Under the Shadow of Etna

by Giovanni Verga

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Transcriber's Note:

Inconsistent hyphenation and spelling in the original document have been preserved. Obvious typographical errors have been corrected.

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UNDER THE SHADOW OF ETNA

SICILIAN STORIES FROM THE ITALIAN OF

GIOVANNI VERGA

BY

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE

ILLUSTRATED

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INTRODUCTION.

Giovanni Verga was born at Catania, in Sicily, in 1840. His youth was spent in Florence and Milan. He afterwards lived in Catania again, where he had an opportunity of studying those types of the Sicilian peasantry which he introduces so effectively, and with such dramatic suggestion, into many of his stories and sketches. After experiencing grievous family losses he returned to Milan, where he now resides.

In "L'Amante di Gramigna" Verga gives, in the form of a letter to his friend, the novelist, S. Farina, a sort of brief exposition of his literary Creed. Much of the drama is left to the imagination of the reader, who sees through the lines the action hinted at in a word or a phrase. Thus, in the story just mentioned, no definite time-limit is assigned. Months elapse, but only a passing expression gives the clue to it. It is amazing how definite is the idea left in the mind. It gives all the vividness of reality.

"Cavalleria Rusticana," or "Rustic Chivalry," has been known all over the world by its operatic setting by Mascagni. "La Lupa," which is scarcely less strong and vital, has been chosen by another Italian composer, Puccini, as the subject for a two-act opera. These two, as well as "L'amante di Gramigna" and "Jeli il Pastore," illustrate the deeper passions of the Sicilian peasantry. Verga's sardonic humor is shown in "Gli Orfani." How the sordid poverty of the people stands out in the comparison between the sorrow over the dying ass, and the utterly materialistic grief at the loss of the painstaking second wife!

"La Storia dell' Asino di San Giuseppe," well illustrates the average treatment of the long-suffering, long-eared mules and asses which make so picturesque a part of the scenery of Italian and Spanish countries. It is a document for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and well deserves to be circulated together with "Black Beauty." What pathos in the sudden transfer of the poor little beast from

comparative comfort, at least from the "dolce far niente" of its foalhood, to the grim realities of life, and its steady and fatal decline through all the gamut of wretchedness and degradation, to die at last under the weight of its burdens! And what side glances on the condition of those unfortunate Sicilians who live in what ought to be the very garden and Paradise of the world, and yet are so oppressed by unregulated Nature and too well regulated taxes!

It is no land of the imagination into which we are brought by Verga; there is no fascinating glamour of the virtuous triumphing after many vicissitudes, and seeing at last the wicked adequately punished. Here it is grim reality. The poor and weak go relentlessly to the wall; innocence and humble ignorance are crushed by experienced vice, the butterfly is singed by the flame; there is little joy, little peace. The fleckless sky shines down brilliantly on wreck of home and fortune; the son must go to the army, and the daughter to her shame; the father's gray hairs must be crowned with dishonor, and despair must abide in the mother's breast. But yet the stories are not wholly pessimistic, nor do they give an utterly hopeless idea of the Sicilian peasant. He shows his capabilities; the woman her fiery zeal and faithfulness, even when on the wrong track. You see that education and a little real sympathy might make a great people out of Verga's "Turiddus" and "Alfios." There are dozens of others of Verga's short sketches which would repay translation, but the little collection of Sicilian pictures here presented is marked by quite wonderful variety and contrast. They well illustrate the author's genius at its best.

Nathan Haskell Dole.

"Hedgecote," Glen Road, Jamaica Plain, June 19, 1895.

NOTE.

Some of the Italian titles applied to the characters in these stories are retained. They are untranslatable; to omit them takes away from the Sicilian flavor, which is their great charm. Thus the words compare (con and padre) and comare (con and madre),

literally godfather and godmother, are used in almost the same way as "uncle" and "aunt" in our country districts, only they are applied to young as well as old; gnà is a contraction for signora, corresponding somewhat to our mis' for "Mrs." Babbo is like our "dad" or "daddie." Massaro is a farmer; compagni d'armi are district policemen, not quite the same as gens d'armes; Bersegliere is the member of a special division of the Italian army.

HOW PEPPA LOVED GRAMIGNA.

UNDER THE SHADOW OF ETNA.

HOW PEPPA LOVED GRAMIGNA.

Dear Farina, this is not a story, but the outline of a story.

It will at least have the merit of being short, and of having fact for its foundation; it is a human document, as the phrase goes nowadays:—interesting perhaps for you and for all those who study the mighty book of the heart. I will tell it just as I found it among the country paths, and in almost the same simple and picturesque words that characterize the tales of the people; and really you will prefer to find yourself facing the bare and unadulterated fact rather than being obliged to read between the lines of the book through the author's spectacles.

The simple truth of human life will always make us thoughtful; will always have the effectiveness of reality, of genuine tears, of the fevers and sensations that have inflicted the flesh. The mysterious processes whereby conflicting passions mingle, develop and mature, will long constitute the chief fascination in the study of that psychological phenomenon called the plot of a story, and which modern analysis tries to follow with scientific care, through the hidden paths of oftentimes apparently contradictory complications.

Of the one that I am going to tell you to-day I shall only narrate the starting point and the ending, and that will suffice for you, as, perchance, some day it will suffice

for all.

We replace the artistic method to which we owe so many glorious masterpieces by a different method, more painstaking and more recondite; we willingly sacrifice the effect of the catastrophe, of the psychological result as it was seen through an almost divine intuition by the great artists of the past, and employ instead a logical development, inexorably necessary, less unexpected, less dramatic, but not less fatalistic; we are more modest, if not more humble; but the conquests that we make with our psychological verities will not be any less useful to the art of the future. Supposing such perfection in the study of the passions should be ever attained that it would be useless to go further in the study of the interior man, will the science of the human heart, the fruit of the new art, so far and so universally develop all the resources of the imagination that in the future the only romances written will be "Various Facts?"

I have a firm belief that the triumph of the Novel, the completest and most human of all the works of art, will increase until the affinity and cohesion of all its parts will be so perfect, that the process of its creation will remain a mystery like the development of human passions; I have a firm belief that the harmony of its forms will be so absolute, the sincerity of its reality so evident, its method and justification so deeply rooted, that the artist's hand will remain absolutely invisible.

Then the romance will seem to portray a real event, and the work of art will apparently have come about by itself, spontaneously springing into being and maturing like a natural fact, without any point of contact with its author. It will not have preserved in its living form any stamp of the mind in which it originated, any shade of the eye that beheld it, any trace of the lips that murmured the first words thereof as the creative fiat; it will exist by its own reason, by the mere fact that it is as it should be and must be, palpitating with life and as immutable as a statue of bronze, the author of which has had the divine courage of eclipsing himself and

disappearing in his immortal work.

A few years ago, down by the Simeto, they were giving chase to a brigand, a certain Gramigna,[1] if I am not mistaken, a name as cursed as the weed that bears it. The man had left behind him, from one end of the province to the other, the terror of his evil reputation. Carabineers, compagni d'armi, and cavalry-men had been on his track for two months, without ever succeeding in putting their claws on him; he was alone, but was equal to ten, and the evil plant threatened to take firm root.

Moreover the harvest-time was approaching, the crops already covered the fields, the ears bent over and were calling to the reapers, who indeed had their reaping-hooks in their hands, and yet not a single proprietor dared show his nose over the hedge of his estate, for fear of meeting Gramigna, who might be stretched out among the furrows with his carbine between his legs, ready to blow off the head of the first person who should venture to meddle with his affairs.

Thus the complaints were general. Then the prefect summoned all those gentlemen of the district—carabineers and companies of armed men and told them two words of the kind that makes men prick up their ears. The next day an earthquake in every nook and corner:—patrols, squadrons, scouts for every ditch and behind every wall; they hunted him by day, by night, on foot, on horseback, by telegraph, as if he had been a wild beast! Gramigna eluded them every time, and replied with shots if they came too close on his track.

In the fields, in the villages, among the factories, under the signs of country taverns, wherever people met, Gramigna was the only topic of conversation,—that wild chase, that desperate flight. The carabineers' horses returned dead-tired; the soldiers threw themselves down in utter weariness on the ground when they got back to the stables; the patrols slept wherever chance offered; Gramigna alone was never tired, never slept, kept always on the wing, climbed down precipices, slipped through the harvest-fields, crept on all fours among the prickly pear-trees,[2] made his way out

of danger like a wolf by means of the hidden channels of the torrents.

The chief argument of every discourse at the cross roads, before the village entrances, was the devouring thirst from which the fugitive must suffer in the immense, barren plain, under the June sun. The lazy loungers opened wide their eyes.

Peppa, one of the prettiest girls of Licodia, was expecting at that time soon to marry compare Finu, called "Candela di sego" (the tallow-candle), who had landed property and a bay mule, and was a tall young man, handsome as the sun, who carried the standard of Santa Margherita without bending his back, as though he were a pillar.

Peppa's mother shed tears of delight over the good fortune that had befallen her daughter, and spent her time in looking over and over the bride's effects in the trunk, all white linen and of the nicest quality, like a queen's, and earrings that would hang down to the shoulders and gold rings for all the ten fingers of both hands; more money than Santa Margherita could have ever had—and so they were to have been married on Santa Margherita's day, which would fall in June, after the hay had been harvested.

"Candela di Sego," on his way back from the field, used every evening to leave his mule at Peppa's front door and go in to tell how the crops promised to be a veritable enchantment, unless Gramigna set them on fire, and the lattice over against the bed would not be large enough to hold all the grain, and that it seemed to him a thousand years off before he should carry home his bride on the crupper of his bay mule.

But Peppa one fine day said to him,—

"Let your mule have a rest, for I do not wish to get married."

The poor "Candela di Sego" was dumbfounded, and the old mother began to tear her hair when she heard that her daughter had refused the best match in the village.

"I am in love with Gramigna," said the girl, "and he is the only one whom I will

marry."

"Ah!" screamed the mamma, and she stormed through the house, with her gray hair streaming so that she looked like a witch—"Ah! that demon has been here to bewitch my daughter!"

"No," replied Peppa, with her eyes flashing like a sword—"no, he has not been here."

"Where did you ever see him?"

"I never saw him. I have only heard him spoken of. But I feel something here, that burns me."

The report spread through the region, though they tried to keep it a secret. The women and girls who had envied Peppa the prosperous farming, the bay mule and the handsome youth who could bear the standard of Santa Margherita without bending his back, went around telling all sorts of unkind stories: how Gramigna had been to visit her one night in the kitchen, and how he had been seen hiding under the bed. The poor mother burnt a lamp for the souls in purgatory and even the curato went to Peppa's house to touch her heart with his stole, so as to drive out that devil of a Gramigna, who had got possession of it.

But she persisted in her statement that she did not know the fellow by sight; but that she had seen him one night in a dream, and the following morning she had got up with her lips dry as if she had herself suffered from all the thirst which they reported him to be enduring.

Then the old woman shut her up in the house, so that she might not hear another word about Gramigna, and she stopped up all the cracks of the door with images of the saints.

Peppa heard all that was said in the street behind the sacred images, and she turned red and white, as if the devil had kindled all his fires in her face.

Finally she heard it said that Gramigna had been located among the prickly pear-trees of Palagonia.

"They have been firing for two hours," they said. "He has killed one carabineer and wounded more than three compagni d'armi. But they sent back such a hailstorm of shots that he must have been hit; there was a pool of blood where he had been."

Then Peppa made the sign of the cross before the old mother's pillow, and made her escape out of the window.

Gramigna was in the prickly pear-trees of Palagonia, and they were not able to find him in that stronghold of rabbits. He was ragged and covered with blood, pale after two days of fasting, burning with fever, and he had his carbine levelled. When he saw her coming, resolute, among the prickly pear bushes, in the dim light of the gloaming, he hesitated a moment whether to shoot or not:—

"What do you want?" he demanded. "What are you coming here for?"

"I am coming to stay with you," said she, looking straight at him. "Are you Gramigna?"

"Yes, I am Gramigna. If you expect to get those twenty oncie[3] of reward, you are mightily mistaken."

"No, I have come to stay with you," she replied.

"Go away!" said he. "You can't stay with me, and I don't want anyone with me. If you are after money, I tell you you have made a mistake. I haven't any, mind you! For two days I haven't had even a morsel of bread."

"I can't go back home now," said she; "the place is all full of soldiers."

"Go away! What is that to me? Each for himself."

As she was turning away like a kicked dog, Gramigna called to her:

"Say, go and get me a jug of water, down yonder in the brook. If you want to stay with me, you must risk your skin."

Peppa went without saying a word, and when Gramigna heard the gunshots he began to laugh immoderately, and said to himself: "That was meant for me!"

But when he saw her coming back a few minutes later with the jug in her hand, pale and bleeding, he said, before he sprang forward to snatch the jug from her, and then when he had drunk till it seemed as if he had no more breath:

"You escaped, did you? How did you do it?"

"The soldiers were on the other side, and there was a thick bush on this."

"But they put a bullet through your skin. There's blood on your dress."

"Yes."

"Where were you hit?"

"In the shoulder."

"That's nothing. You can walk."

So he allowed her to stay with him. She followed him, all in rags, shoeless, suffering from the fever caused by the wound, and yet she went foraging to procure for him a jug of water or a piece of bread, and if she came back with empty hands, escaping through the gunshots, her lover, devoured by hunger and thirst, would beat her. At last one night when the moon was shining in the prickly pears, Gramigna said to her,—

"They are on us."

And he obliged her to stand with her back to the rock far in the crevice; then he fled in another direction. Among the bushes were heard the frequent reports of the musketry, and the shadows were cut here and there by quick bright flashes. Suddenly Peppa heard the sound of steps near her and saw Gramigna coming back, dragging along a broken leg. He leaned against the prickly pear bushes to reload his carbine:

"It's all over," he said to her. "Now they'll take me."

And what froze the blood in her veins more than anything else was the light that shone in his eyes, as if he were a madman.

Then when he fell on the dry branches like a log of wood, the soldiers were on him in an instant.

The following day they dragged him through the village street on a cart, all in rags and covered with blood. The people who had crowded in to look at him began to laugh when they saw how small he was, how pale and ugly like a punchinello. And it was for him that Peppa had deserted compare Finu, the "Candela di Sego!"

The poor "Candela di Sego" went and hid from sight, as if it behoved him to be ashamed, and Peppa was led off, handcuffed by soldiers, as if she also were a thief,—she who had as much gold as Santa Margherita! Her poor mother was obliged to sell all the white linen stored in her trunk, and the gold earrings and the rings for the ten fingers, so as to pay the lawyers who defended her daughter and bring the girl home again,—poor, ill, in shame, ugly as Gramigna, and with Gramigna's child in her arms.

But when at the end of the trial her daughter was restored to her, the poor old soul recited an "Ave Maria" in the bare and already dark jail among the soldiers of the guard; it seemed to her that they had given her back a treasure when she had nothing else in the world, and she wept like a fountain at this consolation.

Peppa on the other hand seemed to have no tears to shed any more, and said nothing, and disappeared from sight; yet the two women went out every day to get their living by their own hands. People declared that Peppa had taken up "the trade" in the woods, and went on robbing expeditions at night. The truth of the matter was that she hid herself in the kitchen like a wild beast in its lair, and it was only when her old mother was dead of her privations, and the house had to be sold, that she left it.

"See here!" said "Candela di Sego," who was as much in love with her as ever, "I could smash your head with two stones for the evil you have brought on yourself

and others."

"It's true," replied Peppa, "I know it. It was God's will."

After her house and those few wretched pieces of furniture that were left to her were sold, she went away from the town by night, just as she had done before, without turning round to look at the roof under which she had slept so long, and she went to do God's will in the city, with her baby boy, near the prison in which Gramigna was incarcerated. She could see nothing else besides the black grated windows along the mighty silent façade, and the sentinels drove her away if she stopped to look where he might be. At last she was told that he had not been there for some time, that he had been taken away to the other side of the sea, manacled, and with a basket fastened over his shoulder.

She said nothing. She did not go away; for she knew not where to go, and she had nothing more to expect. She made a shift to live, doing chores for the soldiers, for the prisoners, as if she herself made a part of that black and silent building; and she felt for the carabineers who had taken Gramigna in the thicket of prickly pears, and who had broken his leg with their shots, a sort of respectful tenderness, as it were a brute admiration of force.

On holidays, when she saw them with their plumes and their glittering epaulettes, stiff and erect in their gala uniforms, she devoured them with her eyes, and she was always at the barracks cleaning the big rooms and polishing the boots, so that they called her "The Carabineers' dish-cloth."

Only when she saw them load their guns at nightfall and march out, two and two, with their trousers turned up, revolver in belt, and when they mounted horse under the light that made the muskets flash, and heard the clattering of the horses' feet dying away in the darkness and the jingling of sabres, she always grew pale, and while she was closing the door of the stable she shivered; and when her youngster played with the other urchins on the glacis before the prison, running among the legs

of the soldiers, and the urchins called him "Gramigna's son, Gramigna's son," she flew into a rage and chased them away with stones.

JELI, THE SHEPHERD.

JELI, THE SHEPHERD

JELI, THE SHEPHERD.

JELI, THE SHEPHERD.

Jeli, who had charge of the horses, was thirteen when he first became acquainted with the young gentleman, Don Alfonso. But he was so small that he did not come up to the belly of the old mare Bianca, who carried the big bell for the drove. Wherever his animals wandered for their pasturage, here and there, on the mountains and down in the plain, he was always to be found erect and motionless on some eminence or squatting on some big rock.

His friend, Don Alfonso, while he was at his country seat, went to find him all the days that God sent to Tebidi, and shared with him his piece of chocolate and shepherd's barley-bread and the fruit stolen in the neighborhood.

At first Jeli called the young nobleman eccellenza—your excellence—as is the custom in Sicily, but after they had had one good quarrel their friendship was established on a solid basis. Jeli taught his friend how to climb up to the magpies' nests on the tip-top of the walnut-trees, higher than the campanile of Licodia, to knock down a sparrow on the wing with a stone, and to mount with one spring on the bare backs of his half-wild animals, seizing by the mane the first that came within reach, without being frightened by the wrathful whinnyings and the desperate leaps of the untrained colts.

Ah! the delightful gallops across the mown fields with their hair flying in the wind; the lovely April days when the wind billowed the green grass and the horses neighed

in the pastures; the glorious summer noons when the whitening fields lay silent under the cloudy sky, and the crickets crackled among the clods as though the stubble were on fire; the bright wintry sky seen through the naked branches of the almond trees shivering under the north wind, and the narrow path sounding frozen under the horses' hoofs, and the larks singing on high in the warmth, in the azure; the delicious summer afternoons that passed slowly, slowly, like the clouds; the sweet odor of the hay in which they plunged their elbows, and the melancholy humming of the evening insects, and those two notes of Jeli's zufolo or whistle, always the same—iuh iuh!—making one think of distant things, of the feast of Saint John, of Christmas eve, of the dawn of the scampagnata,[4] of all those great events of the past which seemed sad, so distant were they, and made you look up with moistened eyes as if all the stars that were kindling in heaven poured showers into your heart and made it overflow!

Jeli, himself, did not suffer from any such melancholy; he squatted on the side of the hill with puffed-out cheeks, quite intent on sounding his iuh! iuh! iuh! Then he would bring together his drove by dint of shouts and stones, and drive them into the stable beyond the "poggio alla Croce."[5]

Out of breath he would mount the hillside beyond the valley, and sometimes shout to his friend Alfonso,—

"Call the dog! ohè! Call the dog!" or "Fling a good-sized stone at the bay who's got the better of me and is slowly wandering away, dallying among the bushes of the valley," or "To-morrow bring me a big needle—one of gnà Lia's."

He could do all sorts of things with the needle, and he had a heap of odds and ends in his canvas bag, in case of need, to mend his trousers or the sleeves of his jacket; he also knew how to braid horsehairs, and with the clay in the valley he used to wash out his own handkerchief which he wore around his neck when it was cold. In fact, provided he had his bag with him, he needed nothing in the world, whether he

were in the woods of Resecone, or lost in the depths of the plain of Caltagirone. Gnà Lia used to say,—

"Do you see Jeli, the shepherd? He is always alone in the fields, as if he himself had been born a colt, and that's why he knows how to make the cross with his two hands!"[6]

Indeed, it is true that Jeli needed nothing, but everybody connected with the estate would have gladly helped him in any way because he was a serviceable lad, and there was always a chance of getting something from him. Gnà Lia baked bread for him out of neighborly love, and he showed his gratitude by making her osier baskets for her eggs, reels of reeds, and other little things.

"Let us do as his animals do," said gnà Lia, "they scratch each other's backs."

At Tebidi every one had known him since he was a baby; there was no time when he wasn't seen among the tails of the horses pasturing in the "field of the lettighiere" and he had grown up, so to speak, under their eyes, though really no one ever saw him very much, for he was forever here and there, roaming about with his drove.

"He had rained down from heaven and the earth had taken him up," as the proverb has it; he was just one of those who have neither home nor relatives. His mamma was out at service at Vizzini, and he never saw her more than once a year when he went with his colts to the fair of San Giovanni; and the day that she died they came to call him—it was one Saturday evening—and on the following Monday Jeli was back with his drove, so that the contadino who had taken his place in looking after the horses might not lose a day's work; but the poor lad came back so upset that he kept letting the colts get into the ploughed land.

"Ohè! Jeli!" cried massaro Agrippino, from the threshing-floor. "You want to have a taste of the rope's end, do you, you son of a dog?"

Jeli started to run after his stray colts, and drove them mechanically toward the hill; but always before his eyes he saw his mamma with her head done up in the white

handkerchief. She would never speak to him more!

His father was a cow-herd at Ragoleti, beyond Licodia, "where the malaria could be harvested," as the peasants of that region say, meaning to signify its density; but in the malarious lands the pasturage is fat and cows do not catch the fever. Jeli for that reason stayed in the fields all the year long, either at Don Ferrante's, or in the enclosure of la Commenda, or in the valley of il Jacitano, and the hunters or travellers who took cross-cut over the country saw him in this place or in that, like a dog without a master.

He did not suffer from this state of things because he was accustomed to be with his horses, as they moved about leisurely nibbling the clover, and with the birds who flew around him in bevies, while the sun accomplished his daily journey, slowly, slowly, until the shadows grew long and then vanished; he had time to watch the clouds pile up on the horizon, one behind another, and imagine them mountains and valleys; he knew how the wind blew when it brought thunder-showers, and what color the clouds were when it was going to snow. Everything had its aspect and significance, and his eyes and ears were kept on the alert all day long. In the same way when toward sunset the young herdsman began to play his alder-whistle, the brown mare would come up, lazily cropping the clover, and also stand looking with great, pensive eyes.

The only place where he suffered a little from melancholy was in the desert lands of Passanitello, where not a grass-blade or a shrub is to be seen, and during the hot months not a bird flies. The horses there would cluster together with drooping heads to shade one another, and during the long days of the threshing that mighty silent radiance rained down without mitigation for sixteen hours. Wherever pasturage was abundant and the horses liked to loiter, the lad busied himself with something else—he would make reed-cages for the crickets, or carved pipes and little baskets of bulrushes; with four branches he could set up a shelter for himself when the North

wind drove the long lines of crows through the valley, or, when the cicadæ fluttered their wings in the broiling sun over the parched stubble; he would roast acorns in the coals of his sumach fire and imagine they were chestnuts, or toast his thick slice of bread when it began to grow musty, because, when he was at Passanitello in winter, the roads were so bad that sometimes a fortnight would elapse without a single soul passing.

Don Alfonso, who had been kept in cotton by his parents, envied his friend Jeli the canvas bag in which he stored his effects,—his bread, his onions, his bottle of wine, his neckerchief for cold weather, his little hoard of rags and thread and needles, his little tin food-box and his flint; he envied him especially that superb spotted mare, that animal with rough forelock and wicked eyes, swelling her indignant nostrils like a fierce mastiff when anyone tried to mount her. Sometimes she would allow Jeli to get on her back and scratch her ears; she was jealous of him, and would come smelling round to find out what he was saying.

"Let the vajata be," Jeli would say, "She isn't ugly, but she doesn't know you."

After Scordu from Bucchiere took away the Calabrian which he had bought at San Giovanni's Fair, under agreement to keep her in the drove until vintage time, Zaino, the bay colt, orphaned, refused to be comforted and galloped over the mountain precipices with long, lamenting neighings, and its nose in the wind. Jeli ran behind it, calling to it with loud shouts, and the colt paused to listen with its head in the air, and its ears pricking back and forth, and switching its flanks with its tail.

"It's because they have carried off his mother, and he doesn't know what to make of it," observed the herdsman. "Now we must keep him in sight, for he would be capable of jumping over the precipice. That was the way I felt when my mamma died; I couldn't see with my eyes."

Then, after the colt began to try the clover and to make believe bite:—

"See! he is gradually beginning to forget.... But this one will be sold, too. Horses are

made to be sold, just as lambs are born to go to the butcher, and the clouds to bring the rain. Only the birds have nothing else to do but sing and fly all day."

These ideas did not come to him clear cut and in sequence one after the other, for it was rarely that he had anyone to talk with, and, therefore, he had no cause for haste in starting them up and disentangling them in the depths of his brain, where he was accustomed to let them sprout and grow gradually, as the twigs burgeon under the sun.

"Even the birds," he added, "have to hunt for food, and when the snow covers the ground they perish."

Then he pondered for a moment,—"You are like the birds; but when winter comes you can sit by the fire and do nothing."

But Don Alfonso replied that he too went to school and had to study. Jeli opened his eyes wide and was all ears, while the signorino began to read, and he looked at the book and at the young master himself with a suspicious air, listening with that slight winking of the eyelids which indicates intensity of attention in beasts little accustomed to mankind.

He was delighted with the poetry that caressed his ears with the harmony of an incomprehensible song, and occasionally he frowned, drew up his chin, and made it evident that a great mental operation was taking place within him; then he nodded "yes, yes," with a crafty smile, and scratched his head. Then when the signorino started to write so as to show how many things he knew how to do, Jeli could have staid whole days watching him; and suddenly he would look round suspiciously. He could not be persuaded that the words that were said either by him or by Don Alfonso could possibly be repeated on paper, and still more—those things that had not proceeded from their mouths, and he ended with that shrewd smile.

Every new idea which knocked for entrance at his head made him suspicious; he seemed to try it with the wild diffidence of his vajata. But he expressed no wonder at

anything in the world; he might have been told that in cities horses rode in carriages,—he would have kept on that mask of oriental indifference which is the dignity of a Sicilian peasant. It would seem as if he intrenched himself instinctively in his ignorance, as if it were the force of poverty. Every time that he remained short of arguments he would repeat,—

"I do not know at all. I am poor," with that obstinate smile that was intended to be shrewd.

He had asked his friend Alfonso to write for him the name of Mara on a piece of paper that he had found somewhere, because it was his habit to pick up whatever he saw lying about and put into his packet of odds and ends. One day, after being rather quiet and looking round anxiously, he said, very gravely,—

"I'm in love with some one."

Alfonso, though he knew how to read, opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes," continued Jeli, "massaro Agrippino's daughter Mara, who used to be here; but now they're at Marineo, in that great house in the plain that you can see from the 'plain of the lettighiere' yonder."

"O you're going to get married, then?"

"Yes, when I'm grown up and have six onze a year wages. Mara knows nothing about it."

"Why, haven't you told her?"

Jeli shook his head and reflected. Then he opened his hoard and unfolded the paper which bore the written name.

"It must be that it says 'Mara'; Don Gesualdo, the campiere,[7] has read it; and fra Cola, when he came down here begging for beans."

"He who knows how to write," he went on saying, "is like one who preserves words in his tinder-box and can carry them in his pocket, and even send them this way and

that."

"Now what are you going to do with that piece of paper that you can't read?" asked Alfonso.

Jeli shrugged his shoulders, but kept on carefully folding his written leaf to put away in his heap of odds and ends.

He had known la Mara ever since she was a little girl. Their acquaintance had begun in a pitched battle once when they met down in the valley, both of them after blackberries. The little girl, knowing that she was "within her rights," had seized Jeli by the neck as if he were a thief. For awhile they exchanged blows on the slope—"You one, I one,"—as the cooper does on the hoops of his barrels; but when they got tired of it they gradually calmed down, though they still had each other by the hair.

"Who are you?" demanded Mara.

And when Jeli with less breeding refused to tell who he was,—

"I am Mara, the daughter of Massaro Agrippino, who is the keeper of all these fields here."

Jeli then let his grasp relax, and the little girl set to work to pick up the blackberries that had fallen during their struggle, now and then glancing with curiosity at her antagonist.

"Just beyond the bridge, on the edge of the orchard, there are lots of big berries," suggested the little maid, "and the hens are eating them."

Jeli meantime was creeping off stealthily, and Mara, after standing on tip-toe to watch him disappearing in the grove, turned her back and ran home as fast as her legs would carry her.

But from that day forth they began to be friends. Mara went with her hemp to spin on to the parapet of the little bridge, and Jeli would slowly drive his cattle toward

the slopes of the poggio del Bandito. At first he kept at a distance, roving around and looking from afar, with suspicion in his face, but he kept gradually edging near, with the watchful gait of a dog used to stones. When at last he joined her, they remained long hours without speaking a word, Jeli attentively watching the intricate work of the stockings which Mara's mamma had hung round her neck, or she looking on while he carved his pretty zig-zags on the almond sticks. Then they would separate, he going one way, she the other, without saying a word, and the little girl as soon as she was in sight of her house would start to run, kicking high her petticoat with her little red legs.

When the prickly pears were ripe they would settle down in the thick of the bushes, peeling the figs all the live-long day. They would wander together under the immemorial walnuts, and Jeli would beat so many of the walnuts that they would shower down thick as hail, and the girl would tire herself out picking them up with jubilant shouts—more than she could carry; and then she would scamper away nimbly, holding up the two corners of her apron, bobbing like a little old woman.

During the winter time, Mara dared not put her nose out of doors, it was so cold. Sometimes toward evening could be seen the smoke of Jeli's fires of sumach wood, which he built on the Piano del lettighiere, or on the Poggio di Macca, so as not to perish of the cold, like the tomtits which he sometimes found in the morning behind some rock, or in the shelter of a clod. The horses also found pleasure in dangling their tails around the fire, and they would cuddle close together so as to be warmer.

In March, the larks came back to the plain, the sparrows to the roofs, the leaves and the nests to the hedges. Mara took up her habit of going about with Jeli in the soft grass among the flowering bushes under the still bare trees which were just beginning to show tender points of green. Jeli would make his way through the brambles like a bloodhound, so as to discover the nests of the blackbirds which would look up to him in astonishment with their little keen eyes; the two children

would carry, cuddled in their hearts, little wee rabbits just born, almost without fur, but already quick to move their long ears.

They would scour the fields in pursuit of the drove of horses, entering the plains behind the hay-gatherers, step for step with the herd, pausing every time that a mare stopped to pluck a mouthful of grass. At evening, when they got back to the bridge, they separated, he going in one direction, she in another, without saying good-by.

Thus they passed the whole summer. When the sun began to go down behind the Poggio alla Croce, the robin red-breasts also went toward the mountain, as it grew dark, following the light among the clumps of prickly pears. The crickets and cicadæ were no longer heard, and at that hour a great melancholy spread through the air.

About that time, to Jeli's tumble-down hovel came his father, the cowherd, who had caught the malaria at Ragoleti, and could scarcely dismount from the ass which brought him. Jeli started a fire quickly, and ran to "the hall" for some hen's eggs.

"Put a little straw down in front of the fire as soon as you can," said his father, "for I feel the fever returning."

The chill of the fever was so severe that compare Menu buried under his thick cloak, the saddle-bags of the ass and Jeli's sacks shook as the leaves do in November, in spite of the great blaze of branches which made his face white as a corpse.

The contadini of the farm came to ask him,—

"How do you think you feel, compare Menu?"

The poor man could only answer with a whine like a sucking puppy.

"It's a kind of malaria that kills more surely than a rifle bullet," said his friends, as they warmed their hands at the fire.

The doctor was called, but it was money thrown away, because the disease is one of those clear and evident ones which even a boy would know how to cure; unless the fever happens to be so severe that it will kill at any rate, a little quinine cures it

quickly.

Compare Menu spent the eyes of his head for quinine but it was as good as thrown down a well.

"Take a good dose of ecalibbiso tea, which does not cost anything," suggested massaro Agrippino, "and if it doesn't work as well as quinine it doesn't ruin you by its cost."

So he took the decoction of eucaliptus, but the fever returned all the same, and even more violently. Jeli attended to his father the best he knew how. Every morning before he went off with his colts, he left him his medicine all prepared in a drinking cup, his bundle of dry branches within reach, his eggs in the hot ashes, and he came back as early as he could in the afternoon with more wood for the night, and the bottle of wine and a little piece of mutton, which he had gone as far as Licodia to buy for him. The poor lad did everything as handily as a clever maiden would have done, and his father, following him with weary eyes in his operations about the hovel, sometimes smiled to think that the boy would be able to do for himself in case he were left alone in the world.

On days when the fever left him for a few hours, compare Menu would get up, all feeble as he was, and with his head wrapped in his handkerchief, would stagger out to the door to wait for Jeli while the sun was still warm. When Jeli dropped the bundle of wood at the door-steps, and placed the bottle and the eggs on the table, he would say to him,—

"Put the ecalibbiso to boiling for to-night," or, "Remember that your aunt Agata has charge of your mother's money, when I shall be no more."

Jeli would nod "yes" with his head.

"It is hopeless," said massaro Agrippino, every time he came to see compare Menu and his fever. "His blood is all diseased by this time."

Compare Menu listened without winking, with his face whiter than his night-cap.

He now no longer got up. Jeli began to weep when he found himself not strong enough to help him turn from one side to the other; shortly after compare Menu lay perfectly still. The last words that he spoke to his boy were,—

"When I am dead, go to the owner of the cows at Ragoleti and let him give you the three onze and the twelve tumoli of corn, which are my due from March till now."

"No," replied Jeli, "it's only two onze and a half, because you left the cows more than a month ago, and one must be fair to one's padrone."

"True!" agreed compare Menu, closing his eyes.

"Now I am quite alone in the world, like a lost colt which the wolves may eat!" said Jeli to himself, when his father had been carried off to the cemetery of Licodia.

Mara had been one of those who came to see the dead man's house with that morbid curiosity which is excited by horrible things.

"Do you see how I am left?" asked Jeli, but the girl drew back so frightened that he could not induce her to step inside the house where the dead man had been.

Jeli went to receive the money due his father, and then he started off with his drove for Passanitello, where the grass was already tall on the fallow-land, and the fodder was abundant; therefore, the colts remained there for some time in pasture.

Meantime Jeli had been growing into a big lad, and Mara also must be grown tall, he often thought to himself, while he played on his zufalo; and when he returned to Tebidi after some little time, slowly driving forward the mares through the dangerous paths of "Uncle Cosimo's Fountain," he scanned the little bridge down in the valley, and the hovel in the Valle del Jacitano, and the roof of "the Hall" where the pigeons were always flying.

But at that time the padrone had dismissed massaro Agrippino, and all Mara's family were just on the point of moving away.

Jeli found the girl, who had grown tall and very pretty, standing at the entrance of

the yard watching the furniture and things, which they were loading on the cart. The empty room seemed to him more gloomy and smoky than ever before. The table, the commode and the images of the Virgin and of Saint John, and even the nails for hanging up the gourds for seed had left on the walls the marks where they had been for so many years.

"We are going away," said Mara, when she saw him looking around. "We are going down to Marineo, where the great house stands in the plain."

Jeli took hold and helped massaro Agrippino and la gnà Lia load up the cart, and when there was nothing else to carry out of the room he went and sat down with Mara on the edge of the watering-trough.

"Even houses," he remarked, when he saw the last hamper piled on, "even houses, when anything is taken away from them, do not any longer seem the same."

"At Marineo," replied Mara, "we shall have much better rooms, mamma says, and large as the cheese house."

"Now that you are going away, I shall not want to come here any more; it seems to me as if winter had come back—to see that door closed."

"At Marineo we shall find other friends, Pudda la rossa and the campiere's daughter; it will be jolly there; they have more than eighty harvesters in the season, and the bag-pipes, and they dance on the threshing-floor."

Massaro Agrippino and his wife had gone off with the cart. Mara ran behind them, full of joyous excitement, carrying the baskets with the pigeons. Jeli was going to accompany her as far as the little bridge; and when Mara was just on the point of disappearing down the valley he called after her, "Mara! oh! Mara!"

"What do you want?" demanded Mara.

He knew not what he wanted.

"Oh! what will you do here all alone?" asked the girl.

"I shall stay with the colts."

Mara ran skipping away, and he stood there as if rooted to the spot so as to catch the last sounds of the cart rattling over the stones.

The sun was just resting on the high rocks of the Poggio alla Croce, the gray crests of the olive trees were shading into the twilight and over the vast campagna far away, nothing was heard except the tinkling bell of "Bianca" in the gathering stillness.

Mara, now that she was in the midst of new faces and amid all the bustle of the grape gathering, forgot about Jeli; but he was always thinking about her, because he had nothing else to do in the long days that he spent looking at the horses' tails. There was now no special reason for him to go down into the valley beyond the bridge, and no one ever saw him any more at the farm.

Thus it was that he was for some time ignorant that Mara had become betrothed—so much water had run and run under the bridge. The only time that he saw the girl was on the day of Saint John's Festa, when he went to the fair with his colts to sell; a festa which changed everything for him into poison, and caused the bread to fall out of his mouth by reason of an accident that befell one of the padrone's colts—the Lord deliver us!

On the day of the fair, the factor waited for the colts ever since dawn, walking impatiently up and down in his well-polished boots behind the groups of horses and mules that came filing in along the highway from this direction and that. It was almost time for the fair to close, and still Jeli with his animals was not in sight beyond the turn made by the highway. On the parched slopes of Calvario and the Mulino a vento—the Wind-Mill Mountain—there remained only a few droves of sheep gathered in a circle, with noses drooping and weary eyes, and a few yoke of oxen with long hair—of the kind that are sold to satisfy unpaid rent, waiting motionless under the boiling sun.

Yonder toward the valley, the bell of San Giovanni's was ringing for High Mass, accompanied by the long crackling of the fireworks.

Then the fair grounds seemed to spring up, and there ran a prolonged cry among the shops of the green grocers, clustered in the place called salita dei Galli, spreading through the country roads and seeming to return from the valley where the church stood.

"Viva San Giovanni!"

"Santo diavolone!" screamed the factor. "That assassin of a Jeli will make me lose the fair!"

The sheep lifted their heads in astonishment and began to bleat all at once, and the cattle also made a step or two, slowly looking around with their great, calm eyes.

The factor was in a rage because he was expected that day to pay the rent due for the large enclosures—as the contract expressed it, "when Saint John arrived under the elm;" and to make up the full sum, the profits on the sale of the colts was necessary. Meantime the colts and horses and mules were coming in such numbers as the good Lord had seen fit to make, all curried and shining and adorned with tassels and cockades and bells; and they were switching their tails to while away their tedium, and turning their heads toward every one who passed, and evidently waiting for some charitable soul willing to buy them.

"He must have gone to sleep on the way, the assassin!" yelled the factor, "and so made me lose the sale of my colts."

In reality, Jeli had travelled all night so that the colts might reach the fair fresh, and get a good position on their arrival; and he had reached the piano del Corvo, and the "three kings" had not yet set, but were shining over monte Arturo. There was a continuous procession of carts passing along the road, and people mounted on horses or mules going to the festa. Therefore, the young fellow kept his eyes open so that the colts, frightened by the unusual commotion, might not get away, but that he

might keep them together along the ridge of the road behind la bianca, the white mare, who with the bell around her neck, always travelled straight ahead without minding anything.

From time to time, when the road ran over the crest of the hills, the bell of Saint John's could be heard in the distance, and in the darkness and silence of the plain the rumor of the festa was distinguishable, and along the whole road far away, wherever there were people on foot or on horseback going to Vizzini, were heard shouts of "Viva San Giovanni!" And the rockets rose up high in the air and brilliant behind the mountains of la Canzaria, like the rain of meteors in August.

"It is like Christmas Eve!" Jeli kept saying to the boy, who was helping him drive the herd. "And in every place there is feasting and light, and throughout the whole campagna you can see fireworks."

The boy was half asleep as he forced one leg after the other, and he made no response; but Jeli, who felt his blood stir within him at the sound of that bell, could not keep quiet, as if each one of those rockets that left their silent shining trails on the darkness behind the mountains burst forth from his soul.

"Mara also must be going to the festa of Saint John," he said, "because she goes every year."

And without caring because the boy made no reply,—

"Don't you know? Mara is now so big that she must be taller than her mother, and when I saw her last I couldn't believe that it was the very same girl with whom I used to go after prickly pears and knock off the nuts."

And he began to sing at the top of his voice all the songs that he knew.

"Oh Alfio, why do you sleep?" he cried, when he was through with them. "Look out that you keep la bianca always behind you, look out!"

"No, I am not asleep," replied Alfio, with a hoarse voice.

"Do you see la puddara[8] which stands winking down at us yonder, as if they were firing up rockets also at Santa Domenica? It is almost sunrise; we shall reach the fair in time to secure a good position. Ah! morellino bello! you pretty little brownie! You shall have a new halter, that you shall, with red cockades for the fair; and so shall you, stellato!"[9]

Thus he went on, talking to one and another of his colts so that they might be encouraged hearing his voice in the darkness. But it grieved him to think that the stellato and the morellino were going to the fair to be sold.

"When they are sold, they'll go off with a new master, and we shan't see them any more in the herd, just as it was with Mara after she went to Marineo.

"Her father is well-to-do down there at Marineo, and when I was there, found myself, poor fellow that I was, sitting down to bread and wine and cheese, and everything good that God gives, and as if he were the factor himself, and he has the keys to everything, and I could eat up the whole place if I had wanted. Mara scarcely knew me, it had been so long since we had seen each other, and she cried out,—'Oh, look! there's Jeli the guardian of the horses, from Tebidi. He is like one who comes home from abroad, who only at the sight of the distant mountain-top is quick enough to recognize the country where he grew up.' Gnà Lia didn't want me to speak to her daughter with the thee and the thou, because Mara had grown to be so big, and the people who don't know about things easily gossip. But Mara only laughed, and looked as if she had only just that minute been baking the bread, so rosy her face was; she was getting the dinner ready, and she was unfolding the table-cloth, and she seemed different. 'Oh, have you forgotten Tebidi?' I asked her as soon as gnà Lia went out to broach a fresh cask of wine. 'No, no, I haven't forgotten' said she. 'At Tebidi there was a bell with a campanile looking like the handle of a salt-cellar, and there used to be two stone cats which stood at the entrance of the garden.' I felt all through me those things that she was saying. Mara looked at me from head to heels,

with her eyes wide open, and then she said,—'How tall you've grown!' and then she began to laugh, and then she patted me on the head—here!"

In this way Jeli, the guardian of the horses, came to lose his place; for just at that instant there suddenly appeared a coach, which had given no sign of its approach, because it had been slowly climbing the steep ascent, but started off at full speed as soon as it reached the level ground at the top, with a great cracking of whips and jingling of bells, as if it were carried by the devil himself. The colts, in alarm, galloped off quicker than a flash, as if there had been an earthquake, and all the shouts and cries and ohi! ohi! ohi's! of Jeli and the boy scarcely sufficed to collect them again around la bianca, who in spite of her gravity had shied away desperately with the bell around her neck.

When Jeli had counted over his animals he discovered that stellato was missing, and he buried his hands in his hair, because at that place the road ran along side a deep ravine, and it was down in that ravine that stellato broke his back—a colt worth a dozen onze, like a dozen angels from Paradise! Weeping and shouting he went calling the colt ahu! ahu! It was too dark to see it. At last stellato replied from the bottom of the ravine with a melancholy neigh, as if it had human speech, poor creature!

"Oh, mamma mia!" cried Jeli and the boy, as they went to it. "Oh, what bad luck! mamma mia!"

The travellers on their way to the festa, hearing such a lamentation in the darkness, asked what they had lost, and then when they learned what had happened, went on their way.

The stellato remained motionless where it had fallen, with its legs in the air, and while Jeli was feeling it all over, weeping and talking to it as if he could make it understand, the poor creature stretched out its neck painfully and turned its head toward him, and then could be heard its breathing, cut short by its agony.

"Something must be broken!" mourned Jeli in despair, because nothing could be seen in the darkness; and the colt, inert as a rock, let its head fall back. Alfio, who remained on the road above in charge of the drove, had begun to view the matter more calmly, and had taken out his bread from his bag.

The sky by this time was beginning to grow pale, and the mountains all around seemed to be blossoming out, one after another, dark and high. From the bend in the road the country round about began to stand out, with monte del Calvario and monte del Mulino a vento—the Windmill Mountain—outlined against the dawn. They were still in shadow, but the flocks of sheep made white blurs, and as the herds of cattle grazing along the ridge of the mountains wandered hither and thither against the azure sky, it seemed as if the profile of the mountain itself were alive and full of motion.

The bell from the depths of the valley was no longer heard; travellers were growing less numerous, and those who passed along were in haste to reach the fair. Poor Jeli knew not what saint to call on in that solitude. Alfio himself could not help him in any way; so the boy continued breaking off the morsels of his loaf leisurely.

At last the factor was seen coming along mounted, cursing and swearing as he came, at seeing his animals stopped on the road. When Alfio saw him he ran off down the hill. But Jeli did not stir from the side of the stellato. The factor left his mule by the roadside, and climbed down into the ravine. He tried to help the colt to rise; he pulled him by the tail.

"Let him be," said Jeli, as white in the face as if it were himself whose back was broken. "Let him be! Don't you see that he can't move, poor creature."

The stellato, in fact, at every movement and at every attempt made to help him, set up a screech that seemed human. The factor fell on Jeli tooth and nail, and gave him as many kicks as there are angels and saints in Paradise. By this time Alfio had got his courage back, and had returned to the road, so that the animals might not be

without a guardian, and he tried to excuse himself, saying, ""T wasn't my fault. I was on ahead with the bianca."

"There's nothing more to be done," said the factor at last, having persuaded himself that it was all time lost. "Nothing can be done with this colt but to take his pelt; that's good for something."

Jeli began to tremble like a leaf when he saw the factor go and fetch his gun from the mule's pack.

"Get off of him, good-for-nothing!" shouted the factor. "I don't know what keeps me from laying you out beside this colt, which is worth more than you, in spite of the swine's baptism which that thief of a priest gave you!"

The stellato, unable to move, turned its head, with its big, steady eyes, as if it understood every word, and its skin crisped in waves along the back-bone as if a chill ran over it.

In that way, the factor killed the stellato on the spot, so as at least to save his pelt, and the dull noise which the gun held at short range made, as the charge pierced the living flesh, Jeli thought he felt in his own heart.

"Now if you want a piece of advice from me," said the factor, as he left him there, "I'd not let the master lay eyes on you, in spite of that bit of wages due you, for you may be sure, he'd give it to you with a vengeance!"

The factor went off together with Alfio, taking along the other colts, which did not once turn round to see what had become of the stellato, but proceeded cropping the grass along the ridge. The poor stellato was left alone in the ravine waiting for the knacker to flay him, its eyes were still wide open, and its four legs stretched into the air, for to stretch them up was the only thing it could do.

Jeli, now that he had seen how the factor had been able to aim at the colt, as it painfully lifted its head in fear, and had been courageous enough to fire off the gun at it, no longer wept, but remained sitting on a rock looking at the stellato till the

men came to take off the pelt. Now he might go at his own pleasure and enjoy the festa, or stand in the square all day long and see the gentlemen in the café, as best pleased him, for now he no longer had bread or a shelter, and it behooved him to find a new padrone, if any one would take him after the misfortune of the stellato.

Thus go things in this world:—While Jeli was seeking a new employer, walking about with his bag over his shoulder and his staff in his hand, the band was playing gayly in the square, with plumes in their caps, and surrounded by a merry throng of white hats thick as flies, and the gentlemen were enjoying themselves as they sat at their coffee. All the people were dressed in holiday attire like the animals of the fair, and in one corner of the square was a lady, with a short gown and flesh-colored stockings, making her appear bare-legged, and she was pounding on a great box before a great painted sheet on which appeared a slaughter of Christians with blood flowing in torrents, and, there among the throng, gazing with open mouth, was massaro Cola, whom he used to know when he was at Passanitello, and he told him that he would find him an employer, because compare Isidoro Macca was in want of a herdsman for his hogs.

"But I wouldn't say anything about stellato," recommended massaro Cola. "A misfortune like that might happen to any one in the world. But it is best not to talk about it."

So they went in search of compare Macca, who was at the ball, and while massaro Cola went to plead his cause, Jeli waited outside in the street in the midst of the throng, who were gazing in at the door of the hall. In the big room, there was a world of people jumping about enjoying themselves, all flushed and perspiring, and making a great trampling on the floor, while above all was heard the ron ron of the double bass, and as soon as one piece of music, costing a grano,[10] was finished they would all lift their fingers to signify that they wanted another; and the man of the double bass would make a cross with a piece of charcoal on the wall, to keep

account to the last, and then begin over again.

"Those in there spend without thought," said Jeli, to himself. "That means that they have their pockets full and are not in trouble as I am, for lack of an employer, and if they sweat and tire themselves out in dancing, it is for their own pleasure, as if they were paid by the day."

Massaro Cola came back saying that compare Macca needed no one.

Then Jeli turned away, and walked off gloomily, gloomily.

Mara's home was toward Sant'Antonio, where the houses climb up the mountainside, facing the valley of la Canziria, all green with prickly pears, and with the mill-wheels churning the water into foam in the lowlands by the stream. But Jeli hadn't the courage to go in that direction, now that they needed no one to watch the swine; and, making his way amid the throng which jostled him and pushed him without any thought of him, he seemed more alone than ever he had been when he was with his colts in the plains of Passanitello, and he felt like weeping.

At last massaro Agrippino, wandering about with his arms swinging, and enjoying the festa, fell in with him in the square, and shouted to him,—

"Oh! Jeli! oh!" and took him home.

Mara was in gala dress, with such long ear-rings that they hung down to her cheeks, and she was standing on the threshold with her hands folded, loaded with rings, waiting till it should grow dark, so as to go and see the fireworks.

"Oh!" said Mara to him, "so you have come also for the festa of Saint John!"

Jeli did not want to go in because he was shabbily dressed, but massaro Agrippino forced him in saying that it was not the first time they had ever seen each other, and that he knew that he had come to the fair with his employer's colts. Gnà Lia poured him out a good generous glass of wine, and wanted to take him with them to see the illuminations, together with the comari and their other neighbors.

When they reached the square Jeli stood with open mouth, wondering at the spectacle; the whole square seemed a sea of fire as when the steppes are burning, and the reason was the great number of torches which the devout lighted under the eyes of the saint, who stood enjoying it all at the entrance of il Rosario—all black under his silver baldachin. The acolytes were coming and going amid the flames like so many demons, and there was, moreover, a woman in loose attire and with dishevelled hair, and with her eyes staring out of her head, also engaged in lighting the candles, and a priest in a black soutane and without a hat, like one rendered crazy by religion.

"There's the son of massaro Neri, the factor of Saloni, and he is spending more than ten lire for rockets," said gnà Lia, pointing to a young man who was going round through the square holding two rockets in each hand, just like candles, so that all the women devoured him with their eyes, and cried to him: "Viva San Giovanni!"

"His father is rich and owns more than twenty head of cattle," added massaro Agrippino.

Mara also knew well that he had carried the great banner in the procession, and held it as straight as a pillar—such a strong and handsome youth was he.

Massaro Neri's son seemed to have heard them, and he set off his rockets for Mara, making the wheel of fire before her, and after this part of the fireworks was over, he joined them, and took them to the ball and to the cosmorama, where the new world and the old world were to be seen depicted, and he paid for them all, even for Jeli, who followed behind the others like a masterless cur, to see massaro Neri's son dancing with Mara, who whirled round and crouched down like a dove on a roof, and held daintily up the corner of her apron, and massaro Neri's son gamboling like a colt, so that gnà Lia wept like a child at the consolation of the sight, and massaro Agrippino nodded with his head to signify that all was going to his mind.

At last when they were all tired, they went out where the people were promenading,

and they were carried away by the crowd as if they were in the midst of a torrent, and there they saw the transparencies lighted where the decapitation of Saint John was represented with such faithfulness that it would have moved the heart of a Turk, and the saint kicked out his legs like a goat under the hatchet. Near by the band was playing under a great wooden umbrella, all lighted up, and in the square there was such a crowd that one would have said never before had so many Christians come to the fair.

Mara went holding massaro Neri's son's arm, as if she were a fine lady, and she whispered into his ear and laughed, as if she were having a fine time. Jeli was utterly tired out, and actually went to sleep sitting on the sidewalk till the first bombs of the fireworks were sent up. At that moment Mara was still by the side of massaro Neri's son, leaning against him with her hands clasped on his shoulder, and in the different-colored lights from the fireworks she seemed now all white and now all rosy. When the last sparks died away in the darkness of the sky, massaro Neri's son turned toward her, with green light on his face, and gave her a kiss.

Jeli said nothing, but at that instant all that he had enjoyed till then changed into poison, and he began once more to think of his misfortunes, which he had for the moment forgotten—that he was without an employer—and knew not what to do, nor where to go, that he had no food or shelter; that the dogs might eat him as they were eating the poor stellato left down in the bottom of the ravine, skinned to the hoofs!

Meantime, around him the people were still making merry in the darkness that had ensued; Mara, with her companions, was dancing and singing through the rock-paved streets as they turned homeward.

"Good-night! Good-night—buona notte!" shouted the people to one another, as they were left at their own doors. Mara shouted "good-night—buona notte!" in her musical voice, and it expressed her happiness, and massaro Neri's son did not see fit to leave her while massaro Agrippino and gnà Lia were disputing about the opening

of the house door. No one gave Jeli a thought, till at last massaro Agrippino remembered him, and said,—

"And where are you going?"

"I don't know," said Jeli.

"Come and see me to-morrow and I will help you find a place. For to-night, go back to the square where we have been hearing the band play. You'll find a spot on some bench, and sleep out doors; you must be used to that."

Jeli was used to that, but what pained him was that Mara said nothing to him, but left him there at the door as if he were a beggar; and the next day when he came back to see massaro Agrippino, he was hardly alone with the girl before he said to her,—

"Oh, gnà Mara! How you forget old friends!"

"Oh, is that you, Jeli?" replied Mara. "No, I haven't forgotten you. But I was so tired after the fireworks!"

"You're in love with him aren't you—massaro Neri's son?" demanded Jeli, twirling his staff in his hands.

"What are you saying?" abruptly interposed gnà Mara. "My mother is there and hears everything you say."

Massaro Agrippino found him a place as shepherd at la Salonia, where massaro Neri was factor, but as Jeli was not very much skilled in taking care of sheep, he had to be content with far smaller wages than he had been having.

Now he attended faithfully to his flocks, and strove to learn how cheese is made—the ricotta and the caciocavallo, and all the other products of the flocks; but in the gossip that went on at eventide in the yard, among the shepherds and contadini, while the women were preparing the beans for the soup, if ever massaro Neri's son was mentioned as soon to marry massaro Agrippino's Mara, Jeli said not a

word, and never dared open his mouth.

One time when the keeper insulted him, by saying, jestingly, that Mara refused to have anything more to do with him, after every one had declared that they were to be husband and wife, Jeli, as he went to the pot where the milk was boiling, replied, as he slowly shook in the rennet,—

"Now Mara has grown to be so pretty, she seems like a lady."

But as he was patient and laborious, and quickly got hold of the secrets of the business, even better than one who had been born to it, and as he was accustomed to be with animals, he came to love his sheep as if they were his own, and for this reason the distemper—il male—did not do so much damage at la Salonia, and the flock prospered, so that it was a delight for massaro Neri every time that he came to the estate, and the next year it was no great trouble to induce the padrone to increase Jeli's wages, so that he came to have as much as he got in looking out for the horses. And it was money well spent, for Jeli never thought of reckoning up the miles and miles that he travelled in search of the best pasturage for his flock, and if the sheep were with young or were sick, he would take them to his saddle-bags and carry the lambs in his arms, and they would lick his face, thrusting their noses out of his pocket, and they would even suck his ears.

In the famous snow storm of Santa Lucia's night, the snow fell four handbreadths deep in the lago morto at la Salonia, and all around for miles and miles there was nothing else to be seen when day came, and nothing would have been left of the sheep but the ears, had not Jeli got up three or four times in the course of the night to drive the sheep into the yard, so that the poor beasts shook the snow from their backs and did not remain, as it were buried, as was the case in so many of the neighboring flocks—at least so massaro Agrippino said when he came to give a look to a field of beans which he had at la Salonia, and he also said that that story of massaro Neri's son marrying his daughter Mara was a lie made up of whole

cloth—that Mara had some one else in mind.

"It was said they were to be married at Christmas," said Jeli.

"Nothing of the sort; they aren't to marry at all; it's all the gossip of envious folks who meddle with others' business," replied massaro Agrippino.

But the keeper, who had known about it for some time, having heard it talked about in town when he was there on Sunday, told the story as it really was, after massaro Agrippino had gone away.

"The engagement was broken because massaro Neri's son had learned that massaro Agrippino's Mara was keeping company with Don Alfonso, the signorino, who had known Mara from a little girl; and massaro Neri had declared that his son was to be a man respected as his father was, and the only horns he wanted in his house should be those of his oxen."

Jeli was present at this conversation, sitting with the others in the circle at breakfast, and at that instant was cutting his bread. He still said nothing, but his appetite left him for that day.

While he was driving his sheep out to pasture he began to think of Mara, as she had been when she was a little girl, when they were together all day long wandering through the valle del Jacitano and over the poggio alla Croce, and how she stood looking at him, with her chin in the air, while he climbed up to the tree-tops after the birds' nests; and he thought also of Don Alfonso, who used to come and see him from the neighboring villa, and how they would stretch themselves out on their bellies, stirring up crickets' nests with straws. All these things he considered and reconsidered for hours and hours, as he sat on the edge of the brook, holding his knees between his arms, and thinking of the tall walnuts of Tebidi, and the thick bushes in the valleys and the slopes of the hills, green with sumachs, and the gray olive trees spreading through the valley like a fog, and the red-tiled roof of the house, and the campanile that looked like "a handle of a salt cellar" among the

oranges of the garden.

Here the campagna stretched away naked, desert, speckled with dried grass, blending silently with the distant horizon.

In Spring the bean pods had begun to fill out when Mara came to la Salonia with her father and mother and the boy and the ass, to pick the beans, and they all came together to sleep at the farm for two or three days during the picking.

In this way Jeli saw the girl morning and evening, and they would sit together on the wall of the sheep-fold and talk, while the boy looked after the sheep.

"It seems as if I were at Tebidi again," said Mara, "when we were little things, and used to stand on the foot bridge."

Jeli also remembered everything, though he said little, being always a judicious youth, and of few words.

When the harvest was over, and the eve of parting had come, Mara went out to talk with the young man, just as he was making "ricotto cheese," and he was wholly intent in skimming the whey with his ladle.

"Now I'll say addio," said she, "for to-morrow we return to Vizzini."

"How have the beans gone?"

"Bad! la lupa[11] has eaten them all this year."

"It depends on the rain which has been scarce," said Jeli. "We have had to kill even the lambs because there hasn't been enough feed for them. Over all of la Salonia there hasn't been three inches of grass."

"But that doesn't affect you. You always have your wages, good year or bad."

"Yes, that's so," said he. "But it disgusts me to give those poor creatures to the butcher."

"Do you remember when you came for the festa of Saint John, and were left without a padrone?"

"Yes, I remember."

"It was my father who got you a place here with massaro Neri."

"And why didn't you marry massaro Neri's son?"

"Because it wasn't the will of God. My father has been unlucky," she continued, after a brief pause. "Since we came to Marineo, everything has gone ill with us. The beans, the corn, that piece of vineyard that we have yonder. Then my brother went off to the army, and we lost a mule that was worth forty onze."

"I know," said Jeli, "the bay mule."

"Now, that we have lost all our property, who would want to marry me?"

Mara was breaking up a twig of briar while she said this, with her chin in her bosom, and, with her elbow, she gently nudged Jeli's elbow without appearing to mean it. But Jeli, with his eyes on the churn, also made no response, and she went on,—

"At Tebidi they used to say that you and I would be husband and wife, do you remember?"

"Yes," said Jeli, and he laid his ladle on the top of the churn. "But I am a poor shepherd, and I can not pretend to a massaro's daughter like you."

La Mara remained silent for a little while, and then she said, "If you want me, I will willingly be yours."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"And what will massaro Agrippino say to it?"

"My father says that now that you know your trade, and since you are not one of those who waste their wages, but make one soldo into two, and do not eat to consume bread, in time you will come to have flocks of your own, and will be rich."

"If that is so," said Jeli, in conclusion, "I will gladly take you."

"There," said Mara, as soon as it had grown dark and the sheep were relapsing into silence, "if you want a kiss, I will give you one, because we are going to be husband and wife."

Jeli took one in "holy peace," and not knowing what to say, added, "I have always loved you, even when you were going to desert me for the son of massaro Neri."

But he had not the heart to speak of the other one.

"Don't you see? We were meant for one another," said Mara, in conclusion.

Massaro Agrippino, in fact, said "Yes," and gnà Lia put on a new gown, and she had a pair of velvet trousers made for their son-in-law. Mara was as lovely and fresh as a rose, with her white mantellina, reminding you of the Paschal lamb, and that amber necklace which made her neck look so white; so, when Jeli walked through the street at her side, he marched stiffly and erect, dressed in his new cloth and velvet suit, and he did not dare even blow his nose with his red silk handkerchief, lest he should make a fool of himself; and the neighbors and all who knew the story of Don Alfonso laughed in his face.

When Mara said "sissignore," and the priest made her Jeli's wife with a grand sign of the cross, Jeli took her home, and it seemed to him as if they had given him all the gold of the Madonna, and all the lands that he had seen with his eyes.

"Now that we are husband and wife," said he, when they reached their house, as he was sitting in front of her, and trying to appear very humble, "now that we are husband and wife, I may tell you that it does not seem to me true as you pretended—you might have had ever so many better husbands than I—so beautiful and gracious you are."

The poor fellow could not find anything else to say, and he could not contain his delight to see Mara setting and arranging everything through the house, and playing la padrona. He found it impossible to tear himself away to return to la Salonia; when he started Monday, he was very slow in arranging in the pack of the ass, his

saddle-bags, and his cloak, and his umbrella.

"You ought to come to la Salonia, yourself," he said to his wife, who was watching him from the door-step. "You ought to come with me."

But the young woman began to laugh, and replied that she was not born to look after sheep, and had no reason to go to la Salonia.

Truly, Mara was not born for tending sheep, and she was not accustomed to the January tramontana wind, which stiffens the hand on the staff, and it seems as if your fingers would drop off, or to furious storms that come, when the water penetrates to your very bones, and again, when the dust drives choking through the streets, when the sheep travel under the boiling sun, or to the hard bed on the ground, and the mouldy bread, and the long, silent, solitary days, when through the arid fields nothing else is seen in the distance but occasionally some sun-burned peasant driving his ass silently along over the white, interminable road.

Jeli knew at least that Mara was warm and comfortable under the quilts, or was spinning in front of the fire, talking with the women of the neighborhood, or was enjoying the sun on the balcony, while he was returning from the pasture tired and thirsty, or wet through with the rain, or when the wind drifted the snow back of his hut and put out his fire of branches.

Every month Mara went to receive the wages from the padrone, and they lacked neither eggs nor fowls, nor oil in the lamp, nor wine in the jug. Twice a month Jeli came home to see her, and she would stand on the balcony looking for him with her spindle in her hand, and after he had left the ass in the stable and removed his pack and filled the rack with oats, and placed the wood under the shed in the yard, or whatever he brought into the kitchen, Mara would help him hang his cloak on the nail and take off his leather leggings before the hearth, and pour him out a glass of wine, and set to work to boil the soup and get the table ready, quiet and thoughtful, like a good housewife, while talking of this thing and that,—of the brooding hen that

was setting, of the cloth that was on the loom, of the calf which they were raising, never forgetting anything of what she had been doing.

Jeli, when he found himself at home, felt that he was more important than the pope.

But on the eve of Santa Barbara he came home unexpectedly late, when all the lights were out in the street and the town clock was striking midnight. He came in because the mare which the padrone had left out at pasture had been suddenly taken sick, and he saw that it was a case that required the services of the farrier quickly, and he had wanted to bring him to town in spite of the rain that was falling like a torrent, and the muddy roads into which he sunk half up to his knees.

Knock and call as loud as he might behind the door, he had to wait half an hour under the eaves, while the water ran out at his heels. At last his wife came to open for him, and began to scold worse than if it had been herself who had been obliged to wander across country in such a tempest.

"Oh, what's the matter?" she demanded. "How you frightened me coming at this time o' night! Does it seem to you a proper Christian time to come? To-morrow I shall be ill!"

"Go back to bed, I will start up a fire."

"No, I'll have to go and get some wood."

"I'll go."

"No, I say."

When Mara returned with the wood in her arms Jeli said to her, "Why did you leave the door to the yard open? Was there not enough wood in the kitchen?"

"No, I went to get it under the shed."

She let him kiss her, coldly, coldly, and turned her head in another direction.

"His wife lets him wait at the door," said the neighbors, "when there is another bird in the nest."

But Jeli knew nothing about the fact that his wife was untrue to him, nor did any one care to tell him, because it could surely be of no consequence, for he had taken the woman with a damaged reputation after massaro Neri's son had jilted her, because he knew of the story of Don Alfonso. But Jeli seemed to live happy and contented in the shame of it, and grew as fat as a pig; for the proverb has it "horns are lean but they make the house fat." At last, one time, the herdman's boy told it to him in his face, while they were scuffling about the pieces of cheese that had been stolen.

"Now that Don Alfonso has taken your wife you consider yourself his brother-in-law, and you are proud enough to be a crowned king with those horns on your head."

The factor and the keeper expected to see blood flow for those insulting words, but on the contrary Jeli stood stupefied, as if he had not heard, or as if it concerned him not, wearing the dull face of an ox whose horns really fitted him.

Now that Easter was at hand the factor sent all the men of the estate to confession, with the hope that through the fear of God they would not do any more stealing. Jeli also went, and at the church entrance sought for the boy with whom he had exchanged those hot words, and he threw his arms around his neck, saying,—

"The confessor has bade me pardon you; but I am not angry with you for such gossip; and if you will not steal any more of the cheese from me, I will not take any further notice of what you said to me in passion."

It was from that moment that they nicknamed him Corno d'ore—"Gold horns"—and the nickname stuck to him and all his, even after he had washed his horns in blood.

La Mara also went to confession and returned from the church all wrapped up in her mantellina, and with her eyes cast down, so that she seemed a genuine Santa Maria Maddelena. Jeli, who was silently waiting for her on the balcony, when he saw her coming in that way, seeming as if she had the Holy Presence in her heart, kept looking at her,—pale, pale from his foot to his head as if he saw her for the first

time, or as if his Mara had been changed for him, and he seemed hardly to dare to lift his eyes to her while she was shaking the cloth and setting the table, calm and neat as ever.

Then after long thinking he put the question to her: "Is it true that you keep company with Don Alfonso?"

Mara looked him full in the face with those black eyes of hers and made the sign of the cross.

"Why do you want to make me commit a sin on this day?" she demanded.

"I did not believe it, because Don Alfonso and I were always together when we were boys, and there never passed a day that he did not come to Tebidi when he was in the country there; and then he is rich, and has bushels of money, and if he wanted women he might get married, nor would he lack anything, either clothes to wear, or bread to eat."

But Mara was really angry, and she began to scold so that the poor fellow did not dare lift his nose from his plate.

At last, so that that gift of God which they were eating might not turn into poison, Mara changed the conversation, and asked him if he had thought of weeding that little plot of flax which they had sowed in the bean field.

"Yes," replied Jeli, "and the flax will do well."

"If that is so," said Mara, "this spring I will make you two new shirts which will keep you warm."

In truth Jeli did not realize what "cuckold" meant, and he did not know what jealousy was. Every new thing found difficulty in getting into his head, and this became so great that, in making its way in, it played devilish work, especially when he saw his Mara before him so beautiful and white and neat, and how she had herself chosen him, and how he had thought about her so many years, and so many

years, ever since he was a young boy, so that the day when they told him that she was going to marry some one else, he had had no heart to eat anything or to drink all day long.

Then again he thought of Don Alfonso, who had been his companion so many times, and how he had always brought him strange feeling within his heart. Don Alfonso had grown so tall that he no longer seemed the same person, and now he had a full beard, curly like his hair, and a velvet coat and a gold chain across his waistcoat. But he recognized Jeli, and patted him on the shoulder in salutation. He had come with the padrone of the estate and a number of friends to have a jollification while the sheep-shearing was in progress, and Mara also came unexpectedly, under the pretext that she was pregnant, and longed for some fresh ricotto.

It was a beautiful warm day in the pale fields, with the grain in flower and the long green rows of the vines; the sheep were gamboling and bleating for delight, at feeling themselves freed from all that weight of wool, and in the kitchen, the women had made a great fire to cook all the provisions that the padrone had brought for the dinner.

The gentlemen, while they were waiting, had sat down in the shade under the carob-trees, and were playing tambourines and bag-pipes, and dancing with the girls of the estate, as if they were all of the same class.

Jeli, meantime, went on with his work shearing the sheep, and felt something within him, without knowing what, like a thorn, like a nail, like a pair of shears, working within him, slowly, slowly, like a poison.

The padrone had ordered that they should kill a couple of goats, and the yearling sheep, and some chickens, and a turkey cock. In fact, he was going to do things on a grand scale, and lavishly, so as to do honor to his friends; and while all those creatures were squealing under the death-agony, and the goats were screaming under the knife, Jeli felt his knees tremble, and little by little, it seemed to him that the

wool that he was shearing, and the grass in which the sheep were leaping, were stained with blood.

"Don't go," he said to Mara, when Don Alfonso called her to come and dance with the rest. "Don't go, Mara."

"Why not?"

"I don't want you to go. Do not go."

"I hear them calling me."

He uttered not another intelligible word while he stayed with the sheep that he was shearing. Mara shrugged her shoulders, and went to dance. She was blushing with delight, and her two black eyes shone like two stars, and she smiled so that there was a gleam of white teeth, and all the gold ornaments tossed and scintillated on her wrists and on her bosom, so that she seemed like the Madonna herself.

Jeli had arisen to his full height, with the long shears in his hand, and white in face, as white as once he had seen his father, the cowherd, when he was trembling with fever in front of the fire in the hovel.

Suddenly, when he saw how Don Alfonso, with his curling beard and his velvet coat, and the gold chain at his waistcoat, took Mara by the hand to dance—then—only at that moment that he touched her did he fling himself on him and cut his throat with one stroke, as if he had been a goat.

Later, while they were leading him off to the judge, bound, wholly unmanned, without daring to make the least resistance,—

"How," said he, "should I not have killed him. He robbed me of my Mara!"

RUSTIC CHIVALRY.

(Cavalleria Rusticana.)

LOLA

"LOLA USED TO GO OUT ON THE BALCONY WITH HER HANDS CROSSED."

RUSTIC CHIVALRY. (Cavalleria Rusticana.)

Turiddu Macca, gnà Nunzia's son, after returning from the army, used every Sunday to strut like a peacock through the square in his bersegliere uniform and red cap, looking like the fortune-teller as he sets up his stand with his cage of canaries. The girls on their way to Mass gave stolen glances at him from behind their mantellinas, and the urchins buzzed round him like flies.

He had brought back with him, also, a pipe with the king on horseback carved so naturally that it seemed actually alive, and he scratched his matches on the seat of his trousers, lifting his leg as if he were going to give a kick.

But in spite of all this, Lola, the daughter of massaro Angelo, had not shown herself either at Mass or on the balcony, for the reason that she was going to wed a man from Licodia, a carter who had four Sortino mules in his stable.

At first, when Turiddu heard about it, santo diavolone! he threatened to disembowel him, threatened to kill him—that fellow from Licodia! But he did nothing of the sort; he contented himself with going under the fair one's window, and singing all the spiteful songs he knew.

"Has gnà Nunzia's Turiddu nothing else to do," asked the neighbors, "except spending his nights singing like a lone sparrow?"

At length, he met Lola on her way back from the pilgrimage to the Madonna del Pericolo, and when she saw him, she turned neither red nor white, just as if it were none of her affair at all.

"Oh, compare Turiddu, I was told that you returned the first of the month."

"But I have been told of something quite different!" replied the other. "Is it true that you are to marry compare Alfio, the carter?"

"Such is God's will," replied Lola, drawing the two ends of her handkerchief under her chin.

"God's will in your case is done with a snap and a spring; to suit yourself! And it was God's will, was it, that I should return from so far to find this fine state of things, gnà Lola!"

The poor fellow still tried to bluster, but his voice grew hoarse, and he followed the girl, tossing his head so that the tassel of his cap swung from side to side on his shoulders. To tell the truth, she felt really sorry to see him wearing such a long face, but she had not the heart to deceive him with fine speeches.

"Listen, compare Turiddu," she said to him at last, "Let me join my friends. What would be said in town if I were seen with you?"

"You are right," replied Turiddu, "Now that you are going to marry compare Alfio, who has four mules in his stable, it is best not to let people's tongues wag about you. But my mother, poor soul, was obliged to sell our bay mule, and that little plot of vineyard on the highway while I was off in the army. The time 'when Berta spun,' is over and gone, and you no longer think of the time when we used to talk together from the window looking into the yard, and you gave me that handkerchief before I went away, and God knows how many tears I shed into it at going so far that even the name of our place is lost! So good-by, gnà Lola,—Let's pretend it's rained and cleared off, and our friendship is ended."[12]

Gnà Lola married the carter, and on Sundays used to go out on the balcony with her hands crossed on her stomach, to show off all the heavy gold rings that her husband gave to her. Turiddu kept up his habit of going back and forth through the street with his pipe in his mouth, his hands in his pockets, and an air of unconcern, and ogling the girls; but it gnawed his heart that Lola's husband had so much money, and that she pretended not to see him when he passed.

"I'll get even with her, under her very eyes; the vile beast," he muttered.

Opposite compare Alfio lived massaro Cola, the vinedresser, who was as rich as a pig, and had one daughter at home. Turiddu said and did all he could to become massaro Cola's workman, and he began to frequent the house, and make sweet speeches to the girl.

"Why don't you go and say sweet things to gnà Lola?" asked Santa.

"Gnà Lola is a fine lady. Gnà Lola has married a crowned king now!"

"I don't deserve crowned kings!"

"You are worth a hundred Lolas, and I know some one who wouldn't look at la gnà Lola or her saint when you are by, for gnà Lola isn't worthy to wear your shoes, no, she isn't!"

"The fox when he couldn't get at the grapes said, 'How beautiful you are, racinedda mia,' my little grape!"

"Ohè! hands off, compare Turiddu!"

"Are you afraid that I will eat you?"

"I'm not afraid of you or of your God."

"Eh! your mother was from Licodia, we all know that! You have quarrelsome blood. Uh! How I could eat you with my eyes!"

"Eat me then with your eyes, for we should not have a crumb left, but meantime help me up with this bundle."

"I would lift up the whole house for you, yes, I would!"

She, so as not to blush, threw at him a stick of wood which was within reach, and by a miracle didn't hit him.

"Let's have done, for chattering never picked grapes."

"If I were rich I should try to get a wife like you, gnà Santa."

"I shall never marry a crowned king like gnà Lola, but I have my dowry as well as

she, whenever the Lord shall send me anyone."

"We know you are rich, we know it."

"If you know it, say no more, for father is coming, and I shouldn't like to have him find me in the court-yard."

The old father began to turn up his nose, but the girl pretended not to notice it, because the tassel of the bersegliere's cap had set her heart to fluttering, and was constantly dancing before her eyes. When the babbo put Turiddu out of the house, his daughter opened the window for him, and stood chatting with him all the evening long, so that the whole neighborhood talked of nothing else.

"I'm madly in love with you," said Turiddu, "and I am losing my sleep and my appetite."

"How absurd!"

"I wish I were Victor Emmanuel's son, so as to marry you."

"How absurd!"

"By the Madonna, I would eat you like bread!"

"How absurd!"

"Ah! on my honor!"

"Ah! mamma mia!"

Lola, who was listening every evening, hidden behind the vase of basil, and turning red and white, one day called Turiddu:—

"And so, compare Turiddu, old friends don't speak to each other any more?"

"Ma!" sighed the young man, "blessed is he who can speak to you."

"If you have any desire to speak to me, you know where I live," replied Lola.

Turiddu went to see her so frequently that Santa noticed it, and shut the window in his face. The neighbors looked at him with a smile or with a shake of the head when

the bersegliere passed. Lola's husband was making a round of the fairs with his mules.

"Sunday I am going to confession, for last night I dreamed of black grapes," said Lola.

"Put it off, put it off" begged Turiddu.

"No, Easter is coming, and my husband will want to know why I haven't been to confession."

"Ah," murmured massaro Cola's Santa, as she was waiting on her knees before the confessional for her turn, while Lola was making a clean breast of her sins. "On my soul, I will not send you to Rome for your punishment!"

Compare Alfio came home with his mules; he was loaded with money, and he brought to his wife for a present, a handsome new dress for the holidays.

"You are right to bring her gifts," said his neighbor Santa, "because while you are away your wife adorns your house for you."

Compare Alfio was one of those carters who wear their hats over one ear, and when he heard his wife spoken of in such a way he changed color as if he had been knifed.

"Santo diavolone!" he exclaimed, "if you haven't seen aright, I will not leave you eyes to weep with, you or your whole family."

"I am not used to weeping!" replied Santa, "I did not weep even when I saw with these eyes gnà Nunzia's Turiddu going into your wife's house at night!"

"It is well," replied compare Alfio, "many thanks!"

Turiddu, now that the cat was at home, no longer went out on the street by day, and he whiled away the tedium at the inn with his friends; and on Easter eve they had on the table a dish of sausages.

When compare Alfio came in, Turiddu realized, merely by the way in which he fixed his eyes on him, that he had come to settle that affair, and he laid his fork on

the plate.

"Have you any commands for me, compare Alfio?" he asked.

"No favors to ask, compare Turiddu; it's some time since I have seen you, and I wanted to speak concerning something you know about."

Turiddu at first had offered him a glass, but compare Alfio refused it with a wave of his hand. Then Turiddu got up and said to him,—

"Here I am, compare Alfio."

The carter threw his arms around his neck.

"If to-morrow morning you will come to the prickly pears of la Canziria, we can talk that matter over, compare."

"Wait for me on the street at daybreak, and we will go together."

With these words they exchanged the kiss of defiance. Turiddu bit the carter's ear, and thus made the solemn oath not to fail him.

The friends had silently left the sausages, and accompanied Turiddu to his home. Gnà Nunzia, poor creature, waited for him till late every evening.

"Mamma," said Turiddu, "do you remember when I went as a soldier, that you thought I should never come back any more? Give me a good kiss as you did then, for to-morrow morning I am going far away."

Before daybreak he got his spring-knife, which he had hidden under the hay, when he had gone to serve his time in the army, and started for the prickly-pear trees of la Canziria.

"Oh, Gesummaria! where are you going in such haste!" cried Lola in great apprehension, while her husband was getting ready to go out.

"I am not going far," replied compare Alfio. "But it would be better for you if I never came back."

Lola in her nightdress was praying at the foot of the bed, and pressing to her lips the

rosary which Fra Bernardino had brought to her from the Holy places, and reciting all the Ave Marias that she could say.

"Compare Alfio," began Turiddu, after he had gone a little distance by the side of his companion, who walked in silence with his cap down over his eyes, "as God is true I know that I have done wrong, and I should let myself be killed. But before I came out, I saw my old mother, who got up to see me off, under the pretence of tending the hens. Her heart had a presentiment, and as the Lord is true, I will kill you like a dog, so that my poor old mother may not weep."

"All right," replied compare Alfio, stripping off his waistcoat. "Then we will both of us hit hard."

Both of them were skilful fencers. Turiddu was first struck, and was quick enough to receive it in the arm. When he returned it, he returned it well, and wounded the other in the groin.

"Ah, compare Turiddu! so you really intend to kill me, do you?"

"Yes, I gave you fair warning; since I saw my old mother in the hen-yard, it seems to me I have her all the time before my eyes."

"Keep them well open, those eyes of yours," cried compare Alfio, "for I am going to give you back good measure."

As he stood on guard, all doubled up, so as to keep his left hand on his wound, which pained him, and almost trailing his elbow on the ground, he swiftly picked up a handful of dust, and flung it into his adversary's eyes.

"Ah!" screamed Turiddu, blinded, "I am dead."

He tried to save himself, by making desperate leaps backwards, but compare Alfio overtook him with another thrust in the stomach, and a third in the throat.

"And that makes three! that is for the house which you have adorned for me! Now your mother will let the hens alone."

Turiddu staggered a short distance among the prickly pears, and then fell like a stone. The blood foaming, gurgled in his throat, and he could not even cry, "Ah! mamma mia!"

LA LUPA.

She was tall and lean; but she had a firm, full bust, and yet she was no longer young; her complexion was brunette, but pallid as if she had always suffered from malaria, and this pallor set forth two big eyes and fresh rosy lips that seemed to eat you.

In the village she was called la Lupa—the She-Wolf—because she was never satisfied. Women made the sign of the cross when they saw her pass, always alone like a big ugly hound, with the vagabond and suspicious gait of a famished wolf; she would bewitch their sons and their husbands in the twinkling of an eye with her red lips and she made them fall in love with her merely by looking at them out of those big Satanic eyes of hers, even if they were before Santa Agrippina's altar.

Fortunately la Lupa never came to church at Easter or at Christmas, nor to hear Mass or to make confession. Padre Angiolino of Santa Maria di Gesù, a true servant of God, had lost his soul on her account.

Maricchia,—poor girl, pretty and clever she was,—secretly wept because she was la Lupa's daughter, and no one had offered to marry her though she had nice clothes in her bureau, and her own little piece of land in the sun, like every other girl of the village.

One time la Lupa fell in love with a handsome youth who had just served out his time in the army, and had come home and was helping to reap the notary's harvest with her; for surely it means to be in love when she felt the flesh burn under the fustian shift, and on looking at him to experience the thirst that one has in hot June days down in the low-lands.

But he went on with his work, undisturbed, with his nose on his sheaves, and he said to her, "Oh, what's the matter, gnà Pina?"

In the immense fields where the only sound was the rustle of the grasshoppers flying up, while the sun was pouring down his hottest beams perpendicularly, la Lupa was heaping up sheaf on sheaf, and pile on pile, without ever showing any signs of fatigue, without one moment straightening herself up, without once touching her lips to the water jug, so as to stick close to Nanni's heels as he reaped and reaped; and now and again he would ask,—

"What do you want, gnà Pina?"

One evening she told him, it was while the men were sleeping in the threshing-floor, weary of the long day's work and the dogs were howling through the vast black campagna,—

"I want you! you are as handsome as the sun and as sweet as honey; I want you!"

"But I want your daughter—I want the young calf," said Nanni, laughing at his own joke.

La Lupa thrust her hands into the masses of her hair, scratching her temples, without saying a word, and went off and was not seen again in the harvest field. But the following October she saw Nanni again at the time when they were pressing the oil, because he worked near her house, and the rattle of the press kept her awake all night.

"Take a bag of olives," she said to her daughter, "and come with me."

Nanni was shoveling the olives into the hopper and shouting "Ohi" to the mule to keep it going.

"Do you want my daughter Maricchia?" demanded gnà Pina.

"What dowry will you give with your daughter Maricchia?" replied Nanni.

"She has her father's things, and besides I will give her my house; it will be enough for me if you'll let me have a corner in the kitchen to spread out a mattress in."

"If that is so, we can talk about it at Christmas," said Nanni. Nanni was all grease

and dirt from the olives put to fermenting, and Maricchia would not have him on any account; but her mother grabbed her by the hair as they stood in front of the hearth and hissed through her set teeth,—

"If you don't take him, I'll kill you."

La Lupa looked ill, and the people remarked: "When the devil was old the devil a monk would be." She no longer went wandering about; she stood no more at her doorway looking out with those eyes as of one possessed.

Her son-in-law, when she fixed those eyes on his face, always began to laugh, and would pull out his cloth talisman, with its effigy of the Madonna, to cross himself with.

Maricchia stayed at home to nurse her children, and her mother went out to work in the fields with the men, just like a man,—to weed, to dig, to guide the animals, to dress the vines, whether it were during the Greek-Levant winds[13] of January, or during the August sirocco, when mules let their heads droop, and men sleep prone on their bellies under the shadow of the North wall.

In that time between vespers and nones, when, according to the saying, no good woman is seen going about, gnà Pina was the only living creature to be seen wandering across the campagna, over the fiery hot stones of the narrow streets, among the parched stubble of the wide, wide fields that stretched away into the burning haze toward cloudy Etna, where the sky hangs heavy on the horizon.

"Wake up!" said la Lupa to Nanni, who was asleep in the ditch next the dusty harvest-field, with his head on his arms. "Wake up, for I've brought you some wine to cool your throat."

Nanni opened his eyes, half awake, and saw her sitting up straight and pale before him, with her swelling breast, and her eyes as black as coal, and drew back waving his arms,—

"No! a good woman does not go about between vespers and nones," groaned Nanni,

thrusting his face in amongst the dried weeds of the ditch as far as he could, and putting his fingers into his hair. "Go away! Get you gone! And don't you come to the threshing-floor any more."

She turned and went away,—la Lupa,—knotting up her splendid tresses again, looking down steadily as she made her way among the hot stubble, with her eyes black as coal.

But she did go back to the threshing-floor, and Nanni no longer reproached her; and when she failed to come, in that hour between vespers and nones, he went, and with perspiration on his brow, waited for her at the top of the white deserted footpath, but afterwards he would thrust his hands through his hair, and every time he would say, "Go away! Go away! Don't come to the threshing-floor again."

Maricchia wept night and day, and she looked into her mother's face with eyes blazing with tears and jealousy, like a lupachiotta, a young wolf herself, every time that she saw her coming back from the fields, silent and pale.

"Vile! scellerata!" she would say, "Vile mamma."

"Hold your tongue!"

"Thief! thief!"

"Hold your tongue!"

"I'll go to the brigadiere!"[14]

And she actually went with her infants in her arms, without a sign of fear, and without shedding a tear, like a crazy woman, because now she passionately loved that husband whom she had been forced to marry, greasy and dirty as he was from the olives set to fermenting.

The brigadiere summoned Nanni, and threatened him with the galleys and the gallows. Nanni began to weep, and pull his hair; he denied nothing, did not try to justify himself.

"The temptation was too much," said he, "'twas the temptation of hell." He flung himself at the brigadiere's feet, begging him to send him to the galleys.

"For mercy's sake, Signor brigadiere, take me out of this hell! Have me shot! Send me to prison! Don't let me see her ever again! never again!"

"No," replied la Lupa, to the brigadiere's question. "I kept a corner of the kitchen to sleep in when I gave him my house as my daughter's dowry. The house is mine. I do not intend to go away."

Shortly after, Nanni was kicked in the chest by a mule, and was like to die; but the priest refused to bring him the Holy Unction unless la Lupa was out of the house.

La Lupa went away, and her son-in-law was then permitted to pass away like a good Christian; he confessed and partook of the Sacrament with such signs of penitence and contrition that all the neighbors and inquisitive visitors wept as they surrounded the dying man's bed.

And it would have been better for him if he had died then and there, before the devil had a chance to return to tempt him, and take possession of him, mind and body, when he got well again.

"Let me be!" he said to la Lupa; "for mercy's sake, leave me in peace! I have seen death with my own eyes! Poor Maricchia is in despair. Now the whole region knows about it! If I don't see you, it's better for you and better for me."

And he would rather have put his eyes out, than see la Lupa's, for when hers were fastened on him, they made him lose soul and body. He did not know what to do to overcome the enchantment. He paid for Masses to be sung for the souls in Purgatory, and he went for aid to the priest and the brigadiere. At Easter he went to confession, and as a penance, publicly stood on the flint stones of the holy ground in front of the church, putting out six handbreadths of tongue, and then, when la Lupa returned to tempt him,—

"See here," said he, "don't you come on the threshing-floor again, because if you do

come to seek me again, as sure as God exists, I'll kill you."

"All right, kill me!" replied la Lupa. "It makes no difference to me; but I can not live without you."

When he saw her afar off coming through the green corn field, he left off pruning the vines, and went and got his axe from the elm.

La Lupa saw him coming to meet her, with his face pale and his eyes rolling wildly, with the axe shining in the sun; but she did not hesitate an instant, did not look away. She went straight forward with her hands full of bunches of red poppies, and devouring him with those black eyes of hers.

"Ah! a curse on your soul!" stammered Nanni.

THE STORY OF THE ST. JOSEPH'S ASS.

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They had bought it at the Fair of Buccheri when it was still a young colt, and if it caught sight of a she ass, it would run to it and try to nurse; for this reason, it had got blows and kicks on its rump, and it was all in vain for them to shout "arricca"—get up—to it.

Compare Neli, when he saw how lively and obstinate it was, and how it licked its nostrils when the blows fell, and how it kept wagging its ears, said,—

"That's the one for me."

And he went straight up to the proprietor, with his hand in his pocket on thirty-five lire.

"The colt is handsome," said the proprietor, "and is worth more than thirty-five lire. No matter if it has a white and black skin like a magpie. There, I'll show you its

mother; we keep her over yonder in that little grove, because the colt's all the time wanting to nurse. You shall see what a pretty dark hide it's got! Why, she does more work for me than a mule would, and has given me more colts than she has hairs on her back. My conscience! I don't know where this colt got its magpie coat. But it is well built, I tell you. Even men aren't judged by their moustaches. Look, what a chest! and what thick, solid legs! See how it holds its ears. An ass that holds its ears up like that can be put in a cart or to a plow as you please, and it will carry four bushels of corn better than a mule, I swear it will—by all the saints. Just feel that tail—strong enough to hold up you and all your kith and kin."

Compare Neli knew that as well as the other, but he wasn't dunce enough to say so, and he stood with his hand in his pocket, shrugging his shoulders and making grimaces while the proprietor of the colt made it turn round before them.

"Huh!" grunted compare Neli, "with a skin like that, it looks like Saint Joseph's ass. Animals of that color are always vigliacche,[15] and when you ride them about, people laugh in your face. Am I going to be made a laughing stock for a Saint Joseph's ass?"

It was the padrone's turn to turn his back on him in a passion, screaming that some people didn't know a good animal when they saw one, and if they hadn't any money to buy with, they'd better not come to the fair, and waste good Christian's time—on a saint's day, too.

Compare Neli let him fume away, and he went off with his brother, who pulled the sleeve of his jacket, and whispered in his ear, that if he was going to throw away his money on that good-for-nothing animal he would deserve to be kicked.

While the padrone pretended to be shelling some young beans, holding the halter between his legs, compare Neli, not really losing sight of the Saint Joseph's ass, went off on a tour of inspection among the mules and horses, now and again stopping to criticise or even haggle over the price of this one or of that among the

better animals; but he did not open his hand, which still clasped safely in his pocket the thirty-five lire as if it were going to buy half the fair. But his brother kept telling him in a whisper, pointing to the ass, which they called Saint Joseph's,—

"That's the one for us."

The ass's mistress, every once in a while, came over to her husband to see how business was progressing, and when she saw him sitting with the halter in his hand, she said,—

"Isn't the Madonna going to send a purchaser for the foal, to-day?"

And the husband would always reply in these terms,—

"None yet! One's been here bargaining, and he liked it. But he objected to the price, and went off again with the money in his pocket. There he is, over yonder with the white cap, beyond that flock of sheep. He hasn't bought anything yet; that means, he'll be back again."

The woman was about to squat down on a couple of stones near her foal, to see whether it would be sold or not. But her husband said to her,—

"Off with you. If they see you are waiting, they won't finish the bargain."

Meantime the foal was nosing about between the legs of several she-asses that were passing by. It wanted to nurse, for it was half starved. It was just opening its mouth to bray when the padrone reduced it to silence by a shower of blows because they had not wanted it.

"It's still there," said compare Neli in his brother's ear, pretending to turn round and look for something. "If we wait till the Ave Maria, we may be able to get it for five lire cheaper than the price that we offered."

The May sunshine was warm so that gradually amid all the noise and bustle of the fair a great silence followed throughout the whole field, as if no one were there: then it was that the mistress of the young ass came to her husband again and said:

"I wouldn't hold out for five lire more or less, for to-night we have not enough to buy our supper and you know well that the foal will eat his head off in a month if he remains on our hands."

"If you don't go off," replied her husband, "I'll give you a kick that you'll remember."

Thus passed the hours at the fair; but of all those who passed in front of the Saint Joseph's ass not one stopped to look at it, and that, too, though the padrone had chosen the most humble place near the animals of small value, so that with its magpie skin it might not be compared with the beautiful bay mules and the sleek horses! Some one like compare Neli was wanted to buy his Saint Joseph's ass, at the sight of which every one at the fair was laughing.

The colt, after such a long waiting in the sun, let his head and ears hang down; his padrone went and squatted on the stones, with his hands also hanging between his knees and the halter in his hands, gazing at the long shadows that began to be cast across the plain from the sun, which was preparing to set, and at the legs of all those animals that had not as yet found purchasers.

Just then compare Neli and his brother, and a friend of theirs whom they had picked up for the occasion, came sauntering by, with their noses in the air; but the owner of the young ass turned his head aside so as not to seem to be on the look out for them. And compare Neli's friend, squinting up his eyes, remarked as if the idea had just occurred to him:

"O, see that Saint Joseph's ass! Why don't you buy that one, compare Neli?"

"I bargained it this morning; but he asks too much for it. Besides, I should be the laughing stock of the town if I were seen with that black and white beast. You see no one has had a thought of buying it so far."

"That's so, but the color makes no difference in the use that you make of one."

And turning to the padrone he asked,—

"How much must we pay for that Saint Joseph's ass of yours?"

The mistress of the Saint Joseph's ass, seeing that the business was on once more, had quietly approached, with her hands clasped under her apron.

"Don't speak to me of it," cried compare Neli making off across the field. "Don't speak of it again, I don't want to hear a word."

"If you don't want it, let it be," replied the padrone. "If he does not take it, some one else will. 'A sad wretch is he who has nothing left to sell after the fair.'"

"And I will be heard, santo diavolone!" screamed the friend. "Can't I be permitted to have my say?"

And he ran and caught compare Neli by the jacket, then he came back and whispered something in the padrone's ear as the man was about to return home with his young ass, and he flung his arm round his neck, murmuring,—

"Look here! five lire more or less, and if you don't sell it to-day you won't find another blunderhead like my compare to buy a beast, which between you and me, isn't worth a cigar!"

He also embraced the young ass's mistress, whispered in her ear to win her to his way of thinking. But she shrugged her shoulders and replied with stern face,—

"'Tis my husband's business: I don't mix myself in it. But if he lets it go for less than forty lire he is a dunce, and that's what I say. It cost us more than that."

"This morning I was crazy when I offered him thirty-five lire," resumed compare Neli. "Has he found any other purchaser even at that price? I reckon not. In the whole fair there aren't more than four scabby rams and the Saint Joseph's ass. I'll give thirty lire if he'll take it."

"Take it," softly whispered the young ass's mistress to her husband, and the tears came into her eyes. "We haven't made enough this evening to buy our supper, and Turiddu has the fever again; he'll have to have quinine."

"Santo diavolone!" screamed her husband, "if you don't get away from here I'll give you a taste of this halter."

"Thirty-two and a half, there now!" cried the friend at last, giving him a powerful shake to the collar.

"Neither you nor I! This time my advice ought to hold, by all the saints in paradise! and I don't even ask for a glass of wine. Don't you see the sun is set? What is the use of you both holding out any longer?"

And he snatched the halter from the padrone's hand, while, at the same time, compare Neli with an oath took out of his pocket his closed fist clutching the thirty-five lire, and gave them to the man without looking at them as if they took his liver with them. The friend retired to one side with the mistress of the young ass to count over the money on a rock, while the padrone went off to another part of the fair like a colt, cursing and beating himself with his fists.

But when he was at last rejoined by his wife, who was carefully recounting the money in her handkerchief, he demanded,—

"Have you got it?"

"Yes, the whole of it; praised be San Gaetano![16] Now I'll go to the apothecary's."

"I got the best of them! I'd have let them have the beast for twenty lire; asses of that color are vigliacchi—vile."

And compare Neli, as he got behind the ass to drive it off, said,—

"As God exists I robbed him of the colt! The color makes no difference. See what solid legs, compare! That beast is worth forty lire with one's eyes shut."

"If it had not been for me," returned the friend, "you would not have struck the bargain. Here are still two lire and a half of your money. And if you don't object we will go and have a drink to the health of the ass!"

Now the colt needed to have its health in order to repay the thirty-two and a half lire

which had been paid for it, and the straw which it ate. Meanwhile it was contented to frisk behind compare Neli, trying to bite his new padrone's coat tails, and making no ado because it was leaving forever the stall where it had been sheltered by its mother's side, free to rub its nose on the edge of the manger, or to gambol and cut up capers, butting with the ram or going to rub the pig's back in its pen.

And the padrone, who was still again counting over the money in her handkerchief before the apothecary's counter, had on her side no regrets, although she had assisted at the birth of the foal with its black and white skin, as shiny as silk, and which could not at first stand up on its legs, but lay in the warm sun in the court-yard while all the grass which had made it grow so big and strong had passed through her hands!

The only person who missed the foal was its mother, who stretched out her neck toward the entrance of the stall and brayed. But when her udder was no longer painfully distended with the milk, she also forgot about the foal.

"Now you will see," said compare Neli, "that this ass will carry four bushels of corn better than a mule, for me."

And at harvest time he was set to threshing.

At the threshing, the colt, fastened by the neck, in a row with other animals—worn out mules, decrepit horses, paced over the sheaves, from morning till night, so that when it was brought back to the stable, he was so tired that he had no desire to bite at the heap of straw where they put him up in the shade when the wind blew, while the peasants did their winnowing with shouts of "Viva Maria!"

Then he let his nose hang down and drooped his pendent ears, like a full-fledged ass with eyes dulled, as if he were weary of gazing across over that vast plain, smoking here and there with the dust of the threshing-floors, and he seemed made for nothing else than to die of thirst and enforced treading on sheaves.

At eventide, it was sent to the village with the saddle-bags filled full, and the

padrone's boy followed, to prick it in the withers, along the hedges lining the road, that seemed alive with the chattering of the tomtits, and the odor of the catnip and rosemary; and the ass would gladly have snatched a mouthful, if they had not always kept it on the go, until at last, the blood ran to its legs and they had to take it to the farrier; but this did not trouble the padrone, because the harvest was good, and the young ass had earned its cost,—his thirty-two lire and a half. The padrone said,—

"Now, the work has worn him out, but if I could sell him for twenty lire, I should still have made a good thing out of him."

The only person who had a fondness for the young ass was the boy who made it trot over the road on the way from the threshing-floor. And he felt badly when the farrier burnt its legs with red-hot irons, so that the young ass squirmed and flung its tail into the air, and pricked up its ears, and when it ran across the field of the fair, and it tried to break loose from the twisted rope which they fastened to its lip, and it rolled its eyes with the agony, as if it were undergoing torture, when the farrier's apprentice came to change the hot irons, red as fire, and the skin smoked and sizzled, like fish in a frying-pan. But compare Neli cried to his boy,—

"You beast! what are you weeping for? Now that he is played out, and since the harvest has been a good one, we'll sell him and buy a mule, and that will be better."

Boys do not understand some things, and after the young ass was sold to massaro Cirino, of Licodiana, compare Neli's son used to visit it in the stall, and to caress its face and neck, and the ass would turn round its head, and snuff as if it had become attached to him, while, as a general thing, asses are made to be tied wherever their padrone may see fit to tie them, and change their lot as they change their stall.

Massaro Cirino, of Licodiana, had paid a very small price for the Saint Joseph's ass, because it still bore the scars on its pastern, and compare Neli's wife, when she saw the poor beast go by with its new master, said,—

"That beast was our mascot. That black and white skin brought joy to the

threshing-floor, and now the profits are going from bad to worse, for we have had to sell the mule, too."

Massaro Cirino had yoked the ass to the plow, together with an old mare which matched it like a stone in a ring, and drew her brave furrow all day long, for miles and miles, from the time the lark began to sing in the clear morning sky, till, with quick and hasty flights, and melancholy chirping, the robin red-breasts ran to hide behind the naked bushes, trembling with cold under the mist that rose like a sea.

Only, as the ass was smaller than the mare, a cushion of hay was put over the saddle under the yoke, and it had hard work to break up the frozen clods, by dint of chafed shoulders.

"It'll help spare the mare, who's getting old," said massaro Cirino. "It's got a heart as broad and big as the Plain of Catania, that Saint Joseph's ass has! and you would not think it!"

And he added, turning to his wife, who had followed him, wrapped in a mantellina, penuriously scattering the seed,—

"If anything should happen to it—Heaven forefend—we are ruined with the prospects before us."

The woman looked forward to the prospects of crops in the rocky, desolate, little field, with its white and cracked soil, so long had it been since the rain fell, and all the water it got came in the form of mist and fog, of the kind that spoils the seed, and when it was time to dig up the ground, it was so yellow and hard, that you would call it the very beard of the devil, as if it had been burnt with sulphur matches!

"In spite of the crop which I put in," mourned massaro Cirino, pulling off his doublet, "why, that ass has worked himself to death like a stupid mule. That ass is under a curse!"

His wife had a lump in her throat at the sight of the parched field, and she replied

with tears rolling from her eyes,—

"The ass had nothing to do with the failure. It brought a good crop to compare Neli. But we are unfortunate."

So the Saint Joseph's ass changed masters once more, when massaro Cirino returned from the field with the sickle over his shoulder, it being useless even to try to reap that year, although the images of the saints had been stuck into bamboo sticks all over the ground for protection, and two tarì[17] had been paid to the priest for his blessing.

"It's the devil that we want rather than the saints," said massaro Cirino, irreverently, when he saw all those stalks standing up like crests, which even the ass refused to touch, and he spat up towards that turquoise-colored sky, so relentlessly cloudless.

It was then that compare Luciano, the carter, meeting massaro Cirino, as he was driving back the ass with empty saddlebags, asked,—

"What'll you take for that Saint Joseph's ass?"

"Anything you'll give me! Cursed be he and the saint who made him!" replied massaro Cirino. "Now we haven't any more bread to eat, or fodder to give the beast."

"I'll give you fifteen lire for it, seeing that you are ruined, but the ass isn't worth so much, for it won't last out more than six months! See how thin it is!"

"You might have got more than that," grumbled massaro Cirino's wife, after the bargain was settled. "Compare Luciano's mule's dead, and he hadn't money enough to buy another. Now if he hadn't bought our Saint Joseph's ass, he wouldn't have known what to do with his cart and harnesses; you'll see that ass'll be a fortune to him."

The ass was set to work drawing the cart, but the shafts of it were much too high for it, and brought all the weight on its shoulders, so that it would not have survived even six months; for it went limping along over the hilly roads under compare

Luciano's cruel cudgelling, who tried to put a little spirit into it; and when it went down hill, the case was even worse, for then the whole load rested on it, and pushed against it so hard that it had to make its back like an arch to hold the cart back, and push with those poor scarred legs, and people would laugh to see it, and when it fell it would have taken all the angels of Paradise to get it to its feet again. But compare Luciano knew that he carried three quintals of merchandise more than a mule, and the load would bring him five tarì a quintal.

"Every day that Saint Joseph's ass lives," said he, "I make fifteen tarì, and his keep costs me less than a mule's would."

Every time the people who happened to be sauntering along behind the cart saw the poor beast, which could hardly put one leg in front of the other, arching its spine and panting heavily, with discouragement clouding its eye, they would say,—

"Block the wheel with a rock, and let that poor creature have a chance to get its breath."

But compare Luciano would reply,—

"If I let him do as he pleases, I should not make my fifteen tarì a day. His hide's got to pay for mine. When he can't do any more work I shall sell him to the lime dealer; for the beast is good enough for his work. I tell you there's no truth at all in the idea that St. Joseph's asses are vigliacchi. Besides, I got this one of massaro Cirino for a piece of bread, after he was 'poverished."

In this way the Saint Joseph's ass passed into the hands of the lime-dealer, who already possessed a score or more of asses all lean and moribund, which carried his sacks of plaster, and picked up a wretched living by means of the mouthfuls of weeds that they could snatch as they went along the road.

The lime-dealer objected to the Saint Joseph's ass because it was covered with worse scars than his other beasts, with its legs seared by the hot iron, and the skin on its chest worn off by the poitrel, and the withers raw by the chafing of the plow, and the

knees barked by constant falls, and then that pelt of black and white seemed to him so inharmonious among his other brown-skinned animals.

"That makes no difference," replied compare Luciano. "Besides, it will serve to distinguish your asses at a distance."

But he deducted two tarì from the seven lire that he had asked, so as to bring the business to a settlement.

Now the Saint Joseph's ass would not have been recognized even by the padrona who had been present when it was born, so greatly had it changed as it stumbled along with its nose to the ground and its ears curled over like an umbrella under the lime-dealer's heavy sacks, twitching its flanks under the blows of the youth who drove the caravan. But then the padrona herself was changed at that time, what with the bad harvests they had gathered and the hunger from which she had suffered, and the fevers which they had all contracted in the low lands, she and her husband and her Turiddu, while they had no money to buy any more quinine at the apothecary's and at the same time they had no more asses even of the Saint Joseph kind to sell for the small price of thirty-five lire!

In winter, when there was little work and the wood for burning the lime was scarce, and to be had only at a distance, and the frozen paths hadn't a leaf on their hedges or a mouthful of stubble along by the icy gutters, life was still harder for those poor brutes, and the padrone knew that in winter not half as much was eaten; so he used to buy a good stock of provisions in the spring.

At night the drove remained in the open air near the lime-burners, and the brutes clustered together for protection against the cold. But those stars shining like swords through and through them in spite of their thick hides, and all those ulcer-eaten beasts shook and trembled in the cold as if they were human beings.

But then there are many Christians who are not better off, not having even such a ragged coat as that wrapt up in which the herd-boy slept before the furnace.

Near by there lived a poor widow in a dilapidated hut, more tumble-down by far than the lime-furnace, and through its roof the stars penetrated like swords, as if it were no roof at all, and the wind fluttered the wretched rags of her covering. At first she took in washing, but that was meagre pay, for the people thereabouts do their own washing, when they wash at all, and now that her little boy had grown she went about peddling wood in the village. No one had known her husband and no one knew where she got the wood that she sold; that was known only by her son, who went about picking it up here and there at the risk of getting shot by the campieri.

"If you only had an ass!" the lime-dealer had said to her, hoping that he might dispose of that Saint Joseph's ass, which was good for nothing more, "then you could take down to the village much bigger fagots, now that your son is getting to be grown up."

The poor woman had a few lire in the knot of her handkerchief, and she let herself be persuaded into it by the lime-burner, because it is said that "old things go to destruction in the house of a fool."

One thing at least was true: the poor Saint Joseph's ass had a more endurable existence at last, because the widow regarded it as a treasure by reason of the few soldi that it had cost her, and she went out nights in search of straw and hay for it, and she kept it in her hut next her own bed because its vital heat was as good as a fire, and in this way one hand washed the other, as the proverb has it.

The woman driving the ass loaded with a mountain of wood so that its ears could not be seen, built air-castles as she went, and her son ravaged the hedges, and risked his life in the borders of the woodlands to gather together his load, while both mother and son had an idea that they were going to become rich by that business, until, finally, the baron's campiere caught the boy breaking off branches, and gave him a terrible beating.

The doctor, for the price of curing the lad, devoured all the spare soldi knotted in the

handkerchief, the store of wood, and whatever else vendible she had,—and that was not much in all conscience,—so that the widow one night when her son was in a raging fever, with his face turned to the wall, and there was not a mouthful of bread in the house, went out, raging and talking to herself, as if she, too, had the fever, and she went to break off an almond-tree near by in such a way that it would not appear how it happened, and at dawn she loaded it on the ass to go and sell it. But the ass on the way up stumbled under the weight, and went down on its knees, just as Saint Joseph's ass knelt before the infant Jesus, and would not get up again.

"Souls of the dead!" stammered the woman, "won't you carry this load of wood for me."

And the passers-by pulled the ass's tail, and they bit its ears, so as to make it get up.

"Don't you see it's dying?" at last remarked a carter, and so at least the others let it alone, because the ass had the eye of a dead fish, a cold nose, and a shudder ran over its skin.

The woman, meantime, thought of her son, who was delirious with fever, and a flushed face, and cried,—

"Now what shall we do,—what shall we do?"

"If you will sell it, and all the wood on its back for five tarì, I'll give that much," said the carter who had an empty cart; and as the woman looked at it with squinting eyes, he added, "I'll only take the wood, for the ass isn't worth that—"

And he gave a kick to the carcass, which sounded like a burst drum.

THE BEREAVED.

The little girl appeared at the door, twisting the corner of her apron in her fingers, and said,—

"Here I am!"

Then, when no one paid any attention to her, she looked shyly first at one and then

at another of the women who were kneading dough, and spoke again,—

"They told me,—'Go to comare Sidora.'"

"Come here, come here," cried comare Sidora, red as a tomato, as she stood in the back part of the bake-shop. "Wait a moment, and I'll make you a nice cake."

"It means they are bringing comare Nunzia the Viaticum; they've sent the little girl away," observed the woman from Lacodia.

One of the women engaged in kneading the dough, turned her head, with her hands still at work in the trough, her arms bare to the elbow, and asked the little girl,—

"How is your step-mother?"

The child, not knowing the woman, looked at her with frightened eyes, and hanging her head, and nervously working at the ends of her apron, said, in a low voice, between her set teeth,—

"She's in bed."

"Don't you see 'tis the Sacrament," replied la Licodiana. "Now the neighbors have begun to scream at the door."

"As soon as I finish kneading this dough," said comare Sidora, "I'll run over a moment to see if they have need of anything. Compare Meno loses his right hand when this second wife of his dies."

"Some men have no luck with their wives, just as some are unfortunate with their mules. No sooner do they get 'em than they lose 'em. There's comare Angela."

"Yesterday evening," observed la Licodiana, "I saw compare Meno at his door; he had come back from the vineyard before the Ave Marie, and was blowing his nose on his handkerchief."

"But," suggested the woman who was kneading the dough, "he is a master hand at killing off his wives. In less than three years already two of curátolo[18] Nino's daughters have been eaten up, one after the other! Wait a little and you'll see the

third go the same way, and all curátolo Nino's things wasted."

"Is this little girl comare Nunzia's daughter, or his first wife's?"

"She's his first wife's daughter. But this one has been just as kind to her as though she had been her own mamma, because the little orphan was her niece, you know."

The child, hearing them speaking of herself, began to weep silently in a corner, thus relieving her bursting heart, which she had till then kept under control, by playing with her apron.

"Come here, come here," pursued comare Sidora. "The nice cake's all ready. There, there! Don't cry; for your mamma's in Paradise."

The little girl then dried her eyes with her doubled fists, because she saw that comare Sidora was preparing to open the oven.

"Poor comare Nunzia!" said a neighbor, appearing at the door. "The gravediggers are on their way. They just passed by here."

"Heaven protect me! as I am under Mary's grace!"[19] exclaimed the women, crossing themselves.

Comare Sidora took the cake out of the oven, brushed off the ashes, and handed it, smoking hot, to the little girl, who took it in her apron and walked away slowly, slowly, blowing on it as she went.

"Where are you going?" cried comare Sidora. "Stay here! There's a black-faced ba-bau at your house who carries folks off."

The little orphan listened gravely, with wide-opened eyes. Then she replied in the same obstinate drawl,—

"I am going to carry it to my mamma."

"Your mamma is dead; stay here," said one of the neighbors. "Eat your cake."

Then the little girl squatted down on the door-step, the image of sadness, holding her cake in her hand without offering to eat it.

Then suddenly seeing "il babbo" coming, she jumped up joyously and ran to meet him.

Compare Meno entered without saying a word, and sat down in a corner, with his hands dangling between his knees, with a long face, and his lips as white as paper; for since the day before, he had not put a morsel of food into his mouth because of his grief. He looked at the women as if to say,—

"Poveretto me!"

Seeing the black handkerchief around his neck, the women, with their hands still pasted with dough, made a circle round him and condoled with him in chorus.

"Don't speak of it to me, comare Sidora," he exclaimed, shaking his head, and heaving up his great shoulders. "This is a thorn that will never be pulled out of my heart. That woman was a real saint! I did not deserve her, saving your presence. Only day before yesterday, when she was so sick, she got up to tend to the weaning colt, and she would not let me call in the doctor, or buy any medicine, either—so as to not waste any money. I sha'n't find another wife like her. No I sha'n't, I tell you. Let me weep—I've good reason to."

And he began to shake his head and to heave his shoulders as if his misfortune were a burden not to be borne.

"As to getting another wife," said la Licodiana, to encourage him, "all you've got to do is to look for one."

"No! no!" asseverated compare Meno, with his head hung low, like a mule's. "Such another wife is not to be had. This time I shall remain a widower. I tell you I shall."

Comare Sidora interrupted him,—

"Don't say foolish things like that. You must get another wife, if only for the sake of this little orphan girl; for otherwise, who will look out for her when you are out working? You wouldn't let her run in the streets, would you?"

"Then find me another wife like my last one! She would not wash herself, for fear of soiling the water; and at home, she served me better than a farm-hand—affectionate and faithful. Why, she would not take even a handful of beans from the rack, or ever open her mouth to ask for anything. And beside, a fine dowry—things as good as gold. And I've got to give it all back because she had no children. At least, so the sacristan says, when he came with the Holy Water. And how kind she was to the little girl who reminded her of her poor sister. Any other woman, except an aunt, would have cast an evil eye on her, the poor little orphan!

"If you asked curátolo Nino for his third daughter, it would make things all right, both for the orphan and for the dowry," suggested la Licodiana.

"That's what I say. But don't speak of it to me, for now my mouth is bitter as gall."

"I wouldn't talk about it now," said comare Sidora. "Eat a bit of something, compare Meno. You are all tired out."

"No! no!" returned compare Meno several times. "Don't speak to me of eating, for I have a lump in my throat."

Comare Sidora placed before him on a stool fresh bread with ripe olives, a piece of sheep's-head cheese, and a jug of wine. And the poor clumsy fellow set to work nibbling at it, all the time grumbling, with a long face.

"Such bread as she made," he observed with a quaver in his voice, "no one else could ever make. Just as if it were made of real meal. And with a handful of wild fennel, she would make a soup to lick your fingers over! Now I shall have to buy bread at the shop of that thief, mastro Puddo; and as for hot soup, I sha'n't have any more, when I come home wet as a fresh-hatched chicken. And I shall have to go to bed with a cold stomach. Only the other night, while I was watching with her, after I had been digging and grubbing all day on the hill, and caught myself snoring as I sat next the bed, so tired I was, the poor soul said to me: 'Go and get a mouthful of something to eat. I left the soup to keep hot on the hearth.' And she was always

thinking about my comfort, and about the house, and whatever was to be done, and this thing and that thing; and she could not come to an end of speaking or of giving her last directions, like one who is going off on a long journey, and I heard her constantly muttering between waking and sleeping. And how contentedly she went off to the other world! With the crucifix on her breast, and her hands folded over it. She has no need of Masses and rosaries, saint that she was. Money spent on the priest would be money thrown away."

"World of tribulation!" exclaimed a neighbor. "Comare Angela's ass is like to die of the colic."

"But my misfortunes are heavier," ended compare Meno, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "No, don't make me eat any more, for the mouthfuls fall like lumps of lead into my stomach. You eat something, you poor innocent, for you don't understand what you've lost. Now you have no one any longer to wash you and brush your hair. Now you haven't a mamma any more to shelter you under her wings like a setting hen, and you are ruined, as I am. I found her for you, but a second stepmother like her you won't get, my daughter!"

The child with bursting heart put up her lip again, and stuck her fists into her eyes.

"No, you can't possibly get along alone," interposed comare Sidora. "You must find another wife for the sake of this poor little motherless girl, left in the midst of the street."

"And how shall I get along? And my colt? And my house? And who'll look after the hens? Let me weep, comare Sidora! It would have been better if I had died instead of that good soul."

"Hush, hush! you don't know what you are saying, and you don't know what a house without its head is!"

"That is true," assented compare Meno, comforted.

"Just take example from poor comare Angela! First, her husband died; then her

grown-up son, and now her ass is also dying."

"The ass ought to be bled in the belly, if it has the colic," said compare Meno.

"Come, you know all about such things," suggested the neighbor. "Do a work of charity for the sake of your wife's soul."

Compare Meno got up to go to comare Angela's, and the little orphan ran behind him like a chicken, now that she had no one else in the world. Comare Sidora, good housewife that she was, called him back.

"And the house? How have you left it, now that there is no one there to look after it?"

"I locked the door, and besides cousin Alfia lives opposite, and will keep an eye on it."

Neighbor Angela's ass lay stretched out in the midst of the yard, with his muzzle cold and his ears hanging, every now and then kicking his four legs into the air whenever the colic made him draw in his sides like a pair of bellows. The widow crouching in front of him on the rocks, with her hands clenching her gray hair, and her eyes dry and despairing, was watching him, pale as a corpse.

Compare Meno manœuvred round the animal, touching his ears, looking into his lifeless eyes, and when he saw that the blood was still oozing from the punctured vein under the belly, drop by drop, and coagulating in a black mass on his hairy skin, he remarked:

"So you've had him bled, have you?"

The widow fixed her dark eyes on his face without speaking, and nodded her "yes."

"Then there's nothing more to do," said compare Meno, and he continued to stare at the ass, which stretched itself out on the stones, stiffly, with its hair all rumpled, like a dead cat.

"It is God's will, sister!" said he to comfort her. "We are ruined, both of us!"

He had gone round by the widow's side and squatted down on the stones, with his little daughter between his knees, and both of them continued to gaze at the poor beast, which from time to time threshed the air with its legs as if it were in the agonies of death.

Comare Sidora, when she had got the bread safely out of the oven, also came into the yard with the cousin Alfia, who had put on her new gown and wore her silk handkerchief on her head, all ready for a bit of gossip, and comare Sidora said to compare Meno, drawing him aside,—

"Curátolo Nino won't give you his third daughter, for at your house the women die off like flies, and he loses the dowry. And then la Santa is too young, and there's the risk that she'd fill your house with children."

"If only one could be sure of boys! But there's always the danger of girls coming. Oh, I am so unfortunate!"

"Well, there's the cousin Alfia. She is no longer young, and she has property,—the house and a bit of vineyard."

Compare Meno fixed his eyes on the cousin Alfia, who with her arms a-kimbo was pretending to look at the ass, and then he said, "That's so! One might think of that. But I am so very unlucky!"

Comare Sidora interrupted him,—

"Think of those who are more unlucky than you are!"

"No one is, I tell you. I shall never find another wife like her, I shall never be able to forget her, even if I married ten times. And this poor little orphan will never forget her, either."

"Calm yourself! You'll forget her fast enough. And the little girl will forget her, too. Didn't she forget her own mother? But just look at poor neighbor Angela, whose ass is dying, and she hasn't got anything else. She'll never be able to forget it."

Comare Alfia saw that it was a favorable moment for her to approach, and drawing a long face, she began to eulogize the dead woman. She had with her own hands helped to lay her out on the bier, and had put over her face a fine linen handkerchief, of which she had a goodly store, as may be imagined.

Then compare Meno, with his heart melting within him, turned to his neighbor Angela, who was sitting motionless, as if she had been turned to stone.

"I suppose you'll have the ass skinned won't you? At least get some money for his pelt."

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Gramigna means dog's-tail-grass.

[2] Fichidindia, also called Indian figs.

[3] An onza is $2.55.

[4] Pic-nic day.

[5] Hill with a cross on it.

[6] I.e., a lusus naturæ, abnormal!

[7] Field guard.

[8] La puddara is the Sicilian name for Ursa Major,—the Big Bear.

[9] Stellato, starred, said of a horse with a white spot in his forehead.

[10] A fraction of a soldo, or cent.

[11] A parasitic disease.

[12] Facemu cuntu ca chioppi e scampau e la nostra amicizia finiu.

[13] North-east.

[14] Brigadiere is the station or the Commandant of the detachment of the Carabaneers in a small town.

[15] Cowardly, ridiculous, vile.

[16] The especial saint of the Provident.

[17] A tarì is one-thirtieth of an onza.

[18] The manager of a farm, not a tenant.

[19] "Lontano sia! che son figlia di Maria!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK UNDER THE SHADOW OF ETNA: SICILIAN STORIES FROM THE ITALIAN OF GIOVANNI VERGA ***

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