had spoken these words he encircled the head of the fair-haired youth with his arm, almost as if to defend him from evil, and prayed, in his soul, for him who was, perhaps, his greatest hope. Then he resumed:

"Be holy. Seek neither riches nor honours. Put your superfluous possessions—measured by the inner voice of the Spirit—into a common fund for your works of truth and of charity. Give friendly help to all the human suffering you may encounter; be meek with those who offend you, who deride you, and they will be many, even within the Church herself; be dauntless in the presence of evil; lend yourselves to the necessities of one another, for if you do not live thus you cannot serve the Spirit of Truth. Live thus, that the world may recognise the Truth by your fruits, that your brothers may recognise by your fruits that you belong to Christ."

Don Clemente, distressed by his laboured breathing, bent over him, and, in a low voice, begged him to rest. Benedetto took his hand, and pressed it, and was silent for a few seconds. Then raising his great shining eyes to Don Clemente's face, he said,

“Hora ruit.”

And he resumed:

“Let each one perform his religious duties as the Church prescribes, according to strict justice and with perfect obedience. Do not give your union a name, or speak collectively, or draw up rules, beyond those I have dictated! Love one another, love is enough. Communicate with one another. Many are doing the same work in the Church for which you are preparing yourselves, through the moral preparations I have prescribed for you; I mean the work of purifying the faith, and imbuing life with the purified faith. Honour them and learn from them, but do not allow them to become members of your union unless they come to you of their own free will, and pour their superfluity into the common fund. This shall be the sign that they are sent unto you by God.”

Here Benedetto paused, and gently begged Giovanni Selva to come nearer.

“I wish to see you,” he said. “What I have said and, above all, what I am going to say, was born of you.”

He stretched out his hand, and taking Don Clemente’s hand, he added:

“The Father knows it. Each should feel God’s presence within himself, but each should feel it also in the other, and I feel it so strongly in you. Yes,” he continued, turning to Don Clemente, as if appealing to his authority, “this is the true foundation of human fraternity, and therefore those who love their fellow men and believe they are cold toward God are nearer the Kingdom than many who imagine they love God, but who do not love their fellow-men.”

The young priest who was standing, almost timidly, behind Selva, exclaimed, “Oh! yes, yes!” Selva bowed his head with a sigh. The tall, dark figure leaning against the doorpost did not move, but the gaze fixed on Benedetto became inexpressibly intense, tender and sad.

Don Clemente again bent over the invalid, entreating him to pause a moment, and

the sister also begged him to rest. Neither Mayda nor any of the disciples spoke. Benedetto drank a little water, thanked the sister, and began to speak once more:

“Purify the faith for grown men, who cannot thrive on the food of infants. This part of your work is for those who are outside the Church, whether they belong to her by name or not—for those with whom you will be constantly mingling. Work to glorify the idea of God, worshipping above all things, and teaching that there is no truth which is opposed to God or to His laws. But be equally cautious that the infants do not approach their lips to the food for grown men. Be not offended by an impure faith, an imperfect faith, when the life is pure and the conscience upright; for in comparison with the infinite depths of God, there is little difference between your faith and the faith of a simple, humble woman, and if the woman’s conscience be upright, and her life pure, you will not pass before her in the Kingdom of Heaven. Never publish writings concerning difficult religious questions, for sale, but rather distribute them with prudence, and never put your name to them.

“Labour that the purified faith may penetrate into life. This labour is for those who are in the Church,—and for those who wish to be in the Church,—and their name is legion, they are infinite in number; for those who really believe in the dogmas, and would gladly believe in more dogmas; I who really believe in the miracles, and are glad to believe in more miracles, but who do not really believe in the Beatitudes, who say to Christ, ‘Lord, Lord!’ but who think it would be too hard to do all. His will, and who have not even zeal enough to search for Him in the Holy Book; who do not know that religion is, above all things, action and life. Teach such as these who pray abundantly, often idolatrously, to practise, besides the prayers which are prescribed, the mystic prayer as well, in which is the purest faith, the most perfect hope, the most perfect charity, which in itself purifies the soul and purifies life. Do I tell you to take, publicly, the place of the pastors? No; let each one work in his own family, each one among his own friends, and those who can, with the pen. Thus you will till the soil from which the pastors arise. My sons, I do not promise you that you

will renew the world. You will labour in the night-time, without visible gain, like Peter and his companions on the Sea of Galilee. But, at last, Christ will come, and then your gain shall be great."

He was silent, praying for his disciples, sighing in the prescience of much suffering to come to them from many enemies of many kinds. Then he pronounced the last words:

"Later, give me your prayers; now, your kiss."

The disciples, with one voice, begged him to bless them. He sought to avoid this, saying he did not feel himself worthy.

"I am only the poor blind man, whose eyes Christ has opened with clay."

Don Clemente did not appear to have heard. He knelt down saying, "Bless me, also!"

With humble obedience Benedetto laid his hand on Don Clemente's head, said the words of the ritual benediction, and kissed him. He did the same with all the others, one by one. Each one seemed to feel the breath of the Spirit flowing into him from that hand. When the priest's turn came, he murmured:

"Master, and to us?"

The dying man composed himself and replied: "Be poor, live in poverty. Be perfect. Take no pleasure in titles nor in proud vestments, neither in personal authority nor in collective authority. Love those who hate you; avoid factions; make peace in God's name; accept no civil office; do not tyrannise over souls, nor seek to control them too much; do not train priests artificially; pray that you may be many, but do not fear to be few; do not think you need much human knowledge,—you need only much respect for reason and much faith in the universal and inseparable Truth."

The last to come forward was Maria Selva. She knelt at a short distance from the bed. The sick man smiled at her, and motioned to her to rise.

“I have already blessed you in your husband,” said he, “I cannot distinguish you. You are a part of his soul. You are his courage. Let this courage increase in the painful hours which await him. And, together, may you be the poetry of Christian love, until the end. Stay here a little while, both of you.”

As the disciples passed out, the room grew darker. The rumbling of thunder was heard, and the sister went to close the window. First, however, she glanced into the garden, and exclaimed, “Poor things!” Benedetto heard, and wished to know what she meant. He was told that the garden was full of people who had come to see him, and that a heavy shower was threatening. He begged the Selvas to wait, and the Professor to allow the people to enter.

A heavy trampling sounded, on the narrow wooden stairs. The door was thrown open, and several persons entered on tiptoe. In a moment the room was full. A crowd of bare heads peered in at the door. No one spoke; all were gazing at Benedetto, and they were reverent and respectful. Benedetto greeted them with both hands, with widespread arms.

“I thank you,” he said. “Pray, as I have surely taught some of you to do. And may God be with you always!”

A big, stout man answered, his face crimson:

“We will pray, but you are not going to die. Don’t believe that. But please give us your blessing.”

“Yes, give us your blessing, give us your blessing!” was repeated by many voices.

Meanwhile, from the narrow stairway the impatient voices could be heard of those who wished to come up, and could not. Benedetto said something in an undertone to Don Clemente. Don Clemente ordered those present to file past the bed and then leave the room, that the others might do the same.

One by one they all passed. They were poor people from the Testaccio—workmen, clerks from shops, women who sold fruit, pedlars and beggars. From time to time

Benedetto said a word of dismissal, in a tired voice: “Addio.”—“Farewell!”—“We shall meet in Paradise.”—Some in passing silently bent the knee, others touched the bed and then made the sign of the cross. Some begged him to pray for them or for their dear ones, while others called down blessings upon him. One asked to be forgiven because he had believed the slanderers, and at that a series of “Forgive me also, me also!” sounded. The hunchback from Via della Marmorata was there, and began telling him amidst her tears that the old priest had confessed; and would have liked to tell him all her gratitude, had not those behind her pushed her away, and taken her from the sight of him for ever. Many passed thus before him for the last time, and, weeping, went from him, forever,—many he had comforted, in body and in mind. He recognised some, and greeted them with a gesture. On they passed, often turning their tearful faces back towards him. The stream that passed down brushed against the stream that passed up the narrow stairs, and gave them their impressions of the sorrowful room in advance:—“Ah! what a face.”—“Ah! what a voice!”—“Good God! he is dying!”—“He is one of God’s angels!”—“You will see!”—“He has Paradise in his eyes!” And not a few were murmuring curses against the wretches who had slandered him; not a few spoke, with a shudder, of poison, or murder. Dio!—He had been taken away by the police, and had returned in this state. A mournful, continuous rumbling of thunder, and the loud steady splash of the rain, drowned both the sorrowful and the angry whisperings. When the stream of people had ceased to flow out, Mayda had the window opened, for the air had become vitiated. Benedetto asked them to raise his head a little. He wanted to see the great pine-tree, with its top bending towards the Coelian Hill. The dark green crown of the pine cleft the stormy sky. He gazed at it a long time. When his head was resting on the pillow once more, he motioned to Dom Clemente to bend down to him, and whispered almost into his ear:

“Do you know, when they brought me here from the villa I longed to be laid under the pine-tree, which we see from the window, so that I might die there. But I thought

at once that this was something too strongly desired, and that it was not good. And besides," he added, smiling, "after all the habit would have been missing."

A slight movement of Don Clemente's lips revealed to him that he had brought the habit with him from Subiaco. Benedetto experienced a great wave of intense inward emotion. He clasped his hands, and remained silent as long as the inward struggle was going on, the struggle between the desire that the vision might be fulfilled, and the consciousness that its fulfilment could not come about naturally. He concentrated his mind in an act of abnegation to the Divine Will.

"The Lord wishes me to die here," he said. "But still he permits me, at least, to have the habit on my bed, before I die." Don Clemente bent over him, and kissed his forehead.

Meanwhile the Selvas were waiting a little way off. Benedetto called them to him, and told them that he would receive Signora Dessalle in half an hour, but he begged her not to come alone. She might come with them. Mayda went out with the Selvas. The sister was dozing. Then Benedetto asked Don Clemente to go to the Pontiff, afterwards, and to tell him that the end of the vision had not been fulfilled, that thus all that had seemed miraculous in his life had vanished and that before his death he had felt the sweetness of the Pope's blessing.

"And tell him," he added, "that I hope to speak in his heart again."

His breathing was less laboured, but his voice was growing weaker, and his strength was going with the fever. Don Clemente took his wrist and held it for some time. Then he rose.

"Are you going for the habit?" Benedetto murmured, with a sweet smile. The Padre's handsome face flushed. He quickly conquered the human sentiment which prompted him to prevaricate, and replied:

"Yes, caro, I think the hour is come."

"What time is it?"

“Half-past five.”

“Do you think it will be at seven? At eight?”

“No, not so soon, but I want you to have this consolation at once.” In a small sitting-room at the villa, Giovanni Selva, after consulting his watch, said to his wife, “Go, now.”

It had been arranged that Maria and Noemi should accompany Jeanne to see Benedetto. Noemi stretched out her hands to her brother-in-law.

“Giovanni,” she said, trembling, “I have some news to give him concerning my soul. Do not be offended if I tell him first.”

Jeanne guessed the nature of the news Noemi had for the dying man: her conversion to Catholicism, in the near future. All the strength she had gathered in herself for the supreme moment now forsook her. She embraced Noemi, and burst into tears. The Selvas strove to encourage her, mistaking the cause of her tears. Between her sobs she entreated them to go, to go; she herself could not possibly go. Only Noemi understood. Jeanne would not come because she had guessed, because she could not do the same. She besought her, she entreated her, and whispered to her, holding her in an embrace: “Why will you not yield, at this moment?”

Jeanne, still sobbing, answered,

“Ah! you understand me!” And because Noemi protested that now she would not go, it was Jeanne’s turn to entreat her to do so, to go at once; not to delay giving him this consolation. She, herself, could not go, could not, could not! It was impossible to move her. A servant came to call Selva. Maria and Noemi went out. When she was alone Jeanne was tempted, for a moment, to hasten after them, to yield, to go also, and say the joyful word to him. She fell upon her knees, and stretched out her arms, almost as if he were standing before her, and sobbed: “Dear one, dear one! How could I deceive you?” She had often struggled against her own unbelief, and always in vain. A surrender to faith through sudden impulse would not be lasting,

that she knew.

“Why will you not have me alone?” she groaned again, still on her knees. “Why will you not have me alone? That pious consciences may not be scandalised? That my despair may not trouble you? Why will you not have me alone? How can I say, before them, what is within me? You who are gentle as your Lord Jesus, why will you not have me alone? Oh!”

She started to her feet, convinced that if Piero heard her, he would answer, “Yes, come!” She stood a moment as if turned to stone, her hands pressed to her forehead; then she moved slowly, like one walking in her sleep, left the room, crossed the hall and went down into the garden.

It was raining so hard, the sky, still rent from time to time by lightning, was so dark, that although it was not yet seven o’clock, on that February evening it seemed almost like night. Just as she was, with bare head, Jeanne went out into the cold and streaming rain. Without hastening her steps, she took, not the avenue of orange-trees on the right, but the path which, on the left, leads downwards, between two rows of great agaves, to a little grove of laurels, cypresses and olives, to which roses cling. She passed the great pine that looks towards the Crelian and winding down, on the right by a long curve of paths, she reached the spring which an ancient sarcophagus receives on the steep slope, within a belt of myrtles, a few steps below the gardener’s little house. Here she stopped. A window in the little house was lit up; surely that was Piero’s window. A shadow flitted across it—perhaps that was Noemi! Jeanne sat down on the marble rim of the basin. Would it be possible to drown in that? Would she try to die, if it were not for Carlino? Vain speculations! She did not linger over them. She waited, and waited in the cold rain, her eyes and her soul fixed on the lighted window. Other shadows passed. Were they going now? Yes, perhaps Maria and Noemi were going, but they would not leave Piero alone. Mayda would be there; the Benedictine and the sister would be there. Well, at least,

she would try. A hurried footstep in the avenue of orange-trees; some one was going towards the gardener's house. Jeanne, who had risen, sat down again. Now the unknown person entered. More shadows at the window. Two people came out, in animated conversation—the voices of the Professor and of Giovanni Selva. They seemed to be speaking of some one who had come for news. Others came out. The water from the eaves dripped on their umbrellas. It must be Maria and Noemi. Jeanne once more rose, and started forward.

She crossed the threshold of the little house, and saw people in the gardener's kitchen. She asked a girl to go up-stairs and see who was with the sick man. The girl hesitated, demurred at first, but finally went, and came down again immediately. The priest and the sister were in the room. Jeanne asked for a piece of paper, a pencil, and a light. She began to write.

"Padre—I appeal—" She stopped and listened. Someone was coming down the wooden stair. A man's step, therefore it must be the Padre. Then she would speak to him. She threw aside the pencil, and went to meet him on the stairs. It was dark, and Don Clemente mistook her for Maria Selva.

"He is quiet," the Benedictine said, before she could speak. "He seems to be asleep. What your sister told him did him so much good! The Professor thinks he will live through the night. Send for the other lady. He has asked for her. I thought you had already gone for her."

Jeanne was dumb. She stepped aside. With an "Excuse me" he passed her without looking at her, and entered the kitchen, to ask for a little bread and some water, for he had been fasting since the night before. Jeanne was trembling like a leaf. He had asked for her! The words and the opportunity thus offered made her dizzy. Noiselessly she mounted the stairs. Noiselessly she pushed the door open. The sister saw her, and started to rise. She signed to her, her finger on her lips, not to move, and noiselessly approached the bed. She saw a long, black something spread upon it,

over the quilt, and stopped, horrified, not understanding. A faint groan. The man on the bed raised his right hand with a vague gesture, as if in search of something. The sister rose, but Jeanne, moving more swiftly, rushed to the pillow, and bent over Piero, who had begun to groan again and move his hand.

Jeanne questioned him anxiously, but he did not answer. He only groaned and looked at something beside the bed. Jeanne offered him a glass of water, but he shook his head. She was in despair because she could not understand. Ah! the Crucifix! the Crucifix! The sister lifted the light from the ground; Jeanne held out the Crucifix to Piero, who, pressing his lips to it, gazed at her, gazed at her with those great glassy eyes, from which death looked forth. The sister gave a cry and ran to call the Padre. Piero gazed and gazed at Jeanne. With a great effort, he clasped the Crucifix in both hands, and raised it towards her. His lips moved, moved again, but no sound came from them. Jeanne took Piero's hands between her own, and pressed a passionate kiss upon the Crucifix. Then he closed his eyes. A smile broke across his face.

His head drooped a little towards his right shoulder. He moved no more.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SAINT ***

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