Tales from Blackwood, by Various

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Title: Tales from Blackwood Volume 8

Author: Various

Release Date: April 7, 2011 [EBook #35788]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TALES FROM BLACKWOOD ***
Good resolutions are, like glass, manufactured for the purpose of being broken. Immediately after my marriage, I registered in the books of my conscience a very considerable vow against any future interference with the railway system. The Biggleswade speculation had turned out so well that I thought it unsafe to pursue my fortune any further. The incipient gambler, I am told, always gains, through the assistance of a nameless personage who shuffles the cards a great deal oftener than many materialists suppose. Nevertheless, there is always a day of retribution.

I wish I had adhered to my original orthodox determination. During the whole period of the honeymoon, I remained blameless as to shares. Uncle Scripio relinquished the suggestion of "dodges" in despair. He was, as usual, brimful of projects, making money by the thousand, and bearing or bulling, as the case might be, with genuine American enthusiasm. I believe he thought me a fool for remaining so easily contented, and very soon manifested no further symptom of his consciousness of my existence than by transmitting me regularly a copy of the Railway Gazette, with some mysterious pencil-markings at the list of prices, which I presume he intended for my guidance in the case of an alteration of sentiment. For some time I never looked at them. When a man is newly married, he has a great many other things to think of. Mary had a decided genius for furniture, and used to pester me
perpetually with damask curtains, carved-wood chairs, gilt lamps, and a whole wilderness of household paraphernalia, about which, in common courtesy, I was compelled to affect an interest. Now, to a man like myself, who never had any fancy for upholstery, this sort of thing is very tiresome. My wife might have furnished the drawing-room after the pattern of the Cham of Tartary's for anything I cared, provided she had left me in due ignorance of the proceeding; but I was not allowed to escape so comfortably. I looked over carpet-patterns and fancy papers innumerable, mused upon all manner of bell-pulls, and gave judgment between conflicting rugs, until the task became such a nuisance that I was fain to take refuge in the sacred sanctuary of my club. Young women should be particularly careful against boring an accommodating spouse. Of all places in the world, a club is the surest focus of speculation. You meet gentlemen there who hold stock in every line in the kingdom--directors, committee-men, and even crack engineers. I defy you to continue an altogether uninterested auditor of the fascinating intelligence of Mammon. In less than a week my vow was broken, and a new liaison commenced with the treacherous Delilah of scrip. As nine-tenths of my readers have been playing the same identical game towards the close of last year, it would be idle to recount to them the various vicissitudes of the market. It is a sore subject with most of us--a regular undeniable case of "infandum regina." The only comfort is, that our fingers were simultaneously burned.

Amongst other transactions, I had been induced by my old friend Cutts, now in practice as an independent engineer, to apply for a large allocation of shares in the Slopperton Valley, a very spirited undertaking, for which the Saxon (as we used to call him) was engaged to invent the gradients. This occurred about the commencement of the great Potato Revolution--an event which I apprehend will be long remembered by the squirearchy and shareholders of these kingdoms. The money-market was beginning to exhibit certain symptoms of tightness; premiums were melting perceptibly away, and new schemes were in diminished favour. Under these circumstances, the Provisional Committee of the Slopperton Valley Company were beneficent enough to gratify my wishes to the full, and accorded to me the large privilege of three hundred original shares. Two months earlier this would have been equivalent to a fortune--as it was, I must own that my gratitude was hardly commensurate to the high generosity of the donors. I am not sure that I did not accompany the receipt of my letter of allocation with certain expletives by no means creditable to the character of the projectors--at all events, I began to look with a milder eye upon the atrocities of Pennsylvanian repudiation. However, as the crash was by no means certain, my sanguine temperament overcame me, and in a fit of temporary derangement I paid the deposit.

In the ensuing week the panic became general. Capel-court was deserted by its herd--Liverpool in a fearful state of commercial coma--Glasgow trembling throughout its Gorbals--and Edinburgh paralytically shaking. The grand leading doctrine of political economy once more was recognised as a truth: the supply exorbitantly exceeded the demand, and there were no buyers. The daily share-list became a far more pathetic document in my eyes than the Sorrows of Werter. The circular of my brokers, Messrs Tine and Transfer, contained a tragedy more woful than any of the conceptions of Shakespeare--the agonies of blighted love are a joke compared with those of baffled avarice; and of all kinds of consumption, that of the purse is the most severe. One circumstance, however, struck me as somewhat curious. Neither in share-list nor circular could I find any mention made of the Slopperton Valley. It seemed to have risen like an exhalation, and to have departed in similar silence. This boded...
ill for the existence of the L750 I had so idiotically invested, the recuperation whereof, in whole or in part, became the subject of my nightly meditations; and as correspondence in such matters is usually unsatisfactory, I determined to start personally in search of my suspended deposit.

I did not know a single individual of the Slopperton Provisional Committee, but I was well enough acquainted with Cutts, whose present residence was in a midland county of England, where the work of railway construction was going actively forward. As I drove into the town where the Saxon had established his headquarters, I saw with feelings of peculiar disgust immense gangs of cut-throat-looking fellows--"the navvies of the nations," as Alfred Tennyson calls them--busy at their embankments, absorbing capital at an alarming ratio, and utterly indifferent to the state of the unfortunate shareholders then writhing under the pressure of calls. Philanthropy is a very easy thing when our own circumstances are prosperous, but a turn of the wheel of fortune gives a different complexion to our views. If I had been called upon two months earlier to pronounce an oration upon the vast benefits of general employment and high wages, I should have launched out con amore. Now, the spectacle which I beheld suggested no other idea than that of an enormous cheese fast hastening to decomposition and decay beneath the nibbling of myriads of mites.

I found Cutts in his apartment of the hotel in the unmolested enjoyment of a cigar. He seemed fatter, and a little more red in the gills, than when I saw him last, otherwise there was no perceptible difference.

"Hallo, old fellow!" cried the Saxon, pitching away a pile of estimates; "what the mischief has brought you up here? Waiter--a bottle of sherry! You wouldn't prefer something hot at this hour of the morning, would you?"

"Certainly not."

"Ay--you're a married man now. How's old Morgan? Lord! what fun we had at Shrewsbury when I helped you to your wife!"

"So far as I recollect, Mr Cutts, you nearly finished that business. But I want to have a serious talk with you about other matters. What has become of that confounded Slopperton Valley, for which you were engineer?"

"Slopperton Valley! Haven't you heard about it? The whole concern was wound up about three weeks ago. Take a glass of wine."

"Wound up? Why, this is most extraordinary. I never received any circular!"

"I thought as much," said Cutts, very coolly. "That's precisely what I said to old Hasherton, the chairman, the day after the secretary bolted. I told him he should send round notice to the fellows at a distance, warning them not to cash up; but it seems that the list of subscribers had gone amissing, and so the thing was left to rectify itself."
"Bolted! You don't mean Mr Glanders, of the respectable firm of Glanders and Co.?

"Of course I do. I wonder you have not heard of it. That comes of living in a confounded country where there are neither breeches nor newspapers--help yourself--and no direct railway communication. Glanders bolted as a matter of course, and I can tell you that I thought myself very lucky in getting hold of as much of the deposits as cleared my preliminary expenses."

"Cutts--are you serious?"

"Perfectly. But what's the use of making a row about it? You look as grim as if there was verjuice in the sherry. You ought to thank your stars that the thing was put a stop to so soon."

"Why--didn't you recommend me to apply for shares?"

"Of course I did, and I wonder you don't feel grateful for the advice. Everybody thought they would have come out at a high premium. I would not have taken six pounds for them in the month of September; but this infernal potato business has brought on the panic, and nobody will table a shilling for any kind of new stock. It was a lucky thing for us that we got a kind of hint to draw in our horns in time."

"And pray, since the concern is wound up, as you say, how much of our deposit-money will be returned?"

"You don't mean to say," said Cutts, with singularly elaborate articulation--"You don't mean to say that you were such an inconceivable ass as to pay up your letter of allotment? Well, I never heard of such a piece of deliberate infatuation! Why, man, a blacksmith with half an eye must have seen that the game was utterly up a week before the calls were due. I don't think there is a single man out of Scotland who would have made such a fool of himself; indeed, so far as I know, nobody cashed up except a dozen old women who knew nothing about the matter, and ten landed proprietors, who expected compensation, and deserved to be done accordingly. You need not look as though you meditated razors. The Biggleswade profits will pay for this more than thirty times over."

"I'll tell you what, Cutts," said I in a paroxysm, "this is a most nefarious transaction, and I'm hanged if I don't take the law with every one connected with it. I'll make an example of that fellow Hasherton, and the whole body of the committee."

"Just as you like," replied the imperturbable Cutts. "You're a lawyer, and the best judge of those sort of things. I may, however, as well inform you that Hasherton went into the Gazette last week, and that you won't find another member of the committee at this moment within the four seas of Great Britain."

"And pray, may I ask how you came to be connected with so discreditable a project? Do you know that it is enough to blast your own reputation for ever?"
"I know nothing of the kind," said the Saxon, commencing another cigar. "I look to the matter of employment, and have nothing to do with the character of my clients, beyond ascertaining their means of liquidating my account. The committee required the assistance of a first-rate engineer, and I flatter myself they could hardly have made a more unexceptionable selection. But what's the use of looking sulky about it? You can't help yourself; and, after all, what's the amount of your loss? A parcel of pound-notes that would have lain rotting in the bank had you not put them into circulation! Cheer up, Fred, you've made at least one individual very happy. Glanders is going it in New York. I shouldn't be surprised if half your deposit-money is already invested in mint-juleps, gin-slings, and sherry-cobblers."

"It is very easy for you to talk, Mr Cutts," said I, with considerable acrimony. "Your account, at all events, appears to have been paid. Doubtless you looked sharply after that. I cannot help putting my own construction upon the conduct of a gentleman who makes a direct profit out of the misfortunes of his friends."

"You affect me deeply," said Cutts, applying himself diligently to the decanter; "but you don't drink. Do you know you put me a good deal in mind of Macready? Did you ever hear him in Lear, 'How sharper than a serpent's thanks it is To have a toothless child?'

You're remarkably unjust, Fred, as you will acknowledge in your cooler moments. I am hurt by your ingratitude--I am," and the sympathising engineer buried his face in the folds of a Bandana handkerchief.

I knew, by old experience, that it was of no use to get into a rage with Cutts. After all, I had no tenable ground of complaint against him; for the payment of the deposit-money was my own deliberate act, and it was no fault of his that the shares were not issued at a premium. I therefore contrived to swallow, as I best could, my indignation, though it was no easy matter. Seven hundred and fifty pounds is a serious sum, and would have gone a long way towards the furnishing of a respectable domicile.

I believe that Cutts, though he never allowed himself to exhibit a symptom of ordinary regret, was internally annoyed at the confounded scrape in which I was landed by following his advice. At all events he soon ceased comporting himself after the manner of the comforters of Job, and finally undertook to look after my interest in case any fragment of the deposits could be rescued from the hands of the Philistines. I have since had a letter from him with the information that he has recovered a hundred pounds--a friendly exertion which shall be duly acknowledged so soon as I receive a remittance, which, however, has not yet come to hand.

By the time we had finished the sherry, I was restored, if not to good-humour, at least to a state of passive resignation. The Saxon gave strict orders that he was to be denied to everybody, and made some incoherent proposals about "making a forenoon of it," which, however, I peremptorily declined.

"It's a very hard thing," said Cutts, "but I see it's an invariable rule that matrimony and good-fellowship can never go together. You're not half the brick you used to be, Fred; but I suppose it can't be helped."
There's a degree of slow-coachiness about you which I take to be peculiarly distressing, and if you don't take care it will become a confirmed habit."

"Seven hundred and fifty pounds--what! all my pretty chickens and their----"

"Don't swear! it's a highly immoral practice. At all events you'll dine with me to-day at six. You shall have as much claret as you can conscientiously desire, and, for company, I have got the queerest fellow here you ever set eyes on. You used to pull the long bow with considerable effect, but this chap beats you hollow."

"Who is he?"

"How should I know? He calls himself Leopold Young Mandeville--is a surveyor by trade, and has been working abroad at some outlandish line or another for the last two years. He is a very fair hand at the compasses, and so I have got him here by way of assistant. You may think him rather dull at first, but wait till he has finished a pint, and I'm shot if he don't astonish you. Now, if you will have nothing more, we may as well go out, and take a ride by way of appetiser."

At six o'clock I received the high honour of an introduction to Mr Young Mandeville. As I really consider this gentleman one of the most remarkable personages of the era in which we live, I may perhaps be excused if I assume the privilege of an acquaintance, and introduce him also to the reader. The years of Mr Mandeville could hardly have exceeded thirty. His stature was considerably above the average of mankind, and would have been greater save for the geometrical curvature of his lower extremities, which gave him all the appearance of a walking parenthesis. His hair was black and streaky; his complexion atrabilious; his voice slightly raucous, like that of a tragedian contending with a cold. The eye was a very fine one--that is, the right eye--for the other optic was evidently internally damaged, and shone with an opalescent lustre. There was a kind of native dignity about the man which impressed me favourably, notwithstanding the reserved manner in which he exchanged the preliminary courtesies.

Cutts did the honours of the table with his usual alacrity. The dinner was a capital one, and the wine not only abundant but unexceptionable. At first, however, the conversation flowed but languidly. My spirits had not yet recovered from the appalling intelligence of the morning; nor could I help reflecting, with a certain uneasiness, upon the reception I was sure to meet with from certain brethren in the Outer House, to whom, in a moment of rash confidence, I had intrusted the tale of my dilemma. I abhor roasting in my own person, and yet I knew I should have enough of it. Mandeville ate on steadily, like one labouring under the conviction that he thereby performed a good and meritorious action, and scorning to mix up extraneous matter with the main object of his exertions. The Saxon awaited his time, and steadily circulated the champagne.

We all got more loquacious after the cloth was removed. A good dinner reconciles one amazingly to the unhappy chances of our lot; and, before the first bottle was emptied, I had tacitly forgiven every one of the Provisional Committee of the Slopperton Railway Company, with the exception of the villainous
Glanders, who, for anything I knew, might, at that moment, be transatlantically regaling himself at my particular expense. His guilt was of course inexpiable. Mandeville, having eat like an ogre, began to drink like a dromedary. Both the dark and the opalescent eye sparkled with unusual fire, and with a sigh of philosophic fervour he unbuttoned the extremities of his waistcoat.

"Help yourselves, my boys," said the jovial Cutts; "there's lots of time before us between this and the broiled bones. By Jove, I'm excessively thirsty! I say, Mandeville, were you ever in Scotland? I hear great things of the claret there."

"I never had that honour," replied Mr Young Mandeville, "which I particularly regret, for I have a high--may I say the highest?--respect for that intelligent country, and indeed claim a remote connection with it. I admire the importance which Scotsmen invariably attach to pure blood and ancient descent. It is a proof, Mr Cutts, that with them the principles of chivalry are not extinct, and that the honours which should be paid to birth alone, are not indiscriminately lavished upon the mere acquisition of wealth."

"Which means, I suppose, that a lot of rubbishy ancestors is better than a fortune in the funds. Well--every man according to his own idea. I am particularly glad to say, that I understand no nonsense of the kind. There's Fred, however, will keep you in countenance. He says--but I'll be hanged if I believe it--that he is descended from some old king or another, who lived before the invention of breeches."

"Cutts--don't be a fool!"

"Oh, by Jove, it's quite true!" said the irreverent Saxon; "you used to tell me about it every night when you were half-seas over at Shrewsbury. It was capital fun to hear you, about the mixing of the ninth tumbler."

"Excuse me, sir," said Mr Mandeville, with an appearance of intense interest--"do you indeed reckon kindred with the royal family of Scotland? I have a particular reason personal to myself in the inquiry."

"Why, if you really want to know about it," said I, looking, I suppose, especially foolish, for Cutts was evidently trotting me out, and I more than half suspected his companion--"I do claim--but it's a ridiculous thing to talk of--a lineal descent from a daughter of William the Lion."

"You delight me!" said Mr Mandeville. "The connection is highly respectable--I have myself some of that blood in my veins, though perhaps of a little older date than yours; for one of my ancestors, Ulric of Mandeville, married a daughter of Fergus the First. I am very glad indeed to make the acquaintance of a relative after the lapse of so many centuries."

I returned a polite bow to the salutation of my new-found cousin, and wished him at the bottom of the Euxine.
"Will you pardon me, Mr Cutts, if I ask my kinsman a question or two upon family affairs? The older cadets of the royal blood have seldom an opportunity of meeting."

"Fire away," said the Saxon, "but be done with it as soon as you can."

"Reduced as we are," continued Mr Mandeville, addressing himself to me, "in numbers as well as circumstances, it appears highly advisable that we should maintain some intercourse with each other for the preservation of our common rights. These, as we well know, had their origin before the institution of Parliaments, and therefore are by no means fettered or impugned by any of the popular enactments of a later age. Now, as you are a lawyer, I should like to have your opinion on a point of some consequence. Did you ever happen to meet our cousin, Count Ferguson of the Roman Empire?"

"Never heard of him in my life," said I.

"Any relation of the fellow who couldn't get into the lodging-house?" asked Cutts.

"I do not think so, Mr Cutts," replied Mandeville, mildly. "I had the pleasure of making the Count's acquaintance at Vienna. He is, I apprehend, the only heir-male extant to the Scottish crown, being descended from Prince Fergus and a daughter of Queen Boadicea. Now, you and I, though younger cadets, and somewhat nearer in succession, merely represent females, and have therefore little interest beyond a remote contingency. But I understand it is the fact that the ancient destination to the Scottish crown is restricted to heirs-male solely; and therefore I wish to know, whether, as the Stuarts have failed, the Count is not entitled to claim in right of his undoubted descent?"

I was petrified at the audacity of the man. Either he was the most consummately impudent scoundrel I ever had the fortune to meet, or a complete monomaniac! I looked him steadily in the face. The fine black eye was bent upon me with an expression of deep interest, and something uncommonly like a tear was quivering in the lash. Palpable monomania!

"It seems a very doubtful question," said I. "Before answering it, I should like to see the Count's papers, and take a look at our older records."

"That means, you want to be fee'd," said Cutts. "I'll tell you what, my lads, I'll stand this sort of nonsense no longer. Confound your Fergusons and Boadiceas! One would think, to hear you talk, that you were not a couple of as ordinary individuals as ever stepped upon shoe-leather, but princes of the blood-royal in disguise. Help yourselves, I say, and give us something else."

"I fear, Mr Cutts," said Mandeville, in a deep and choky voice, "that you have had too little experience of the vicissitudes of the world to appreciate our situation. You spoke of a prince. Know, sir, that you see before you one who has known that dignity, but who never shall know it more! O Amalia, Amalia!--dear wife of my bosom--where art thou now! Pardon me, kinsman--your hand--I do not often betray this weakness, but my heart is full, and I needs must give way to its emotion." So saying, the unfortunate Mandeville bowed down his head and wept; at least, so I concluded, from a succession of
severe eructations.

I did not know what to make of him. Of all the hallucinations I ever had witnessed, this was the most strange and unaccountable. Cutts, with great coolness, manufactured a stiff tumbler of brandy and water, which he placed at the elbow of the ex-potentate, and exhorted him to make a clean breast of it.

"What's the use of snivelling about the past?" said he. "It's a confounded loss of time. Come, Mandeville, toss off your liquor like a Trojan, and tell us all about it, if you have anything like a rational story to tell. We'll give you credit for the finer feelings, and all that sort of nonsense--only look sharp."

Upon this hint the Surveyor spoke, applying himself at intervals to the reeking potable beside him. I shall give his story in his own words, without any commentary.

"I feel, gentlemen, that I owe to you, and more especially to my new-found kinsman, some explanation of circumstances, the mere recollection of which can agitate me so cruelly. You seemed surprised when I told you of the rank which I once occupied, and no doubt you think it is a strange contrast to the situation in which you now behold me. Alas, gentlemen! the history of Europe, during the last half-century, can furnish you with many parallel cases. Louis Philippe has, ere now, like myself, earned his bread by mathematical exertion--Young Gustavson--Henry of Bourbon, are exiles! the sceptre has fallen from the hands of the chivalrous house of Murat! Minor principalities are changed or absorbed, unnoticed amidst the war and clash of the great world around them! Thrones are eclipsed like stars, and vanish from the political horizon.

"Do not misunderstand me, gentlemen--I claim no such hereditary honours. I am the last representative of an ancient and glorious race, who cut their way to distinction with their swords on the field of battle. Roger de Mandeville, bearer of the ducal standard at the red fight of Hastings, was the first of my name who set foot upon English ground. Since then, there is not an era in the history of our country which does not bear witness to some achievement of the stalwart Mandevilles. The Crusades--Cressy--Poitiers--and--pardon me, kinsman--Flodden, were the theatres of our renown.

"I dare not trust myself to speak of the broad lands and castles which we once possessed. These have long since passed away from us. A Birmingham artisan, whose churl ancestor would have deemed it an honour to run beside the stirrup of my forefathers, now dwells in the hall of the Mandeville. The spear is broken, and the banner mouldered. Nothing remains, save in the chancel of the roofless church a recumbent marble effigy, with folded hands, of that stout Sir Godfrey of Mandeville who stormed the breach of Ascalon!

"I was heir to nothing but the name. Of my early struggles I need not tell you. A proud and indomitable heart yet beat within this bosom; and though some of the ancient nobility of England, who knew and lamented my position, were not backward in their offers, I could not bring myself in any one instance to accept of eleemosynary assistance. Even the colours which were spontaneously offered to me by the great Captain of the age, were rejected, though not ungratefully. Had there been war, Britain should
have found me foremost in her ranks as a volunteer, but I could not wear the livery of a soldier so long as the blade seemed undissolubly soldered to the sheath. I spurned at the empty frivolity of the mess-room, and despised every other bivouac save that upon the field of battle.

"In brief, gentlemen, I preferred the field of science, which was still open to me, and became an engineer. Mr Cutts, whose great acquirements and brilliant genius have raised him to such eminence in the profession"--here Cutts made a grateful salaam--"can bear testimony to the humble share of talent I have laid at the national disposal; and if you, my kinsman, are connected with any of the incipient enterprises in the north, I should be proud of an opportunity of showing you that the genius of a Mandeville can be applied as well to the arts of peace as to the stormy exercises of war. But even Mr Cutts does not know how strangely my labours have been interrupted. What an episode was mine! A year of exaltation to high and princely rank--a year of love and battle--and then a return to this cold and heavy occupation! Had that interval lasted longer, gentlemen, believe me, that ere now I should have carried the victorious banners of Wallachia to the gates of Constantinople, plucked the abject and besotted Sultan from his throne, and again established in more than its pristine renown the independent Empire of the East!"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! Well said, Mandeville!" shouted Cutts. "I like to see the fellow who never sticks at trifles."

"No reality, sirs, could have prevented me; but I fear my preface is too long. About two years ago I was requested by the projectors of the great railway between Paris and Constantinople to superintend the survey of that portion which stretches eastward from Vienna. I accepted the appointment with pleasure, for I longed to see foreign countries, and the field abroad appeared to me a much nobler one than that at home. I had personal letters of introduction to the Emperor, who treated me with marked distinction; for some collateral branches of my family had done the Austrian good service in the wars of Wallenstein, and the heroic charge of the Pappenheimers under Herbert Mandeville at Lutzen was still freshly and gratefully remembered. It was in Vienna that I made the acquaintance of our mutual kinsman, Count Ferguson, whose claims to hereditary dignity, I trust, you will reflect on at your leisure.

"Do either of you, gentlemen, understand German?--No!--I regret the circumstance, because you can hardly follow me out distinctly when I come to speak of localities. But I shall endeavour to be as clear as possible. One evening I was in attendance upon his majesty--who frequently honoured me with these commands, for he took a vast interest in all matters of science--at the great theatre. All the wealth, beauty, and talent of Austria were there. I assure you, gentlemen, I never gazed upon a more brilliant spectacle. The mixture of the white and blue uniforms of the Austrian officers, with the national costumes of the nobility of Hungary, Wallachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, and the Tyrol, gave the scene the appearance of a studied and gorgeous carnival. The glittering of diamonds along the whole tier of the boxes was literally painful to the eyes. Several of the Esterhazy family seemed absolutely sheathed in jewel armour, and I was literally compelled to request the Duchessa Lucchesini, who was seated next me, to lower her beautiful arm, as the splendour of the brilliants on her bracelet--I, of course, said the lustre of the arm itself--was so great as to obstruct my view of the stage. She smilingly complied. The last long-drawn note of the overture was over, the curtain had risen, and the **prima donna**
Schenkelmann was just trilling forth that exquisite aria with which the opera of the Gasthaus begins, when the door of the box immediately adjoining the imperial one opened, and a party entered in the gay Wallachian costume. The first who took her place, in a sort of decorated chair in front, and who was familiarly greeted by his Majesty, was a young lady, as it seemed to me even then, of most surpassing beauty. Her dark raven hair was held back from a brow as white as alabaster by a circlet of gorgeous emeralds, whose pale mild light added to the pensive melancholy of her features. I have no heart to describe her further, although that image stands before me now, as clearly as when I first riveted these longing eyes upon her charms!—O Amalia!

"Her immediate companion was a tall stalwart nobleman, beneath whose cloak glittered a close-fitting tunic of ring-mail. His looks were haughty and unprepossessing; he cast a fierce glance at the box which contained the Esterhazys; bowed coldly in return to the recognition of the Emperor; and seated himself beside his beautiful companion. I thought—but it might be fancy—that she involuntarily shrank from his contact. The remainder of the box was occupied by Wallachian ladies and grandees.

"My curiosity was so whetted, that I hardly could wait until the Schenkelmann had concluded, before assailing my neighbour the Duchessa with questions.

"'Is it possible?' said she. 'Have you been so long in Vienna, chevalier, and yet never seen the great attraction of the day—the Wallachian fawn, as that foolish Count Kronthaler calls her? I declare I begin to believe that you men of science are absolutely born blind!'

"'Not so, beautiful Lucchesini! But remember that ever since my arrival I have been constantly gazing on a star.'

"'You flatterer! But seriously, I thought every one knew the Margravine of Kalbs-Kuchen. She is the greatest heiress in Europe—has a magnificent independent principality, noble palaces, and such diamonds! That personage beside her is her relation, the Duke of Kalbs-Braten, the representative of a younger branch of the house. He is at deadly feud with the Esterhazys, and the Emperor is very apprehensive that it may disturb the tranquillity of Hungary. I am sure I am glad that my own poor little Duchy is at a distance. I wish he would not bow to me—I am sure he is a horrid man. Only think, my dear chevalier! He has already married two wives, and nobody knows what has become of them. Poor Clara von Gandersfeldt was the last—a sweet girl, but that could not save her. They say he wants to marry his cousin—I hope she won't have him.'

"'Does he indeed presume!' said I, 'that dark-browed ruffian, to aspire to such an angel?'

"'I declare you make me quite jealous,' said the Lucchesini; 'but speak lower or he will overhear you. I assure you Duke Albrecht is a very dangerous enemy.'

"'O that I might beard him!' cried I, 'in the midst of his assembled Hulans! I tell you, Duchessa, that ere now a Mandeville——'
"'Potz tausend donner-wetter!' said the Emperor, good-humouredly turning round; 'what is that the Chevalier Mandeville is saying? Why, chevalier, you look as fierce as a roused lion. We must take care of you old English fire-eaters. By the way,' added he very kindly, 'our Chancellor will send you to-morrow the decoration of the first class of the Golden Bugle. No thanks. You deserve it. I only wish the order could have been conferred upon such a field as that of Lutzen. And now come forward, and let me present you to the Margravine of Kalbs-Kuchen, whose territories you must one of these days traverse. Margravine--this is the Chevalier Mandeville, of whom I have already told you.'

"She turned her head--our eyes met--a deep flush suffused her countenance, but it was instantly succeeded by a deadly paleness.

"'Eh, wass henker!' cried the Emperor, 'what's the meaning of this?--the Margravine is going to faint!'

"'Oh no--no--your Majesty--'tis nothing--a likeness--a dream--a dizziness, I mean, has come over me! It is gone now. You shall be welcome, chevalier,' continued she, with a sweet smile, 'when you visit our poor dominions. Indeed, I have a hereditary claim upon you, which I am sure you will not disregard.'

"'Hagel und blitzen!' cried his imperial Majesty--'What is this? I understood the chevalier was never in Germany before.'

"'That may be, sire,' repeated the Margravine with another blush. 'But my great-grandmother was nevertheless a Mandeville, the daughter of that Field-marshal Herbert who fought so well at Lutzen. His picture, painted when he was a young cuirassier, still hangs in my palace, and, indeed, it was the extreme likeness of the chevalier to that portrait, which took me for a moment by surprise. Let me then welcome you, cousin; henceforward we are not strangers!'

"I bowed profoundly as I took the proffered hand of the Margravine. I held it for an instant in my own--yes!--by Cupid, there was a gentle pressure. I looked up and beheld the dark countenance of the Duke of Kalbs-Braten scowling at me from behind his cousin. I retorted the look with interest. From that moment we were mortal foes.

"'Unser Ritter ist im klee gefallen--the chevalier has fallen among clover,' said the Emperor with a smile--'he has great luck--he finds cousins everywhere.'

"'And in this instance,' I replied, 'I might venture to challenge the envy even of your Majesty.'

"'Well said, chevalier! and now let us attend to the second act of the opera.'

"'You are in a critical position, Chevalier de Mandeville,' said the Lucchesini, to whose side I now returned. 'You have made a powerful friend, but also a dangerous enemy. Beware of that Duke Albrecht--he is watching you closely.'
"'It is not the nature of a Mandeville to fear anything except for the safety of those he loves. You, sweet Duchessa, I trust have nothing to apprehend?'

"'Ah, perfide! Do not think to impose upon me longer. I know your heart has become a traitor already. Well--we shall not be less friends for that. I congratulate you on your new honours, only take care that too much good fortune does not turn that magnificent head.'

"I supped that evening with the Lucchesini. On my return home, I thought I observed a dark figure following my steps; but this might have been fancy, at all events I regained my hotel without any interruption. Next morning I found upon my table a little casket containing a magnificent emerald ring, along with a small slip of paper on which was written, 'Amalia to her cousin--Silence and Fidelity.' I placed the ring upon my finger, but I pressed the writing to my lips.

"On the ensuing week there was a great masquerade at the palace. I was out surveying the whole morning, and was occupied so late that I had barely half an hour to spare on my return for the necessary preparations.

"'There is a young lady waiting for you upstairs, Herr Baron,' said the waiter with a broad grin; 'she says she has a message to deliver, and will give it to nobody else.'

"'Blockhead!' said I, 'what made you show her in there? To a certainty she'll be meddling with the theodolites!'

"I rushed upstairs, and found in my apartment one of the prettiest little creatures I ever saw, a perfect fairy of about sixteen, in a gipsy bonnet, who looked up and smiled as I entered.

"'Are you the Chevalier Mandeville?' asked she.

"'Yes, my little dear, and pray who are you?'

"'I am Fritchen, sir,' she said with a curtsy.

"'You don't say so! Pray sit down, Fritchen.'

"'Thank you, sir.'

"'And pray now, Fritchen, what is it you want with me?'

"'My mistress desired me to say to you, sir--but it's a great secret--that she is to be at the masquerade to-night in a blue domino, and she begs you will place this White Rose in your hat, and she wishes to have a few words with you.'

"'And who may your mistress be, my pretty one?'
"'Silence and Fidelity!'"

"'Ha! is it possible? the Margravine!'"

"'Hush! don't speak so loud--you don't know who may be listening. Black Stanislaus has been watching me all day, and I hardly could contrive to get out.'"

"'Black Stanislaus had better beware of me!'"

"'Oh, but you don't know him! He's Duke Albrecht's chief forester, and the Duke is in such a rage ever since he found my lady embroidering your name upon a handkerchief.'"

"'Did she, indeed?--my name?--O Amalia!'"

"'Yes--and she says you're so like that big picture at Schloss-Swiggenstein that she fell in love with long ago--and she is sure you would come to love her if you only knew her--and she wishes, for your sake, that she was a plain lady and not a Princess--and she hates that Duke Albrecht so! But I wasn't to tell you a word of this, so pray don't repeat it again.'"

"'Silence and fidelity, my pretty Fritchen. Tell your royal mistress that I rest her humble slave and kinsman; that I will wear her rose, and defend it too, if needful, against the attacks of the universe! Tell her, too, that every moment seems an age until we meet again. I will not overload your memory, little Fritchen. Pray, wear this trifle for my sake, and----'"

"'O fie, sir! If the waiter heard you!' and the little gipsy made her escape.

"I had selected for my costume that night, a dress in the old English fashion, taken from a portrait of the Admirable Crichton. In my hat I reverently placed the rose which Amalia had sent me, stepped into my fiacre, and drove to the palace.

"The masquerade was already at its height. I jostled my way through a prodigious crowd of scaramouches, pilgrims, shepherdesses, nymphs, and crusaders, until I reached the grand saloon, where I looked round me diligently for the blue domino! Alas! I counted no less than thirteen ladies in that particular costume.

"'You seem dull to-night, Sir Englishman,' said a soft voice at my elbow. 'Does the indifference of your country or the disdainfulness of dark eyes oppress you?'

"I turned and beheld a blue domino. My heart thrilled strangely.

"'Neither, sweet Mask; but say, is not Silence a token of Fidelity?'"
"'You speak in riddles,' said the domino. 'But come--they are beginning the waltz. Here is a little hand as yet unoccupied. Will you take it?"

"'For ever?"

"'Nay--I shall burden you with no such terrible conditions. Allons! Yonder Saracen and Nun have set us the example."

"In a moment we were launched into the whirl of the dance. My whole frame quivered as I encircled the delicate waist with my arm. One hand was held in mine, the other rested lovingly upon my shoulder. I felt the sweet breath of the damask lips upon my face--the cup of my happiness was full.

"'O that I may never wake and find this a dream! Dear lady, might I dare to hope that the services of a life, never more devotedly offered, might, in some degree, atone for the immeasurable distance between us? That the poor cavalier, whom you have honoured with your notice, may venture to indulge in a yet dearer anticipation?"

"I felt the hand of the Mask tremble in mine--

"'The White Rose is a pretty flower,' she whispered--'can it not bloom elsewhere than in the north?'

"'Amalia!'

"'Leopold!--but hush--we are observed.'

"I looked up and saw a tall Bulgarian gazing at us. The mask of course prevented me from distinguishing his features, but by the red sparkle of his eye I instantly recognised Duke Albrecht.

"'Forgive me, dearest Amalia, for one moment. I will rejoin you in the second apartment----'

"'For the sake of the Virgin, Leopold--do not tempt him! you know not the power, the malignity of the man.'

"'Were he ten times a duke, I'd beard him! Pardon me, lady. He has defied me already by his looks, and a Mandeville never yet shrunk from any encounter. Prince Metternich will protect you until my return.'

"The good-natured statesman, who was sauntering past unmasked, instantly offered his arm to the agitated Margravine. They retired. I strode up to the Bulgarian, who remained as motionless as a statue.

"'Give you good-evening, cavalier. What is your purpose to-night?'

"'To chastise insolence and punish presumption! What is yours?"
"To rescue innocence and beauty from the persecution of overweening power!"

"Indeed! anything else?"

"Yes, to avenge the fate of those who trusted, and yet died before their time. How was it with Clara of Gandersfeldt? Fell she not by thy hand?"

"Englishman--thou liest!"

"Bulgarian--thou art a villain!"

"The duke gnashed his teeth. For a moment his hand clutched at the hilt of his poniard, but he suddenly withdrew it.

"I had thought to have dealt otherwise with thee, ' he said, 'but thou hast dared to come between the lion and his bride. Englishman--hast thou courage to make good thy injurious words with aught else but the tongue?"

"I am the last of the race of Mandeville!"

"Enough. I might well have left the chastising of thee to a meaner hand, and yet--for that thou art a bold fellow--I will meet thee. Dost thou know the eastern gate?"

"Well."

"A mile beyond it there is a clump of trees and a fair meadow-land. The moon will be up in three hours; light enough for men who are determined on their work. Dost thou understand me--three hours hence on horseback, with the sword, alone?"

"Can I trust thee, Bulgarian?--no treachery?"

"I am a Wallachian and a duke!"

"Enough said. I shall be there; ' and we parted.

"I flew back to Amalia. She was terribly agitated. In vain did I attempt to calm her with assurances that all was well. She insisted upon knowing the whole particulars of my interview with her dreaded cousin of Kalbs-Braten, and at last I told her without reserve.

"You must not go, Leopold,' she cried, 'indeed you must not. You do not know this Albrecht. Hard of heart and determined of purpose, there are no means which he will not use in order to compass his revenge. Believe not that he will meet you alone: were it so, I should have little dread. But Black Stanislaus will be there, and strong Slavata, and Martinitz with all his Hulans! They will murder you,
my Leopold! shed your young blood like water; or, if they dare not do that for fear of the Austrian
vengeance, they will hurry you across the frontier to some dreary fortress, where you will pine in
chains, and grow prematurely grey, far--far from your poor Amalia! Oh, were I to lose you, Leopold,
now, I should die of sorrow! Be persuaded by me. My guards are few, but they are faithful. Avoid this
meeting. Let us set out this night--nay, this very hour. Once within my dominions, we may set at
defiance Duke Albrecht and all the black banditti of Kalbs-Braten. I have many friends and feudatories.
The Hetman, Chopinski, is devoted to me. Count Rudolf of Haggenhausen is my sworn friend. No man
ever yet saw the back of Conrad of the Thirty Mountains. We shall rear up the old ancestral banner of
my house; give the Red Falcon to the winds of heaven; besiege, if need be, my perfidious kinsman in
his stronghold--and, in the face of heaven, my Leopold, will I acknowledge the heir of Mandeville as
the partner of my life and of my power!

"Dearest, best Amalia! your words thrill through me like a trumpet--but alas, it may not be! I dare not
follow your counsel. Shall it be said that I have broken my word--shrunk like a craven from a meeting
with this Albrecht;--a meeting, too, which I myself provoked? Think it not, lady. Poor Mandeville has
nothing save his honour; but upon that, at least, no taint of suspicion shall rest. Farewell, beautiful
Amalia! Believe me, we shall meet again; if not, think of me sometimes as one who loved you well, and
who died with your name upon his lips.'

"O Leopold!' 

"I tore myself away. Two hours afterwards I had passed the eastern gate of Vienna, and was riding
towards the place of rendezvous. The moon was up, but a fresh breeze ever and anon swept the curtains
of the clouds across her disc, and obscured the distant prospect. The cool air played gratefully on my
cheek after the excitement and fever of the evening; I listened with even a sensation of pleasure to the
distant rippling of the river. For the future I had little care, my whole attention was concentrated upon
the past. I felt no anxiety as to the result of the encounter; nor was this in any degree surprising, since,
from my earliest youth, I had accustomed myself to the use of the sword, and was reputed a thorough
master of the weapon. Neither could I believe that Duke Albrecht was capable, after having given his
solemn pledge to the contrary, of anything like deliberate treachery.

"I was about half-way to the clump of trees, which he of Kalbs-Braten had indicated, when a heavy
bank of clouds arose, and left me in total darkness. Up to this time I had seen no one since I passed the
sentry; but now I thought I could discern the tramping of horses upon the turf. Almost mechanically I
loosened my cloak, and brought round the hilt of my weapon so as to be prepared. When the moon
reappeared, I saw on either side of me a horseman, in long black cloaks and slouched hats, which
effectually concealed the features of the wearers. They did not speak nor offer any violence, but
continued to ride alongside, accommodating their pace to mine. The horses they bestrode were large
and powerful animals. There was something in the moody silence and even rigid bearing of these
persons, which inspired me with a feeling rather of awe than suspicion. It might be that they were
retainers of the duke; but then, if any ambuscade or foul play was intended, why give such palpable
warning of it? I resolved to accost them.
"'Ye ride late, sirs.'

"'We do,' said the one to the right. 'We are bent on a far errand.'

"'Indeed! may I ask its nature?'

"'To hear the bat flutter and the owlet scream. Wilt also listen to the music?'

"'I understand you not, sirs. What mean you?'

"'We are the guardians of the Red Earth. The guilty tremble at our approach; but the innocent need not fear!'

"'Two of the night patrole!' thought I. 'Very mysterious gentlemen, indeed; but I have heard that the Austrian police have orders to be reserved in their communications. I must get rid of them, however. Good-evening, sirs.'

"I was about to spur my horse, when a cloak was suddenly thrown over my head as if by some invisible hand; I was dragged forcibly from my saddle, my arms pinioned, and my sword wrested from me. All this was the work of a moment, and rendered my resistance useless.

"'Villains!' cried I, 'unhand me--what mean you?'

"'Peace, cavalier!' said a deep low voice at my ear; 'speak not--struggle not, or it may be worse for you; you are in the hands of the Secret Tribunal!''

During the course of his narrative, Mr Mandeville, as I have already hinted, by no means discontinued his attentions to the brandy-and-water, but went on making tumbler after tumbler, with a fervour that was truly edifying. Assuming that the main facts of his history were true, though in the eye of geography and politics they appeared a little doubtful, it was still highly interesting to remark the varied chronology of his style. A century disappeared with each tumbler. He concentrated in himself, as it appeared to me, the excellencies of the best writers of romance, and withal had hitherto maintained the semblance of strict originality. He had now, however, worked his way considerably up the tide of time. We had emerged from the period of fire-arms, and Mandeville was at this stage medieval.

Some suspicion of this had dawned even upon the mind of Cutts, who, though not very familiar with romance, had once stumbled upon a translation of Spindler's novels, and was, therefore, tolerably up to the proceedings of the Vehme Gericht.

"Confound it, Mandeville!" interrupted he, "we shall be kept here the whole night, if you don't get on faster. Both Fred and I know all about the ruined tower, the subterranean chamber--which, by the way, must have looked deucedly like a tunnel--the cord and steel, and all the rest of it. Skip the trial, man. It's a very old song now, and bring us as fast as you can to the castle and the marriage. I hope the
Margravine took Fritchen with her. That little monkey was worth the whole bundle of them put together!"

The Margrave made another tumbler. His eye had become rather glassy, and his articulation slightly impaired. He was gradually drawing towards the chivalrous period of the Crusades.

"Two days had passed away since that terrible ride began, and yet there was neither halt nor intermission. Blindfold, pinioned, and bound into the saddle, I sate almost mechanically and without volition, amidst the ranks of the furious Hulans, whose wild huzzas and imprecations rung incessantly in my ears. No rest, no stay. On we sped like a hurricane across the valley and the plain!

"At last I heard a deep sullen roar, as if some great river was discharging its collected waters over the edge of an enormous precipice. We drew nearer and nearer. I felt the spray upon my face. These, then, were the giant rapids of the Danube.

"The order to halt was given.

"'We are over the frontier now!' cried the loud harsh voice of Duke Albrecht; 'Stanislaus and Slavata--unbind that English dog from his steed, and pitch him over the cliff. Let the waters of the Danube bear him past the castle of his lady. It were pity to deny my delicate cousin the luxury of a coronach over the swollen corpse of her minion!'

"'Coward!' I exclaimed; 'coward as well as traitor! If thou hast the slightest spark of manhood in thee, cause these thy fellows to unbind my hands, give me back my father's sword, stand face to face against me on the greensward, and, benumbed and frozen as I am, thou shalt yet feel the arm of the Mandeville!'

"Loud laughed he of Kalbs-Braten. 'Does the hunter, when the wolf is in the pit, leap down to try conclusions with him? Fool! what care I for honour or thy boasted laws of chivalry? We of Wallachia are men of another mood. We smite our foeman where we find him, asleep or awake--at the wine-cup or in the battle--with the sword by his side, or arrayed in the silken garb of peace! Drag him from his steed, fellows! Let us see how lightly this adventurous English diver will leap the cataracts of the Danube!'

"Resistance was in vain. I had already given myself up for lost. Even at that moment the image of my Amalia rose before me in all its beauty--her name was on my lips; I called upon her as my guardian angel.

"Suddenly I heard the loud clear note of a trumpet--it was answered by another, and then rang out the clanging of a thousand atabals.

"'Ha! by Saint John of Nepomuck,' cried the Duke, 'the Croats are upon us--There flies the banner of Chopinski! there rides Conrad of the Thirty Mountains on the black steed that I have marked for my
second charger! Hulans! to your ranks. Martinitz, bring up the rear-guard, and place them on the right flank. Slavata, thou art a fellow of some sense----'

"Ay, you can remember that now,' grumbled Slavata.

"Take thirty men and lead them up that hollow--you will secure a passage somewhere over the morass--and then fall upon Chopinski in the rear. Let two men stay to guard the prisoner. Now, forward, gentlemen; and if you know not where to charge, follow the white plume of Kalbs-Braten!

"I heard the cavalry advance. Maddened by the loss of my freedom at such a moment, I burst my bonds by an almost supernatural exertion, and tore the bandage from my eyes. To snatch a battle-axe from the hand of the nearest Hulan, and to dash him to the ground, was the work of a moment--a second blow, and the other fell. I leaped upon his horse, shouted the ancient war-cry of my house, 'Saint George for Mandeville!' and dashed onwards towards the serried array of the Croats, which occupied a little eminence beyond.

"For whom art thou, cavalier?' cried Chopinski, as I galloped up.

"For Amalia and Kalbs-Kuchen!' I replied.

"Welcome--a thousand times welcome, brave stranger, in the hour of battle! But ha!--what is this?--that white rose--that lordly mien--can it be? Yes! it is the affianced bridegroom of the Margravine!

"With a wild cry of delight the Croats gathered around me. 'Long live our gracious Margravine!' they shouted--'long live the noble Mandeville!'

"By my faith, Sir Knight,' said the Count Rudolf of Haggenhausen, an old warrior whose seamed countenance was the record of many a fight--'By my faith, I deemed not we could carry back such glorious tidings to our lady--nor, by Saint Wladimir, so goodly a pledge!'

"May I never put lance in rest again,' cried Conrad of the Thirty Mountains, 'but the Margravine hath a good eye--there be thews and sinews there! But we must take order with yon infidel scum. How say you, sirs--shall this cavalier have the ordering of the battle? I, for one, will gladly fight beneath his banner----'

"And so say I,' said Chopinski, 'but he must not go thus. Yonder, on my sumpter-mule, is a suit of Milan armour, which a king might wear upon the day he went forth to do battle for his crown. Bring it forth, knaves, and let the Mandeville be clad as becomes the affianced of our mistress."

"Brave Chopinski,' I said, 'and you, kind sirs and nobles--pardon me if I cannot thank you now in a manner befitting to the greatness of your deserts. But there is a good time, I trust, in store. Suffer me now to arm myself, and then we shall try the boasted prowess of yonder giant of Kalbs-Braten!'"
"In a few moments I was sheathed in steel, and, mounted on a splendid charger, took my station at the head of the troops. Again their applause was redoubled.

"'Lord Conrad,' said I to the warrior of the Thirty Mountains, 'swart Slavata has gone up yonder with a plump of lances, intending to cross the morass, and assail us on the rear. Be it thine to hold him in check.'

"'By my father's head!' cried Conrad, 'I ask no better service! That villain Slavata oweth me a life, for he slew my sister's son at disadvantage, and this day will I have it or die. Fear not for the rear, noble Mandeville--I will protect it while spear remains or armour holds together!'

"'I doubt it not, valiant Conrad! Brave Chopinski--noble Haggenhausen--let us now charge together! 'Tis not beneath my banner you fight. The Blue Boar of Mandeville never yet fluttered in the Wallachian breeze, but we may give it to the winds ere long! Sacred to Amalia, and not to me, be the victory! Advance the Red Falcon of Kalbs-Kuchen--let it strike terror into the hearts of the enemy--and forward as it pounces upon its prey!'

"With visors down and lances in rest we rushed upon the advancing Hulans, who received our charge with great intrepidity. Martinitz was my immediate opponent. The shock of our meeting was so great that both the horses recoiled upon their hams, and, but for the dexterity of the riders, must have rolled over upon the ground. The lances were shivered up to the very gauntlets. We glared on each other for an instant with eyes which seemed to flash fire through the bars of our visors--each made a demivolte----"

"I say, Cutts," whispered I, "it occurs to me that I have heard something uncommonly like this before. Our friend is losing his originality, and poaching unceremoniously upon *Ivanhoe*. You had better stop him at once."

"I presume then, Mandeville, you did for that fellow Martinitz?" said Cutts.

"The gigantic Hulan was hurled from his saddle like a stone from a sling. I saw him roll thrice over, grasping his hands full of sand at every turn."

"That must have been very satisfactory. And what became of the duke?"

"Often did I strive to force my way through the press to the spot where Kalbs-Braten fought. I will not belie him--he bore himself that day like a man. And yet he had better protection than either helm or shield; for around him fought his foster-father, Tiefenbach of the Yews, with his seven bold sons, all striving to shelter their prince's body with their own. No sooner had I struck down one of them than the old man cried--'Another for Kalbs-Braten!' and a second giant stepped across the prostrate body of his brother!"

"*The Fair Maid of Perth*, for a rump and a dozen!" was my remark.
"Meanwhile, Conrad of the Thirty Mountains had reached the spot where Slavata with his cavalry was attempting the passage of the morass. Some of the Hulans were entangled there from the soft nature of the ground, the horses having sunk in the mire almost up to their saddle-girths. Others, among whom was their leader, had successfully struggled through.

"Conrad and Slavata met. They were both powerful men, and well matched. As if by common consent, the soldiers on either side held back to witness the encounter of their chiefs.

"Slavata spoke first. 'I know thee well,' he said: 'thou art the marauding baron of the Thirty Mountains, whose head is worth its weight of gold at the castle-gate of Kalbs-Braten. I swore when we last met that we should not part again so lightly, and now I will keep my oath!'

"'And I know thee, too,' said Conrad; 'thou art the marauding villain Slavata, whose body I intend to hang upon my topmost turret, to blacken in the sun and feed the ravens and the kites!'

"'Threatened men live long,' replied Slavata with a hollow laugh; 'thy sister's son, the Geissenheimer, said as much before, but for all that I passed this good sword three times through his bosom!'

"'Villain!' cried Conrad, striking at him, 'this to thy heart!'

"'And this to thine, proud boaster!' cried Slavata, parrying and returning the blow.

"They closed. Conrad seized hold of Slavata by the sword-belt. The other----"

"He's off to Old Mortality now," said I to Cutts. "For heaven's sake stop him, or we shall have a second edition of the Bothwell and Burley business."

"Come, Mandeville, clear away the battle--there's a good fellow. There can be no doubt that you skewered that rascally duke in a very satisfactory manner. I shall ring for the broiled bones, and I beg you will finish your story before they make their appearance. Will you mix another tumbler now, or wait till afterwards? Very well--please yourself--there's the hot water for you."

"They led me into the state apartment," said Mandeville, with a kind of sob. "Amalia stood upon the dais, surrounded by the fairest and the noblest of the land. The amethyst light, which streamed through the stained windows, gorgeous with armorial bearings, fell around her like a glory. In one hand she held a ducal cap of maintenance--with the other she pointed to the picture of my great ancestor--the very image, as she told me, of myself. I rushed forward with a cry of joy, and threw myself prostrate at her feet!

"'Nay, not so, my Leopold!' she said. 'Dear one, thou art come at last! Take the reward of all thy toils, all thy dangers, all thy love! Come, adored Mandeville--accept the prize of silence and fidelity!' And she added, 'and never upon brows more worthy could a wreath of chivalry be placed.'
"She placed the coronet upon my head, and then, gently raising me, exclaimed--

"Wallachians! behold your PRINCE!"

Mr Mandeville did not get beyond that sentence. I could stand him no longer, and burst into an outrageous roar of laughter, in which Cutts most heartily joined, till the tears ran plenteously down his cheeks. The Margrave of Wallachia looked quite bewildered. He attempted to rise from his chair, but the effort was too much for him, and he dropped suddenly on the floor.

"Well," said I, after we had fairly exhausted ourselves, "there's the spoiling in that fellow of as good a novelist as ever coopered out three volumes. He would be an invaluable acquaintance for either Marryat or James. 'Tis a thousand pities his talents should be lost to the public."

"There's no nonsense about him," replied Cutts; "he buckles to his work like a man. Doesn't it strike you, Freddy, that his style is a great deal more satisfactory than that of some other people I could name, who talk about their pedigree and ancestors, and have not even the excuse of a good cock-and-bull story to tell? Give me the man that carves out nobility for himself, like Mandeville, and believes it too, which is the very next best thing to reality. Now, let's have up the broiled bones, and send the Margrave of Wallachia to his bed."

THE FORREST-RACE ROMANCE.

(EXTRACTED FROM PAPERS DATED 1773.)

[MAGA. FEBRUARY 1833.]

I passed my examination with some credit, and was appointed assistant-surgeon to my ship, then lying at Portsmouth. As she was expected, however, to sail every tide to join the fleet off Cherbourg,[A] I was not sent down at once, but received instructions to be on board the Gull tender, at Sheerness, in eight days. In the mean time, with my appointment, and twenty guineas in my pocket, a light heart and a tolerable figure, I went down into Surrey, to Bromley Hall, the seat of an excellent friend, from whom I had long had an invitation. I found the house fall of visitants, chiefly young people about my own age, all making merry, and had little difficulty in being admitted of their crew. I never saw so many happy, fair and handsome faces together, as were there assembled for the next week--but by far the loveliest of the fair faces was that of a young lady from the west, called Fane; and none, perhaps, was happier than my own, when beside her. She delighted in botany; and although I at that time knew little more of the science than would have enabled me to make a tolerable guess at the dried drug in a medicine-chest, yet the temptation was so great that I could not resist the opportunity of becoming her more constant companion, by undertaking the office of her tutor. My inadequacy must have been soon betrayed; nevertheless, we continued to pursue our studies, with as regular attendance as ever on my part, and as implicit attention on hers, till mutually we arrived at the tacit understanding that, provided we looked at the flower together, it mattered little whether I assigned it a right or a wrong place in our rare classification. We soon exchanged the garden for the fields and green lanes; and often before the others
had risen to their daily vocations of riding or sailing, we would contrive a ramble in search of some
unknown species of an unheard-of genus, to the romantic borders of Holmsdale, which lay within a half
mile of Bromley, with the apology of the children for our guides, who rarely failed to find inducement
enough in the rabbit-warren or rookery to leave us alone in our search through the glades and avenues
of the old holm oak and the furze. It cannot be expected that, with these occasions constantly falling
out, an ardent youth of nineteen, as I then was, should long conceal feelings fostered by such appliances
of time and circumstance; nor need it be wondered at that, before even the week had elapsed, I had
avowed my passion, and had not been altogether unsuccessful in eliciting a confession of its return. My
exultation on that evening must have been very apparent, for next morning, as I came down stairs,
having lain much later than usual, my host Mr Blundell met me, and took my arm as he bade me good
morning, then led me into the library, and, "Harry, my fine fellow," said he, in his good-natured way,
"you must get the M.D. to your name, and make something handsome of your own, before you begin to
run away with the hearts of our girls here in the country."

[Footnote A: This must have been in 1758.]

"'Pon my soul, sir," stammered I, while I felt myself blushing to the eyes, "I--I--we were only pulling
flowers, sir."

"Ah! my dear boy," he sighed and went on, "take care that, while you pull the flowers, you do not plant
thorns for both hereafter." I had expected nothing short of thorns for my roses; but he surprised me a
little when he proceeded: "Ellen is my ward: she is a good girl, and will be a rich girl; and you know
very well I would not be acting as a guardian worthy such a trust, if I encouraged the addresses of one
whose fortune is still to make, and whose attachments, Harry, have still to undergo the changes of the
most fickle time in his life. Come, tell me candidly, now, how far has this business gone?"

Here was a pretty reckoning to be run up under a hedge. I was silent and sheepish for a while; but told
him honestly all about it, so soon as I could speak without choking on every second word.

"Surely," said he, when I had done, "you must have been aware of the great impropriety of trying to
engage this young lady's affections without my sanction--I am her guardian, you know."

"I declare, my dear sir, I never knew that you were her guardian," I exclaimed; "I never knew she had
any fortune to guard."

He smiled, and asked, "Were you ever in love before, Harry?"

"Never, sir, upon my honour--except once--but that was nothing."

"Nothing to this, I suppose," he replied; "and this, I daresay, will be nothing to the next. Tut, man! I was
a young fellow once myself, and remember many a time when I would have given my eyes to have
walked to church with one pretty girl, and my head, I suppose, if I could, to have walked home with
another. I was just your age then--what age are you now, Harry?"
"Nineteen past, sir" (it was not a week since my birthday).

"Ay, ay, I was just about nineteen myself then--but no matter. You would see the propriety, my dear boy, of going up to London in the mean time, were it not that Ellen is obliged to leave us to-day; it is no arrangement of mine, I can assure you. If I thought it necessary to get either of you out of the other's way, I certainly would pack you off, and keep Ellen with me; but the fact is, I am only joint trustee in this business: her other guardians insist on having her away to the house of one of them, to whose nomination I have been over-persuaded to consent. He is needy, and the allowance may be an object; but I would rather pay the money out of my own pocket twice told, than let her go down among them. However, it cannot be helped: she must leave us. Poor thing! with such a fortune and so many connections--keeping myself out of the question, without whose sanction, thank Heaven, they cannot marry her--there never was a more friendless dependent."

"And has Miss Fane no brother, no father alive?" inquired I.

"Mother, sister, and brother, all the family are dead," replied Mr Blundell, "excepting her father, who, I am sorry to say, is still alive to everything but a proper sense of his ownrespectability and his child's happiness. His last instructions were dated London, but what he is doing there, or where, or how he lives, I cannot tell."

He had now forgotten my misdemeanours in his own confidential regrets, and I had forgotten my confusion in eagerness to know something more of one who, I felt, for all the careful old gentleman's prudent veto, was not yet quite out of my reach; although the mention of her fortune, while it made the prize (why should I be ashamed to confess it?) much more seriously valuable, had inspired me with a fear of failure proportionate to the enhanced advantages of success.

"What a pity, sir," I said, going cunningly to work, "that testators do not attend more to the interests of their legatees in the appointment of equally careful guardians, if they think one not enough."

"Ah, it was the doing of the law, not of her grandfather, else Fane would never have had the control of a penny of it; but had it not been for me, he would have had it all. I fought her battle stoutly though, and kept matters square enough till I was induced to consent to the admission of this other worthy, as a sort of balance-wheel to keep our ill-sorted motions from bringing everything to a stand."

"And pray, sir," I went on, elated with my success, "who may this vexatious umpire be?" I fairly overshot the mark.

"That's no affair of yours, Harry, just now. Go on with your profession, get half-a-dozen years over your head, and a decent independence at least in your pocket, and then I shall be very happy indeed to put the son of an old friend in the way of a good match; but never, Harry, never let your wife have to say that she made a man of you, while you have head and hands and health to make a man of yourself."
"Dear sir, you are quite right; and believe me, I would never dream of acting otherwise--only--had I not better see about Miss Fane's hortus siccus, as you say she goes to-day?"

"I have saved you that trouble, Harry: she is gone before you were out of bed."

I am afraid I proved but dull company during the few hours of my stay at Bromley Hall after this disappointment. I took my leave that evening, and, to tell the truth, came up to London in a fuming passion, for I could get no satisfaction whatever, notwithstanding my numerous inquiries; I could not even ascertain the boarding-school at which she had been in town. All I knew amounted to this, that I was in love, and likely to continue so; but with whom exactly, I could not tell, farther than that she was a lovely girl, an heiress, and the ward of my careful friend Mr Blundell, in conjunction with her father--a character, I feared, not too respectable--and some one else of much the same stamp, with whom she now was about to be placed, not less against her own and Mr Blundell's will than mine. But I had little time to indulge in regrets or speculations; I found the Gull with her mainsail set at moorings in the Medway, and hurrying on board forgot everything for a while in the bustle of getting the little schooner under weigh. As we stretched out of the Nore, however, with a steady breeze and smooth water, in the summer evening, when the difficulties of crooked pilotage and frequent alterations in our course had been exchanged for the quiet relaxation of fair wind and open sea-room; and when the boat had begun to take her work into her own hand, like a strong and willing labourer, laying herself to the water, and sending the crew from her sloped deck to lounge about the companion, and lean into the sunset over her high weather-rail, with folded arms and half-shut eyes; then, as I looked across the glittering expanse, where the level sun danced upon every wave between us and the hazy shore, I insensibly began to people the filmy and golden-grained air with my old familiar images again; and long after the failing radiance had spent itself in the eastern gloom, and long after the waters had ceased to roll in even the reflected splendour of the upper sky, I continued sowing their dim and restless floor with waving visions of green fields, and flowery plats, and airy coppices, till the bright enchantress of them all seemed to be won back to my side, and I wandered with her again through the long day of sunshine, forgetful alike of sea, and ship, and sorrow, and the fast-falling shadows of night.

The chill breeze sent me below at last, and, wearied with a day of unusual fatigue, I turned into my berth; but was long kept awake by an angry altercation between the commander and his mate, who were drinking together in the main cabin. What they disputed about I could not understand, but I heard enough to convince me that the command had been intrusted to a person of no very amiable temper; in fact, I had hardly ever met a more disagreeable man than our petty captain, or one on whose countenance habitual violence and intoxication had contracted a more repulsive look.

In the morning we were off Dungeness, with a steady south-easterly breeze, that gave us a favourable run to Portsmouth that evening. Here we joined three others on the same destination, and, standing out again, made so much of it during the night, that when I came on deck next morning I found ourselves and consorts beating up with a light wind abreast of Cherbourg, the coast about which was just beginning to be distinguishable. There had been a good deal of disputing the day previous on board the Gull; and the captain's tyrannical conduct had put every one on board in a state of angry excitement. For my own part, I avoided coming in contact with him, except at meals, when I could not help it, and
then I had only to dread the want of social humanity which I never failed to meet; but it was far otherwise with the crew; he knocked them about with whatever came to hand without mercy, and openly kept up his mastery by exciting himself to a pitch of sufficient violence with quantities of brandy.

We could not yet distinguish any of the fleet; for the wind had come round to the south, and was still getting lighter; but at last we plainly heard the noise of a heavy cannonade. It was the first time in my life that I had heard a shot fired in anger; and as every deep explosion came through the air, my heart beat faster and faster, and, natural fear mingling with natural impatience, I stood engrossed in pleasingly fearful feelings, till I was roused by the voice of the mate, crying that there was a ship to windward. As our fleet lay between us and the shore, we had no fear of its proving an enemy, and farther than as an object of casual speculation, the sail attracted little notice, till at length, as we stood up Channel, with the ship, which seemed a large merchantman, going full before the wind, that had now freshened, under a heavy press of sail, about a mile to windward on our bow, the mate gave it as his opinion that we ought to speak him, and learn how the fleet lay. Now, about a quarter of an hour before this, one of the men having grumbled at a cuff, the Captain had taken me regularly to witness the mutiny; and, going to his arms' chest, had stuck a pair of pistols in the breast of his jacket, with which he had paraded the deck for a few minutes, in tenfold truculence, and had then gone below again, where he now sat over his articles of war and brandy-bottle. The cabin light was partly open to admit air; and he made his inquiries, and gave his orders, without coming on deck. "What colours does the fellow show, sir?"

"He is canvass to the mast-head, sir, and I cannot see his flag; but I think I know the cut of his royals: he's a merchant victualler, if I don't mistake, belonging to the leeward division, standing across to Portsmouth--for stores, I suppose."

"I don't care what you suppose, sir--what is his name?"

"The Prince Frederick."

"Ah--eh!--old Manson's craft?"

"Yes, sir."

"What course do you lie, sir?"

"Hard upon the wind: if he hold on, we will cross his wake close astern."

"Well, do now as I desire you, sir. Let the boat away as many points as will run you under his bows--and hold on your course till I give you farther orders." Then, in an under-growl to himself, "Ah, ha, he thought he had swamped me about that d----d business of his Son's and the Phoenix; but I'll show the old costermongering rogue that I can cross his bows, both on shore and at sea"--here he raised his voice again--"and, hilloa, sir! order him, as soon as he comes within hail, to run under my stern, and
round to leeward, till your commander questions him on his Majesty's service. And clear away that gun in the bows there, for, by ----, if he does not put his helm up, I'll fire into him, as I would into a huxter's stall!"

We accordingly fell away to leeward, and the vessels rapidly neared each other. The stranger had studding-sails set from the very top-gallant royals to the chain-plates; and a more splendid sight my eyes never beheld than he presented, spooming down, swift and steady through the fresh, green, sparkling seas that sheeted off round either bow in a continuous jet, glassy, unbroken, and in colour like the purest amethyst, till it foamed away down the broadside in white boiling eddies of froth. We were now within hail: the mate took the trumpet, and shouted his orders as he had received them: there was no answer. The stranger still held on his course, right before the wind.

"He won't alter his course, sir," said the mate to the captain. "What is to be done?"

"Hold on, as I ordered you, sir; bring up under his lee; and if he don't slacken sail, fire your gun into him, and be d----d! Ah, is it luffing you are, you mutinous lubber? must I overhaul you?" And he laid hold of a handspike, and came up the companion, his eyes glaring, his teeth set, and a torrent of curses hissing through them, hot and horrible. He kicked the mate into the scuppers, and laid hold of the tiller, round which he lashed its lanyard with a second turn, before he had given more than one look at the stranger; and while knotting the lashings, reiterated his orders with double vehemence about the gun. If ever the devil had possession of any man, he was in him then. It all occurred in less time than a minute; but so inexperienced at sea was I, that I apprehended a fight more than anything else; although, as the tiller was lashed, I saw it was next to impossible for the vessels to escape running foul. The seamen were all in consternation, crowding from the bows, and clamouring advice, entreaties, and denunciations, without the slightest effect, on their captain. He held a pistol in his hand, and swore he would shoot the first mutineer who should dare to interfere. But, at the second look he took at the tower of canvass now stooping down upon us, within half a stone's throw, he dropped the tiller, staggered back, and clapt both his hands over his eyes. When he withdrew them to grasp the tafferel, against which he had stumbled, one might have thought that he had been smearing his face with white paint, so deadly pale was he grown all on the sudden; but his eyes were fixed and glazed, his mouth wide open, his lips livid, and shaking like jelly, his hair on end, his limbs in a loose palsy, his knees going against and over one another. It was a moment of dreadful confusion. I was thrown down by the rushing about of the crew; and, as I looked up from among the trampling crowd, through whose feet I rolled like a log, I saw, all at once, between me and the blue sky, over our quarter, the jib-boom of the ship pushed through the serene air with a smooth and equable motion, but swift and irresistible in the whole wing of the wind. It caught us by the lifts of the mainsail, and we were gently pushed over for an almost imperceptible moment; then came a sharp crash, and the main-topmast toppled down, tearing and smashing everything in its descent, and making the started planks fly from stern to stern, as it drove right through the deck into the cabin. At the same moment the ship's jib-boom sprung high into the air, and from among her pile of sails that were now bellying out almost overhead, there leaped down, like an eagle from his cloud, the whole broad-winged fore-top-gallant-mast, royals and all, with a swoop upon our deck. All the men round the tiller were struck down; some with broken limbs, and all dreadfully bruised, but none was killed save their miserable commander; he was killed where he stood
still paralysed against the tafferel. I saw him struck by the jagged stump of the broken mast, as it fell; he dropped shrieking over the low bulwark, and sank with his face downwards. I saw no more, for the bows of the ship here caught us astern with a crushing shock, that drove the schooner right under water, up to the main hatchway, and I was floated off in the sea. The first thing I can remember after that catastrophe, was the roaring as if of a thousand cataracts about my ears, and a consciousness that I was hauled through the water like a fish in a net. This was indeed the case: I had been entangled in the loose wreck of rigging that fell on board the Gull; and when the ship, after grazing her stern, drew these masts and sails after her, by the numerous ropes that still remained unbroken, I was carried along, and would certainly have perished, had not the lightness of the wreck, and the rapidity with which it was dragged, kept me on the surface; yet even there I was never nearer anything than suffocation, from the overwhelming tumult of the broken water which was now sheeting over my head and shoulders, and falling in foam upon my feet like the very jets round the ship's cutwater. I saw that I must perish if I did not get out of the rush; and having with infinite labour disentangled myself from the rope round my middle, by which I was held, made a desperate exertion, and succeeded in drawing myself forward, and climbing up the connecting rigging at the bows, till I got my head out of the spray. So soon as I was out of immediate peril I relaxed my exertions for a few minutes to take breath; and although I frequently cried for help, I could not make myself heard, for my voice, as well as my strength, was almost exhausted, and once or twice I was on the point of giving up the struggle, and dropping into my deep death-bed, through pure inability of longer hanging on. At last, finding my cries fruitless, and feeling that, without some extraordinary exertion, I must face the abhorred change without further preparation, I collected all the energies of my remaining strength, and with an effort that left me as weak as an infant, drew myself up by the sheer force of my arms, and grasped the fore-chains; then slowly clambered to the dead-eyes, gained the rail of the bulwark, doubled over it like a sack, and fell on deck insensible. When my senses began to collect, and before I had yet opened my eyes, I remember congratulating myself in my own mind on my escape, and dimly contrasting the oozy bed of the sea with the warm berth in which I either was, or was about to be placed. But it was cold—cold. I opened my eyes; I was lying in a dripping coil like a bundle of wet sea-weed, the deck flooded all round with the water still running from my clothes and hair. I dried the blinding spray from my eyes, and, raising myself upon my elbow, looked about. There was not a soul there but myself!

I swallowed a strange pang that arose from my heart, and looked out for something to make a noise with; there was nothing to be had--the decks were free from everything but tar and tallow. I had never seen such dirty decks before, yet there was nothing loose lying about. I had not yet risen--I was afraid to rise--so I pulled off my shoe, and began to hammer on the deck with the heel of it; then to call and to whistle. There was no answer! I started up with another pang that made the water gush to my eyes, and ran astern without looking either to the right or left. I stretched myself half over the tafferel, and looked for the schooner. I saw her lying far away astern, a water-logged wreck, with the other tenders bearing up to her, and signals flying from all their masts. I tossed my arms and shouted, in the wild hope that I might still be taken on board some of them. Alas! I felt the unmanned ship speeding on her dark errand beyond the hope of being overtaken. All the frightful stories of the Flying Dutchman came back with unnatural vividness upon my memory. I remembered the unaccountable terror of the wretched captain of the Gull, his horrible fate, and the invisible agency by which it seemed accomplished. I thought myself in superhuman hands, and my heart sank, and my breath failed, and I swooned for fear, as I had
already fallen senseless from fatigue. Let it be remembered that I was a very young man; although I feel that apology need hardly be made for a fear so dreadful, and, in such circumstances, so natural, that not even at this day would the wealth of worlds induce me to spend another hour in the same ignorance of my situation that then afflicted me. I lifted my head from the deck with a bewildering recollection of all that had passed, but as my eye rested on the tall and shining sails overhead, I could not think that a fabric so beautiful was made to bear any but a human crew. Be her navigators who they might, I knew that it was the same whether I faced them fore or aft; so I leaped up, and forced myself forward, that I might put an end to my horrible suspense at once. From few, if any, do I apprehend contempt on account of this avowal. The awe of preternatural agency is part of this life's natural religion; and sanctioned as it is in the revealed religion that has been vouchsafed to us, let no man scorn me for acknowledging its influence, while his own soul must tell him that he is a being existing he knows not how, among he knows not whom. I am not ashamed to confess, that I walked the deck of that deserted vessel in excessive fear; from companion and hatchway I expected every moment to see some inconceivable horror ascend; and although I held in my breath, and kept myself drawn up in rigid determination not to flinch from anything that a Christian man should confront, yet, with all the preparation I could muster, I felt that the twirling of a straw upon that bare deck would have upset me. My senses, however, were not so totally overwhelmed in awe and wonder as to prevent my perceiving that there really was something unusual in the appearance of things on deck. There were four wide funnels, one under each of the main and fore shrouds--things I had never seen in any ship before. The ports were larger than usual, and had, which seemed very strange, their hinges below. The decks were smeared and slippery, as I have before observed, with tar and tallow. I looked up with a lightened heart to the yard-arms;--there were the grappling-irons swinging from them one and all! I ran into the main-cabin without one hesitating pause--I was rushing desperately to be satisfied, and I was satisfied. The cabin was stripped of its furniture; troughs were laid along each side; they ran into the main-hold, and terminated in sally-ports at either quarter; they were stuffed with reeds in sheaves bound together with matches, and steeped in composition. It was evident--I was in a fire-ship; it accounted for everything. I ran to the sally-port; there was the black track of the gunpowder, and the spot plainly marked where the match had been extinguished. The ship had missed taking fire, and stood out to sea. I ran out on deck--threw off my clothes to dry--got a remnant of a sail, and rubbed myself into life and warmth once more; then wrapping myself in a canvass cloak very fairly cut from the fore stay-sail, I lay down in the sunny scuppers, and without a single thought of navigating the vessel--it never entered my head, once I had got the horrible deceit of my fear removed--gave myself up to the enjoyment of my security and rest so heartily, that at last, like a wearied child, I dropped involuntarily asleep. I could not have slept more than an hour when I was awakened by the snapping of a royal studding-sail boom, for the breeze had been freshening ever since I came on board, and was now straining spars and canvass at a pitch that threatened to carry away everything. The new dangers of my situation rose in fearful array before me, as I considered with myself the probable consequences. I was driving right on shore at a rate that must smash the vessel to pieces the moment she would take the ground; and how to shorten sail or lie to, I could not tell. Everything was fast, and my single strength could not suffice to slacken away anything of consequence. The vessel could never be put upon another course with all her yards braced square. There was little or no chance of my falling in with any sail in the Channel in such dangerous times. The wind was getting round to the east again, and I saw plainly that if it settled there, and still carried me before it, I must drift to the Atlantic, and die of hunger, unless I could subsist on tallow and
brimstone (since nothing more eatable had been left on board) till the final catastrophe of going on shore, that sooner or later must befall me. Even if I should fall in with a sail, how were they to know that I was in distress? and if they did, how was I to bring the ship to? or (unless it fell a dead calm) how was a boat to be sent on board me driving at such a rate? I went to the wheel to try what I could do; not much caring though I should lay her fairly on her beam-ends; for, if she should not founder outright, I thought even such a state would be better than the rapid ruin she was then threatening me with. I brought her up till I shook the wind out of her canvass. She reeled and staggered for a moment like a drunken being, then all at once her lighter sails were taken aback with a slap that beat away booms, and tore down yards and tackling with a succession of crashes, flappings, and snaps like gun-shots, which threw me into such confusion, that I let go the wheel, and ran for the cabin, in dread of having my brains beaten out by a falling spar, like the luckless captain of the Gull. I sat down in despair among the tubs of composition and piles of oakum steeped in turpentine, with which the place was crammed, and listened to the effects of my rashness still sounding overhead, and making themselves known even below by the mad plunges of the vessel, that pitched me at length into a corner, where I lay till she righted, and went off dead before the wind once more. The rigging when I came on deck presented a strange sight. All the great sails had filled again, but the lighter ones were flying in lumbering streamers from every yard-arm like ribbands from a tattered cap; while booms and blocks went swinging through the confusion, knocking against the standing spars, and adding at every stroke some new disaster to the ruinous uproar. I would have almost changed places with Phaeton. I would as soon have laid my hand upon the fiery mane of a courser of the sun, with all the zodiac reeling underfoot, as have touched a spoke of that fatal wheel during the next hour. I went below again, and got between decks by the communication from the cabin, where I saw the arrangement of the combustibles, which put the nature of the vessel beyond all doubt. The troughs crossed each other between four barrels of composition, placed one under each of the above-mentioned funnels. Chambers were loaded opposite all the ports, to blow them open and give the flame vent. Powdered resin and sulphur were scattered plentifully in all directions, and a mixture of combustibles like soft dry paste filled the bottoms of all the troughs, on top of which the reeds were tied with matches innumerable. The breeze now began to take off, and continued to lull away during all the afternoon, having settled at length at about south-east, so that my fears of drifting past the Land's-end were now almost at rest. I dressed myself in my dried clothes, but dared not kindle a fire;--every spot was ready to start into flame with the merest spark; even in the after-cabin the berths were stowed full of old turpentine and oil jars, and dusted with meal of resin. I walked the deck till evening, and with departing light of day distinguished St Michael's Mount, rising in a grey and purple haze high into the ruddy horizon. The night fell chilly and thick, and I went into the cabin and tried to make up my mind for the worst. But I could not long bear to stay there, it was so lonely and dismal. There was a sort of company in the wind and the struggling sails on deck, but below, everything was deadly dark and silent. So, chilly as it was, I wrapped my cloak of canvass once more about me, and sat down on the forecastle, shivering with cold and apprehension, and gazing, till my eyes grew strained and dizzy, into the monotonous gloom ahead. I could not see any star, but I think it must have been about one o'clock, when the heavy washing of the seas about our bows was broken by the distant murmur of breakers. Had I heard my death-bell tolling, it could not more surely have impressed me with the certainty of my immediate fate; and yet the very growling of that merciless band, into whose strangling tumult I so soon expected to be cast, came upon my numbed senses with a rousing and invigorating influence; for the dull uncertainty of my former state had been altogether
stupifying. I rose and took my post once more by the wheel, determined to use my experience to the best advantage in counteracting or seconding the wind as I saw necessary, so far as its very limited command would go.

The tumult of broken water now became louder and louder, but instead of advancing on my ear as before, out of the darkness ahead, it growled away down the night on our starboard beam in an oblique direction, which I could not account for, till, looking over the stern, I saw, by the dim glimmer of the ship's wake, that we were making more lee than head way; that, in fact, the ship was driving broadside on, in a powerful tide-race along a reef of rocks, through some opening in which, or past which altogether, I did not despair of being yet carried by the current, as I heard no surf loud enough to tell of its running anywhere against them, except beyond one breach in their line, comparatively smooth. The coast was now distinguishable ahead, black, high, and precipitous. It advanced higher and higher up the sky, till it almost seemed to overhang our forecastle, and I now felt the ship swing round in the sweep of the current, and saw the breakers running white astern as we swept clear of them, right through the reef. There rose presently a rustling sound about the bows; then a heavy grating all along the keel, a dull prolonged concussion, and the tide broke on her as she stuck--fast in a sand-bank. It was pitch dark. The breakers were on all sides; but the ship lay in smooth water among them. It would have been madness to attempt swimming on shore; where, even if I should escape the violence of the current and surf, I must spend the long morning on the bleak hill, weighed down by wet clothes, and ignorant of my road. Under these considerations, particularly as there was no fear of the ship yielding to any sea likely to run there, during the calm state of the weather, I determined to remain on deck till day; and now, considering my safety almost certain, I mingled my supplications with thanksgivings, and, falling on my knees, blessed God with tears of gratitude and delight; then wrapping myself up once more behind the shelter of the bulwark, went to sleep. I started up from a dream of home, for I distinctly heard the stroke of oars alongside. I was on the point of calling out when some one close under the quarter said, in a low but (to my morbidly sensitive ear) a clear whisper, "By ---- I believe they have deserted her! But look sharp, my lads, for you may find plenty of them still, skulking behind the bulwarks." I heard this with an accompaniment of cocking fire-arms and unsheathing cutlasses; and with the horrifying suspicion that they were a gang of Cornwall wreckers, I crept in renewed and redoubled terror into the cabin. Just as I concealed myself behind the door, which opened on the quarter-deck from under a high poop, the boat's crew sprung on deck with lanterns and levelled weapons. Two tall and rather fine-looking men led the party, and so soon as they saw that there was no fighting for them on deck, drew their company together round the main-mast, and proceeded, to my inexpressible relief, to take possession of the ship in the name of his Majesty George the Third, by virtue of certain letters of marque and reprisal, empowering them, Adam and Hiram Forrest, of Forrest-Race, Esquires, to set upon by force of arms, subdue, and take all ships, vessels, goods, wares, munitions of war, &c. &c. of, or belonging to, the French nation. Now was my time to discover myself (and I confess I had a thought or two about my claim to a share of the prize-money).--One step I made from my position, but the noise arrested me with its immediate consequence--half-a-dozen muskets levelled at the door. "Keep together, men! they are barricaded in the cabin!--go aft, Hiram, with four hands, and break open the door, while I secure the forecastle and hatchways," cried the elder leader. His associate sprung towards my place of concealment at the head of four fellows, brandishing their naked cutlasses; and bursting open the door with a drive of his foot, rushed in--a pistol in one hand, a drawn sword in the other. I
thought it most prudent to keep clear of the first rush of their irruption, and so had retreated quietly to the 
after-cabin, where I concealed myself in one of the berths close by the stern-port. They soon found 
the cabin equally deserted with the deck; and as they went stumbling about with their one lantern 
through the lumber of combustibles, filled it with exclamations of amazement.

"Why, here's no crew that I can see but a regiment of paint-pots--that must have been a rat that we 
heard, sir," said one.

"D----n me, Tom, I say, what sort of a devil's drawing-room have we here?" muttered another, as he 
stood turning over a mop of oakum with his toe; "and what sort of a damnable smell is this?" snuffing 
at a box of composition.

"The devil's own smell--brimstone, by ----!" cried a fourth, shaking a cloud of sulphur from his fingers; 
and one fellow rummaging through the troughs pulled up a bundle of reeds and tossed them out on the 
floor, exclaiming, "Nothing but rush-lights in these here lockers, Master Hiram--rush-lights and 
mouldings of white biscuit, as I take it--light diet that, I may say, sir, for a ship's company." Just then 
some lumber getting loose, rolled out of an upper berth among them, and three or four smart cuts were 
made at it before they saw what it was. I had taken them as a hint to lie quiet a little longer, when their 
leader started suddenly, and, after standing for a moment at the heel of the mizen-mast, gave a strong 
shudder, and ordered the men out of the cabin. "Off, off to the forecastle every man of you!--off, I say, 
and send Captain Forrest here." The men withdrew, muttering exclamations of amazement as he drove 
them out on deck, whence he presently returned, accompanied by the other. He locked and bolted the 
door after him, and led his companion up to the mast, then throwing the light full on it, asked in a 
whisper, that thrilled through me where I lay, "Do you know that?" "What?" "That splinter of steel 
buried in the wood." The elder Forrest, without one word of reply, snatched up the lantern and ran 
round the cabin, holding the light over his head, and gazing at everything with a strong expression of 
astonishment; then stuck the lantern down upon a barrel-head, slapped his hands against his thighs, and 
exclaimed, "Hah!--Now may I be damned if it is not the old Phoenix come back again!--but Hiram, I 
say, by Heaven I cannot understand this--she is not the same boat, and yet she is--I thought I knew her 
deck although it is strangely altered--but what is the matter with you?" for the younger one stood pale 
and trembling, and here grasped him convulsively by the arm.

"What ails you, Hiram? I say,--I hope you are not afraid?"

"Yes, by ----" (with a slow and solemn asseveration), "I am afraid, Adam Forrest!" the other answered, 
gasping; "I am afraid, for I saw him there as plainly as I see you, clinging round the mast as he did that 
night, when he held on till you shore through his wrist with your cutlass, and snapped it an inch deep in 
the solid wood below! and if I go in there" (pointing to the after-cabin without even raising his averted 
face),--"if I go in there, I will see the others!--Come on deck--I am sick."

"Stay where you are--you must not expose yourself to the men,--tut, tut!--What! after all we have seen 
together, to let a trick of your fancy get the better of your manhood in this disgraceful way!--Why," and 
he mused for a moment, "it is odd enough too, that she should come here without hands, and all to give
us a second crop off her old timbers; but egad, I have it! I'll lay my life Tom has been overhauling her in the Channel, and has sent the old bird adrift, well knowing to whose door the Race would bring her!--Ah! poor Tom! many an ugly job he has brought me through; however, they say that *Gull thing* that I got him the command of is a switching fast sailer, and if he has but a stanch crew, he may make a good thing of it yet—that is, if he can only keep from getting more than moderately drunk. But come along till we see what this after-cabin has got for us. We have our letters of marque now, and need not be ashamed to show our faces under that authority to man or devil!—Come," and he dragged his reluctant associate almost close to the spot where I lay, in another and still more dreadful relapse of horror. The young man leaned against a timber, with his head sunk upon his breast, and shuddered violently.

"Adam," said he at length, "we have never thriven in anything since the night we had that business in this abominable den of blood. You and I then were, or ought to have been, country gentlemen, and he was no more than a careless sailor at worst; but with all the money we got in Bordeaux for the fruits of our villany, we are three miserable adventurers to-day, if the damning cargo she carries has not sunk the Gull already—Mother of God defend me! there is young Manson!" I can no more account for it now, than I could help it then, but the truth is, I had risen at this mention of the Gull in a sort of reckless frenzy, for I had no control over either my words or actions, and started out on the floor before them, a very ghastly and hideous spectacle; for I was pale and haggard with fear and desperation, and my face was bloody from a scratch I had got in the dark. The eyes of the repentant sinner fastened on me as I rose, and his terror was full as horribly depicted on his countenance, as that of his already punished associate had been on his; he fell flat on his face, and even the hardened ruffian at his side leaped back with a shout of horror as I rose before him with my hands held up, and a storm of denunciation that I could not control bursting from my lips. What I said I did not even then know, but it soon betrayed my mortal nature, and Forrest, with a blow of his fist, struck me back whence I had risen, then drew a pistol and came close up to me to make sure. I prayed for mercy now as wildly as I had before denounced vengeance, and in the extremity of my terror shut my eyes and clung to the very boards. A flash first came through my closed eyelids, and then a rushing and flapping burst of flame like interminable lightning. The pistol had burned priming, but even that had been enough to set fire to an open can of turpentine that was upset from a locker above by the thrust he had made after me with the weapon. The liquid starting into fire and smoke over the exploding gunpowder, flowed down in a waving river of flame, and spreading on the resined floors, and catching the loose combustibles all round, raised such a chaos of fire, smoke, hissing, sputtering, and suffocation, that I had only power to feel myself unwounded, and with my coat over my head, to pitch myself bodily against the port below me. I literally sank through a little pool of flame, but I burst open the port as I had expected, and found myself the next moment in the sea. It was now low water, and the stream that I had feared would sweep me among the breakers was totally subsided; but I could see nothing clearly for the first minute, only a dazzling and flashing of light through the spray, that swept over my head from the broken water on the rocks. The first thing I saw distinctly was a trail of flame writhing like a tail round the stern of the ship, as if the great black hulk had been lashing herself into the furious fit, that in another minute burst out from every vent and funnel in spouting and roaring jets of fire, that blazed up into the rigging as high as the lower masts, and pierced the night for miles round, with a splendour strong as the light of the sun at noonday. I got upon the nearest of the rocks (by the fall of the water they now rose much nearer than
they had before seemed to do), and rising out of reach of the surf, contemplated a spectacle the grandest and most appalling I ever witnessed. The ship had run aground upon the landward side of a tongue of sand, that stretched (like half the string of a bent bow) partly across a curve of the coast, thus intercepting whatever the current from the opposite side might sweep into the bay; and there settling on a rapidly shelving bank, had fallen over as the water left her, till her masts and rigging lay almost across the narrow channel between. On shore an overhanging precipice rose right opposite, and close under her lee--so close that her rigging sloped up to within a stone's-throw of the jutting rock. Between the base of this rock and the water's edge, there was a stripe of greensward, evidently artificial, forming a platform of perhaps thirty yards across, which widened away at one side into a lawn with haycocks and shrubbery, while there was a good deal of planting visible up the back of the ravine. An old-fashioned straggling house stood almost under the precipice, facing the platform on one side, and the lawn on the other. Its steep roof of grey slate, and slender chimneys, made a gaunt and spectral show in the ruddy glare, contrasted with the black mass of rock behind, and the boiling flashes of the surf tossed up almost to its fantastic porch in front. I looked at the ship--the fore-hatchway had torn up with a tremendous burst, and the massy planks and bars of wrought-iron were scattered on either side; but the black tarpaulin rose like a canopy over the body of flame that followed, and was dissipated into smoke and ashes, without ever coming down. And now the breeze tossing that blaze about through the rigging in rolling and heavy volume, like a great tongue, it roared at every wallowing flap, and licked up square-sails, stay-sails, and studding-sails, as though they had been so much tinder, while the port-chambers successively exploding, thundered and flashed down either broadside, then vomited out their voluminous, flaring streamers of fire, that curled and climbed up into the conflagration till consumed amid the general flame. All the water out of the ship's shadow blazed to the blazing pile; but wherever her hull momentarily intercepted its light, the sea seemed to heave more heavily, and with a lurid glow like blood. The boat's crew had now pushed off from the quarter; I saw all on board save the two miserable beings I had left in the flames of the cabin: but the men had scarce pulled the boat's length from the vessel's side, when a figure leaped up on the quarter rail from deck--he looked as if he had risen out of hell; for his head was singed bald, and his face and hands were all livid, swollen, and bloody, from the scorching. It was the elder Forrest. He was tossing his arms and howling. The men pulled back, the boat shot into the shadow of the ship, and in the sudden difference of light I lost them for an instant; but the great flame of the forecastle took a sweep to windward, and showed them again, close under the quarter. All their faces glowed like copper, as they turned them up to the crimsoned figure wavering above, for Forrest had now seized a rope, that dangled still unconsumed from the mizen-yard arm, and was swinging to and fro, as the scorching flame behind him swayed forward or collapsed; but their faces fell, and a cry of horror burst from them all as it gave way, and the wretch, after balancing a moment on his narrow footing, fell back into the fire;--there was a puff of smoke and ashes, a long heaving roll of the flame, a shriek that rung shrilly over everything, and the seamen, silent and horrified, pushed off again, and made for the shore. And now the whole rigging was in a light flame, and the dance of sparks to leeward, where it eddied round the chimneys and gables of the old house, looked like a great spangled mantle shaken out in the sky. Beneath, smoke was curling in white eddies from every door and window, and the fate of the doomed dwelling seemed fixed, to burn first, while anything remained in it that would burn, and then to be swept from its foundations by the final explosion, out of reach of which I had all this time been painfully making my way, sometimes clambering over the rocks high and dry, and sometimes swimming. I gained the dry land at last, about
three hundred yards astern of the vessel, and rounding the shoulder of a hill, lay down among the grass in the sudden pitchy darkness behind it, till my eyes had a little recovered from the effects of the excessive light, and I was able to see my way into the country. I was between two steep hills; that behind me was lurid in the dim reflection of the sky, but a ruddier haze than ever the sunset had thrown over it, glowed across the track of air above, and bore a crown of fire to the top of the higher hill opposite, on which every stock and stone showed like iron at a forging heat. Through this red region I had to pass to reach the inland. Pursuing a horse-track that led over it, I gained the limits of darkness again, without once turning to look at the scene behind--I had beheld enough. Suddenly I heard the sound of hoofs in the valley beyond, and turning, beheld a riderless horse toss up his mane like a fiery crest over the illuminated mountain, then plunge into the darkness between. I laid hold of the reins as he rushed past me, determined to use the opportunity of escape; and having checked him with some difficulty, threw myself into the saddle and gave him head. He bore me down the open hill like the wind; but when I got among the precipices below, through which the road was intricately carried, I was reluctantly obliged to draw up a little for fear of accidents. I was unwilling to do this, as well from the desire of making my escape to as great a distance as possible from the explosion, as from the conviction, growing every moment stronger, that I heard some one on horseback in pursuit. Now, I had no doubt that the animal I rode had thrown another rider immediately before being caught by me; and I thought it most probable, that whoever was now pursuing, had been in company with him when his horse had first run off. Be that as it might, I had had enough of Forrest-Race and its inhabitants, to make me determined, if I must be overtaken, to conceal myself by the road-side, and let my pursuer look after the runaway at his leisure. However, I tried to make the most of my chances in the mean time, and pushed on as rapidly as prudence would allow; but in ten minutes more, I found I had no prospect of escape; I heard the clatter of the horse, and once or twice the cries of the rider behind, and was just preparing to dismount, and looking back to try what I could see, when there shot up a column of fire, a hundred feet and more over the top of the highest mountain, and hill and valley, road, rock, and river, leaped out into astonishing splendour before me. Every object, for three or four seconds, was apparent in steady and intense light. I saw the perilous road down which I had come, and wondered how my horse had kept his footing at all; but my wonder was considerably greater when, about half a furlong behind, I saw my pursuer, as plainly as I ever saw my own mother, to be a woman--dressed, at least, in a female habit, and light as Diana, while she sat her rearing and plunging hunter through the wild tumult of his terror. But, before I could take a second look, down stooped the night again in tenfold power of darkness, while there burst through the shaken sky such a concussion, as with its tremendous and stunning violence beat the poor animal I bestrode, and myself along with him, flat down upon the ground, among the rebounding echoes and black darkness. I escaped from the fall unhurt, and the horse stood still and trembling, till I remounted, for I now was no longer desirous of escaping my pursuer. I was hardly in the saddle again, when I heard a sweet voice at my side--"Now, Heaven have mercy on us,--this is a fearful night!--How could you leave me in this way, George?--Ah! you could not help it, poor fellow--but did I not see you thrown after the grey ran off?--Why do you not answer, George--are you hurt?"

"In the name of God, Ellen Fane, what do you do here?" I exclaimed, in a voice that I could hardly think my own. She screamed aloud, for it was indeed she, and checked her horse till he almost went on his haunches; I seized him by the bridle to keep him from backing over the precipice.
"Keep off--keep off," she cried. "Oh, have mercy on me if you are a man or a Christian, for I am a helpless girl, and in danger of my life!--Oh, only help me to get to Truro, and I will pray for you--indeed I will--as long as this miserable existence lasts!"

I was agitated by contending emotions--innumerable--indescribable; but I made a struggle to compose myself, and implored her not to be alarmed. "And, oh, Ellen, Ellen!" I cried, "do you not yet know me?"

"Henry!--Mr Jervas!" she exclaimed, and would have fallen to the ground had I not drawn our horses together, and supported her sinking frame upon my breast. There was not a sound in the air, that had so lately been torn with dreadful noises, except the low sobs of my companion, whose tears were flowing unrestrained upon my bosom, and the dreamy plashing of the river beside us, as it hastened to drown its murmurs in the moan of the sea, that came heavily at intervals on the wind like a lamentation. The wind that was now abroad was barely strong enough to lift a curl or two of the long and lovely tresses that lay clustering on my breast. All the light in the sky was insufficient to show more than the dim outline of the hills rising black around us against the paler gloom of the heavens. Everything was steeped in profound tranquillity, but the uproar that this quiet had succeeded was less confounding a thousand times, than the tumultuous feelings which agitated my heart in the midst of that solemn and oppressive calm.

"Tell me, Ellen, is it possible that you can have been under the same roof with this villain Forrest?"

"Alas, poor wretch!" she exclaimed, "he was burned to death--he and his cousin Hiram."

"Murderous ruffians!--robbers, dogs, and pirates! what better fate did they merit?" I exclaimed, forgetting that she was ignorant of their piracy.

"Nay, indeed, Mr Jervas, they were only doing their duty. You know that they would have been obliged to fight with the crew, had not the ship been deserted. Oh, although Mr Forrest was a harsh and selfish man, and although I came here so much against my own wishes, yet, believe me, you wrong him with these horrid names; but tell me, I beseech you, how did you come here? Surely you cannot have come all the way from Bromley Hall?--Pray tell me."

"Could I show you my dripping clothes, my bleeding hands, my scorched and smarting face," cried I, "you might then guess where I come from--from the midst of breakers and fire, out of the hands of pirates and assassins, who would fain have stained with my blood that fatal ship that they once before polluted with the massacre of her crew, but which God in his justice has guided over the seas to be a destruction for them and theirs. I came in the French fire-ship!"

This was indignantly, bitterly, and thoughtlessly spoken; and I was well rebuked by her placid reply. "Let us pray to be protected in our distress, for, alas! I fear you are distracted, and I scarcely know, myself, whether I am awake or not."
"I would give all I value in the world, except your good wishes, Ellen, that this were a dream; but it is too true--listen now (and I solemnly assure you there is no deception in what I say), and I will tell you all;" and so I related to her everything that had occurred from the time of our dancing the last rigadoon together in Bromley Hall, up to our present meeting among the Forrest-Race Hills.

"And now, Ellen, that these wretches themselves have been tossed out like burned cinders from the fire, and that their house has been blown stone from stone to the foundation, can you doubt that the hand of Providence has been put forth in their punishment, as plainly as in our reunion after so sudden a separation, and one which threatened to last for years, if not for life? and can you for a moment doubt that I have been brought here thus fearfully and strangely to be a protector to you now, and a cherisher and protector to you till death part us?"

"Oh, do not talk of happiness to me; I feel that I am doomed to be miserable and the cause of misery; the avenging hand lies heavy on us all. But let us hasten to Truro, and hurry up to Bromley, and get my dear guardian's advice, before----" she burst into renewed tears, and then exclaimed, "Alas, alas, ill-fated Mary Forrest! you had little thought, when you went to sleep to-night, that you should be awakened by the light of your husband's death-fire!"

"The miserable woman!" I cried, "what has become of her?"

"She will soon be with her brothers, I trust, in safety; they took her and her baby in the boat to Falmouth, but I was sent off with George the gardener, on horseback, as you see, for Truro. Poor George has suffered with the rest; his horse was frightened by the fire and threw him on the hill; let us go back and see if he is hurt."

I with difficulty dissuaded her from delaying us by such a fruitless search, and represented my own miserable condition.

"Oh that the sky would clear," she cried, "and show us how to go! there is a cottage somewhere near us where you can get dried. You will perish if you remain in wet clothes any longer--but can it be that you are all this time riding bare-headed?" and she drew up her horse, and pulling a handkerchief from her neck, tied it, yet warm from her bosom, round my cold temples and dank hair. Every touch of her fingers streamed a flood of warmth to my heart; my very brain derived new vigour from the comfortable cincture; and having kissed her gentle hands again and again, I recommenced to explore the road with indefatigable perseverance. At length, after a tedious ride over a bleak and almost impracticable track, we saw the low roof of the cottage rise between us and the sky. A feeble light struggled for a moment over the common as we approached, and then disappeared. Having with some searching found a stake to which to tie the horses, we advanced to the door; it opened, and we entered the cabin's only apartment. In one corner, on a low truckle, lay an old man bedridden and doting. In the middle of the floor, a child of about eight years was lighting a candle at the embers of a wood fire; she screamed as we stood before her, and flew to the bedside of the cripple, who mumbled and moaned at the disturbance, but did not seem to comprehend its cause. The little girl's large dark eyes bespoke terror and amazement till my companion addressed her, "My pretty Sally, do you not remember the
lady who gave the gown to your mother, and the money?" The little thing then let go its hold of the old man's quilt, and shading the candle from the open window, dropped a timid curtsy and said, "They are all gone down to see the burning at the Race, and they told me to keep the candle in the window till they would come back; but the draught blows it out, madam."

"Lend me the candle, my dear, and we will kindle a nice fire which the draught will only make burn the brighter, and that will do far better," said my companion, and began--beautiful being!--to pile up the wood and clean the hearthstone, with as prompt and housewife-like an alertness as though she had herself been a daughter of the carefullest cottager. The blaze soon crackled up through the grey smoke, and while I stretched myself along the earthen floor, and basked in the pleasant glow, she busied herself in the corner with the little girl--how, I could not imagine, till I heard a rustling of straw and the bleat of a goat. I looked round, and beheld her kneeling on the ground, and milking the poor ragged animal, with hands that took from their pious and charitable employment a loveliness far purer than ever the flowers of the green lane at Bromley had shed over them. She bore the milk warm in a wooden bowl to my lips as I lay; and the child brought me bread. I ate and drank, and blessed them, and tears gushed from my eyes.

"And now my pretty Sally," said my sweet friend, patting the dark head of the little maiden, "does not your mother plait straw hats?"

"Oh!" cried the child, lifting up her tiny hands, "there is a beautiful one in the chest for Simon Jones, madam; but he has gone to be a soldier, and has got a hat now that shines like glass, and has lovely feathers in it."

"Then give it to me for this gentleman, and I will give you all this money for your mother." I had my own purse in my pocket, but felt that it would gratify her not to interfere, and did not. So, after a great deal of coaxing, she at length prevailed on the child to open the sacred box, and take out the hat with reverential hands, into which she put a sum that made the poor little creature hold them up even higher than at the mention of the admirable Simon Jones. I being thus refitted and refreshed, we prepared to take the road again, the less reluctantly, as we had already consumed the last log of wood in the house. So, after raking the embers together for fear of accident, and kissing our little benefactress, we remounted, and turned our horses' heads along the road to Truro. Here we arrived before day, and having knocked up the people of an inn, got admitted with some difficulty. It was now my turn to take care of my companion, and I did my best to repay her kindness. I procured refreshments, saw to the horses, and bade her good-night, just as the morning dawn was breaking. I got two or three hours' sleep, and had my clothes thoroughly cleansed and dried before the coach arrived in which we were to proceed, when I placed the horses at livery in the name of Mr Forrest's executors, and took my seat beside all that was now dearest to me in the world. We were two days and a night on the road, for the proprietor of the coach would not permit it to run on the Sabbath, and we therefore spent all the second day, which was Sunday, in the little village where we stopped on the previous night. We went to church together, and after service wandered about the environs. That was the most delightful morning I had ever spent. It was then I persuaded her to promise that if Mr Blundell and her father refused to sanction our union, she would never marry another. I had little thought when exacting an engagement so
important, of the heavy responsibility we both undertook. I thought only that the possession of so much
goodness and beauty--I will not do injustice to my enthusiasm then, though I might add "riches" to the
list, did this refer to any other day--would make me the happiest of living men; and I urged and
entreated till I made as sure of the divine prize as ever man did in Courtship's lottery, before the final
certainty of marriage.

We arrived at Bromley Hall on the evening of Monday. I need not try to describe how my worthy friend
stared when he saw us walk in together, whom he had sent little more than a week before, as widely
asunder as east and west could separate. Nevertheless, he met his ward with open arms.

"Ellen, my darling child, welcome back to me!--but what the devil do you mean, sir?" cried he, with a
ludicrous comminglement of anger and goodwill upon his face, while he seized my hand with the grasp
of a thief-catcher, and held me at arm's-length in the middle of the floor.

"I have the strangest story to tell you, sir," I began-----

"Some trumpery excuse," cried he, "for thwarting my desires, and neglecting your own business,
sir--Why have you not gone on board your vessel yet? Ah, I'll warrant, you would rather be running
after heiresses than facing the French cannon."

"Indeed, my dear sir, you wrong Mr Jervas very much," interrupted my fair friend in good time, for I
was on the point of making a most indignant reply; but she stopped short, blushing and confused at the
betrayal of any interest towards one in whom she took so much, till I broke the awkward silence which
succeeded by requesting my host to grant me his private ear for a very few minutes.

"Very well, sir, very well; here is the same spot where you made all your fine promises to me not a
week ago" (he had led me into the library); "so sit down, and let me hear what you have to say for
yourself in this very suspicious business." I surprised myself by the manliness and confidence with
which I told my story, and avowed my determination never to forego a claim so sanctioned by
Providence, and so fully recognised by the party most concerned.

"But trust me, sir, I have more pride than to act otherwise than you once so prudently advised me," said
I; "I will return immediately to my profession, and you shall not again see me in the character of a
suitor till I can come in one that will be worthy such an errand."

I stopped to hear what he would say to this; but he made no reply; indeed, he hardly seemed to have
heard the latter part of my story at all, for he looked utterly bewildered and confounded.

"Henry," at length, said he, after long rubbing his temples, and twice or thrice ejaculating, "God help
us!" "you have brought yourself into a situation where you will have need for all the patience and
resignation you possess--Sit down,"--for I had risen with a sudden apprehension of something dreadful.
"Sit down, and bear this like the man you have shown yourself to be. You remember what I once told
you of Ellen's father--that he was living in a manner disgraceful to us all in London. Well, Henry, keep
your seat. I wrote the other day to inquire about him from a friend in the Admiralty. You are unwell, Harry; let me ring for something for you."

"For God's sake, sir," I gasped, "tell me the worst at once."

"It is bad enough, Harry, but here it is:--I was informed in answer that Mr Fane had obtained the command of the tender, Gull, and had just sailed for Cherbourg."

"By Heaven, it is not possible!--that wretch the father of my Ellen! Oh, sir, it is impossible! it is impossible," I reiterated; "what was his christened name?"

"Harry, Harry!" he exclaimed, "be calm, I beseech you, and do not drive me more distracted than I am already. Mr Fane's name was Thomas--Tom Fane. You see, my dear boy, that this is all too true. Bear it like a man, or you will make children of us both; and rather try to aid me in considering how it is to be revealed to her, than make yourself unfit to join in alleviating her misery. I say nothing now, Henry, about your proposals--be that as you may think fit hereafter, for such a calamity as this must alter everything; only this I conjure you to, let us not now desert the innocent girl in the time of her affliction."

But I could not bear up against the agony of my feelings, as I was at length forced to admit the horrible conviction. I was utterly unable to take a part in the solicitous cares of my friend. In vain did he persuade--chide--denounce,--I wept, and groaned in the bitterest and deepest despair. After trying every means that prudence and humanity could suggest, he led me at last to my bedroom, where he left me, with the assurance that, in the mean time, nothing should be disclosed to Ellen (in whose presence I had not been trusted again even long enough to bid good-night--nor had I desired it), and promised, at parting, to make my apologies below, on the ground of sudden illness. I spent a night, if possible, more miserable than the evening. Not one minute's sleep, not one minute's respite from horrible thoughts--I tossed in bodily fever, and mental disorder still more insufferable, through all the long hours (although but few in number), till the grey dawn appeared around me. And now I am going to make a shameful confession. I rose with the first light, strong enough to show the shape of things, and stole like a thief out of my window. I could no longer bear the thought of being married to a murderer's daughter, and had made up my mind to fly from Bromley Hall. I dropped safely to the court, and ran across the lawn, impelled by shame, and selfishness, and pride, and turned my steps with a dastardly speed along the road towards London. I ran on till broad daylight, when, after ascending a steep hill, I threw myself behind a clump of furze by the road side, being utterly exhausted by my impetuous speed and contending passions. The bright freshness of the sunrise glittered over wide and rich lowlands beneath me. The breeze came up, heavy with meadow sweet and new mown hay--a delicious bath for my hot forehead. The singing of birds was showered forth from every bush and blossoming hedgerow, and a milk-white heifer came lowing up a lane, and stood placid and ruminating in the warmth beside me. I could not help thinking of the Sunday, when I had sat with Ellen on just such a hill, and had overlooked just such a sweep of meadows and pastures--and could I think of that scene, and forget how I had then vowed to cherish and support her through good and evil report, and how she had promised that she would never marry man but me? Could I forget how she had bared her bosom to the bleak wind, that
she might bind my brows when I was perishing with cold? Could I forget how she had stooped to
menial occupations in a hovel, to get me fire, and meat, and drink, when I was wet, and hungry, and
athirst? And could I now be the false, the base and recreant villain, to leave her in her premature
widowhood alone, exposed to all the calamity of sudden abhorrence and bereavement? It was beyond
the obstinacy of pride to resist the influence of such reflections. I found myself looking round at the
white chimneys of Bromley, where they rose among the trees behind me: I burst into tears like a child,
and, with a revulsion of feelings as complete as when I had first felt myself longing to escape from her,
I turned my steps back again towards Ellen's dwelling.

I had hardly descended the hill when I met the London coach--I would have given twenty fares for a
seat on it half an hour before; and even now, when the driver checked his horses as he passed, and
asked me, was I for London, I felt a renewal of the conflict almost as fierce as ever: But my better
genius conquered. I continued on my way, and reached the house again before seven o'clock. I wished
to get in unobserved, and appear at breakfast as if nothing had happened, but my host himself met me
as I crossed the lawn. We exchanged a melancholy salute, and he turned with me, without even asking
where I had been. We walked into the library together, and I took up a book, and turned away to avoid
his eye, in which a tear was trembling as well as in my own. He sat down to read his letters, sighing as
if his heart would break while he opened one after another, till suddenly he caught me by the arm, and
drew me close to him. I had been standing in his light; but it was not that that made him grasp me so
closely. "Harry, Harry, thank God, with me!" he cried, in a voice tremulous with joy, "she is safe! she is
safe!--our dear girl is safe from even a shadow of disgrace!--But why do I talk of disgrace?--here, read
that letter, and thank God!"

This is a copy of the letter, which he here put into my hands:--

"MY DEAR BLUNDELL,--I have made a sad mistake about poor Fane. I was called on to visit him
suddenly this morning, and found him in his last moments at a miserable lodging in the Barbican,
where he expired to-day at four o'clock. Before his death, he told me the circumstances connected with
the command of the Gull. It appears that, when the commission came, he was unable to move in its use
from gout and the effects of long dissipation, and that the Forrests of the Race being in town, prevailed
on him, for a trifling sum, to give up the papers to a vagabond namesake of his own (but no connection,
as far as I can understand), who had been an old associate of theirs in Cornwall. This fellow went down
to Sheerness, and took the command unquestioned, in the hurry of preparation for sea, and, as I
mentioned in my note of yesterday, has set sail for the fleet. By the by, there are dark reports in the
Admiralty about the Forrests and the old Phoenix (Manson, jun.), that was supposed to have gone down
at sea two years ago. The story goes, that they and this fellow Fane (against whom an order is already
issued, on the elder Manson's application), made away with the crew at the Race, into which she had
driven at night, and getting the ship off by the next tide, sailed her to Bordeaux, where they sold her to
the Messrs Devereux, and fitted out their letter of marque with the money. Of course, this is in
confidence. I have often warned poor Ellen's father of Adam Forrest, and told him how improper the
situation was for her (I know Forrest designed getting her for his cousin), but he was in the fellow's
debt, and therefore under his control; so that, although he disliked the thing as much as I, my
representations had no effect. His death must be a relief to us all, yet I cannot but lament him--bold,
generous, and honourable he always was, even to the last; and, now that he is gone, let us say nothing of the one deforming vice.--Believe me, most truly yours," &c. &c.

For five days I had been torn from my former self by a continued series of disaster and passionate suffering, and so constantly and rapidly had each astonishment succeeded the other, that I was become, I thought, in great measure callous to the most surprising change that could now possibly take place. But here I was placed all at once, and that when least of all expected, on the same ground as when I had parted from Ellen on the night before our first separation; and all the intermediate ordeal of terror and despair was past, and from it I had come out a bolder, truer, and happier man. It may well be credited, then, that my thanks to the Providence, through whose inscrutable hands I had been thus kindly dealt with, were full and fervent; and it may well be supposed how Ellen wondered, with blushes and doubtful confusion, what the embrace, so sadly tender yet so ardent, might mean, when both her guardian and her lover congratulated her on the dispersion of her threatened calamities. Natural sorrow took its course; and grief for the parent, wretched as he was, claimed its indulgence of time and solitude. I had not forgotten the advice of my excellent friend, about making a man (worthy such a wife) of myself by my own exertions; and receiving official directions to join the fleet, after I had made the necessary depositions, I left Ellen with her tears scarce dried, on the understanding that I should return, so soon as of age, and claim her for my own.

DI VASARI.

A TALE OF FLORENCE.

BY THE LATE CHARLES EDWARDS, ESQ.

[MAGA. DECEMBER 1826.]
CHAPTER I.

"It is the Plague Fiend--the King of Fever! Look! at his garments of the grave: His bloodless lip, white cheek, and glassy eye! See how he shoots, borne on his car of fogs, over our city!"

It was somewhere about the middle of the fourteenth century, or, to fix dates more precisely, in the autumn of the year 1343, that the great plague, described by various Italian writers, and especially by Boccaccio in his Decameron, for the sins or admonition of the Tuscans, fell upon the rich and beauteous city of Florence. The means by which this calamity, after spreading desolation through the Levant, and also through many of the maritime cities of Italy, was first introduced into Florence, have been matter of dispute. Some historians declare, that it first came in by the dealing of certain Jews; who introduced into the town, and bartered with the inhabitants, large quantities of condemned apparel--clothes belonging to the dead--which they had bought privately, getting them at a low market, in the infected city of Ancona. And of this suspicion, whether it was well or ill founded, the accused in the end bore the consequences; for, with only twelve hours allowed for preparation, in the fourth week of the disease, they were driven beyond the walls of the city; the streets in which they had dwelt being levelled with the ground, and themselves adjudged to death in case they attempted to return. Other writers, however, assert, on the contrary, that the malady itself was never "infectious;" but merely "endemic;" and that it was not imported at all, but arose from some malaria, or general predisposition to disease in the atmosphere. And certain it is, which so far goes to set up the theory of these last speculators, that the weather, during the whole of the spring and summer preceding the visitation, had been unusually close and sultry. Foul and offensive exhalations had proceeded, in a remarkable degree, from all pools, and fens, and marshes, in the neighbourhood of the city. The bed of the Arno, though afterwards replenished by sudden and heavy rains, had, at one period, sunk lower than the oldest citizen ever remembered to have seen it. Insects, moreover, in all fields and gardens, had appeared in numbers quite unprecedented; so as even, in many places, combined with the effect of the drought, entirely to destroy vegetation. And--a circumstance which still more attracted notice--the rats, both in the houses of Florence, and in the farms in the neighbouring villages, multiplied with such rapidity, and to such an excess, that all temporal remedies being found unavailing, it was thought necessary to have recourse to the aid of the church, and formally to excommunicate them. The success of this extraordinary measure, or how far it operated at all, does not appear; but the fact of its being applied, is distinctly stated in all the chronicles of the time. Notice was formally read in open church against the rats; that, unless they withdrew from all houses, wheat-stacks, barns, or granaries, in Florence and the vicinity, within four days from the date of those presents, process of "deprivation" would be issued against them. And a curious feature in the superstition of the time was, that the officer of the spiritual court, appointed to maintain the interests of all "non-appearing defendants," interfered for the rats, and actually obtained leave to "enlarge the rule" for their departure, from four days to six, on the ground that the cats of the city, knowing of the order, would be upon the watch to intercept them.

During a considerable time, however, from whatever cause the distemper in Florence arose, it seems that the authorities of the state had presence of mind enough strenuously to maintain, that it was not the "plague." The increasing deaths which occurred in the meaner and closer quarters of the city, were declared to proceed from the Typhus Carcerum, or putrid gaol fever. Cleanliness was recommended,
and a cheap antiseptic process about all houses, and charitable distribution of wine and food by the richer citizens among the needy. Separation of the infected people from the sound, by removing them to distant hospitals, was in a few instances accomplished by force; and those who contradicted the official statement, or expressed their own alarm too obtrusively, were thrown into prison, here and there, as public agitators. But the truth, even by these expedients, was not long capable of being concealed. Some of the offenders who were sent to gaol for clamouring about the plague died of it in confinement, without waiting for the formality of a trial. The physicians who had attended the sick in the city began themselves to be attacked with illness; and hurried through their visits at the fever hospitals, in spite of their published certificates that nothing serious was the matter. At length Brother Gasparo Marcelli, a monk of the Dominican Convent of Santa Croce, who had been slightly indisposed on the night of the Feast of St Michael, was found dead in his bed on the next morning, and with appearances which admitted of no equivocation. The alarm quickly ran through the monastery; the prior and several monks were seized with sickness. The deceased had been one of the most popular confessors in Florence; and three of his penitents, who had never dreamed that fever might enter palaces, were dead—almost between the next sunrise and sunset—in different directions of the city. Upon which, personal apprehension among the higher classes superseding every consideration of public policy, those who had most actively chastised the terrors of other persons, could now make no secret of their own. The rich began openly to provide for their safety. The seditious, always active in moments of danger, thundered against the government for its deception. The executive power gave up its doubts, whether real or pretended; and it was openly confessed that THE PLAGUE WAS IN FLORENCE.

The panic which spread through the city upon this admission became, as might have been expected, an evil scarcely second to the original calamity. Almost all parties had been vehement in desiring to have the declaration. It could do nothing but mischief to any. When it came, by a strange seeming anomaly in the ordering of men's minds, numbers began directly to question or discredit it. While among the lower classes (who had been the most anxious to get it), doubt or belief made little difference, for few had any power to act upon it at all.

Day and night, as soon as the proclamation came out, the streets and squares of Florence were filled—the gates of all the palaces surrounded—with carriages and wagons, loading up household furniture, pictures, and treasure, and carrying them away into the country. Long trains of mules and horses, and companies even of persons on foot, were seen moving, first at night, to avoid too open publicity, but very soon in broad day, and without disguise, out at all the gates of the city. But still these fugitives were chiefly from among the landed proprietors, and the small capitalists who had ready money at command; and the bulk of the population yet had ties, which, in spite of danger, confined them to the place. For the merchant was bankrupt if he gave up his trade. And the farmer paused where he had to leave ungathered crops behind him. The physician staid, for he hoped in some antidote; and if he could live, the sickness was his harvest. The monks staid; most because their convent was their only home; some because they hoped its privacy would shut out danger. Public officers staid, to save the posts they had; or in the hope that their resolution would be the means of promoting them to better. The vast tribe that lived only by their daily labour had no choice but to stay; for to want the day's meal was to starve, and they had no way to gain it but by staying where they were, and going on to exercise their calling. So that, upon the whole, as soon as it became lawful to declare the extent of the mischief, vast
hordes became very unwilling to confess it; and it was the progress of death itself, in the end, rather than the desertions, numerous as they were, occasioned by the fear of it, which brought the great crowd of the city of Florence, first to little, and then to nothing.

For the evil in the future is no evil, and this it is that laughs theorists and legislators to scorn! the reckoning which shall come hereafter ever is forgotten, against but a little measure of advantage offered in the present. The vengeance of Heaven, is it sure? we trust that it is far off. The axe, and the gibbet? "Chance" may save us from them; and though that deliverance hangs on the one ace cast with two dies, every sinner believes that it will be his own! The thief plans a robbery--executes it--escapes with the booty--and the "chance" that has saved him brings a hundred to the gallows! The projector trades against probability--wins in the teeth of principle--His very blindness--which could not see the risk--passes for sagacity, and crowds are beggared who follow his example! This "chance" it is--this "hope"--which makes fools--and fools are villains--of us all! Its seeds are rooted in the strongest minds; and in the weak they flourish even to insanity. The liar elects to speak on "hope." The gamester arranges to live (in a castle) upon it. But woman's brain--there is its chosen seat of quicksand empire!--where to desire an impossibility, and to account upon it, are but as one. Hope it is that makes her frail. Hope makes her false. Hope makes her the dupe of those who care not for her, and the curse of those who do. She fires a palace, and "hopes" that it will not burn. Casts herself into the sea, and "hopes" that the waters will quit their bed to leave her upon land. Her confidence--and this perhaps is the case with all of us--becomes invariably more unbounded in proportion with the real desperateness of her condition. And the worst of all is--that, as human nature is constituted, for nothing of all this is there any remedy!

And "Hope" worked strange wonders in the earlier stages of the plague; especially among those who had all to gain and little to lose; a sort of persons, whose fearlessness, and spirit of reliance, since the world began, has always been proverbial. There is a point to which you civilise mankind; but beyond which education cannot go. You seem to tame the wolf, while he sees you hold the whip over him: but--blood will have its way--he flies at your throat at last, if you give him opportunity. Man's instinct makes him war on man! 'Tis trash! my strength must be my neighbour's weakness. The miller, when his granaries are full, laughs loud, and well he laughs--he buys a lordship--out of the ruined harvest. What is that flood that wastes my neighbour's fields but blessing, so it doubles, in the common market, the produce of my own? Go to! they who gain by the dead, when did they love the living? When agues thrive, do not the sextons delve merrily? Does not the surgeon fatten on the miseries, the headsman on the vices of mankind? In no general blessing yet did all men ever find contentment; in no common infliction have there not always been some who saw a good. Battles and blood make soldiers generals. Revolts and revolutions peasants princes. Out of broken windows, as the adage tells us, do there not arise rich glaziers? And he who wants a fortune may find one even in the PLAGUE.

And, accordingly, among the most curious results of the visitation, when it first began to show its strength in Florence, was the extra quantity of actual rejoicing, as well as of mourning; the great increase of hilarity in the midst of tears; and the decided, immediate gain to individuals, which arose out of the thinning in the numbers of the community. Husbands, many, wept for the death of their wives; wives, often, for the death of their husbands; both, constantly, for the deaths of their children;
for these were, generally, losses, at least in some sort, of present sources of happiness; disturbances of
long habit and existing arrangements; and no benefit (to balance) accruing to the survivor. But sons did
not always mourn for their fathers--nephews for their uncles--younger brothers, destined to exertion and
poverty, for their elders, who had shut them from title and estate: those who were the best disposed to
do all this, often could not do it; their wants, in spite of themselves, were relieved, and their desires of
pleasure administered to--they thought that they grieved for the fate of the dead--perhaps they did
grieve; but before the bell had ceased tolling, they would not have had him live again. For even the
comparatively poor who died, had something to leave behind them, which was an object to those as
poor, or poorer, than themselves. Very soon the constant occurrence of such falls of fortune began to
make men expect and look for them. They could not help recollecting the fact, that there was one
particular life stood between them and happiness. The possibility of a change would just present
itself--the wish, perhaps not yet. And among the labouring classes, too, the diminished number of hands
at work in every calling soon gave the remainder high rates of wages, which they spent in idleness and
excess. The mere passage of wealth into fresh hands, always unthrifty, created an immense demand out
of the very general mourning and distress for articles of cost and luxury. All who had been rich, had not
drank choice wines, or maintained brilliant equipages. All who rose from poverty did so--often to the
most prodigal dissipation of their means--on the instant. Until even the very same calamity which in a
few months made the city absolutely a desert, in its outset actually gave a new and increased impulse to
its pleasurable and commercial movements!

In the mean time, however, the shroud-maker plied his needle almost as rapidly as the maker of new
robes; and, as the fury of the pestilence increased, all this jollity, which at first had some show of the
mirth of madness about it, ran on till, like the merriment produced by wine in company, by degrees, it
broke into bloodshed and misrule. In the beginning of the scourge, the succession to an estate or a title
had not carried with it--as of course--a notice that the inheritor was only tenant for an hour. But when
the deaths had risen to more than a hundred a-day in the city, and when the man who became heir to an
estate in one twenty-four hours left it to somebody else--or perhaps left it without a claimant--in the
next, this general state of insecurity, added to the extraordinary description of hands into which
property passed, seemed first to repeal all sanity and principle; and soon led to the wildest and most
unheard-of outrages.

The successor to a splendid mansion--the fifth or sixth remove perhaps within a month--seized
possession--it might be, with a title--but certainly without waiting for the forms of law to ratify it. Great
quantities of personal property, of houses and movables especially, were sometimes left in a few hours
without any certain claimants at all; and ruffians and outcasts--the police of the city being virtually
almost extinct--fought and scrambled for the right of rifling such possessions in open day. Antonio
Malespini, the servant of a goldsmith who had fled the city and died under the walls of Pisa, produced a
will, alleged to have been left by his master, bequeathing to him the whole of his effects. On the very
next day, this title passing undisputed, there were twenty claimants for similar successions! From
inheriting after those who had fled and died, it was but one step farther to presume the death, and a
man's flight then at once conveyed his effects to those who stayed behind. And within the expiration of
eight-and-forty hours farther (no interference by the authorities taking place), both lie and forgery
began to be considered unnecessary; and the rights of health and strength became the only rights
acknowledged in the new community.

It was then that the general tumult and terror reached its height; and that Florence appeared like a city delivered over to pillage, in which each man made his best of what came next him; or rather like a vast ship tossed in a tempest, under which she could not choose but founder, and where each man, according to the usage of desperate mariners, resolved to live, at common cost, the short while longer that existence lasted. Domestics, left in charge of their masters' houses, burst open the cellars and cabinets, and used the treasure as their own. The richest garments were seen worn by common beggars; the most costly wines intoxicated the lowest of the population. All safe people fled the city at every hazard, or shut themselves up, and refused to communicate even with each other; and a scarcity of food—in the very excess of valuables and money—began to aggravate the general distress. Those physicians who still lived now made off, with one consent, to secure what they had gained. The monks barred the gates of their convents: some would say no mass; and scarce any would confess the sick any longer. Some men lay dead or dying in their houses, and none would come to aid or bury them. Others were found with marks of violence on their bodies and their chambers rifled; and none could say, nor did any inquire, who had done it. The hired nurses, it was reported, poisoned their patients; and one beldam confessed afterwards to having caused the death of five women, by administering the *eau forte* (*aqua fortis*) to them instead of common water. Brute strength, and freedom from the plague, became the only sources of power; and the slave spat in the face of his master. Those few who still dwelt within the city, or near it, watched armed, and shut their doors by day; for murders were done even in the broad light. The cemeteries now became choked, and there was more room in the streets and market places. Houses got cheap, and graves were hard to come by. The great *fosse* which had been hastily opened and consecrated, at the back of the Spedale St Martino, ran over with bodies, from all ranks, ages, and conditions, which night after night were cast promiscuously into it. And, to quote the words used by a writer of the time, in describing the state of Florence at the close of the malady—almost for want of matter to feed upon—"Worth was useless; strength gone; glory sullied; title was buried; honours were forgotten; greatness humiliated; dignity scorned;—and of the good and of the evil equally perished the memory!"

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It was on one night, however, about this time, in the month of October, when the ravages of the plague were at their height; when no stranger, unless he were insane, or sought his death, could have been expected to enter Florence, nor any inhabitant any longer abided there, but such to whom it would have been ruin as bad as death to leave it;—it was on one night while affairs were in this condition—the night of the vigil of St Luke—that two horsemen, moving on a track once the most frequented of all Italy, but to which the tread of travellers had now become almost a thing forgotten, were seen rapidly stretching towards the city from the eastward, by the road that led from the direction of Arezzo.

The foremost rider was a cavalier scarce twenty years, apparently, of age; clad simply, but elegantly, in the travelling dress of a Tuscan gentleman of that day. His vest, which was of the richest velvet, slashed and embroidered in the fashion of the time, was covered, on back and breast, by the strong "Jazeran," or scaled corslet, which was the armour then generally worn in Italy, and which, while it was less
cumbrous than complete steel, was yet fully proof against the thrust either of lance or poniard. A belt of gold, four fingers broad, drawn tightly round the waist, and clasped by a jewel of price in front, marked the division between the bottom of the "Camiciuola," or upper garment, and the long breeches and stockings of woven silk,—the "Calzoni alla pantalona"—which, with yellow Morocco boots and massy spurs of gold, terminated the lower portion of the figure. And the broad "mantello" or cloak, of ample extent,—on foot or horseback, still the constant equipment of every Italian gentleman,—gathered plaidslike round the body, clinging upon the bridle shoulder, and passing under the right arm, so as to clothe the bust and loins, yet leave the sword-hand free—swelled with the damp and unwholesome "libeccio" which blew in the rider's face, and seemed to bring a death in every gust, as he lifted his strong horse, all dust and foaming—plunging with short springs, and gathered almost upon its haunches—down the last sharp pitch of hill which marked the boundary of the Apennines, and carried the traveller forward into the fair valley of the Arno.

The hard unbeaten road clattered hollow beneath the footsteps of the steeds, as both the strangers plied onwards, at a steady yet rapid pace, in the direction of Florence. Did they know the peril to which they went? It seemed they did, or should do so: for the long arm of the calamity reaching to the distance, spoke already too plainly to be mistaken. The whole route along which they were passing had but a short time back been lined with populous and flourishing villages: the houses yet remained, but every door and window now was barred and bolted; and the hare and the rabbit gazed on the passenger through the broken hedges in every garden. Three months since, and, if the moon shone bright, looking down from that raised road into the vale beneath, a hundred palaces were seen rearing their marble fronts amid the delicious woods and waters of the Val d'Arno! Three months since, and, if the night was dark, the very tapers that glistened in those mansions, from their bowers and lattices, showed in the deep vale like a world of stars below the gazer's path, in mimic rivalry of those that reigned above! Now, all was solitude on the near approach, and gloom and darkness in the distance. The marble mansions, black and silent, stood like the sepulchres of former greatness, for the spirits that gave life to them had departed. No song, sung by Italy's voices, rose from the cot of the peasant; there was no music of dancing feet; no tinkling of the guitar or the theorba. There stood the village church! but its doors hung open, swinging on their hinges with every blast. The village inn remained: but no smoke poured now from its chimney; and the branch that should have invited the traveller was dead and leafless. Here and there a few stray dogs, lean and masterless, who seemed to have grown wild as the hares and foxes had grown tame, barked and sneaked off as the strangers approached. The frogs croaked hoarsely in the marsh land; and the lizard rustled through the long rank grass that grew upon the tops of the cabins or loose stone wall. But other tokens of inhabitancy—or even of existence—in their path, the travellers found none.

In the realms of death, we look for solitude and silence; on the battle-field, when the fight is done, and in the lone churchyard; but not within the beat and haunts of men. The foremost horseman halted his speed one moment as he advanced deeper into the cheerless scene. With every point in that prospect his eye had been familiar! it could not be all death—all darkness—all ruin—in a few short weeks? Here and afar—at hand and in the distance—it could not be that all were gone! There was surprise and impatience in the stranger's look, rather than sadness:—alarm and incredulity, rather than woe or grief.
"Jacopo!" he exclaimed, turning hastily to his attendant--and speaking rather as a man who makes a comment than asks a question--"I see no light in the palace or gardens of the Orsini?"

The individual to whom this question was addressed followed his master's eye slowly, as he raised himself from the pommel of his saddle. "Nevertheless, my lord," he said, "they should be here, for they have not fled, although they retired beyond the walls of the city."

"But the Vitrani too--their villa is all gloom?"

The reply was given in a more subdued tone. "It is too true, my lord! The Marchioness and both her daughters were among the first victims of the disease."

"But it cannot surely be with all thus?" pursued Di Vasari, with increasing agitation. "This house--Cinthio da Pontelli's?"

"There are weeds, my lord, in its garden; and the pedestals of its statues are grown green with moss."

"But the Counts Di Bruno--Lord Vincent, and his brothers?" continued the alarmed inquirer.

"May be here, my lord; or may have fled; or may have perished," returned the party questioned, "the last of them. They were living and safe two days since, when I set out for Arezzo; but half that time has made strange havoc in many a noble house, since your lordship quitted Florence."

The stranger started as the last words fell upon his ear, from his own inward thought, as though an asp had stung him! Striking his strong horse on both sides with the spur, as one who had already paused too long, and suddenly recollected himself, involuntarily at the same instant he curbed the fierce animal with the rein, until it stood erect--striking at the air, and reared almost beyond the perpendicular. Then stooping low, with slackened bit, and signing to his companion to follow, the rider once more plied both scourge and steel, with the strong impulse of a man who strives by mere motion to escape from his own sensations. With hoof of speed, he scattered into foam the shallow brawling stream of the Mugnone: dashed onwards, and looked neither to the right nor left, through the picturesque villages of La Loggia and Benevento. At the convent of St Giovanni, the evening prayer was saying; but he bent on his steed's neck as he passed; crossed himself; and again rode forward. The nuns of Spirito Santo sang a requiem for a departed sister: but though the lights beamed on his path through the stained windows of their chapel, he still kept on his way. By the shrine of Our Lady of Florence he pressed; and he saw it not, for he uttered no vow. He crossed the "Giustiziere," or area of public execution; but had no time even to breathe an Ave for the souls of the thousands who had suffered upon it. Nor checked he in his long gallop, until entering the "Via di Querci"--the wide, fair avenue of trees, by which Florence is approached on the road which leads from Arezzo. This point at length being won, he held in his well-breathed horse, who still obeyed the rein with difficulty; and soothed the gallant brute with voice and hand, as they turned more slowly towards the Porta alla Croce, or eastern gate of the city.

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CHAPTER I
The narrow, ill-paved road, now known as the Via dei Mal-contenti, by which Florence is entered in the Quartiere alla Croce, was, in the 13th century, a mere straggling suburb, inhabited by the meanest artisans of the city. At the particular time, however, to which our tale refers, it was altogether without occupants of any description; not so much because those who originally dwelt in it had been all cut off by the plague, as that better lodgings were to be had in the upper parts of the town, for taking, and therefore no one thought fit to remain in it. From this long street, or lane, which was in entire unbroken darkness, some more reputable avenues branched on the right hand--the Via Ghibellina, the Via Jesu Cristo, and the Via di Mecca; and, looking up these, here and there, a dull light might be seen glimmering through the lattices of an upper window; and, in such situations, low moanings, and sometimes shrieks of grief, were to be heard, as of some who lamented for the dead, or were themselves perhaps shortly to be so. But, for the greater part, the houses in all the streets within the city, like those in the villages eastward of the walls, bore the aspect of abandonment and desertion. Doors closely barred, and battened with spars on the outside; unless where they had been burst open, on suspicion of containing dead, or else in search of plunder. Casements open in abundance; flapping and swinging to and fro in the wind; but all wreck and disorder, or total emptiness, within, and, in some places, wide gaps, with heaps of half-burnt ruins, obstructed the way--the remnants of fallen houses, with others falling, half destroyed, and blackened by smoke and fire; for, among the minor scourges which, during the time of the plague, had visited the city, conflagrations, wilful or accidental, had been frequent and extensive.

Familiar as both travellers were with this locale, they had yet difficulty in getting their horses forward, so completely dark were the narrow streets, and encumbered with rubbish of every description. They had looked for a light by the shrine of "Our Lady of Grace;" but even the hopes of the pious were fled; not a shrine in all Florence had a taper now burning before it. The splendid and extensive Palazzo di Borgo, the mansion of the family of Antilla, lay in their way; but its lords had left all for life, and fled to Lucca; and the huge building, towering above all but ruin--frowned in dark and sullen silence. They passed, still amid the signs of emptiness and dilapidation, over the Piazza Santa Croce--the great area for gymnastic exercises of the city; crossed the narrow bridge, with the rivulet and sewer, which ran under the walls of the Church of St Jacops tra i Fossi; but so fearfully was the population diminished, and so deep the dread which (except a few desperate wretches) the survivors had of each other, that the busiest streets of the city, and the most gorgeous squares and terraces, were all alike wrapped in gloom and desertion. Nor was it until turning northwards, and winding for some time in the direction of the river, they reached the Piazza Santa Maria--the square in which stood the "Spedale," or great hospital of Florence--that any decided signs of life and activity, or, indeed, of human existence, presented themselves.

At this point, however, there was light and activity enough--and both riders instinctively tightened their reins, as a sharp turning at right angles threw them in front of the "Spedale;" for so sudden a change, from the thickest darkness to a glare of illumination--as of a thousand lamps alight at once--might have startled many steeds, worse tutored, or less true.

The building itself was a bold and striking object; lofty and well-proportioned, though heavy in its style of architecture; and so extensive as to form, with its tributary offices, one entire side of the quadrangle,
or "Piazza," in which it stood. Under ordinary circumstances, the traffic and bustle of such an establishment, which was of capacity to furnish accommodation for all the charitable purposes of the city, must have been considerable and imposing; but, at this period, the immense accession of duty, and consequently of activity, which the calamity of the time had thrust upon it, rendered some of its features extraordinary and interesting in the highest possible degree. The overwhelming excess of patients poured into the house (vast numbers being still every day compelled to be rejected) had called every lobby--every crevice and corner--in addition to the ordinary apartments allotted to the sick, into requisition; and the building being profusely furnished, up to the very fourth story, with windows and lattices of ventilation--from the immense additional array of lamps and candles in every quarter, which its increase of business and multiplication of inhabitants presented--the whole front of the edifice blazed like the face of an immense lantern; and, in spite of the damp breath of the sufferers within, which condensed in streams upon the glass window-panes, and dimmed their transparency, poured out a volume of light, not merely across the whole area of the Piazza, but into the very recesses of the houses on the farther side of it.

In the mean time, the hoarse roar, less of suffering or grief, than of hurry and trade, that went on within the edifice, rose at intervals so high as to be dumbly and indistinctly heard on the outside. Shadows upon the white-clouded window-panes were seen rapidly passing and repassing. And the space in the immediate vicinity of the Spedale, especially the ground and dwellings of the square of Santa Maria, which had long been deserted--for, at the very commencement of the infection, every hospital, as might well be expected, soon cleared a neighbourhood round it--presented a curious spectacle to the attention, even under the general appalling circumstances of the time. The Piazza, or square itself, which was unpaved, stood fetlock-deep in mire and filth; for the gravedigger had more than work enough to do; and the duty of the scavenger was little heeded. In the earlier stages of the pestilence, clothes and bedding, the property of those who died, had been used to be burnt in the front of the hospital; that custom was now laid aside, either because there was no authority to enforce it, or because it had been found unavailing; but the original pile of half-consumed rags and ashes still remained, grown cold and mouldy, for man and horse to flounder through. All the houses in those three sides of the square which consisted of dwellings--the Spedale forming the fourth--without an exception stood open; they had been broken into and rifled by the hospital servants (who ransacked all before them in their nightly rounds) for what they contained; and the wood-work of the doors and staircases had gone to make fires to burn the bedding with. The area of the Piazza was strewed all over with matters of domestic litter: pots, pans, broken furniture, worn-out kitchen utensils, and remnants of apparel, cast forth from the hospital. In the centre of the square there was a marble fountain playing; but to little purpose, for another rose within the walls of the Spedale; and no creature out of the building, though perishing of thirst, would have ventured to taste such water. Some evil jester, desirous, perhaps, to spend the last hour of his life in mischief, had thrown an old saddle into the reservoir into which the stream discharged itself; and broken away all the teeth of the couchant lion, from whose mouth the chief jet issued.

"And this immense house is full, then!" said the Chevalier Di Vasari, as he paused for a moment in front of the hospital. The speaker had interests enough of his own, and vital ones, to contend with; but--it was not in man--the very criminal who went to the scaffold, could not have beheld such a scene without wonder and curiosity.
"Put on, my lord, if you love your life, put on," exclaimed Jacopo. "Full! Ay, it has been filled, and emptied again, into the great fosse behind it.--Your lordship shudders? Spirits of the blest! if you could but have seen that fosse when it was dug!--twenty times over in the course of the last month. Hark again, Signor!--for Mercy's sake put on!--to the roar of voices inside the building!--and those black shadows, how they flit to and fro again upon the windows, though the steam on the glass hinders our seeing what goes on within! Full? my lord, it is full now!--and the Hospital of St Roque is full!--and so is the Lazaretto--that was the gaol--Sancta Maria!--and the Church of the Padri Reformati is turned, besides, into an hospital!--and the Prigione delle Stinche is open for the sick; and----"

Farther yet would the enumeration have gone, but that a noise, as if of loosening bolts and bars in the hospital, interrupted it. In the next moment, one of the massy folding-doors at the great entrance was flung open; and, right hand and left, from its farthest extremity, as far as the eye could see, down to that very door, the common corridor of the house appeared on each side closely set with pallets. Every bed was occupied doubly, and even trebly; or rather the whole range of beds--for each touched the other--was formed into one great litter; crowded with sufferers, in all moods and in all stages of disease. Some--they might be living, or they might be dead--all that could be seen was a strange shapeless lump, rolled in the wretched bed-clothes! Others, covered up in hoods and caps, incapable of speech, stared from the pillows with their glassy eyes and ghastly faces--that the viewer shrank to look on them! Some, furious and strong in agony, sat in their beds bolt upright,--raving, tossing their arms, and muttering horrible imprecations--hideous objects of misery. The most fearful of all were the most healthy,--those whom they called the "Convalescents;" and who glided about in their long, white, shroud-like hospital-gowns and dresses; looking and moving like creatures emerged from the grave--even more appalling to Nature than those who were ready to descend into it.

"This is too hideous!" exclaimed Di Vasari, turning his horse away. Pages are insufficient sometimes to convey that impression which the eye takes in in a moment. But a cry now arose of "Room, room!" and between the double row of beds, jolting carelessly along the corridor, two hospital servants appeared, bearing a long tray--that looked like a shutter with handles to it--covered with a sheet. Out they came, swinging through the hall-door, and descended the steps in front of the building.

"Santa Madonna! it is one of the dead,--a corpse fresh of the plague,--and we stand here!" cried Jacopo.

"Twenty-five this makes!" said the hindmost bearer, stopping, as he came down the stairs, to trim the load in its descent.

"Twenty-seven it makes, if I can count," returned the other; "and by this time last night, we had thirty-one."

As he spoke, they reached the bottom of the staircase. In turning the corner, one of the carved ornaments of the balustrade caught the cloth that covered the shutter; and, at the next step--the corpse lay naked!
It was the body of a man--and of a fine one. The plague had evidently made brief work with him. Still robust--almost florid--full of flesh and muscle--no victim of decay--no sign of age or of consumption. The tree had been struck in its full strength! The limbs and the trunk were those of a living man still. But the face was distorted and discoloured; and there was one broad dark badge upon the breast, that showed what it was had done the business.

The bearers never stopped to recover their wretched pall, but shouldered onwards to a small, low, grated door. Jacopo's eye followed--he knew the place well--it was the door of the dead-house.

The key turned, and the door opened; there was no light within. The two men entered. There was a sound as of some heavy mass falling upon soft ground. It was the fall of a body of flesh and blood, which no other object in the creation falls like; and they returned, in a moment, freed from their burthen. And then a cry arose, to "make haste, and close the hospital gates again;" for the sick were gathering round them, and trying to escape--tumultuous--like lost spirits on the bank of the infernal river!

The crash as the heavy gates were slammed together roused the Chevalier from the stupor in which the scene had plunged him. Slowly pressing his horse with the spur, and followed by his attendant, he again rode forward. They left the ground upon the right hand, which now forms the Piazza di Granduca, passed the high towers of the Duomo, or chief Cathedral; and entered the great thoroughfares of the Porta via de Repoli, and the Via della Scala, intending to cross the river at the Pont St Trinita. But the passage along the south or farther bank of the Arno (as the travellers stood) was now wholly impracticable. This portion of the town had comprehended what was called the Jews' Quarter; and, on the expulsion of that wretched race, the whole neighbourhood in which they dwelt had been given up to destruction. Their houses had been torn down, and fire laid to their synagogue; and one of the last acts of authority on the part of the government, had been the barricading, as far as possible, and publicly forbidding all passage through, or entrance into, their demesne.

"Does your lordship wish to cross here?" asked Jacopo. "The north bank would be the best."

"I know not that," replied Di Vasari. "Our arrangement above may have failed; and this, if we can accomplish it--that is, the passage here--is certain."

The moon, which just then began to rise, threw a dim and dusky light over the long, narrow, squalid lines of building, which had formed the abode of the banished Israelites. The sheds and stalls on which they had exposed their tattered ware for sale were torn down, and left lying in the streets. Heavier and inferior articles of property, such as in the general abundance of plunder had not been thought worth carrying away, were strewn up and down, and here and there, for sport, had been gathered in heaps and set fire to. Nothing living stirred, but an amazing swarm of the black house-rats--which had gone on multiplying, in spite of Papal fulmination, during the plague--dark and obscene as the hillocks of litter over which they gambolled. It seemed a locality which, in such a time of terror and contagion, the boldest man might have felt a dislike to enter.
"We shall not have failed above, my lord," said Jacopo. "And, at worst, it is but fording the river higher up, which would be safer a thousand times than passing here. It is tempting fortune to approach a place like this."

"In Heaven's name, by the north bank be it then," returned Di Vasari; "for we already lose time." And, leading the way by the Piazza della Gracia, and through the Borgo Ogni Santo, in a few minutes the travellers had again cleared the city by the Porto Pisano, now the Porto el Prata. Resuming here their former rapid pace, they kept the high-road some half mile towards Cajano; then turned southward once more where the little rivulet, the Torrente Terzolle, crossed their path; and kept the edge of the stream as it darted through a copse of Alpine trees, to empty itself into the main river.

"This is the spot, my lord," said Jacopo, as they reached a point where the wood grew thickest; throwing himself from his horse, to clear the way, and assist the progress of his master.

The Chevalier sprang lightly down; he paused for no assistance; and, in a few moments, both travellers had halted upon the banks of the Arno.
"It is late, and that castle seems lulled in sleep, But within its walls are tapers gleaming; And along its apartments the females creep, With steps all hush'd, and eyes that are streaming."

For oh! softly glides that serpent, whose sting is the surest death; and smooth shows that dark water, which has blackest rocks beneath it. There is silence, and calmness, and all is still, without the walls of the Arestino Palace; but a volcano of fever and of passion--of fierceness, rage, and fury--flames within!

It is night, and the lady of that bright palace lies upon a bed from which she never more must rise! Is it the course of age--Nature's slow wane--that calls upon the lady?--No! She shows yet in beauty's fullest--loveliest--prime. Her youth has seen its spring, but scarce yet fallen into summer. July has yet to come, though May has passed from us! And all that was the opening blossom--bud of love--now revels in the glorious flower. Not age? Not age. Why then--the plague?--Why ay--the plague! for there be other plagues--is it not so--than pestilence? There is the fire that burns, and the famine that pines us--the sun-stroke that withers, and the tempest to wreck--there is the mildew that blasts, and the quicksand that swallows--there are floods--lightnings--hurricanes--earthquakes--fear ye for these? Alas! for every one poor life that dies by such slight accidents--think!--think of ambition--envy--avarice--false honour--glory in arms--the lust of beauty--pride--the thirst of power--the zealot's triumph--and the soldier's dreams!--for every single wretch, since order first arose, that perished, cut off by nature's shock or violence--how many thousands--say!--have drawn their timeless fates from that worst spring of human woe, the human heart?

Alas! alas! Yet why is the lady thus passing--untouched by sickness--in the pride of youth? Enough--enough! she sleeps--or shortly shall do so. Oh, gentle Death, there is no sleep blest and secure but thine! Revenge! "tis Heaven's prerogative, not ours." So say divines; but men think otherwise when injury stirs them. Now, all her crimes, with all her charms, rest in eternal silence! Has the owl shrieked, or the bat struck on the window? No! these are the death-tokens of sterner regions. But the livelong night yon thistlefinch has sung under the casement--she sings the last dirge of the Lady of Arestino! Yet the lady's fault was common in the land where she lived. Common? Ay, common! Common as the penalty--she is dying--which has followed it.

She dies! and justly--let her meet her doom! She is the ruin of a name that never knew reproach before. The honour of a noble house is gone--their shield is sullied! Blood may wash out the spot--but what the stain? Scorn crooks her white lip, and says, "That shall endure for ever!"

And if, for such a crime, blood must be spilled--what slave is he denies that blood should be the blood of woman?--For man--ay, smile!--he has wronged me. And though his body were a poisonous plant that it were death to touch, I'd cast myself upon it! cut--carve it--to morsels--motes. He dies, though LIFE died with him--for I am suffering! but--in death--he shall have justice.

Man wars on man. It is his instinct--compact. He injures--stabs me! Granted. What should stay him? Is it love for his fellow--kindness --charity? What will--for "love" or "charity"--that "fellow" do for him?
Will he honour in poverty? Defend in danger? Abstain to prey upon when time shall serve? No!--none of these, methinks. He may deride his weakness; insult his misery; publish for sport the tale that maddens him; maltreat and crush, as far as strength and law will serve! Away then with the jest of "Duty"--my "Practice" towards my neighbour is to eye him as my spoil!

Man breaks no faith with man, for he has pledged none. He casts away no fame, no reputation. He does not wreck the heart that blindly trusted--leaned upon--him. He does not, for an hour's indulgence, whim, or vanity, give up all honour--name--esteem--respect--rank--kindred--friends--the world--for ever! This is the sacrifice that woman offers. Let her demand it from her lover--see if he dares to make it? Ask him--let the mistress that he sues to ask him!--to lie--to beg--to steal--to take a blow--be branded as a wretch--shunned by the honoured of his own sex--scorned even by the worthy of the other? His answer is--that he can bleed--can die--can give up fortune--hope--nay, even her love--but may not lose his caste--live in the world's contempt--his own disgust--for ever.

Yet fate had dealt harshly with the lady of Arestino! She was a wife, but she was the unwooed, unwilling wife of a proud and unfeeling husband. Eight years she had been wedded, and eight years her heart had slept as dead; or, waking, waked but to swell with sullen bitterness against that power by which its rights had been despised. He who is wise, though his self-love may suffer, makes his wooing otherwise than this. He will not trust his all of hope in life to one whose every hope in life himself has blasted! Ye who seek service, love, or safety, seek it with the free! Will ye have chains?--then look that they be chains of adamant! ye made a traitor when ye made a slave.

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Chained to the twisted roots of a tall willow which hung its branches across the stream, and almost hidden from view by the drapery of weeping foliage that surrounded it, a light skiff lay pulling in the soft current of the Arno. Towards this point the travellers made their way with rapid and anxious steps, and, as if by common agreement, both in silence. The Chevalier, pressing strongly through the low copsewood, was the first that reached it; and when he saw the stream, and the small boat rippling upon it, he never spoke one word, but drew a long-repressed breath, as of one relieved from much apprehension, and forthwith fell upon his knees, and returned thanks to Heaven. For a gleam of hope seemed to make it possible that his journey might yet be a fortunate one; and though the business was such as Heaven might scarcely countenance, yet the Chevalier had a kind heart, and was a good Catholic; and he could not help feeling that gratitude was due somewhere. And, for the rest, he had no nice scruples, or reserves of pride, that he should check his feelings in the sight of his domestic; for those were days in which the distinctions of rank made no question; they were understood and settled; and a nobleman might even pray to God by the side of his vassal, without looking for assumption, or supposing any infraction of his dignity.

But it was on the north bank of the river that the Chevalier and his attendant had halted. It was hard upon the hour of midnight now, and the moon was up, for she was near her full; and the prospect which, under her broad light, presented itself, southward and west of Florence, over one of the richest plains of Italy, was singularly opposed to the scene of ruin and desertion which had exhibited itself in
the country eastward of the city. On their left, winding along the stream, lay the "City of Flowers" itself, glorious and rich as ever, even in that brief distance. The work of man remained entire, where man himself was fallen; and the tall spires of the Italian churches glittered with their gilded vanes in the cold moonshine, as they lightly shot upwards, towering into the clear blue sky. In front was the south bank of the Arno, scarce three bow-shots across--crowded with splendid palaces and villas--the chosen seat of half the great and gay of Florence. And this spot, by some wild hazard or caprice, the pestilence had scarcely touched on. It might be that the west winds, which had prevailed almost constantly since the commencement of the malady, had carried the city's infection in an opposite course; but certainly all here was safe--all lived and flourished.

The rich moonlight played among the trellised vines, and trembled in the orange groves in the wide gardens of these mansions, which stretched themselves, sloping downwards, to the very margin of the river. The lilies that grew in the last flower-bed bent their white necks as they sprang to kiss the stream; and the perfume which they exhaled rose the sweeter from its cool freshness.

And the Arno itself was no tide-water, no stream for traffic here. Though bolder and deeper, then, at the bridge of Florence, than its current flows at present, yet the little draught that was carried upon it never came above the city. A light breeze from the southward had just swept the mist from the surface of the water; and the white fleeces of weed which floated on its shallows, gently waving with the motion of the stream, gave lustre by their contrast to the deeper blue tint of those calm, unruffled, basin-like, unfathomable pools, which seemed to drink up the strong light from above, rather than to reflect it, so glorious was the brightness of the scene. There was a calm, a repose, at that hour, on the banks of that bright river, as if peace and safety had reigned throughout the world. Yet the silence was not the silence of desolation--it was not the repose of death--but the repose of nature sleeping. The soul felt as though it could lie down for ever upon those green banks, content, and happy, and at rest; and a voice seemed to float across the bright still water, calling on it to come and dwell beneath its lucid deepness.

But there are minds to which repose must live a stranger; hearts which in the tomb alone can hope for slumber, or the folding of the hands to sleep: the eye of the Chevalier Di Vasari gazed on the mild scene before him, but in his soul there was a fever which defied its influence. Two months before, and at that same hour, he had stood, as he stood now, upon the banks of the Arno; he had crossed that river then to fly from Florence, pursued by danger, and struggling for his life. He now returned. For what?--for love, or vengeance? What was his hope--his wish? He scarce knew what. End as his errand might, it must be in perplexity, in wretchedness!

It was no time, however, then, for thought. A task was to be done; the hour was arrived, and the way lay open before him. Passing his horse's rein to his attendant, he first loosened the long cloak from his shoulder, and cast it over the loins of the reeking, yet still untired brute. "Poor Bayard!" he said, patting the gallant animal's neck, who thrust his nose against his master's breast, as if acknowledging the attention, "you have striven hard to-night for a work in which you have but little interest! Look to him well, Jacopo," continued the Chevalier; "and--take my sword also--see that your own horse be well clothed up, for they are sweating both; and when the day breaks, the air from the river here will be cold and chilly."
"Your lordship will not go quite unarmed?" said the domestic, as he took the offered sword from his master's hand.

"I scarcely know that," returned the latter, in a melancholy tone. "A light foot, and the skill of a physician, would be the gifts most like to aid me now. But should I need defence, which Heaven avert, my poniard here, Jacopo, would be the better weapon, which lies as close and silent till I want its service, next my own heart, as it would do the next moment within that of my enemy."

As he spoke, the Chevalier drew from its sheath (within his vest) a dagger of unusual breadth and strength, and rich and costly workmanship. The handle of the weapon was of gold embossed; the sheath of the same metal, set with jewels; the blade of pure Damascus steel, but wrought with curious emblems. It was an heirloom in the family of Di Vasari, brought from the East by their first ancestor, famous in the wars of Spain and of the Crusades; and for eight score years, sleeping or waking, that dagger had never left the bosom of the leader of their house.

"This is defence--more than defence enough!" said the Chevalier, as he slowly replaced the instrument in its scabbard. The broad blade flashed as he waved it in the moonlight; and the name of the first proprietor, "DI VASARI" showed in cold, dull characters, like unpolished silver, worked upon the dark unburnished steel.

At that moment the deep tones of the great bell at the Duomo chimed midnight. The Chevalier drew his boat shoreward, and cast off the fastening which confined it.

"Sleep not, Jacopo, I charge you!" were his last words. "Look to our horses carefully. It is three hours yet to daylight; and within two, at farthest, expect my return."

A long low neigh from the black horse Bayard followed the skiff as it pushed off from the shore. Silently, yet swiftly, as it cut through the glassy water, the fish were scared that fed or sported at the bottom. Plunging from sedge and shallow, they turned their broad sides to the moonlight, as they shot along; and showed, exaggerated in the liquid medium as by a lens, to twenty times their real bulk.

Still the oars touched the stream lightly; there was no plash, no rolling in the thowls; they scarcely broke the water as they dipped. Jacopo marked his master's progress steadfastly till the boat gained the centre of the stream. A small islet, planted with willow and acacia, here broke the view across; the little skiff shot round it like a swallow on the wing, but then could be discerned no farther.

"Be quiet, knave!" exclaimed the valet, checking a second neigh of anxiety from the black horse, as the bark disappeared. "I doubt I had better make thee fast yet, or thou'lt be off into the river after our master, and leave me here behind." He unbitted both the horses, loosened the girths of their heavy saddles, and clothing them as well as he might with the spare mantello and their own housings, fed them copiously with meal that had been brought along. Then, first feeling for the rosary within the breast of his garment, he drew his good broadsword from its scabbard, gave a last glance to see that his beasts were in safety, and seated himself, with his face to the river, at the foot of the most convenient
tree he could select. And in this position, well on the alert to guard against surprise, and recommending himself especially to the protection of St Jago, with his weapon in one hand, and his wine-flask in the other, in silence he expected the event.

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It was a chamber for luxury to dwell in, that in which the Countess Arestino lay, suited to tastes which knew no limit but their will, and decked for climates to which winter was a stranger. The walls were hung with draperies of pale-blue silk; richly wrought carpets--the treasures of the East--were spread at intervals upon the floor of shining marble. Oil from the Tuscan olive, mixed with frankincense and myrrh, burned in silver lamps, whose pale flames lighted the lofty chamber without sullying its delicious coolness. And in every window, flowers disposed in vases of alabaster, each carved with the work of half an artist's life, loaded the light breeze which whispered through the lattice with the richest odours of the season.

The painting of the roof--alone a masterpiece!--was executed by such hands as already, if not noble, claimed little less than noble's deference, and showed more even than noble's pride. The mattressed couches, ranged around the chamber, suiting in colour with its pale-blue tapestry, were of a satin, rich, and quaintly patterned, and bordered with embroidery of flowering silver. And those couches, with their pillows of down and velvet--light and elastic as they bounded to the touch--were harsh and rude compared with the bed on which the Countess lay--but she slept not.

"Giuletta! Giuletta! The twelfth hour is passed, and still comes he not? Camilla--Girl, canst thou hear nothing--is Camilla surely at the gate?"

"What, nothing! why then the messenger----? Yet he had not failed; it was impossible!"

"The danger, perhaps?" doubtfully whispered a dark-haired girl, who watched beside the turret-stair.

"Danger! When had Lorenzo di Vasari gone back for danger!"

"Sickness?"

"Why, sickness?----Yet, no--no--he was not sick--it was not that!--Once more, Giuletta--for mercy! How sayest thou! All is silent still? Then he would not come! He was false--faithless--perjured--fled to his new minion--wedded to another!--Why, rather than that, let him have died--have perished! by plague--by flood--by fire--by knife or poison! Was not she, the Countess, dying--(and did she shrink to die?)--dying for the love she had borne him? Let her behold him lifeless! Mark his last gasp! Hear his last sigh! Know that he died without help--without hope--but let her not know him the husband of Perline di Francavilla!"

Following on that last word, like its response or echo--raised, spell-like, by its utterance--a distant foot is heard upon the winding turret-stair. Light as it falls, the Countess's ear has caught and recognised it!
Low as it treads, the rush with which it comes is that of lightning. In one moment more the tapestried
door has flown open—a cavalier, hurried and travel-worn, flings himself by the Countess's bedside. The
door is closed; the attendant has left the chamber; the Knight has redeemed his faith; and the lady and
her lover—it is for the last time—are to be alone together!

The Chevalier di Vasari held his lady's hand clasped within both his own; and he so held it long, and
spoke not. He pressed it to his burning forehead, not to his lips; his face was buried in the drapery of the
bed by which he knelt; and his sobs, although repressed with pain, were deep and audible. Justly
condemned by his mistress, or unjustly; false to his vows, or true; he was at least no lover of profession,
no idler, who gained and flung away for pride: but what he felt, he spoke right on, whether from the
heart or from the senses (which are nearer akin, perhaps, in the purest passion, than philosophers will
admit); and if he had changed—why was it, but because, in love, there can be no such pledge as
“Constancy?” because men can hold no control over an emotion which is as involuntary as their
laughter or their tears;—and because he who promises, but for one day, the continuance of his passion to
a woman—if he were to promise the continuance of life, might as well have the power to perform!

And if Love, as sure he is so, be the child of accident—of situation; warmed in this hour, and cherished
by that which chills and wastes him in the next; aided to-day by absence, which makes that precious
which possession held too cheap; to-morrow, triumphing by that very presence which overcomes, when
at a distance we might have denied;—if these be truths—as sure they are—take one truth more, and let
who can gainsay it—love, born amidst zephyrs, lives but in a storm! Flowers may charm; but these have
thorns; which, cease to pique, and he will cease to worship them. Pain is his food, of life—far more than
pleasure! mistresses or wives, the women who goad us to distraction are those ever from whom we
have the hardest task to part. Di Vasari was of that age, and of that temperament, in which absence was
likely to weaken a passion rather than increase it. We sigh to Eugenia of Sophia's coldness, and end in
forgetting Sophia altogether! But the heart that wanders is not lost for ever. He had quitted Florence
with unwillingness—in horror—almost in despair. Quitted it only, at last, because, unhappily, his stay
might have aggravated those dangers which were past his hope to aid. And was it in man, now, that he
could look upon that beautiful form—that form which he had so loved, so worshipped—and fancy but
the possibility of its destruction—of its decay! See those dark eyes, into which he had so often gazed for
hope and happiness—their lustre yet undimmed, but shining over a pallid cheek, and soon to shine no
more! That long black hair which flowed in ringlets down a neck so full and white! Those fair round
arms and polished throat—these are charms to live, and still have power, long after the transient red and
white, which charms the first observer, is familiar! Could he behold his mistress—so young and
beauteous still—so soon to be resigned for ever—now before him, and not forget that any other woman
lived, on whom he ever had bestowed a thought? not feel that, without her life—her love—her
safety—life—all the world—to him, would be no longer worth possessing?

The Countess gazed upon her lover as he knelt; and she, too, for a long space, gazed without speaking;
for with her, far less than even with Di Vasari, was there that full indulgence of grief which soothes and
satisfies the heart: but her thoughts were those of doubt—and fancied wrong—and wounded pride—and
passion scorned or slighted. Fierce as had been the paroxysms which that day had convulsed and
shaken her; bodily pain, and mental suffering; her pride still towered over all; her beauty showed
untainted! Scorning death in his triumph; hating his approach, yet smiling on it; never more carefully than in that hour--her last of life--had the Countess's toilet been adjusted. Her force of mind, and feverish heat of purpose, rose even above the anodynes which gave her a temporary release from personal suffering. Excited as she already was by passion, almost to frenzy, the very narcotics which should have deadened the brain's action, turned to stimulants, and served only to add new fury to its purpose. Her cheek had lost its tint of freshness. Her eyes, that glistened with tears repressed, had something of wildness in their expression. And her lips had faded from their ruby hue. But, other than this, her beauty was still uninjured; all her features were full and animated; it was scarce possible to contemplate her as a being who in a few hours should cease to move--to think--to have intent--existence.

At length the Countess spoke. Her hand lay passive in her lover's grasp. But it was cold--damp--and nerveless--trembling;--it suffered, not returned, his ardent pressure. "You would see me once more then, Lorenzo?" she said; and her words were uttered with pain and difficulty. For though her features remained unmoved, her eyes were blind with tears; and the tone of her voice was more terrible in its hollow, wilful steadiness, than if she had at once resigned the contest, and given way to the storm of grief that overwhelmed her.--"You have left Arezzo, and safety, and your new bride that shall be, to watch the last moments of one who can now no more be worth your thinking of; but who, whatever may be the faults she has to answer for, dies for one only, Lorenzo,--the fault of having loved you!"

The Chevalier's cheek was paler even than that of the Countess. His voice was drowned with sobs--he could not speak--the words choked him in their utterance. He lifted his face from the velvet covering in which it had lain buried--he clasped his hands together;--the hand of the Countess fell from his grasp.--"And is there then," at last he said, "oh God!--is there then, Angiolina, indeed no hope?"

"For me, Lorenzo," said the Countess, "there is no hope. Worlds could not purchase for me another hour's life. We meet now for the last time! You are ill, Lorenzo,--you have travelled far--I should not have sent to you--I trouble you too much. But I am going on a long journey--a travel from which I shall not return. I am a weak creature--too weak--but I am dying. Bless you, Lorenzo, for thinking of me this once! I shall die now content--content and happy. For I shall not have seen him, for whom I sacrificed both life and honour--while I still lived--devoted to another."

Avarice, ambition, terror, may have mercy; but there is one passion lurks within the human breast, whose very instinct's murder. Once lodged within the heart, for life it rules--ascendant and alone! Sports in the solitude like an antic fiend; it feeds on blood, and rivers would not sate its appetite. Minds strongest in worth and valour stoop to meanness and disgrace before it. The meanest soul--the weakest--it can give courage to, beyond the daring of despair! What is the sting which no balm can assuage? What is the wound that death alone can heal? What is the injury that--once done--can never be repaired? whose is the sword that, once when drawn, the scabbard must be cast away for ever? When is it that man has no ear but for the tale that falls like molten lead upon his brain; no eye but for the plucked-out heart of him he hates; no hand but for that clutch--that one last clutch--which earth may not resist--that grips his dagger? Who is it that bears about him a life, horrible to himself, and dangerous to the world? Who has been wise, yet now will cast away reason?--was kind and pitiful, yet mimics the
humanity of the wild dog? Who is it he weds his foe to mammocks; writes "Acquittal" on his tomb—and dies? Who is it that stabs, yet will not blame; drinks—as his draught of life—another's blood; yet feels there is but one relief—to shed his own? That wretch is JEALOUS! Oh! talk not of remembrance—consciousness beyond the grave!—once sleeping, let the jealous never wake again! Pity him, whatever his crimes! Were they ten thousand fathom past the reach of mercy, they are punished. The gamester whose last piece is lost—the merchant whose whole risk the sea has swallowed up—the child whose air-bubble has burst,—may each create a bauble like the former! But he whose treasure was in woman's love; who trusted as men once trust, and was deceived!—that hope once gone! weep—search—regret—despair—seek thyself blind—there is again no finding—no restoring it! Woman! symbol of woe, and nature's weakness! gamester of hope and happiness! thy love must be integral—single—perfect—or be nothing. Like the glass toy that has amused thy childhood, entire it sparkles, shining, bright, and precious; but from the farthest thread—the finest—break off but one fibre—it is gone—form—shape—design—material—substance! That flaw has shivered it to countless atoms; and where the jewel was, a heap of dust, which men despise and trample on, alone remains!

"Lorenzo!" said the Countess, in a hurried tone,—"Lorenzo, a chill is creeping over me. It is cold now—cold as the grave—I feel that I am dying. It is terrible, Lorenzo, to die so young! You will pray for me, though you have ceased to love me? Think of me, once more—only once—when Perline di Francavilla is your happy bride. Do not let her triumph too far; but think of me even on your bridal day, one moment, before you forget me for ever. For then, oh, Lorenzo—then—I shall be a thing fit only to forget. A poor, passive, nameless thing, beyond the reach of memory or sensation. And the tears of my friends, and the triumph of my foes, will be alike; for they will both be unknown and unnoticed by me."

"Angiolina!" cried the Chevalier, "if you would not destroy me quite, have mercy!"

"Have you not now come from Arezzo, Di Vasari?"

There are moments in which, even to serve its need, the heart revolts from falsehood.—There was no answer. "Have you not daily seen Perline di Francavilla there? Have you not—perjured as you are—have you not pledged your false heart to her?"

"Then, never—by all my hopes in heaven!" exclaimed the Chevalier, urged almost beyond self-control; and changing his tone from that of sorrow almost into one of injury and recrimination—for if his conscience did not entirely acquit him of blame, yet neither was he guilty in the extent to which he was accused.—"Forced, by your own command—would I had never listened to it!—to quit Florence, chance more than purpose led me to Arezzo. If I have seen Perline di Francavilla there," continued the speaker—and here his voice did falter something—"it has been only in that common intercourse, which the long connection of our houses rendered unavoidable. But your token said, that you were in sickness—in danger—What was Perline, then, or all the world, to me? Am I not here to save—to perish for—Angiolina—to perish with you? For why should one live on, who now can live only to a sense of wretchedness! If I had wronged your trust—say that I had been light and thoughtless—he trifles with the richest gem in fancied safety, who hugs his treasure close, and feels its value when its loss is threatened. Angiolina, you have wronged me. You will regret to have done so; but my errand shall be
fulfilled. I came to aid—to avenge—or perish with you."

The words of the Chevalier were wild; but he spoke them heartily, and his manner was sincere. For the outward act too—it was at some hazard—and the plague still raging—that he had returned to Florence. It was at some hazard that he stood, even at that moment, unaided, and almost unarmed, within walls where but a whisper of his name would have armed an hundred swords against his life. But Perline di Francavilla lived!—the Countess saw but that—would live and triumph—when she should be no more—despised—forgotten. The helplessness—the hopelessness—of all defence against such a consummation—the very sense of that helplessness seemed to exasperate her almost to frenzy.

Eagerly grasping her lover's hands, her action seemed to demand the repetition of his promise. But the words which should have expressed the demand were wanting. A sudden, but sinking change was taking place in the lady's appearance—the poison had run its course; and the crisis of her fate was approaching.

Slowly drawing her hand across her brow, as if to clear the mist that made her vision indistinct, she seemed anxiously to search out some object, which the fading sight had scarcely strength enough to reach.

At that moment, a dial, which faced the feet of the couch on which she lay, struck, with its shrill bell, the first hour of the morning.

The stroke seemed to fall upon the Countess, and paralyse her remaining faculties.

"Angiolina!" cried the Chevalier, springing from the floor—"Angiolina! speak, for mercy's sake! Angiolina!—she is dying!"

His attention was quickly called to his own safety: a footstep as he spoke approached distinctly through the corridor.

"Angiolina!" He started to the door by which he had entered. "Ruin and despair!" it was closed without—it would not open.

The footsteps came on still. Why, then, there was but one hope—his dagger was in his hand.

The Lady Angiolina heard—she saw what was passing. She moved—she pointed. No—it was wrong—not there! She made a last effort—she spoke, once more. "Yonder, Lorenzo—There—there!"

It was but the advantage of a moment. The curtains of the couch on which the Countess was lying parted the coming and the going guest. The light fall of the swinging door by which the new visitor entered the chamber, echoed the heavy drop of that which had shut the Chevalier from view.

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It was not the Count di Arestino whose approach had created this alarm, but that which followed made the presence of his Lordship speedily desired. The female who entered the chamber found her mistress lying insensible, and in a state which left little doubt of her immediate dissolution. From that moment the Countess lived nearly two hours, but she never spoke again. Her confessor came. He pressed the cross to the lips of the expiring lady, and some said that she shrank from it; but the most believed that she was insensible, and the last absolution of the dying was administered. The Count Ubaldi stood by his wife's bedside. He wore no outward semblance of excessive grief. It might be that his heart bled inwardly; but he scarcely dreamed who had knelt on that same spot so short a time before him.

"It was at the bell of one," said Giuletta, in a low voice to her companion, "that my lady desired me to waken her. And when I came, as the clock struck, I found her even alone, and thus."

As she spoke, the shrill tongue of the dial once more struck the hour of two. A slight struggle agitated the features of the Countess at the sound! she clasped her hands as if in prayer, or from some suddenly excited recollection.

In another moment the source of all the anxiety expressed around was at an end. The domestics yet wept; the confessor still bent with the sacred image over his penitent; the Count Arestino still gazed coldly on--upon what? It was not upon his wife--for the Countess Arestino was no more.
CHAPTER III.

"For though he 'scaped by steel or ball, And safe through many a peril pass'd, The pitcher oft goes to the well, But the pitcher comes home broke at last."

The judges of Florence were met, and there were crowds round the gate of the Palazzo di Governo; for a criminal, sentenced to death that day, was to suffer the torture before he underwent his final doom.

Of what crime had the prisoner been guilty? He was a common robber, guilty of a hundred crimes, for any of which his life was forfeit. But there was one charge to which, guilty or not guilty, he refused to plead; and as a disclosure was important, he was to be racked to induce him to confess.

On the morning of the Vigil of St Luke it was that Lorenzo di Vasari had quitted Arezzo. His journey had been taken on the sudden, and no one had been acquainted with its object. Various circumstances in the manner of his departure led to the inference that his absence was to be a short one; and yet two months had elapsed since he had so departed, and intelligence of his course, or of his safety, his family had none.

It was strange--and men declared it so--where the Chevalier Lorenzo could be hidden. He had been traced to Florence. On that dark night, and in those deserted streets, when he felt most sure no eye beheld him, he had nevertheless been seen, mounted on his black horse, and followed by his servant, first passing the column of Victory in the Via di Repoli, and afterwards halting in conference upon the Ponta St Trinita.

But those who had seen the travellers as they paused upon the bridge, were themselves night prowlers, digging after hidden spoil in the Jews' Quarter, and they had not watched them, for they had business of their own, more urgent, to attend to. It was recollected that they had at length ridden off westwards, in the direction of the Porto Pisano; but with that movement all traces both of master and attendant ceased.

Now this disappearance was strange; and except that there had been foul play in some quarter, what other solution could be imagined for it? Why had the Chevalier Lorenzo first quitted Florence? It was not from fear of the plague, for he had returned in the height of it. And when was it that he had so returned--himself to disappear so strangely? when but on the very night, and almost at the very hour, that the Countess Arestino had died! The belief of all made the duty of none. Men might suffer wrong, and never know they suffered it; or they might be wronged, and yet sit down contented. But yet the Count Ubaldi, by those who knew him, was scarcely numbered as one who would so sit down; and there had been a rumour once, though it had passed away, which joined the name of the Chevalier di Vasari too closely with that of the Lady Angiolina. And had Lorenzo's true kinsman, the soldier Carlo, lived, less doubt had drawn his sword for vengeance or for explanation.

But "true Carlo" was dead--your honest men are ever so--dead in the wars of Germany and Spain. And Gonsalvo di Vasari, the last relative and next heir, seemed less curious to revenge his kinsman's death than to inherit. No man in Florence doubted Gonsalvo's courage, but still his dagger slept in its sheath.
It might be he believed his cousin had taken no wrong; or it might be that--take the worst to be proved--his conscience whispered he might have juster cause of quarrel. But week after week elapsed, and even month after month; and though all concluded the absent Lorenzo to be dead, yet no certain tidings even of his death could be obtained, so that the title to his large estates remained in abeyance. The disappearance of the servant Jacopo, too, seemed more puzzling to many people than any other part of the affair. When one morning, about ten weeks after the absentees had been lost sight of, and while men were still debating whether they had been swallowed up, horses, arms, purses, and all, by some local earthquake, or translated suddenly to the skies, and there converted into constellations, as a great mob was sweeping over the piazza Santa Croce, conducting a robber, who had just been condemned, to the place of execution, a citizen, whom accident or curiosity had drawn close to the person of the culprit, suddenly exclaimed, that "he wore a cloak which had belonged to Lorenzo di Vasari!"

"Holy Virgin! will you not hear what I say?" insisted the person who thus stopped his fellow-creatures on their passage to the other world.--"Should I not know the cloak, when I made it myself?" he continued. Which was at least so far likely to be true, that the spokesman was a tailor.

"But the man is going to be hanged, and what more can you have if he had stolen fifty cloaks?" replied the superintending officer, giving the word that the cavalcade, which had halted, should again move forward.

The chief party (as one would have thought) to this dispute--that is, the prisoner who sat in the cart--remained perfectly silent; but the interruption of Nicolo Gozzi bade fair, nevertheless, to be overruled. For the culprit was no other than the famous Luigino Arionelli, or, as he was surnamed, "Luigino the Vine-dresser," who had been the terror of all Florence during the period of the plague; and a great many people had come out to see him hanged, who were not disposed to go home disappointed of the ceremony. And the provost, too, who commanded, was well disposed to get rid of the interference, if he could; for since the law had resumed its powers, despatch (in matters of justice) was rather the order of the day. The disorders which had to be regulated were many and dangerous; and the object being to get rid of such as suddenly as possible, a good many of the delays which were used to lie between the commission of crimes and their final punishment had been agreed to be dispensed with. So that, upon the whole, Signor Gozzi's remonstrances were generally treated as impertinent; and it was a moot point, whether he did not seem more likely to be personally added to the execution, than to put a stop to it; when luckily there came up a servant of the house of Di Vasari, attracted by the uproar, who identified the cloak in question, not merely as having belonged to the Chevalier Lorenzo, but as being the same which he had worn on the night of his disappearance.

This strange declaration--backed by a recollection that Gonsalvo di Vasari's interests must not be treated lightly--decided the commander of the escort in favour of delay; and the culprit, who had been observed to pay deep attention to all that passed, was reconducted to prison. When questioned, however, both casually in his way back to the jail by the officer of justice, and formally, afterwards, by Gonsalvo di Vasari himself, he maintained a determined silence. A sort of examination--if such it could be called when no answers were given--was prolonged for several hours; but no further facts were discovered; and not a word, either by persuasions or menaces, could be extorted from the prisoner. In
the end, the chief judge, the Marquis Peruzzi, to whose daughter Gonsalvo di Vasari was affianced, suggested that time should be given for consideration, and that--Arionelli being retained in close confinement--all proceedings should be stayed for four days. This recommendation was agreed to, not because it was the course which any one desired to take, but because it was the only course, under the circumstances, which seemed open. Arionelli was then shut up anew under close caution. Gonsalvo di Vasari and his friends betook themselves to study how they might hunt out fresh evidence; or, against the next day of examination, work upon the prisoner so that he should confess. And the gossips of Florence had enough of employment in discussing the singular providence which had at last led to the detection of the Chevalier's murderer, puzzling what could be the object of his present silence, and disputing whom his disclosures would impeach.

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"Bring in the prisoner," said the presiding judge.

The day of examination was come, and the judges had taken their seats in the Palazzo di Governo. The Gonfaloniere, the Marquis Peruzzi, sat as president, with Gonsalvo di Vasari and the Count Arestino, both as members of the Council. Two secretaries, with writing implements before them, sat at the head of a long table placed below the president's chair; and a few ushers and inferior retainers of the Court, distinguished by their robes and wands, waited in different quarters of the apartment. But no other members of the Council than those already described were present, for the affair was one rather of individual than of general interest; and the heads of Florence were still too much engaged with private calamities and difficulty, to have any more leisure to spare than was absolutely necessary for the service or direction of the public.

"Let the prisoner be brought in!" said the Marquis Peruzzi.

One of the secretaries signed to an attendant, who rang a small hand-bell which stood upon the table.

Upon which the folding-doors at the lower end of the hall were thrown open, and a guard of soldiers, marching in, ranged themselves (a precaution temporarily adopted in that stormy period) on two sides of the chamber. The prisoner, Arionelli, came next, handcuffed and heavily ironed, followed by six or seven unpleasant but not formidable-looking persons, the servants of the executioner. The doors were then again closed and carefully fastened, as if to prevent the possibility of intrusion from without; the soldiers rested their lances, but remained in an attitude of attention; and a curtain was drawn aside by some unseen hand from a recess in the south side of the apartment, which showed the rack and its apurtenances prepared, and the machinery for the water torture.

"Luigino Arionelli!" then said the chief secretary, "do you yet repent you of your contumacy; and will you confess to this tribunal that which you know touching the fate of Lorenzo di Vasari?"

The culprit, to whom this demand was addressed, had he been forty times an outlaw, was a man of excellent presence. Of a stature sufficient to convey the impression of much bodily command and
strength, yet boldly and handsomely, rather than very robustly, proportioned; the rich cavalier's dress in which he had been disguised when he was first taken, and of which he still wore the faded remains, accorded well with a deportment as high and unconstrained as that of any noble in whose presence he was standing. His countenance was pale, and something worn as with fatigue; perhaps it was with anxiety; for a dungeon, and the prospect of being hanged on quitting it, are not the best helps to any man's personal appearance. But he looked at the rack straightforward and steadily, not as with a forced defiance, but as at an object for which he was prepared, if not with which he was familiar; and when he spoke, there was neither faltering in his voice nor apprehension in his feature. "Carlo Benetti!" he said, when the chief secretary had done speaking--"nay, never bend your brow, my lord, for I have worse dangers than your displeasure to meet already. I am at the point of death, when men in most ranks are equal. Have nothing left to lose, so may make shift to bear the heaviest farther penalty you can inflict. Therefore write down--and see you blur it not--that unless upon terms, and not such terms as the rack to begin, and the gibbet to conclude with, neither you nor your masters shall have any information from me."

The Gonfaloniere turned his eye slowly on the instruments of torture. "Do you not fear," he said, "to die upon that wheel? Reflect! it is a fate to which you have not yet been sentenced; and it is one, compared with which, the death you have to suffer will be as the pleasures of paradise set against the torments of purgatory."

"When I became a robber," returned Arionelli, coolly, "I looked for some such fate. I reckoned with myself, that I could scarcely live gaily, and not die irregularly. I wished to rein a fleet horse in the field, rather than wait on one in the stable. To sing and thrum on my guitar in idleness half the night, rather than hold the plough, or ply the hatchet, in labour all day. In short, I wished to feed luxuriously--drink freely--have a brave mistress--spurn at law and honesty--in brief, my lord, become a nobleman, not having been born one; and I was content to pay something, at a long day, for the change."

The prisoner's demand was for his own life secured, and for pardon of two of his comrades, who were not yet brought to trial. The disclosures which he could make were desirable; but these were terms on which the State could not purchase them.

"Between the rope and the wheel," added Arionelli, "it is but an hour's endurance, which troubles me little."

"We will try the strength of that endurance," said the President, turning to Gonsalvo di Vasari, who slightly assented. "Executioner! do your duty. Let the prisoner strip."

The executioner and his assistants then proceeded immediately to strip the culprit naked to the waist, which they did almost in silence, and very temperately, without any show of violence or roughness; but yet the cold, ready, business-like civility of their manner--the expeditiousness with which they stripped a man for murder and agony, as they might have stripped him for the bath--chilled the heart with more sickness than a demeanour of coarseness or ferocity would have done.
The outlaw smiled bitterly; but it was a smile of confidence and impatience rather than insolence. "Gonfaloniere!" he cried, "once more beware! One moment's haste may kill your hopes for ever. Crack but a sinew--strain but a single limb--let your blind rage but do the smallest act that makes Arionelli's life not worth preserving,--not all the wealth that Florence holds shall ever buy your secret: I die, and it dies with me."

No notice was taken of this menace, except by an order to complete the necessary preparations. The criminal was bound to the rack. An attendant had brought the pot of water which stood by to wet the lips of sufferers in their extremity. And the cords were tightened, ready for the first pull, which was commonly followed by a dislocation of both the wrists and shoulders.

At this point many gave way; and it was the custom to try the resolution of culprits under it by a moment's suspense. But Arionelli uttered no word, nor gave any look, which could be construed into an appeal for mercy. His cheek was flushed--hands clenched--the lips strongly drawn in--the teeth set firm together; but in the whole countenance there was but one expression--that of defiance and disdain; and all eyes were fixed, and all ears were open, for the moment of allowance had expired; when, just as the Gonfaloniere's hand was raised to give the last sign for which the executioner waited, and the prisoner was collecting his strength to meet the impending shock, Gonsalvo di Vasari, who had watched the whole scene in silence, but with the closest attention, made a movement to interfere.

A consultation of some length ensued between the judges, or rather between the first two of them, Gonsalvo di Vasari and the President Peruzzi; for the Count Arestino, although many had been curious to think whether he would or would not be present at the process, seemed merely to have taken his seat as an ordinary member of the council, without feeling any peculiar interest in it. The discussion at the table was carried on in a low tone; but the prisoner watched its progress with an eye of keen and penetrating inquiry. Presently (as well as might be judged from his gestures) the Gonfaloniere appeared to yield to some proposal from Gonsalvo di Vasari; and the latter wrote a few words on a slip of paper, and handed them to an usher, who bowed and left the room; after which the President made some communication (which was not heard) to the Count Arestino; and Gonsalvo himself took up the examination.

"You demand, then," said Gonsalvo di Vasari, addressing Arionelli, "your own life, and a pardon for two of your associates who are in custody, as the price of the confession which you are to make relative to the disappearance of the Chevalier Lorenzo di Vasari?"

"As the price of my full answer to all your questions on that subject, as far as my knowledge goes, my lord," was the reply--"provided, in the mean time, your lordship causes these cords to be loosened, which give me pain something unnecessarily, and which another turn would have drawn too tight for the advantage of your lordship's objects, or of mine."

"And these associates, for whose lives you covenant?" continued Di Vasari, when the prisoner's request had been complied with.
"Are my friends, my lord--men of my own band. They came, indeed, after I was taken, to rescue me at the scaffold; and the least I can do now is to let our cause go together."

"And what if your obstinate silence (to repay that intended obligation) should cause them to die a death of torture, as you are like to do yourself?"

"They will be as able to endure such a fate as I am. I play for the higher stake--our lives. And if the die goes against me, we must suffer."

"And when their turn upon the rack comes," interrupted the Gonfaloniere, "then they will disclose your secret."

"That they will tell you no word of it, my lord, I have the best security--they know nothing of it themselves."

"You are called," said Gonsalvo di Vasari, "Luigino Arionelli. Are you not that Luigino Arionelli who is known by the name of 'The Vine-dresser'?"

"I am known by an hundred names, and seen in an hundred shapes," returned the robber. "Ask your officers how many they have seen me in, in this last month, and in this very city? I am the Venetian monk from Palestine, who was preaching at the Cross in the Piazza dei Leoni, while the three great houses beyond the square were emptied, on the fifth day of the plague. And I was the Austrian officer who came with his long retinue to the inn of 'The Golden Flask' (the host will remember what fell out in that lodging), bringing letters and despatches to the Gonfaloniere from Cologne. I was the Genevese physician, who got good practice, and some money, by the 'infallible remedy against the plague;' and your lordships see, whatever I did for others, I had skill enough to keep clear from it myself. And it was I who ransacked half the houses in the Quartiere St Giovanni in only one night; robbing in a bull's hide, disguised with horns, when two fathers of the Order of Mercy met me, and ran away, mistaking me for the devil."

"Have you not a wife, or a mistress, who is called Aurelia la Fiore?"

"I have. Close with my proposal!" said the outlaw, who seemed excited by the conversation. "I would live, and be once more at liberty, for her sake!"

"Is she your wife, or your mistress only?"

"As chance will have it, not my wife according to the usages of our church. But she might have been. As far as affection is worth--passion, devotion--the asking in vain no prize which hand can win, or sacrifice which heart can make; as far as to have no rival--never to have had a rival--in the heart of her husband, so far she is my wife! There are women, perhaps, worse treated, and wives--the wives of princes--worse deserving."
"Was not this Aurelia the daughter of an oil-farmer near Ferrara?"

"She was. Then you have heard the tale? I stabbed the noble who thought her worth dishonouring, and would have borne her from me. Fortune had shared her stores more evenly between us than he imagined. To him she gave the wealth to purchase pleasure; to me the hand to win it. I was a vine-dresser then; and, but for that event, might have been one still."

"Does Aurelia know this secret, which you would sell to us?"

"That you shall know, my good lord, after you have bought it from me."

"Where is Aurelia now?"

"If you inherit not your kinsman's patrimony, Gonsalvo di Vasari, till you learn that, your patience, as well as your purse, shall fare the harder."

"What if she were in our power?"

The robber smiled contemptuously at the supposition.

"What if I should tell you that she is here--in chains and peril--and that every insolence you utter added to her danger?"

"That would be almost a false assertion, Gonsalvo di Vasari; and the mouths of your race should be clear from dishonour."

"Why, let him then see!" exclaimed Di Vasari, starting from his seat. A door opposite to the recess in which the prisoner stood was thrown open; and a female--it was Aurelia herself--bound, and guarded by Gonsalvo's servants, stood before him.

The recoil of the outlaw burst his bonds like threads; the cords that tied him seemed to fall off by witchcraft more than to be broken. But the effort was involuntary; it was followed by no movement, and indicated no purpose. For one moment the hands of the guards were upon their swords; but a single glance was enough, and showed the precaution was needless.

The shadow of that passing door, as it swung slowly to upon its muffled hinges, seemed to sweep every trace of former expression from Arionelli's countenance. Familiar with objects of danger and alarm, a moment sufficed him to perceive that the ground on which he had stood, as on a rock, was gone. One convulsive shudder ran through his frame, as the high clear voice of Aurelia pronounced, in trembling agony, the name of "Luigino!" He bowed his face, as one who abandoned further contest, and seemed to await what was to come.
"Luigino Arionelli," said Gonsalvo, coldly, and in the measured tone of conscious power, "do you yet repent you of your obstinacy; and will you make confession as to the fate of Lorenzo di Vasari?"

A pause ensued, and the robber attempted to rally his faculties; but the effort was unsuccessful. At length he spoke, but not as he had before spoken; there was a difference in the steadiness of his tone, and a still wider in the carelessness of his manner.--"You know, my lords," he said, "that the power is now yours. There was but one creature on earth for whom I could have wept or trembled, and she is in your hands. The struggle is over; I and my companions have lived like men; and I trust we shall die like men. Let my wife depart; she has done the state no wrong, and has no knowledge of that which you desire to learn. And as soon as she shall have passed the boundaries of the Florentine territory, I will confess the whole--much or little--that I can disclose of the fate of the Chevalier di Vasari."

The very deep, though repressed, anxiety with which the speaker put this proposal, seemed to imply a doubt how far it could be accepted. He was not mistaken; those who held the power, knew the tenure by which they held it, and that tenure they were not disposed to part with.

"Trifle not with the sword and with the fire, if you are wise, Arionelli!" said Gonsalvo di Vasari. "Press not too far upon the patience of this court. She whom you call your wife stands, no less than yourself, within the scope of our danger. Whatever mercy is extended to her, must be upon your full and unconditional submission; and not until all questions which may be put to you have been answered satisfactorily. Therefore I caution you once more; speak instantly, and without reserve; and press no longer on the forbearance of this tribunal; for you guess not the fate which you may draw down upon yourself if you do so."

The outlaw's passion rose in his fear's despite. "And press me not too far, my lords," he exclaimed, "if you are wise. For once remove the temptation of Aurelia's safety--and ten thousand times the torments you command shall never win an answer from me. Take heed, good Gonfaloniere, what you do! Ask your slaves here, if, at the foot of the gibbet, I shrank from the death which was before me. You have the power; beware you strain it not too far. I am in your chains--defenceless--helpless. Those arms are bound, whose strength, if they were free, perhaps the stoutest soldier here might find too much to cope with. But go one point only too far--To tear the hook from the fish's entrails is not to land him! You cannot kill the robber Luigino, though you kill him in extremest tortures, but you kill the secret which you want--the secret for which he dies--at the same moment."

If there be truth in threats like these, it is a truth for which no man (until they are executed) ever gets credit. He who will die, and die content, for his own vengeance, is the exception to the common rule. Arionelli was bound again to the wheel, and with cords which were stronger than before. Up to that moment his wife had never spoken. Her eyes had remained fixed upon the earth, and there were no sobs accompanied the large drops which fell from them; nor signs scarcely that she wept, beyond the convulsive heaving of her bosom. Once, when the dark attendants surrounded her lover, her lips opened to speak; but she only sank upon her knees--the lips were closed again--and one long shriek issued from them, that seemed to cleave the very roof of the palazzo. And then came the command from Gonsalvo di Vasari--not that which she dreaded, but another--cool, distinct, calculating, and delayed until the
confinement of Arionelli was complete.--"Official, bind Aurelia la Fiore, and let the question by water be administered to her."

An obvious effect was perceptible upon the countenances of the soldiers in the hall when this command was uttered. The outlaw himself was bound--this time his bonds did not give way--and when he heard the words, they seemed to paralyse--to engender a doubt that he miscomprehended--rather than to alarm him. He turned his eye rapidly from his kneeling wife to the judges. Its expression was not of humility, and scarcely that even of entreaty. His appeal was not that of a culprit to the mercy of a judge, but the demand which man makes upon man--upon the common feeling of his fellows--"In the name of God!" was all that he exclaimed, "you cannot mean it?"

Nevertheless, however, the men in black surrounded Aurelia, who stood motionless, attempting neither effort nor remonstrance; and having raised her from the ground, were proceeding to cut the laces which held her bodice; for a part of the horrible system was, that all who suffered, male or female, were stripped naked before the application of the question. The soldiers, though, from their cold silence and averted looks, they evidently disliked their duty, showed no disposition to flinch from it; and a passionate flood of tears burst from the eyes of the unhappy Aurelia, as the first infamous preparations for adding degradation to the tortures which she was to endure, were completed.

The cold sweat poured in streams down Arionelli's forehead.--"In the name of Heaven," he cried, "hold but one moment! If you are men, you will not do this deed! Gonfaloniere! my Lord di Vasari! Count of Arestino! will you--as your souls may answer it--will you degrade this helpless and innocent female--and in the presence of her husband? Villains! cowards! slaves!" pursued the outlaw, violently, seeing that his words produced no cessation of the proceedings,--"have you not this frame, more noble than your own, but on which you may trample, still unbent and unbroken? Cannot you burst these sinews with a nod? Rend and destroy, with but a word, these limbs, whose force, naked as they are, and even in bonds, your pale hearts quail at? Am I not bound before you? Will not these miscreant agents delight to crush a frame to ruin, which shames, and shows their own too mean and insignificant? and yet will you--dare you--touch such a piece of Heaven's handiwork as that woman! My Lord Gonfaloniere--you have daughters--Man--if you are one--look at her! Is she more fit than they are for a deed of blood?--Di Vasari!--Gonsalvo!--Villain!--Usurer!--you are a man--young--passionate--can you look upon such a form as hers--and if she had sought your very life a thousand times--would you see it mangled, disgraced, and ruined?--Gonfaloniere!--Count Arestino!--Mercy! This wretch I waste my words on. If he can do the deed--no matter with what cause--my words must be too useless to dissuade him from it!"

"Luigino Arionelli!" said the Gonfaloniere, more mildly, "why, if this female's safety be so precious to you, do you not secure it, and answer the questions which we propose?"

"It is because----" The outlaw hesitated. --"Now, Gonfaloniere--you are a human creature--make that toad-like wretch take his base hands from her! Now she has fainted--let her not be bound! Villain! rogue! bare but one spot of her fair flesh, and you shall yet expire in tortures!--Marquis! Now thanks and blessings! Let the villains stand from her. Captain! Gentleman of honour! You wear a sword--I
have seen you use it in the fight--support her--and may your own wife or sister never ask the same assistance, or lie in the same need!--All who know me--robber as I am--know that I never inflicted injury or insult on a woman. I sent back the Podesta of Trieste's daughter to her father safe, and without ransom, when the villain churl refused to pay it. Why, thanks! Aurelia! Wife! look up! Oh treat me--robber as I am--but as a man! Let me be free--only to sustain her; and command or question what you will."

"Luigino!" said the Marquis Arestino, who seemed something affected by the outlaw's passion, though reasons perhaps prevented his doing anything which might be construed into the showing him favour--"the court in mercy has granted this momentary delay; why is it that you do not use it to confess?"

"It is because--because," continued Arionelli, passionately, but not violently, "my hope is over--I have nothing to confess. It is because--as I stand in this danger--as I have a soul--I have nothing that can assist you in what you desire to know. When I was stopped and brought back to prison from my way to execution, I was ignorant even of how it arose that I was suspected of this crime. I saw your anxiety for the information which you thought I possessed; and would, if I could, have gained a promise of life for myself and my comrades before I declared the truth. You will not blame me for this effort? It was not quite base or selfish; for, win or lose, it included those who had put themselves in danger to aid in my escape. But it is over now. I give it up. The cloak which your people recognise, may or may not, for aught I know, have been taken from the Signor Lorenzo di Vasari. But it was the property--this is all I know--of a robber of my band, who died ten days before my apprehension."

The countenances of the judges darkened. "Where is this man?" asked the secretary Benetti; "how did he obtain this spoil, and is he one of those already in our power?"

"He is dead, as I have declared already," said Arionelli--"dead of the plague. I have proof of this. Send for the visitors of the Ospedale St Sulpice, and ask whether two of them did not find, fourteen days since, in the upper floor of a deserted house in the Rua Pulita, a man dead of the plague; and, in the same apartment, a garment of bull's hide, curiously fitted with a mask and horns? This last garment was mine--I named it before--and it was left there by accident. By the farther token that the directors of St Sulpice commanded the finders to burn it privately, lest its profane exhibition should scandalise the church."

"That is true, my lord," whispered the chief secretary to the Gonfaloniere; "the fact was known to us when it happened."

"The man who was found in that apartment," continued Arionelli, "was called Dominico Torelli: and he died with the cloak which you now challenge in his possession. How he obtained it I know not, for I saw little of his pursuits. We were on ill terms because at other times he had concealed his booty, instead of bringing it fairly to division. Those who follow our profession think but little about forms of burial; when he was dead, his arms and money were shared by such of his associates as were at hand. This rich mantle and the doublet that I wear fell to another's lot; but they struck my fancy, and I

CHAPTER III.
Gonsalvo di Vasari listened patiently till the outlaw had concluded, but it was with the air of a man who was not unmoved by anything that was saying.

"We are approaching the truth," said he, coldly; "but we must have it fully. Mark me, Arionelli! Your object is seen, and you deceive yourself to hope it can prevail. This dead robber, whom you would palm upon us, if ever he had existence, was your comrade, your follower. The crime for which you would make him answerable no single hand ever committed; and the spoil obtained was too large to have been so lightly disposed of, as you would persuade us, or concealed. Now listen to me. There are some in Florence know I am not used to trifle. The clue which lies in my hands now to my kinsman's fate--whether of life or death--words will not induce me to give up. Therefore be wise, and speak at once; for, by the great Heaven, there is no hope that fraud or obstinacy will avail you! If you should find resolution enough to die silent under this torture, I will try whether your wife here has strength to be equally contumacious."

The rage of the hunted wolf was in the robber's countenance. He saw his danger--saw that he was caught in his own toils. The very error of his judges (more than their mercilessness) led inevitably to his destruction.

"Gonfaloniere!" he cried, furiously--"Gonsalvo di Vasari! Hold once more! Reflect--there is a line beyond which human suffering does not pass! The meanest wretch in Florence, who cares not for his own life, holds the fate of the highest among ye at his mercy. You feel that you dare not, for fifty times your titles and possessions, commit this villany you meditate, and let me live. There are others--companions--friends--reflect on it!--who will be left behind, and whom an act like this will rouse to certain vengeance. You have no fault to charge on this helpless woman. You can gain nothing of that you seek from her. You sacrifice her to gain that which cannot be gained--for, so help me Heaven in my last hour, I have it not!--from me. Beware! for no deed like that of tyranny and baseness ever passed unpunished. Do not drive a trodden-down wretch to desperation! Do not rush uselessly upon an act which will stand alone in the annals of infamy and crime!--Or, tell me at least," continued Arionelli, passionately, "if there is indeed no hope--no chance--of mercy! Before you ruin your own objects, and mine, past helping--Signor di Vasari--I know whom it is I have to deal with--Definitively--what is it that you demand?"

"For the last time," said Gonsalvo di Vasari, "that this Court will deign to question--full confession as to the fate of my cousin, the Chevalier Lorenzo."

"If he be dead?"

"A token of his death, and the story of its manner."

"And though he be dead, shall Aurelia then be free?"
The Gonfaloniere replied--"Of that you have our pledge."

The outlaw paused for a moment, anxiously, and in thought.--"My Lord di Vasari," he said, "I have already sworn that I had no share in your cousin's fate. I believe that he has fallen. But means of inquiry I have none, except by message to those who are beyond your warrant, and who knew more of Dominico Torelli's latter course than I know. Who but myself can do an errand such as this? Who else can search out those who hold life only while they are not found? And me you will not part with? There is but one resource. Aurelia knows the haunts of my band; she can seek those whose aid I need, and will be trusted by them as myself. Let me then be carried back to prison; and let her depart whither I direct; and if in twenty-four hours she return not with some intelligence, my life shall answer the event."

"Would it not be safer to reverse that arrangement?" said Gonsalvo, significantly,--"to retain Aurelia here in prison; and suffer you, Arionelli, in whom I trust more than you credit, to depart?"

A long silence followed, which was broken at last by the robber; but the tone in which he spoke, and his manner, was, for the first time, strangely contrasted with the expression of his features. "My Lord!" he said, interrupting the Gonfaloniere, "let us close this conference." (And his voice was steady, even to seeming unconcern; though his countenance was deadly pale, and his eye was livid and glassy, and his lips seemed to perform their office with an effort--as if some swelling in the throat choked up the utterance.) "The proof which Signor Gonsalvo demands may be furnished more easily than I had recollected. Two men of my band are now in your jails of Florence. One of them is named Vincentio Rastelli: he is the lesser offender--set him free. Let Aurelia and myself then be carried back to prison--only one demand must be conceded--that our dungeon shall be the same. Let Rastelli have free access to me at will, and free passage to go and come, unfollowed and unwatched, wherever I shall send him. Promise that, my bond being kept--before I die--I shall see Aurelia at liberty. And before midnight to-morrow, Signor Gonsalvo shall have that put into his hands, which shall for ever set his mind at rest as to the fate--whatever it has been--of Lorenzo di Vasari."

* * * *

It was the hour of midnight on the morrow; and Gonsalvo di Vasari sat in his library alone; and he rejoiced in the fortune of his arrangements. The robber Rastelli had been set at liberty. He had visited Arionelli in his prison. He had gone upon one mission, and had returned as unsuccessful; but at once again he had sped forth upon another. Was it possible that the outlaw might yet fail? Scarcely so! for Aurelia's sake, his strength would be put forth to the utmost. Would the agent make sure of his own safety and escape? This was not likely, for already he had once returned; and the fidelity of such people, generally, to their friends and leaders, was as well known as their enterprise and ferocity.

It was not likely either that Arionelli would have taken his course, without feeling a strong reliance upon its success. A few hours then--nay, a few moments now--were to put him in possession of that evidence which would end all doubt as to his cousin's rich inheritance. For Aurelia--her safety was promised; but her liberty--this evidence obtained--might be a matter for consideration. The outlaw himself would die upon the scaffold. It was pity that so much beauty as Aurelia's should be cast
away.--Meantime Gonsalvo di Vasari sat alone in his palace; and the hour of midnight was passed, and yet there was no messenger. He arose and opened the lattice--the moon shone brightly--but the streets of Florence were at rest. Was it possible that he should be trifled with! A servant was summoned. But--no!--no person had appeared.

At that instant, a man, wrapt in a dark cloak, was seen stealing across the Piazza of St Mark. His form was robust, and his step firm; it was the figure of the robber--of Rastelli. He paused a moment under the shadow of the church of St Benedick, as if to watch if any one observed him; then crossed the square--the portico concealed him;--but it was the hour--the very moment--it must be the messenger!

There was a hasty tap at the door of the cabinet----

"My lord--he has come."

"Admit him."

"He did not stay."

"Where is his message?"

"My lord, it is here."

The servant placed a small iron casket in the hands of his master; a folded packet accompanied it; and retired.

Gonsalvo broke the seal of the packet. There was not a word--the paper was blank. But it contained a small key, apparently that of the casket, of a singular form and workmanship.

The letter was a blank! The chest then, which was in his hands, contained the secret? Gonsalvo hesitated. Was it fit that the deposit should be at once opened? Was it not more fit that the disclosure (whatever it was) should be public--in the presence of the Gonfaloniere, and in the apartment of the Senate?

And yet it might be that the casket contained matter hostile to his desires, rather than tending to assist them. It might be that the proof even of Lorenzo's death failed wholly; and such truth, once openly declared, could never be got rid of.

He poised the chest in his hands. It weighed heavily. What could be its contents? Perhaps the written confession of Arionelli, or some of his companions. At all events, the course of a private search was safe: a public one might be made formally, in the morning, if convenient.

He took the key, secured the door, approached the taper, and cautiously examined the lock of the casket.
The key entered freely. It turned in the lock. The bolt shot. The hand that lay upon the lid tightened its grasp to lift it open.

At that moment the magazine within exploded. The chest, with a report that shook the apartment, burst into a thousand atoms. The household of Di Vasari was alarmed. His domestics rushed in a body to their master's chamber. They tried to enter, but the door was fast. They knocked, but no answer was returned. While they stood irresolute in horror and alarm, an officer of justice, attended, came thundering at the gate. The prison of the Seralio had been alarmed in the night. The robber Arionelli and his wife were dead by poison, and the Gonfaloniere in council desired the presence and assistance of Signor di Vasari. The affrighted domestics burst the door open. The message from the State was answered by the spectacle within. On the floor lay Gonsalvo di Vasari--dead; his garments scorched; his face and hands discoloured; his body mangled with a shower of balls; and the shell of the fatal casket at his feet.
CHAPTER IV.

"Then lay us together for ever to rest, For the grave ends all strife, and all sorrow: As the sun, which, at eve, sinks in blood to the west, Rises calm and serene on the morrow!"

Forty years had passed over from the date of these events; and the horrors of the plague of Florence were forgotten. The tale lived in the recollection of a few old people who had escaped the wreck; but their accounts wavered between fiction and reality, and were held as exaggerations among the juniors. Times had changed, and things had changed with them. The ploughshare passed over that ground which had been the site of palaces in the time of the pestilence; and churches stood, and streets, where cemeteries had been glutted with the remains of thousands. Those who listened to the stories of mortality--of five hundred dead in one week, and three hundred in another--counted the numbers as men hear of thousands dead upon a field of battle: they believed the fact, because it was avouched, but scarcely could understand the possibility.

And with the traces of the plague, other wonders of the time had disappeared. The mystery of Lorenzo di Vasari's fate was forgotten. The desperate revenge of the outlaw Arionelli lived only in the songs of the lower classes, or in the legends of those who still exercised his dangerous profession. The Count Arestino had long paid the debt which all men owe. His sins might, or they might not, be forgiven; but he was gone to his reckoning--had briefly, indeed, followed her whom his vengeance had sent thither perhaps too soon. The great crowd who had lived in that earlier day were now departed or departing; they gave up the post of action and existence to those who had been children in their day.

And in the Chateau Arestino now, there was feasting and all delight. It was the autumn again, and the hedges of myrtle on the banks of the Arno gave out their most delicious scent. The roses that hung faint with the noonday's heat, gathered new life in the cool of the twilight, as they drooped their heads to drink of that fresh stream; and the last rays of the sun fell with a mellowed brightness upon the red and yellow leaves of the chestnut tree, or lingered, where the eye paused with less effort, among the dark-green branches of the olive.

And in the halls of the castle, too, there was a sound of music, and of dancing, and of revelry. And gay forms flitted lightly along its lofty corridors, or dashed in mimic pursuit, with the light step and lighter laugh of youth, through its water-side arbours and gardens. And there were gallant forms of cavaliers, their crests nodding brightly in the sun; and fair, transparent, sylph-like figures of females, their flowing drapery catching in the light breeze, and but adorning the form it seemed to hide, sported gaily through hall and bower. That day was the new lord's wedding-day. He had wandered long abroad, unknowing of his rich inheritance. But all since his return was splendour and fitting and decoration. For he had sighed sometimes at the thought of that palace when he had little hope to possess it. And now it would become his favourite seat--he kept his day of bridal there.

And his bride was come, and her fair bridesmaids; and she was welcomed by the grey-haired domestics who hoped to live yet in ease and comfort from her bounty. And all was gaiety and sparkle. There was the light boat plied upon the river, filled with such freight as showed as though the nymphs fabled to
dwell in ocean's depths had risen to glide upon its surface. And the speckled trout checked at the long
line, or snapped the brittle wand, while shouts of triumph or of laughter--equally gay--hailed his
appearance above water or his escape.

And in the midst of all this tumult, the bride and her attendants, with girlish curiosity, wandered
through the rich saloons, and even through every chamber in the castle. The pictures--the china--the
statues--nothing was spared from their curious view. "And what was this? and whence came that? This
painting, was it from Venice or from Rome? That armour, was it of the French or of the Danish
workmanship? Those jewels too--and those rich plumes, now of past fashion, that filled the
Garde-robe--whose had they been? from what great ancestor of Theodore's had they descended?"

The attentive governante's answer was always ready. She had the knowledge and the memory fitting to
her station. The china was from one illustrious house--the statues, in succession, from another--the
armour had belonged to the first or to the third Lord of Arestino, famous for his conduct in the wars of
Charlemagne, against the Saracens or elsewhere. But the jewels and plumes had been the property of
the Lady Angiolina Arestino, the wife of the last Count Ubaldi, and one of the handsomest women of
her time; "Who died," said the ancient governante, "on this very day forty-four years, even on the very
night of the Vigil of St Luke; and on the same night that the young Chevalier di Vasari, whom
some--Heaven pardon them!--accounted her lover, was basely murdered. How my lady met her death,
some doubted, for the Lord Arestino was of an unforgiving temper, and severe! But it was a strange
business, at least for the Chevalier and his attendant, who disappeared on that night, and no traces were
ever heard of them more!"

"But the Chevalier's body was found, was it not, good Beatrice?" said a fair Florentine girl; "I am sure I
have heard that it was; and that he was one of the noblest cavaliers of his time. And that is a beautiful
bust--if it was like him--which stands in the Church of St Marco, on the tomb erected to his memory!"

"His body was found, with your ladyship's leave, three months after he was missing; but never the
persons by whom he met his death. And up to this time, the servant who waited on him, and who I
always thought had a share in his murder, has never been heard of. Some say that there were signs of
his escape to France, and that his master's famous black horse, Bayard, was many years afterwards
recognised in the capital of that country. I do not know how that was; but I just recollect the finding of
the Chevalier Lorenzo's body, poor gentleman! He was found dead in a ravine, scarce four miles from
the city; stripped of everything--naked--no doubt by those who had robbed and murdered him; and
would never have been recognised but for his sword, which was found beside him, lying broken within
a few yards of the spot where he fell!"

"But the Count Ubaldi----, my Lord Theodore's ancestor--he died, too, early--did he not?" said the fair
Lady Amina.

"He did, by your ladyship's pleasure--alas! he did--soon after his lady; and her death was sudden--it was
said that she was poisoned. It was all in the dreadful time of the plague, before the eldest of you, fair
signoras--before your mothers almost, I might say--were born. Poor lady! it was in this very chamber,
this chamber we now stand in, that she died."

"Good Heaven!" said the Lady Amina, "in this chamber? Surely this was not the Countess Angiolina's bed on which I am leaning?"

"Not the bed, your ladyship," said Beatrice, "but all the other furniture of the room is exactly the same. These are the pictures which used to hang in it; and the marble busts; and those fine flower-vases, of which my lady was so fond. This cabinet contained her jewels, and many of them remain still. Some of the diamonds his lordship, the count, presented to the nuns of St Agnes la Fontagna. But the turquoises are here, that my lady wore mightily, for they became her complexion. And the pearls, too; but they are spoiled, quite black with age and want of wearing! That robe-chest, too--I pray your ladyship's pardon for the dust upon it--this house has been unused and empty so long--and servants will neglect where one is not always--that chest was her ladyship's, and I daresay contains choice fineries, for it stood always in her chamber, and has never been opened since she died."

This last fact seemed more extraordinary than any of the wonders which had preceded it. "Has it really never been opened!" said the young Lady Olympia. "But what a pity that such beautiful ornaments should have been left to decay!"

"Never opened, may it please your ladyship; nor could it, but by violence," returned the governante. "For it is a Spanish piece of work, and was sold to my lady by a foreign merchant, who told the secret of opening it only to her. It opens, your ladyship sees, with some spring--Heaven knows where! but there is neither lock nor bolt. Nobody could open it ever but my lady; and I am sure, since I lived in this house, I have tried a hundred times."

There could scarcely fail, in such an assembly, to be some desire as strong as the governante's to see the fair Countess's hidden treasure; but the having to open the chest by force was a difficulty too formidable rather to surmount. To have performed such a feat (independent of any other objection) would apparently have required strong assistance; and therefore, whatever anxiety curiosity felt, modesty checked its expression; and the gay party proceeded on their rambling review, amidst various strange conjectures as to the manner of Di Vasari's death; or comments upon the conduct of the Count Ubaldi, and the unhappy fate of his fair lady.

But at the close of the evening, when the song rose loudest, and the feast was still enlivening the hall, there were two female forms seen to glide with lighted tapers along the oaken gallery, and enter the light-blue chamber; it was the beautiful bride--the Lady Amina--and her favourite companion, Olympia Montefiore.

The Lady Amina led the way, laughing; but there was a touch of apprehension mingled in her smile. "For Heaven's sake," said she, pausing in the doorway, "let us go back!"

"What folly! what can we have to apprehend!" was the reply.
"But Theodore may have missed us."

"And if he has!--Is it not his wedding-night, and can anything you do displease him? Besides--to-morrow he will cause the chest to be opened himself."

"Then let us wait until to-morrow; and we can then see it."

"Yes! and then everybody will have seen it--and it will not be worth seeing!"

As the beautiful tempter passed her companion, and knelt beside the case, her figure looked like that of Psyche, bending on the couch of Cupid.

"If we should not be able to open it after all!" said the bride, half fearful, half laughing.

"We will--depend on me," said the other, anxious and excited. "I know the secret of these Spanish chests. My father has one--they are common now in Venice--the spring is concealed--but once know the situation of it--as I do--and it is simple."

"But--I tremble all over!"

"Why, what nonsense!"

"But--I'll go away if you don't stop."

"But only think how we shall laugh at Lavinia and Euryanthe! Now--hold the taper. It is but one touch. Now--I have it. There!--do you see?--Now--Amina--now--hold here--help me while I lift the lid----"

* * * * *

Within the chest there lay a skeleton--stretched at its length, and bleached to whiteness. There was a jewel mocked one of the bony fingers; and a corslet of mail enclosed the trunk. And the right hand clutched--as though yet in question--a long and massive dagger. Its handle was of gold embossed; its blade was of the manufacture of Damascus. And on that blade, though rusted here and there, were characters which still appeared distinctly. Their pale brightness flashed as the light of the taper fell upon them; they formed the name--and they told the fortunes--of DI VASARI.

SIGISMUND FATELLO.

BY FREDERICK HARDMAN

[MAGA. DECEMBER 1848.]
CHAPTER I.

THE OPERA.

It was a November night of the year 184-. For a week past the play-bills, upon the convenient but unsightly posts that disfigure the boulevards, had announced for that evening, in conspicuous capitals, the first performance of a new opera by a popular composer. Although the season of winter gaieties had scarcely begun, and country-houses and bathing-places retained a portion of the fashionable population of Paris, yet a string of elegant carriages, more or less coroneted, extended down the Rue Lepelletier, and deposited a distinguished audience at the door of the Academie de Musique. The curtain fell upon the first act; and a triple round of applause, of which a little was attributable to the merits of the opera, and a good deal to the parchment palms of a well-drilled claque, proclaimed the composer's triumph and the opera's success, when two men, entering the house at opposite sides, met near its centre, exchanged a familiar greeting, and seated themselves in contiguous stalls. Both belonged to the class which the lower orders of Parisians figuratively designate as gants jaunes; the said lower orders conscientiously believing primrose gloves to be a covering as inseparable from a dandy's fingers as the natural epidermis. The younger of these two men, the Viscount Arthur de Mellay, was a most unexceptionable specimen of those lions dores who, in modern French society, have replaced the merveilleux, the roues, and raffines of former days. Sleek of face and red of lip, with confident eye and trim mustache, his "getting up" was evidently the result of deep reflection on the part of the most tasteful of tailors and scrupulous of valets. From his varnished boot-heel to the topmost wave of his glossy and luxuriant chevelure, the severest critic of the mode would in vain have sought an imperfection. Born, bred, and polished in the genial atmosphere of the noble faubourg, he was a credit to his club, the admiration of the vulgar, the pet of a circle of exclusive and aristocratic dames, whose approving verdict is fashionable fame. His neighbour in the stalls, some years older than himself, was scarcely less correct in externals, although bearing his leonine honours much more carelessly. Like Arthur, he was a very handsome man, but his pale face and fair mustache contrasted with the florid cheek and dark hair of his companion. The Austrian baron Ernest von Steinfeld had acquired, by long and frequent residences in Paris, rights to Parisian naturalisation. He had first visited the French capital in a diplomatic capacity, and, after abandoning that career, had spent a part of every year there as regularly as any native habitue of the Club Grammont, the Chantilly race-course, and the Bois de Boulogne. Although a German and a baron, he was neither coarse, nor stupid, nor smoky. He did not carry a tobacco-pipe in his pocket, or get muddled at dinner, or spit upon the floor, or participate in any other of the nastinesses common to the majority of his tribe. A nobleman in Austria, he would have been accounted a gentleman, and a highly bred one, in any country in the world. He was of old family, had been much about courts, held a military rank, possessed a castle and fine estate in the Tyrol, mortgaged to the very last zwanziger of their value, was somewhat blase and troubled with the spleen, and considerably in debt, both in Vienna and Paris. He had arrived in the latter capital but a fortnight previously, after nearly a year's absence, had established himself in a small but elegant house in a fashionable quarter, and as he still rode fine horses, dressed and dined well, played high and paid punctually, nobody suspected how near he was to the end of his cash and credit: and that he had sacrificed the last remnant of his disposable property to provide ammunition for another campaign in Paris--a campaign likely to be final, unless a wealthy heiress, a prize in the lottery, or an unexpected
legacy, came in the nick of time to repair his shattered fortunes.

The second act of the opera was over. The applause, again renewed, had again subsided, and the hum of conversation replaced the crash of the noisy orchestra, the warbling of Duprez, and the passionate declamation of Madame Stolz. The house was very full; the boxes were crowded with elegantly dressed women, a few of them really pretty, a good many appearing so by the grace of gas, rouge, and costume. The curtain was no sooner down than de Mellay, compelled by the despotism of the pit to silence during the performance, dashed off at a colloquial canter, scattering, for his companion's benefit, a shower of criticisms, witticisms, and scandal, for which he found abundant subjects amongst his acquaintances in the theatre, and to which the baron listened with the curled lip and faint smile of one for whose palled palate caviare no longer has flavour, scarcely vouchsafing an occasional monosyllable or brief sentence when Arthur's gossip seemed to require reply. His eyes wandered round the house, their vision aided by the double glasses of one of those tremendous opera-telescopes by whose magnifying powers, it is said, the incipient wrinkle and the borrowed tint are infallibly detected, and the very tricot of Taglioni is converted into a cobweb. Presently he touched the arm of Arthur, who had just commenced an animated ocular flirtation with a blue-eyed belle in a stage-box. The baron called his attention to a box on the opposite side of the theatre.

"There is a curious group," he said.

"Oh, yes," replied de Mellay, carelessly, levelling his glass for a moment in the direction pointed out. "The Fatellos." And he resumed his mute correspondence with the dame of the azure eyes.

Steinfeld remained for a short space silent, with the thoughtful puzzled air of a man who suspects he has forgotten something he ought to remember; but his efforts of memory were all in vain, and he again interrupted Arthur's agreeable occupation.

"Whom did you say?" he inquired; indicating, by a glance rather than by a movement, the group that had riveted his attention.

"The Fatellos," replied de Mellay, with a sort of surprise. "But, pshaw! I forget. You were at Venice last carnival, and they have not been twelve months at Paris. You have still to learn the affecting romance of Sigismund and Catalina: how the red knight from Franconie did carry off the Paynim's daughter,--his weapons adapted to the century--bank-notes and bright doubloons, in lieu of couched lance and trenchant blade. Why, when they arrived, all Paris talked of them for three days, and might have talked longer, had not Admiral Joinville brought over from Barbary two uncommonly large baboons, which diverted the public attention. They call them Beauty and the Beast--the Fatellos, I mean, not the baboons."

The persons who had attracted Steinfeld's notice, and elicited this uncomplimentary tirade from the volatile viscount, occupied one of the best boxes in the theatre. In front were two ladies, likely to be the more remarked from the contrast their appearance offered with the Parisian style of beauty. Their jet-black hair, large almond-shaped eyes, and complexion of a rich glowing olive, betrayed their
southern origin. Behind them sat a man of five-and-thirty or forty; a tall, high-shouldered, ungainly figure, with a profusion of reddish hair, and a set of Calmuck features of repulsive ugliness. His face was of an unhealthy paleness, excepting about the nose and cheekbones, which were blotched and heated; and the harsh and obstinate expression of his physiognomy was ill redeemed by the remarkably quick and penetrating glance of his small keen grey eyes.

"Do you mean to say yonder ungainly boor is the husband of one of those two beautiful women, who look as if they had stepped out of a legend of the Alhambra, or of a vintage-piece by Leopold Robert?"

"Certainly--husband of one, brother-in-law of the other. But I will tell you the whole story. Sigismund Fatello is one of those men born with a peculiar genius for money-getting, who, if deposited at the antipodes without a shoe to their foot, or a sou in their pocket, would end by becoming millionnaires. Although little heard of in good society till a year ago, he has long been well known on the Bourse, and in foreign capitals, as a bold financier and successful speculator. Two years ago he had occasion to go to the south of Spain, to visit mines offered by the Spanish government as security for the loan of two or three of his millions. Amongst other places he visited Seville, and was there introduced to Don Geronimo Gomez Garcia Gonfalon (and a dozen other names besides), a queer old hidalgo, descended from Boabdil of the Bloody Crescent, or some such Moorish potentate. The don dwelt in the shadow of the Giralda, and possessed two daughters reputed fair;--you see them there--judge for yourself. With one of these Fatello fell desperately in love, and asked her in marriage. The lady, who had no wish to abandon her native land for the society of so ugly and unpleasant a helpmate, demurred. But the suitor was urgent and the papa peremptory. Old Boabdil had an immense opinion of Fatello, was dazzled by his wealth and financial reputation, and insisted on his daughter's marrying him, vowing that he himself was poor as a poet, and that if she refused she should go to a nunnery. After the usual amount of tears, threats, and promises, the marriage took place. The descendant of the Saracen made an excellent bargain for his child. Fatello, infatuated by his passion, would have agreed to any conditions, and made immense settlements on the beautiful Catalina. His father-in-law, like an old semi-African hunks as he was, pleaded poverty, hard times, forced contributions, and so forth, as excuses for giving his daughter no other portion than a few rather remarkable diamonds, and some antiquated plate dating from the kings of Granada, and better suited for a Moorish museum than a Christian sideboard. Fatello, whose dealings with the Spanish government had given him no very exalted idea of the opulence of Spanish subjects, cared not for the old boy's maravedis, and credited his plea of poverty. A few weeks afterwards, Fatello and his wife being still in Seville, Boabdil retired for his usual siesta; but not reappearing at the usual hour, a servant went to awaken him, and found him purple with apoplexy. The unfortunate Saracen never spoke again. The next day he was buried (they lose no time in those warm latitudes); and behold, when the will was opened, he had left upwards of three millions of reals to his disconsolate daughters--about four hundred thousand francs to each of them. When the decencies had been observed in the way of mourning, and Fatello had finished his affairs, he brought his wife and her sister to Paris, took a magnificent hotel in the Faubourg St Honore, and gave Lucullian dinners, and entertainments such as are read of in the Arabian Nights, but rarely seen in the nineteenth century."

"And were his fetes well attended?"
"Not quite immediately. At first everybody asked who this M. Fatello was, and nobody could tell. All sorts of queer stories were got up about him. Some said he was a Polish Jew, formerly well known in Prague, and who had commenced his fortune by attending horse-fairs. Others--misled by his name, which has an odd Italian sound--swore he was a Lombard, continuing the financial and speculative traditions of his race. He himself claims to be of a good Alsatian family; and I believe the truth is, that his father was a small proprietor in a northern department, who sent his son to Paris, as a boy, to seek his fortune, which, by virtue of industry and arithmetic, he has been lucky enough to find. But people got tired of asking who, and changed the interrogation to what. This was much more easily answered--'The signature of Sigismund Fatello is worth millions upon every Exchange in Europe,' was the prompt reply. You know our good Parisians, or rather, you know the world in general. If John Law or Dr Faustus returned upon earth, with wealth proceeding from the devil or a swindle, and gave banquets and balls, their rooms would not long be empty. No more were those of Fatello, against whom, however, nothing improper was ever substantiated, except a want of ancestors,—a venial offence, in these days, to be charged against a millionaire! With a citizen king, and Jews in the chamber, or upon argent is the truest blazonry, my word for it."

"By their assistance, then, he has got into good society?" said Steinfeld.

"Into almost the best. He has not made much progress beyond the Seine; but on this side the water he is everywhere in good odour. They make much of him at the Tuileries and in diplomatic circles; and in the Chaussee d'Antin, amongst the aristocracy of finance, his money gives him right to a high place. And if he plays the Amphitryon this winter in the style he did the last, there is no saying whether some of our stiff-necked countesses of the vieille roche may not relent, and honour his halls with their transcendental presence. His entertainments of all kinds are quite superlative; and if he be a plebeian and a brute, his wife and sister, on the other hand, are graceful as gazelles, and date from the Deluge. He is an ugly-looking monster, certainly," added the handsome viscount; "but fortune has atoned for nature's stinginess. A man may forget his resemblance to a chimpanzee when he has millions in his strong-box, one of the finest houses, and best filled stables, and prettiest wives in Paris,—when he possesses strength and health, and has every prospect of living long to enjoy the goods the gods have showered upon him."

"Wrong in the last particular,—quite wrong, my dear viscount," said a bland and unctuous voice behind de Mellay. The young men turned and found themselves face to face with a comely middle-aged personage, whose smug costume of professional black was relieved by a red ribbon in the button-hole, and who, gliding into the stall in their rear, whilst they were engrossed with their conversation, had overheard its latter sentences.

"Ha! doctor," exclaimed the viscount, "you here, and eavesdropping! How am I wrong, most sapient and debonair of Galens?"

Dr Pilori was a physician in high practice, and of a class not uncommon in Paris,—at once a man of pleasure and a votary of science. With a fair share of talent and an inordinate one of self-conceit, he had pushed himself forward in his profession, applying himself, in conformity with the Parisian rage for
specialités, particularly to one class of complaint. The lungs were the organ he had taken under his special protection: his word was law in all cases of pulmonary disease. He was physician to an hospital, member of the Legion of Honour, and of innumerable learned societies; his portrait graced the shop-windows of medical booksellers, whilst his works, on maladies of the lungs, occupied a prominent place on their shelves. His patients were numerous and his fees large. So far the man of science. The man of pleasure occupied a gorgeous apartment in the vicinity of the Madeleine; gave smart and frequent soirees (as one means of increasing his connection), where singers of the first water gave their notes in payment of his advice. He was frequently at the opera,—occasionally at the Cafe de Paris,—lived on bad terms with his wife, and on good ones with a ballet-dancer, and was in request as an attendant at duels amongst the young dandies of the clubs, with most of whom he was on a footing of familiarity amounting almost to intimacy.

"How am I wrong, doctor?" repeated de Mellay.

"In your prediction of Fatello's longevity. Of course it is of him you speak?"

"Of no other. What ails him?"

"He is dying of consumption," gravely replied Pilori.

The viscount laughed incredulously, and even Steinfeld could not restrain a smile, so little appearance was there of a consumptive habit in the robust frame, and coarse, rough physiognomy of the financier.

"Laugh if you please, young gentlemen," said the doctor. "It is no laughing matter for Monsieur Fatello, I can tell you. His life is not worth a year's purchase."

"You have been prescribing for him then, doctor?" said Arthur, maliciously.

"I have," said the physician, suffering the hit to pass unnoticed. "No longer ago than yesterday he consulted me for a trifling indisposition, and, in studying his idiosyncrasy, I detected the graver disease. What do you think he called me in for? I ought not to tell these things, but the joke is too good to keep. He was annoyed about the blotches on his face—anxious for a clear complexion. In what strange places vanity finds a corner! Poor fellow! he little thinks how soon the worms will be at work upon his cuticle."

"You did not tell him, then?" said de Mellay, still doubtful of the doctor's sincerity, and with a sort of shudder at his dissecting-room style.

"What was the use? The seeds of decay are too deeply set to be eradicated by the resources of art. Although to a non-medical eye he presents little appearance of pulmonary derangement, the malady has already taken firm hold. Probably it is hereditary. It advances slowly but surely, and will not be turned aside. The forms of that terrible disease are many and various, from the pulmonia fulminante of Spain, and the galloping consumption of our island neighbours, to those more tedious varieties whose ravages
extend over years, to kill as surely at last. But I do not tell you that I shall not inform M. Fatello of his condition. It is our duty to strive to the last, even when we have no hope but in a miracle. I shall see him to-morrow and break the matter to him."

"And send him to Italy or Madeira, I suppose," said Steinfeld, with an appearance of greater interest than he had previously taken in the conversation.

"What for? As well let him die in Paris, where he will at least have all the alleviations the resources of art and high civilisation can afford. But enough of the subject. And you, young gentlemen, say nothing of what I have told you, or you will damage my reputation for discretion."

The rise of the curtain put a period to the conversation, and, before the act was over, a box-keeper delivered a letter to Dr Pilori, who, after reading it, rose with a certain air of importance and solicitude, and hurried out of the theatre,—his sortie provoking a smile amongst some of the habitual frequenters of the stalls, who were accustomed to see this manoeuvre repeated with a frequency that gave it the air of an advertisement. The opera over, Steinfeld and de Mellay left the house together, and, whilst driving along the boulevard, the sentence of death pronounced so positively by Pilori upon Fatello was the subject of their conversation. The viscount was incredulous, took it for a hoax, and would have amused the club by its repetition, and by a burlesque of Pilori's dogmatical and pompous tone, had not Steinfeld urged him to be silent on the subject, lest he should injure the indiscreet physician. Arthur promised to say nothing about it, and soon forgot the whole affair in the excitement of a bouillotte-table. Steinfeld, equally reserved, neither forgot the doctor's prophecy, nor doubted the conviction that dictated it. De Mellay's gossip about the Fatellos had doubtless excited his curiosity, and given him a wish to know them; for, two days afterwards, his elegant coupe drove into the court of their hotel, and a dandified secretary of legation presented, in due form, the Baron Ernest von Steinfeld to the wealthy financier and his handsome wife and sister.
CHAPTER II.

THE MASQUERADE.

Three months had elapsed, and Paris was in full carnival. Since the beginning of the year the town had been kept in a state of unusual excitement by the anticipation of a ball, for which the rich and fashionable Countess de M---- had issued invitations to her immense circle of friends and acquaintances. The position of the countess—who, herself the daughter of an illustrious house, and reckoning amongst her ancestors and their alliances more than one sovereign prince and constable of France, had married a man enriched and ennobled by Napoleon—gave her peculiar facilities for collecting around her all that was distinguished and fashionable in Paris, and for blending the various coteries into which political differences, as much as pride of descent on the one hand, and pride of purse on the other, split the higher circles of Parisian society. Her invitations included stiff-necked Legitimists from the dull but dignified streets of St Germain's faubourg, noble as a La Tremouille or a Montmorency, and still sulking against the monarchy of the 7th August; wealthy parvenus from the Chaussee d'Antin, military nobles of imperial fabrication, Russian princes, English lords, Spanish grandees, diplomatists by the dozen, and a prince or two of the reigning family. Under ordinary circumstances, Madame de M---- might have hesitated to bring together so heterogeneous an assemblage—to have mingled in the same saloons all these conflicting vanities, opinions, and prejudices; but the character of her entertainment removed the inconveniences of such confrontation. It was no ordinary ball or commonplace rout of which the palatial mansion of the countess was upon this occasion to be the scene. She had conceived the bold idea of resuscitating, upon a large scale, an amusement which, in Paris, has long since degenerated into vulgar license and drunken saturnalia. Her entertainment was to be a masquerade, to which no one was to come with uncovered face or in ordinary costume. A mask and a disguise were as essential to obtain entrance, as was the ticket of admission sent to each individual invited, and which was to be delivered up at the door, accompanied by the holder's engraved visiting-card. This precaution was to guard against the recurrence of an unpleasant incident that had occurred two years previously at a minor entertainment of similar character, when two ingenious professors of legerdemain, better known to the police than to the master of the house, found their way into the ball-room under the convenient covering of dominoes, and departed, before their presence was discovered, carrying with them a varied assortment of watches, purses, and jewellery.

The night of the much-talked-of fete had arrived; the tailors, milliners, and embroiderers, who for a month past had slaved in the service of the invited, had brought home the results of their labours: the fashionable hair-dressers had had a hard day's work—some hundreds of wreaths and nosegays, which in June would have been beautiful, and in January seemed miraculous, and whose aggregate cost was a comfortable year's income, had been composed by the tasteful fingers of the Parisian flower-girls. The hour was at hand, and many a fair bosom palpitated with pleasurable anticipations. The hotel of the rich Fatello, as the successful speculator was usually called, had its share of the bustle of preparation; but at last knotty questions of costume were satisfactorily settled, and the ladies committed themselves to the hands of their tirewomen. In his library sat Sigismund Fatello, opening a pile of notes and letters that had accumulated there since afternoon. Some he read and put carefully aside; to others he scarcely vouchsafed a glance; whilst a third class were placed apart for perusal at greater leisure. At last he
opened one by whose contents he was strangely moved, for, on reading them, he started and turned pale, as if stung by an adder. Passing his hand over his eyes, as though to clear his vision, he stood up and placed the paper in the very strongest glare of the powerful Carcel lamp illuminating the room. A second time he read, and his agitation visibly increased. Its cause was a small note, containing but four lines, written in a feigned hand. It was an anonymous letter, striking him in his most vulnerable point. Again and again he perused it, striving to recognise the handwriting, or conjecture the author. All his efforts were in vain. Once, inspired by his good genius, he crushed the treacherous paper in his hand, and approached the fireplace to destroy it in the flames. But as he drew near the logs that glowed and crackled on the hearth, his pace became slower and slower, until he finally stood still, smoothed the crumpled paper, and once more devoured its contents. Then he walked several times up and down the apartment with a hurried step. The three months that had elapsed since Arthur de Mellay and Baron Steinfeld had met in the stalls in the opera, had not passed over the head of Fatello without producing a certain change in his appearance. He was thinner and paler, his eyes were more sunken, and a dark line was pencilled beneath them. The change, however, was not such as an indifferent person would notice; it might proceed from many causes--from mental labour, uneasiness, or grief, as well as from bodily disease--the idea of which latter was unlikely to enter the head of a careless observer of his massive frame and features, and of the general appearance of great muscular strength, still remarkable in the ill-favoured financier. Now, however, he was unusually pale and haggard. The letter he still held in his hand had worked upon him like a malevolent charm, hollowing his cheek and wrinkling his brow. For nearly half an hour he continued his monotonous walk, alternately slackening and accelerating his pace. At times he would come to a momentary halt, with the absent air of one absorbed in working out a puzzling problem. At last he opened a secretaire, touched a spring which made a secret drawer fly open, placed in this drawer the letter that had so greatly disturbed him, closed the desk, and, lighting a taper, took the direction of his wife's sitting-room, in the opposite wing of the hotel.

Madame Fatello and Mademoiselle Sebastiana Gonfalon were equipped for the ball and in readiness to depart. Between the two sisters, in whose ages there was a difference of two years, so strong a resemblance existed that they frequently were taken for twins. Exactly of the same stature, they had the same large dark eyes, abundant hair, and brown tint of skin, and the same mouth, not very small, but beautiful in form, and adorned with teeth of dazzling whiteness. Both had the grace and fascination for which their countrywomen are renowned. The chief difference between them was in expression. Catalina was the more serious of the two: her gravity sometimes verged upon sullenness, and this was especially observable since she had been compelled to a marriage repugnant to her feelings, but which she had lacked energy and courage to resist. Her father would have found it a far less easy task to force Sebastiana to a union opposed to her inclinations. As high-spirited as her sister was irresolute, Mademoiselle Gonfalon was one of those persons whose obstinacy is increased by every attempt at coercion. Laughing and lively amidst all her gay coquetries, there still was a decision in her classically moulded chin and slightly compressed lip, and a something clandestine but resolute in her eye, which a physiognomist would have interpreted as denoting a degree of intelligence and a passionate strength of character denied by nature to her feebler sister. Upon this evening, however, it might have been thought the two young women had exchanged characters. Sebastiana, in general all smiles and sprightliness, was thoughtful and preoccupied, almost anxious; whilst the listless and melancholy Catalina had an unusual appearance of gaiety and animation. Her cheek was flushed, her eyes were brilliant, and she
looked repeatedly at a jewelled bijou-watch, as though she would fain have advanced the hour at which she could with propriety make her entrance into Madame de M----'s saloons.

The door opened and Fatello came in. By a powerful exertion of that self-command which he possessed in no ordinary degree, he had banished from his countenance nearly every trace of recent agitation. He was perhaps a shade paler than usual, but his brow was unclouded, and his uncouth countenance was lighted up by the most agreeable smile it could assume.

"So, ladies," he said, with a liveliness that sat but clumsily upon him, "you are armed for conquest. Accept my compliments on the excellent taste of your costumes. They are really charming. If you are detected, it will hardly be by your dress. Those loose robes and that convenient cowl are the best possible disguises."

"All the better!" cried Sebastiana. "Nothing like the dear black domino, under which you can be impertinent as you like, with scarce a possibility of discovery. There will be fifty such dresses as ours in the room."

"No doubt of it," replied her brother-in-law, thoughtfully. And his piercing green-grey eye scanned the dominoes that shrouded the graceful figures of his wife and her sister. They were of plain black satin; but the art of the maker had contrived to impart elegance to the costume which, of all others, generally possesses it the least. The two dresses were exactly alike, except that Catalina's was tied at the wrists with lilac ribbons, whilst nothing broke the uniform blackness of her sister's garb. Black gloves and masks, and two bouquets of choice exotics, the masterpieces of the celebrated bouquetiere of the Madeleine boulevard, completed the ladies' equipment.

"I am sorry," said Fatello, "to deny myself the pleasure of accompanying you to the Countess's fete, but I am behindhand with my correspondence, and have received important letters, which I must answer by the morning's post. My night, a part of it at least, will be passed at the desk instead of in the ball-room."

There was nothing in this announcement to excite surprise; the tone and manner in which it was made were perfectly natural; but, nevertheless, Sebastiana Gonfalon darted a keen quick glance at her brother-in-law, as though seeking in his words a double meaning or disguised purpose. Madame Fatello showed neither surprise nor disappointment, but, approaching a table, she took from a costly basket of gold filagree, overflowing with cards and invitations, an envelope containing three tickets for the masquerade. Selecting two of them, she threw the third into the basket, and again looked at her watch. At that moment the door opened, and her carriage was announced.

"Come, Sebastiana," said Madame Fatello, impatiently. "Good-night, M. Fatello." And, with a slight bow to her husband, she passed into the anteroom.

"Good-night, Sigismund," said Sebastiana. "Change your mind and follow us."

"Impossible," said Fatello, with the same smiling countenance as before.
Sebastiana followed her sister. Fatello lingered a few moments in the drawing-room, and then returned to his study. As he entered it, he heard the roll of the carriage-wheels driving out of the court.

The masquerade given by the Countess de M---- was that kind of magnificent and extraordinary entertainment which forms the event of the year in which it occurs; which is long held up as a pattern to gala-givers, and as marking a red-letter epoch in the annals of fashion and pleasure. Nothing was spared to make it in all respects perfect. An entire floor of the Countess's vast mansion had been cleared, for the occasion, of all superfluous furniture; three splendid saloons were appropriated to dancing: two others, equally spacious, to refreshments. In these, the appetites of the guests had been richly catered for. One was the coffee-house, the other the restaurant. In the former, on a multitude of small marble tables, a regiment of attentive waiters served ices and sherbets, wine and chocolate, coffee and liqueurs. In the latter, tables were laid for supper, and upon each of them lay a printed bill of fare, where the hungry made their selection from a list of the most delicate dishes, whose appearance followed the order with a celerity that would have done honour to the best-appointed hotel in Paris. A long, wide gallery, and some smaller rooms, were used as a promenade, where the company freely circulated. In a music-hall, a strong party of professional singers kept up an unceasing concert for the entertainment of all comers; and in a chamber fitted up as a tent, an Italian juggler, with peaked beard, and in antique costume of black velvet, performed tricks of extraordinary novelty and ingenuity. Every part and corner of this magnificent suite of apartments was lighted a giorno, draped with coloured silks and muslins, and enlivened by a profusion of tall mirrors, multiplying tenfold the fantastical figures of the maskers and the flame of the countless bougies. Many hundreds of porcelain vases, containing the choicest plants forced prematurely into flower, and all remarkable for brilliancy of colour or fragrance of perfume, lined the broad corridors and the recesses of the windows, which latter were further filled by admirably executed transparencies, forming a series of views from the Italian lakes. The whole resembled a scene from fairyland, or an enchanted palace, raised by the wand of some benevolent gnome for the delectation of the sons and daughters of mortality. If the entertainment was of unparalleled magnificence, the appearance of the guests did it no discredit. Tasteful and ingeniously devised costumes crowded the apartments; history and romance had been ransacked for characters; the most costly materials had been lavishly employed in the composition of dresses for that one night's diversion. All was glitter of jewels, wave of plumes, and rustle of rich brocades. In diamonds alone an emperor's ransom was displayed; and more than one fair masker bore upon her neck and arms, and graceful head, the annual revenue of half-a-dozen German princes.

As Sebastiana had predicted, there was a considerable sprinkling of dominoes amongst the motley throng; and as usual, of those who had selected that dress, more favourable to concealment and intrigue than to display of personal graces or costly ornaments, at least one-half had preferred black to any other colour. These latter seemed the subject of the particular attention of one of their number, who, soon after twelve o'clock, made his appearance in the ball-room. Impatience to share in the much-talked-of fete had rendered the invited punctual; by that hour nearly all had arrived, and in such numbers that the rooms, though so large and numerous, were crowded at least as much as was convenient and consistent with circulation. Hence the black domino was frequently impeded in the rapid movements he commenced whenever one of his own species--that is to say, a domino of the same colour--caught his eye, movements which had for their object to meet or overtake the person of garb similar to his own.
On such occasions, so great was his impatience, that in a public ball-room he would surely have incurred a quarrel by the somewhat too vigorous use he made of his elbows. But Madame de M----‘s well-bred guests merely shrugged their shoulders, and wondered who the *manant* could be who thus imported into their elite society the unceremonious usages of an opera-house masquerade. The black domino heeded not their mute wonderment, nor cared for the unfavourable impression he might leave upon the ribs and the minds of those he jostled. He was evidently looking for somebody, and however discouraging the task of seeking one particular black domino in a crowded masquerade, where there were two or three score of them, he persevered, in spite of repeated disappointments. At last it seemed as if success had rewarded his constancy. With the suddenness and certainty of a well-broken pointer, he came to a dead stop at sight of a black satin domino leaning on the arm of an elegant Hungarian hussar. To the steps of this couple he thenceforward attached himself. Whithersoever they went he followed, keeping at sufficient distance to prevent their noticing his pursuit; regulating his pace by theirs, but occasionally accelerating it so as to pass them, and lingering for a second when close at their side, as if trying to distinguish the tones of their voices, or to catch a few words of their discourse. Whilst thus engaged, he did not observe that he had himself become an object of attention to a third black domino, who, previously to him, had been dogging, but at greater distance, and with still more precaution than he observed, the steps of the hussar and his companion. The curiosity and caution of domino No. 3 appeared to receive fresh stimulus from the apparition of a rival observer, over whose movements he kept careful watch, but from afar, and concealed as much as possible amongst the crowd, somewhat after the fashion in which the Red Indian observes, from his shelter amidst the trees of the forest, the movements of the hunter, who himself watches from an ambush the course of a herd of deer.

The only portion of the apartments thrown open to the maskers that was not rendered light as day by a profusion of wax candles, was a vast conservatory, the entrance to which was through two large French windows, opening out of one of the dancing-rooms. Paved with a mosaic of divers coloured marbles and fanciful device, it contained a choice collection of exotics and evergreens, of such remarkable size and beauty that the topmost leaves of many of them rustled against the elevated glass roof. These trees and shrubs were so arranged as to form a sort of miniature labyrinth, upon whose paths a mild light was thrown by lamps of coloured glass suspended to the branches. This illumination, although ample to guide the steps of the promenaders between the verdant and flowering hedges, seemed but a twilight, from its contrast with the broad glare of the adjoining apartments. The change from a strong to a subdued light had been purposely contrived by the judicious arrangers of the fete, as a relief for eyes wearied by the brilliancy of the ball-room. As yet, however, few persons seemed eager for the transition, and the conservatory was little resorted to except at the close of a dance, when its comparatively fresh atmosphere was gladly sought.

Quadrilles had just commenced in all the dancing-rooms, when the Hungarian hussar and his domino, making their way slowly and with some difficulty in rear of the dancers, took refuge in the conservatory from the din of music and pressure of the crowd. They were evidently so absorbed in their conversation, so much alone in the midst of the multitude, that their eternal pursuer ventured unusually near to them, and was close at their heels when they passed through the glass door. Then, instead of continuing to follow them, he struck into another path, which ran nearly parallel to the one they took.
On reaching a circle of beautiful arbutus, whose white bells and bright strawberries gleamed like pearls and blood-drops in the light of the purple lamps that hung amongst them, the hussar and his companion paused beside a porphyry basin, supported by a sculptured pedestal of the same material. For a few moments they stood silent, gazing at the gold-fish that swam their monotonous circle in the basin; and at the little fountain that spouted up in its centre. Then, leaning upon the edge of the vase, they resumed their conversation in tones less guarded than before, for here they might almost consider themselves alone--the few groups and couples sauntering in the conservatory being too much engrossed in their own discourse to heed that of others. The Hungarian removed his mask, still, however, holding it ready to apply to his face in case of intrusion; whilst the domino contented herself with raising the silken beard of hers, to allow the musical tones proceeding from a pair of rosy and youthful lips to fall more clearly upon her companion's ear. Thus they continued a conversation apparently of deep interest to both, and which they suspended only when some passing party of masks lingered for an instant beside the fountain, until the end of the quadrille brought a throng of dancers into the conservatory. Then they left the place, and sauntered back into the ball-room.

Meanwhile the third domino watched the conservatory doors with a lynx-eyed vigilance worthy a pupil of the celebrated Vidocq. Although the loose black dress might have covered either a short man or a woman of the middle stature, the delicacy of the gloved fingers, and of the tiny foot that peeped from below its border, left little doubt as to the sex of its wearer. From a convenient position on the steps leading up to an orchestra, the fringe of her mask confined by her hand, so as to prohibit even a glimpse of her ivory chin, she subjected to a rigid scrutiny all who issued from the conservatory. Suddenly, from the door nearest to her, the hussar and his companion made their appearance, and, as they passed, she shrouded herself behind the portly figure and sumptuous embroideries of a Venetian doge. Then she resumed her watch, and a minute had not elapsed when she saw the tall black domino, whom she had observed during the evening, re-enter the dancing-room and make his way as fast as the crowd would allow him to the nearest door of exit, with a hurried and irregular step, hardly to be explained otherwise than by sudden illness or violent emotion. She followed him to the head of the staircase, down which he rushed, disappearing at its foot through the crowd of lackeys in the hall. Having seen this, she re-entered the ball-room, sought out the hussar and his companion, and soon afterwards was whirling with the former in the giddy circles of a waltz.

Some hours later, as the Hungarian retired from the ball, almost borne along in the dense stream of masks that now flowed through the rooms, he felt a momentary pressure of his hand. A paper remained in its palm, upon which his fingers mechanically closed. Amidst the ever-moving throng it was impossible to detect the person from whom he had received it. By this time a large portion of the company, oppressed by the heat, had unmasked, but he knew none of the faces he saw around him, whilst of those who had preserved their vizards he could fix on none as object of suspicion. So soon as he could extricate himself from the crowd, he unfolded the paper. It contained the following mysterious words, hastily scrawled with a pencil:--

"One whom you think asleep wakes and watches. He is here; has followed and overheard you, and will seek revenge. Be prepared. Proof is difficult: denial may be safety. Adopt it at all risks. Masked, the sisters are undistinguishable. Credit this warning from a sincere friend."
Thrice the Hungarian perused this mysterious billet; and then, thrusting it into the breast of his richly braided jacket, slowly left the house.
CHAPTER III.

THE ACCUSATION.

The house selected by Baron Ernest von Steinfeld, wherein to pass what might possibly be his last season in Paris, was situated in the Rue St Lazare. It was one of those buildings, of frequent occurrence in modern Parisian architecture, which seem intended to gratify the taste of such persons as prefer the English fashion of occupying an entire house, to the French one of dwelling upon a floor. At the bottom of a paved courtyard, around three sides of which was built a large mansion containing many tenants, stood one of those edifices known in French parlance as pavilions—not that they possess a dome, resemble a tent, or, for the most part, have any of the qualities of a summer-house, but because, in Paris, the term "house" is grudgingly bestowed upon a building of less than five stories and thirty or forty rooms. This pavilion had but three stories and a dozen rooms; it was a particularly complete and independent habitation, standing well back from the body of the house under whose number it was included, and of which, although detached, it was considered to form part; and having two entrances, one through the court, the other from a lane running at right angles with the street. The ground-floor contained, besides a light and commodious vestibule and servants' offices, only one apartment, a handsome dining-room, in which, however, it was impossible, for three quarters of the year, to dine without lamps—the daylight admitted by its one broad window being greatly limited by the walls of a nook of garden, and by the impeding branches of a laburnum and acacia, which mingled their boughs in affectionate union, twin lords of a square yard of grass, and of a fathom's length of flower-bed, and in the spring-time rejoiced the inmates of the pavilion with the odorous rustle of their yellow clusters and rose-coloured blossoms. The first floor contained two pleasant drawing-rooms and a boudoir; the second, bath, bed, and dressing-rooms. The roof, flat and surrounded by a parapet, commanded a view over the adjacent gardens of an extensive bathing establishment and maison de sante, and was no unpleasant resort, on a fine day, for persons desirous to inhale the fresh air, or to scent it with the fumes of Havana's weed. This pavilion, described by the Petites Affiches as fraichement decore—the said decoration consisting in fresh paint and paper, and in a profusion of that cheerful French luxury, large and excellent mirrors—was rented for six months by Baron Steinfeld, who had hired, for the same period, from a fashionable upholsterer—for a sum which would almost have furnished the house permanently in a plainer manner—a complete set of furniture, against whose perfect elegance and good taste not a syllable could be breathed. His establishment was as correct as his residence. It consisted, in the first place, of a French cook, with whose sauces Arthur de Mellay had repeatedly expressed his willingness to eat a fragment of his father; which offer—considering the worthy count had been a guardsman in the time of Louis XVI., and, consequently, was neither young nor tender—was certainly a high testimonial to the merits of sauce and cook. Then came an Italian valet, quite as skilful a personage in his way as the professor of gastronomic science—speaking three or four languages, accumulating in his own individuality the knowledge and acquirements of a legion of hair-dressers, tailors, perfumers, and the like—thoroughly versed in the arcana of the toilet, a secretary in case of need, and a perfect Mercury in matters of intrigue. The third person of Steinfeld's household, the last, and also by much the least—physically speaking, that is to say, but by no means in his own estimation—was one of those miniature tigers (copied from the English, and essential appendages to the establishment of a Paris lion), who look as if they had been subjected to that curious Chinese process by which lofty shrubs and
forest trees are stunted to dimensions that permit the plantation of a grove in a flower-pot--wizen-faced, top-booted abortions, uniting the mischief and the proportions of a monkey, and frightfully precocious in every species of villany. The house also contained, during the day, an old Frenchwoman, of a species indigenous and confined to Paris--the patient butt of the cook's ill-humours and of the groom's pranks, with bearded chin and slipshod feet, and willing for any sort of dirty work, from the scouring of a kettle to the administration of the remedy renowned in French pharmacy.

It was an hour past noon on the day succeeding the Countess of M----'s masquerade, and Steinfeld sat alone at breakfast. It were more correct to say that he sat at the breakfast table; for the savoury meal before him was still untasted, and he seemed in no haste to attack it. In vain the green oysters from Ostend lay invitingly open, and one of Chevet's pies displayed, through a triangular aperture in its crust, the tender tints of an exquisite foie-gras--the result of the martyrdom of some unhappy Strasburg duck; in vain a fragrant steam of truffles oozed from beneath the covers of two silver dishes, fresh from the laboratory of Macedoine the cook, and mingled its odours with the flowery aroma of a bottle of Sauterne, from which Rufini the valet had just extracted the long yellow-sealed cork. Apparently none of these creature-comforts dwelt in the desires of the baron, who sat sideways to the table, his chin resting on his hand, gazing upon vacancy with an intenseness bespeaking deep pre-occupation. One acquainted with Steinfeld's circumstances would have hesitated little in conjecturing the nature of the unpleasant reflections in which he seemed absorbed. They might very well have for motive the unprosperous state of his exchequer, the heavy incumbrances weighing upon the hereditary acres, the approaching decease of that convenient but fickle ally, on whose succour half the world exist, and whose name is Credit. The baron had been anything but a prudent man. Too careless of the future, he had neglected fortune when she offered herself to his embrace; and now she revenged herself by averting her countenance. Of high descent and fair estate, handsome person and fascinating manners, for some years Steinfeld might have aspired to the hand of almost any heiress in Vienna or Paris. Numerous were the matrimonial overtures that had been more or less directly made to him, at a time when, in love with his bachelorhood, and celebrated for his bonnes fortunes, he looked upon the bonds of Hymen as the most oppressive of fetters, intolerable even when sheathed in gold. The match-makers, repulsed without exception, at last renounced all further attempts upon the hand of the handsome Austrian--as Steinfeld was generally called in Paris--and declared him an incorrigible partisan of celibacy. To the unmolested enjoyment of his bachelor bliss the baron was for some years left, until one morning he awoke to the disagreeable consciousness that profuse expenditure had done its work, and that ruin or a rich marriage formed the only alternatives left him. He was fully alive to the difficulties placed in the way of the latter by the change in his circumstances. His ancient name and personal advantages remained, but his fair estate was in the hands of the harpies; and however disposed romantic young ladies might be to overlook this misfortune, prudent papas would deem it a serious stumbling-block. Then it was that, roused by horrid visions of approaching poverty from his usual state of happy insouciance, the baron gathered together the relics of his past opulence, squeezed and exhausted every remaining resource, and, assuming a bold front against bad fortune, returned to Paris with much the feelings of the soldier who screws up all his energies to conquer or to die. It was no apprehension, however, as to the result of this final struggle--no nervous trepidation arising from the imminence of his situation, that now clouded Steinfeld's brow and spoiled his appetite. On the contrary, he deemed victory secure, and beheld himself, in no remote perspective, emerging triumphantly from
his difficulties, even as a snake, casting its shabby skin, reappears in glittering scales of gold. He had
not wasted the three months he had passed in Paris, and was well satisfied with the result of his
exertions. His present uneasiness had a different origin—one similar to the cause by which, some fifteen
hours previously, we saw Sigismund Fatello so deeply moved. The baron turned and twisted in his hand
a letter, to whose contents he again and again recurred, pondering them intently. Like that received by
the banker, the billet was anonymous; like his, it contained but three or four lines; but, despite its
brevity and want of authenticity, it proved, on the part of the writer, whoever that might be, an
acquaintance with the baron’s most important secret, that did not fail greatly to disquiet him. Who had
thus detected what he deemed so surely concealed? He strained his eyes and memory, in vain
endeavouring to recognise the handwriting; and more than once, fancying he had done so, he fetched
notes and letters from a desk in the adjoining boudoir, to compare them with the anonymous epistle.
But the comparison always dissipated his suspicion. Then, taking a pen, and a diminutive sheet of
amber-scented paper, he began a note, but tore the paper after writing only three words, and threw the
fragments impatiently into the fire. Just then the pavilion bell rang loudly; the next minute there was a
knock at the room door, and Celestin the tiger made his appearance, bearing a card inscribed with the
name of M. Sigismund Fatello, and an inquiry whether Monsieur le Baron was at home and visible.

On reading the banker’s name, Steinfeld made a slight and sudden movement, almost amounting to a
start, but, instantly recovering himself, he bade his groom show the visitor upstairs. At the same time he
hastily seated himself, ordered Rufini to take off the covers, poured some wine into a glass, and helped
himself from the first dish that came to hand; so that when Fatello, ushered in by the groom, entered the
apartment, he had all the appearance of one whose whole faculties were concentrated, for the time
being, in the enjoyment of an excellent meal. Rising from his chair, with an air of jovial cordiality, he
hastened to welcome the banker.

"An unexpected pleasure, my dear Fatello," said he. "What favourable chance procures me so early a
visit? You are come to breakfast, I hope. Rufini, a knife and fork for M. Fatello."

"I have breakfasted, M. le Baron," replied Fatello, with a dryness amounting almost to incivility. "If my
call is untimely my business is pressing----and private," he added, with a glance at the Italian, who
stood in respectful immobility behind his master’s chair.

"Leave the room, Rufini," said Steinfeld.

The well-drilled valet bowed in silence, and glided noiselessly from the apartment.

"Now, then, my good friend," said the Austrian, in the same gay off-hand tone as before, "I am all ear
and attention. What is up? Nothing bad, I hope; nothing so serious as to spoil my appetite. I have heard
a proverb condemning discourse between a full man and a hungry one."

Fatello made no immediate reply. There was something very peculiar in his aspect. His lips were pale
and compressed, and his brows slightly knit. He seemed constraining himself to silence until he felt he
could speak calmly on a subject which roused anger and indignation in his breast. Whilst seemingly
engrossed by his breakfast, Steinfeld lost not a look or motion of his visitor's, not a line of his physiognomy, or a glance of his small piercing eye. And the baron, notwithstanding his assumed careless levity of manner, did not feel altogether at his ease.

"You have not turned conspirator, I hope," said he, when Fatello, after a short but awkward pause, still remained silent. "No Henri-quinquist plot, or plan to restore the glorious days of the guillotine and the Goddess of Liberty? No, no; a Croesus of your calibre, my dear Fatello, would not mix in such matters. Your plotters are hungry dogs, with more debts than ducats. Talking of hunger--I am grieved you have breakfasted. This mushroom omelet does honour to Macedoine."

The baron would have talked on--for at that moment any sort of babble seemed to him preferable to silence. But Fatello, who had not heard a word he had said, suddenly rose from his seat, rested his hands upon the table, and leaning forward, with eyes sternly fixed upon Steinfeld, uttered these remarkable words, in tones rendered harsh and grating by the effort that made them calm:

"Monsieur le Baron de Steinfeld, you are courting my wife!"

The most expert physiognomist would have failed to detect upon the countenance of the ex-diplomatist any other expression than one of profound astonishment, tinged by that glow of indignation an innocent man would be likely to feel at an unfounded accusation, abruptly and brutally brought. After sustaining for a few seconds Fatello's fixed and angry gaze, his features relaxed into a slightly contemptuous smile.

"The jest is surely in questionable taste, my dear M. Fatello. And the severity of your countenance might alarm a man with a conscience less clear than mine."

"I jest not, sir, with my honour and happiness," retorted Fatello, with a rude fierceness that brought a flush to the baron's cheek--a flame of anger which the next moment, however, dispelled.

"Then, my dear M. Fatello," said Steinfeld, "since, instead of a bad jest, you mean sober earnest, I can only say you are grossly misinformed, and that your suspicions are as injurious to Madame Fatello, as your manner of expressing them is insulting to myself."

"I have no suspicions," replied Fatello, "but a certainty."

"Impossible!" said the baron. "Name my accuser. He shall account for the base calumny."

"He desires no better," replied Fatello, sternly. "I myself accuse you. No slanderous tongues, but my own ears, are evidence against you. And yourself, sir, shall confess what you now so stubbornly deny. You were at last night's masquerade."

"I was so."
"In hussar uniform--crimson vest and white pelisse."

Steinfeld bowed assent. "The uniform of the regiment to which I formerly belonged."

"A black domino was on your arm."

"Ma foi!" cried the baron, with a laugh that sounded rather forced, "if you demand an account of all the masks I walked and danced with, I shall hardly be able to satisfy you. Dominoes there were, doubtless; and, of all colours, black amongst the rest."

"You equivocate, sir," said Fatello, angrily. "I will aid your memory. The domino I mean was your companion early in the night. The domino I mean danced once with you (a waltz), and afterwards walked with you through the rooms, in deep conversation. The domino I mean stood with you for more than ten minutes beside the fountain in the conservatory. The domino I mean was my wife; and you, Baron Steinfeld, are a villain!"

During this singular conversation Steinfeld had sat, leaning back in his large elbow-chair, in an attitude of easy indifference--one slippered foot thrown carelessly over the other, and his hands thrust into the pockets of his damask dressing-gown. On receiving this last outrageous insult, his lip blanched with passion, his whole person quivered as with an electric shock, and he half rose from his semi-recumbent position. But the baron was a man of vast self-command; one of those cool-headed cool-hearted egotists who rarely act upon impulse, or compromise their interests by ill-timed impetuosity. The first choleric movement, prompting him to throw Fatello downstairs, was checked with wonderful promptitude, and with little appearance of effort. In reality, however, the effort was a violent one. As a soldier at the triangles bites a bullet with the rage of pain, so Steinfeld clenched his hands till the strong sharp nails almost cut into the palm. As he did so, a paper in his pocket rustled against his knuckles. It was the note so mysteriously conveyed to him at the masquerade, and which he had been pondering when Fatello was announced. To one so quick-witted, the mere touch of the paper was as suggestive as a volume of sage counsels. In an instant every sign of annoyance disappeared from his features; he rose quietly from his seat, and with easy dignity and an urbane countenance confronted Fatello, who stood gloomy and lowering before the fire.

"I see, M. Fatello," he said, "that you are bent upon our cutting each other's throats; but, strange as it may seem, after the terms you have employed, I still hope to avert the unpleasant necessity. For one moment moderate your language, and give me time for brief explanation. If I rightly understand you, it is from your own observations you thus accuse me; and I presume you did me the honour of a personal surveillance at last night's ball?"

Fatello, his violence checked for the moment from further outbreak by the baron's courtesy and coolness, made a gesture of sullen assent.

"And that you overheard a part, but not the whole, of my conversation with the black domino in question?"
"I heard enough, and too much," replied Fatello, with a savage scowl at his interlocutor. "This is idle talk, mere gain of time. Baron Steinfeld!" cried the banker, in a voice that again rose high above its usual pitch, "you are----"

"Stop!" interrupted Steinfeld, speaking very quickly, but with an extraordinary and commanding calmness, which again had its effect. "Descend not to invective, M. Fatello. There is always time for violence. Hear reason. You are in error, an error easily explained. I certainly saw Madame Fatello at the ball, saw and spoke with her--patience, sir, and hear me! But the domino, of my conversation with whom you heard a part, was not Madame Fatello, but Mademoiselle Gonfalon. You take little interest in the frivolities of a masquerade, and are possibly unaware that the two ladies' dresses were exactly similar. You can have heard our conversation but imperfectly, or you would not have wronged me by this suspicion."

Whilst uttering these last sentences, Steinfeld redoubled the keenness of the scrutiny with which he regarded the banker's uncomely and agitated physiognomy. But although piquing himself, as a former diplomatist, on skill in reading men's thoughts through their faces, he was unable to decipher the expression of Fatello's countenance on receiving this plausible explanation of the error into which he had been led by the sisters' identity of costume. As he proceeded with it, the banker's lips, slightly parting, gave his face an air of stupefied wonderment, in addition to its previously inflamed and angry aspect. When Steinfeld concluded an explanation uttered with every appearance of sincerity and candour, and in that flexible and affable tone which, when he chose to employ it, imparted to his words a peculiarly seductive and persuasive charm, Fatello's lips were again firmly closed, and curled with a curious and inexplicable smile. This faded away; he struck his left hand against his forehead, and remained for some moments plunged in thought, as if he hastily retraced in his memory what he had heard the night before, to see how it tallied with the explanation just given him. Thus, at least, Steinfeld interpreted his manner; and although the Austrian's countenance preserved its serenity, his heart throbbed violently against his ribs during the banker's brief cogitation. The result of this was evidently satisfactory to Fatello, from whose brow, when his hand again dropped by his side, the lowering cloud had disappeared, replaced by affability and regret.

"I see," he said, with better grace than might have been expected from him, and taking a step towards Steinfeld, "that nothing remains for me but to implore your pardon, baron, for my unwarrantable suspicions, and for the harsh and unbecoming expressions into which they betrayed me. Jealousy is an evil counsellor, and blinds to the simplest truths. I scarce dare hope you will forgive my intemperate conduct, without exacting the hostile meeting for which I was just now as eager as I at present am to avoid it. If you insist I must not refuse, but I give you my word that if I have a duel with you to-day, nothing shall induce me to depart from the defensive."

"I should be unreasonable," replied Steinfeld, graciously, "if I exacted ampler satisfaction than this handsome apology, for what, after all, was no unnatural misconception. Ten years ago I might have been more punctilious, but after three or four encounters of the kind, a duel avoided, when its real motive is removed, is a credit to a man's good sense, and no slur upon his courage."
"No one will ever attack yours, my dear baron," said Fatello. "I only hope you will always keep what has passed between us this morning as profound a secret as I, for my own sake, certainly shall do. I am by no means disposed to boast of my part in the affair."

Steinfeld bowed politely, and the two men exchanged, with smiles upon their faces, a cordial grasp of the hand.

"Out of evil cometh good," said the banker, sententiously, subsiding upon the silken cushions of a causeuse that extended its arms invitingly at the chimney-corner. "I am delighted to find that the leaden bullet I anticipated exchanging with you is likely to be converted into a golden ring, establishing so near a connection between us as to render our fighting a duel one of the least probable things in the world. My dear baron, I shall rejoice to call you brother-in-law."

"It would be a great honour for me," replied Steinfeld, "but you overrate the probability of my enjoying it. Nothing has passed between Mademoiselle Gonfalon and myself to warrant my reckoning on her preference."

"Tush, tush! baron," said Fatello, apparently not heeding, or not noticing the somewhat supercilious turn of Steinfeld's phrases, "you forget the new and not very creditable occupation to which the demons of jealousy and suspicion last night condemned me. You forget that I tracked you in the promenade, and lay in ambush by the fountain, or you would hardly put me off with such tales as these."

The baron winced imperceptibly on being thus reminded how closely his movements had been watched.

"You are evidently new at the profession of a scout," said he, jestingly, "or you would have caught more correctly my conversation with your amiable sister-in-law. Mademoiselle Gonfalon is a charming person; the mask gives a certain license to flirtation, and a partial hearing of what passed between us has evidently misled you as to its precise import."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Fatello, with an odd laugh--"I heard better than you think, I assure you; and what I did hear quite satisfied me that you are a smitten man, and that Sebastiana is well disposed to favour your suit."

"I must again protest," said Steinfeld, expressing himself with some embarrassment, "that the thought of becoming Mademoiselle Gonfalon's husband, great as the honour would be, has never yet been seriously entertained by me; and that, however you may have been misled by the snatches of our conversation you overheard, nothing ever passed between us exceeding the limits of allowable flirtation--the not unnatural consequence of Mademoiselle Sebastiana's fascinating vivacity, and of the agreeable footing of intimacy on which, for the last three months, I have found admittance at your hospitable house."
Sigismund Fatello preserved, whilst the baron waded through the intricacies of his artificial and complicated denial, a half-smile of polite but total incredulity.

"My dear baron," said he gravely, when Steinfeld at last paused, "I am sure you are too honourable a man to trifle with the affections of any woman. I know you as the very opposite character to those heartless and despicable male coquets, who ensnare susceptible hearts for the cruel pleasure of bruising or breaking them, and sacrificing, in their vile egotism, the happiness of others to the indulgence of a paltry vanity. I detect the motives of your present reserve, and, believe me, I appreciate their delicacy. Rumour, that eternal and impertinent gossip, has asserted that Baron Ernest von Steinfeld has impaired, by his open hand and pursuit of pleasure, the heritage of his forefathers. I do not mean that this has become matter of common report; but we bankers have opportunities of knowing many things, and can often read in our bill-books and ledgers the histories of families and individuals. In short, it is little matter how I know that your affairs, my dear baron, are less flourishing than they might be, or than you could wish. But this, after all, is an unimportant matter. The dirty acres are still there--the Schloss Steinfeld still stands firm upon its foundation, and though there be a bit of a mortgage on the domain, and some trouble with refractory Jews, it is nothing, I am sure, but what a clear head and a little ready cash will easily dispose of."

It was natural to suppose that a lover, whose position on the brink of ruin made him scruple to ask the hand of his mistress of her nearest male relative and protector, and who found his embarrassments suddenly smoothed over and made light of by the very person who might be expected to exaggerate them, would be the last man to place fresh stumbling-blocks on the path to happiness thus unexpectedly cleared before him. Steinfeld, however, appeared little disposed to chime in with the banker's emollient view of his disastrous financial position. With an eagerness that bespoke either the most honourable punctiliousness, or very little anxiety to become the husband of Mademoiselle Gonfalon, he set Fatello right.

"I heartily wish," said he, "matters were no worse than you suppose. You quite underrate my real embarrassments. My estate is mine only nominally; not a farthing it produces comes into my pocket; the very castle and its furniture are pledged; some houses in Vienna, and a few thousand florins of Austrian rentes, derived from my mother, melted away years ago; I am deeply in debt, and harassed on all sides by duns and extortioners. I calculated my liabilities the other day--why I know not, for I have no chance of clearing them--and I found it would require three hundred thousand florins to release my lands and pay my debts. You see, my dear M. Fatello, I am not a very likely match for an heiress."

Fatello had listened with profound attention to the insolvent balance-sheet exhibited by the baron.

"Three hundred thousand florins--six hundred thousand francs," said he, musingly--"allowing for usury and overcharges, might doubtless be got rid of for a hundred thousand less. Well, baron, when Sebastiana marries she will have more than that tacked to her apron. Her father left her something like half a million, and I have not let the money lie idle. She is a richer woman by some thousand louis d'ors than she was at his death. I don't carry her account in my head, but I daresay her fortune would clear your lands, and leave a nice nest-egg besides. And although she certainly might find a husband in better
plight as regards money matters, yet, as you are so much attached to each other, and happiness, after all, is before gold, I shall make no difficulties. I noticed the girl was absent and sentimental of late, but never guessed the real cause. Ah, baron! you fascinating dogs have much to answer for!"

Whilst Fatello thus ran on, with, as usual, more bluntness than good breeding, Steinfeld was evidently on thorns; and at the first appearance of a pause in the banker's discourse, he impatiently struck in.

"I must beg your attention, M. Fatello," said he, "whilst I repeat what you evidently have imperfectly understood--that it has never entered my head to gain Mademoiselle Gonfalon's affections, and that I have no reason to believe I should succeed in the attempt. I again repeat, that nothing but the most innocent and unimportant flirtation has passed between us. I am deeply sensible of your kind intentions--grateful for your generous willingness to overlook my unfortunate circumstances, and to promote my marriage with your sister-in-law; but, flattering and advantageous as such a union would be to me, I am not certain it would lead to that happiness which you justly deem preferable to wealth. I doubt whether my disposition and that of Mademoiselle Sebastiana would exactly harmonise. Moreover, necessitous though I am, it goes against my pride to owe everything to my wife. It would pain me to see her dowry swallowed up by my debts. Let us drop the subject, I entreat you. To-morrow you will appreciate and rejoice at my hesitation. I fully comprehend the generous impulse that prompts you. Having done me an injustice, you would compensate me beyond my merits. Thanks, my good friend; but believe me, if happiness resides not in wealth, neither is it found in hasty or ill-assorted unions. And, to tell you the truth, however politic a rich marriage might be in the present critical state of my affairs, I long ago made a vow against matrimony, which I still hesitate to break."

"You are the best judge of your own motives," said Fatello, stiffly, "but you quite misconstrue mine. It never entered my head to view you as a victim, or to think myself called upon to atone, by providing you with a rich and handsome wife, for the jealousy you so successfully proved groundless. Such compensation would be excessive for so slight an injury. No, no, baron--you have quite mistaken me. As the nearest connection and natural guardian of Mademoiselle Gonfalon, it is my duty to watch over her, and not to allow her feelings to be trifled with. For some time past I have suspected her affections were engaged, but it never occurred to me they were fixed upon you. Well--last night I go to a ball, and, actuated by suspicions to which it is unnecessary to recur, I listen to your conversation with my sister-in-law. To a plain man like myself, it bore but one interpretation--that you have sought and won her heart. You deny this, and assert your language to have been that of common gallantry and compliment, such as may be addressed to any woman without her inferring serious intentions. Here, then, we are gravely at issue. You maintain my ears deceived me; I persist in crediting their evidence. Fortunately, an arbiter is easily found. I shall now return home, see my sister-in-law, and confess to her my eavesdropping, keeping its real motive and my visit to you profoundly secret. From her I shall learn how matters really stand. If her account agree with Baron Steinfeld's, I shall ever more mistrust my hearing; if the contrary, and that the baron, himself a sworn foe to marriage, has compromised the happiness of a young and confiding woman, why, then, he will not be surprised if I seek of him, for so grave an offence, the reparation which a short time ago I was ready to afford him for one comparatively insignificant." And Fatello bowed formally, and with severe countenance moved towards the door. But before he could leave the room, Steinfeld, who had stood for a moment thoughtful and perplexed,
hurried to intercept him, and laid his hand upon the lock.

"You are really too hasty, Fatello," said he, "and not altogether reasonable. What ill weed have you trodden upon, that makes you so captious this morning? Own that our conversation has taken an odd turn! Would any one believe that you, Fatello the millionaire press a marriage between your sister, the wealthy Mademoiselle Gonfalon, and myself, the needy Baron Steinfeld--and that it is I, the ruined spendthrift, from whom the obstacles to the match proceed? Neither in romance nor in real life has the case a precedent. And you may be assured the world will not applaud your wisdom, nor Mademoiselle Sebastiana feel grateful for your zeal."

"For the world's applause I care not that," replied Fatello, snapping his fingers. "As to my sister, I have neither will nor power to constrain her. I do but afford her the protection she is entitled to at my hands. I press her upon no man, but neither do I suffer her to be trifled with. Sebastiana Gonfalon does not lack suitors, I can assure you."

"Unquestionably," said Steinfeld, with an absent air; "Mademoiselle Gonfalon is indeed a most charming person, and, were she penniless, would still be a prize to any man. I only wish I enjoyed the place in her good opinion you so erroneously imagine me to occupy."

"Well, well," said Fatello, striving to get at the door, before which the baron had planted himself, "since error there is, it will soon be cleared up. You cannot blame me, baron, for preferring, in so delicate an affair, the testimony of my own ears to that of any one person. But if two unite against me, I shall think myself crazed or bewitched, and shall at least be silenced and confounded, if not entirely convinced."

"Answer me one question," said Steinfeld. "If yesterday, before you overheard a part of my conversation with your sister, I had asked of you her hand, exposing to you at the same time the state of my fortunes, or rather of my misfortunes, would you then have sanctioned my suit and pleaded my cause with Mademoiselle Gonfalon? Would you, and will you now--for, believe me, I need it more than you think--add the weight of your arguments and advocacy to the prepossession you persist in thinking your sister has in my favour, a prepossession of whose existence I hardly dare flatter myself?"

"Why not?" said Fatello, with an air of straightforward cordiality. "Why not? You are not rich, certainly, but Sebastiana is rich enough for both. You have high birth, talents, interest with the Emperor, and, once married, with your debts paid, and your wild oats sown, you may take ambition instead of pleasure for a mistress, and aspire to high employment. Why not return to diplomacy, for which you are so admirably qualified, and come back to us as Austrian ambassador? Believe me, baron, there is a fine career before you, if you will but pursue it."

"Perhaps," said Steinfeld, smiling to himself, like a man to whom a bright perspective is suddenly thrown open; "and, as you say, the first step would be a suitable marriage, which, by ridding me of all encumbrance, might enable me to climb lightly and steadily the hill of wealth and honours."
"And a millionaire brother-in-law to give you an occasional push by the way," added Fatello, with one of his heavy, purse-proud smiles; "pushes you may repay in kind, for diplomatist and financier should ever hunt in couples."

"My dear Fatello," said Steinfeld, "the prospect is too charming to be lightly relinquished. You must think strangely of my first reluctance to avail myself of your friendly disposition in my favour; but I so little suspected it, I was so bewildered by its sudden revelation, so embarrassed by my own difficulties--and then pride, you know--a morbid fear of being thought mercenary; in short, you will make allowance for my strange way of meeting your kind encouragement. I can only say, that since you deem me worthy of her, and if you can obtain her consent (a more difficult task, I fear, than you imagine), I shall be the happiest of men as the husband of the adorable Sebastiana."

"That is speaking to the purpose," said Fatello; "and, for my part, I repeat that I shall be happy to call you brother-in-law. I will do my best for you with Sebastiana, to whom I will at once communicate your formal demand in marriage. But, pshaw! you rogue," added he, with a clumsy attempt at archness, "you have made pretty sure of her consent, and need no brotherly advocate."

"Indeed you are mistaken," replied Steinfeld, earnestly. "I only wish I were as confident, and with good reason, as you think me."

"Well, well, no matter," said the banker. "You shall shortly hear your fate."

"I shall be on thorns till I learn it," said the baron. "And, my dear Fatello," said he, detaining the banker, who, after shaking hands with him, was about to leave the room, "it is perhaps not necessary to refer--at least not weigh upon--our conversation at last night's masquerade. It might vex Mademoiselle Gonfalon--to learn that she had been overheard--or--she might doubt your having heard, and think I had been confiding to you a presumptuous and unfounded belief of her partiality for myself. Women, you know, are susceptible on these points; it might indispose her towards me, and lessen my chance. In short," he added, with a smile, "if you will be guided by an ex-roue, now reformed, but who has some little experience of the female heart, you will confine yourself to the communication of my proposals, without reference to anything past, and apply all your eloquence to induce Mademoiselle Sebastiana to receive them as favourably as yourself."

Fatello nodded knowingly.

"Ay, ay," said he, "I see I need not despair of my ears. They do not serve me so badly. But never fear, baron--I will know nothing, except that you are desperately in love, and that your life depends on your suit's success. That is the established formula, is it not?"

When the baron--after escorting Fatello, in spite of his resistance, to the door of the pavilion, where the banker's carriage awaited him--re-entered the breakfast-room, the joyous and hopeful expression his countenance had worn during the latter part of his conversation with his visitor was exchanged for one of anxiety and doubt. Instead of returning to the breakfast, of which he had scarcely eaten a mouthful,
he drew his arm-chair to the fire, threw himself into it, and fell into a brown study. The attentive valet, who came in full of concern for his master's interrupted meal, was sharply dismissed, with an order to admit no callers. After a short time, however, Steinfeld's cogitations apparently assumed a rosier hue. The wrinkles on his brow relaxed their rigidity, he ceased to gnaw his mustache, and at length a smile dawned upon his features, and grew till it burst into a laugh. Something or other inordinately tickled the baron's fancy; for he lay back in his chair and laughed heartily, but silently, with the eyes rather than the mouth, for nearly a minute. Then getting up, and lounging pensively through the room, he indulged in a soliloquy of muttered and broken sentences, which, like the secret cipher of a band of conspirators, were unintelligible without a key. Their obscurity was increased by a style of metaphor borrowed from the card-table, and which a man of such correct taste as Steinfeld would doubtless have scrupled to employ in conversation with any one but himself.

"What an odd caprice of fate!" he said. "A strange turn in the game, indeed! The card I most feared turns up trumps! It rather deranges my calculations; but perhaps it is as good a card as the other. Decidedly as sure a one. What certainty that yonder pedantic booby is right in his prognostics? And then there was no avoiding it. Provided, only, Fatello is silent about last night. If not, all is spoilt. And if she makes a scene! Your Spanish dames are reputed fiery as Arabs; but I take her for one of the milder sort--rather a pining than a storming beauty. What if I were to miss both, by some infernal quiproquo or other? Query, too, whether Sebastiana accepts; but I think, with Fatello to back me, I need not fear much on that score. I detect his motives. To your rich upstart, money is dirt compared with descent, connection, title. He would like to be an ambassador's brother-in-law, the near connection of a family dating from Charlemagne--he, the man of nothing, with plebeian written on his front. Upwards of half a million. Seven hundred thousand, I daresay. I had reckoned on nearly double, and now I may lose both. Well, a la grace du diable. I will go take a gallop."

And in another half hour the aspirant to the hand and fortune of Sebastiana Gonfalon was cantering round the Bois de Boulogne, followed at the prescribed distance by Celestin, who, mounted on a fine English horse, near sixteen hands high, bore no slight resemblance to an ape exalted on an elephant.
CHAPTER IV.

THE CAPTAIN'S ROOM.

The hotel of the Northern Eagle, situated in one of the most respectable of the numerous small streets between the Rue St Honore and the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, is one of several hundred establishments of the class, scattered over Paris, and which, although bearing the ambitious title of "hotel," differ in no essential respect from what in London are styled third or fourth rate lodging-houses. It is a tall, narrow, melancholy-looking edifice, entered through an archway, which devours a great part of the ground-floor, and is closed at night by a heavy coach-door, and in the day-time by a four-foot palisade, painted a bright green, with a gate in the middle, and a noisy bell that rings whenever the gate is opened. Under the archway, and in the little paved court that terminates it, there is always a strong smell of blacking in the morning, and an equally strong smell of soup in the afternoon; the former arising from the labours of Jean, a strapping, broad-shouldered native of Picardy, who makes beds, cleans boots, and carries water for the entire hotel; the latter emanating from a small, smoky den, not unlike a ship's caboose, where a dingy cookmaid prepares the diurnal pot-au-feu for the mistress of the hotel, her son and husband, and for a couple of pensioners, who, in consideration of the moderate monthly payment of fifty francs each, are admitted to share the frugal ragouts of Madame Duchambre's dinner-table. By an architectural arrangement, common enough in old Paris houses, and which seems designed to secure a comfortable gush of cold air through the crevices of every door in the building, the foot of the staircase is in the court, open to all weathers--a circumstance most painful to Jean, who takes pride in the polish of his stairs, and is to be seen, whenever his other avocations leave him a moment's leisure, busily repairing, with a brush buckled on his foot, and a bit of wax in a cleft stick, the damage done to their lustre by the muddy boots of the lodgers. The hotel contains about five-and-twenty rooms, all let singly, with the exception of the first floor, divided into two appartemens of two rooms and a cupboard each, for which Madame Duchambre obtains the extravagant rent of ninety and one hundred francs per month. Above the first floor the rooms are of various quality--from the commodious chamber which, by the French system of an alcove for the bed, is converted in the day-time into a very tolerable imitation of a parlour--to the comfortless attic, an oven in summer, an ice-house in winter, dearly paid at five francs a-week by some struggling artisan who works hard enough in the day to sleep anywhere at night.

At the period referred to by this narrative, a room upon the third floor of the hotel of the Northern Eagle was occupied, as might be ascertained by inspection of a lithographed visiting-card, stuck upon the door with a wafer, by Godibert Carcassonne, captain in the 1st African Chasseurs, known emphatically amongst the permanent tenants of the hotel as "The Captain." Not that military occupants were a rarity under the wings of the Northern Eagle; captains were common enough there--majors not very scarce--and it was upon record that more than one colonel had occupied the yellow salon upon the first floor. But none of these warriors bore comparison with Captain Carcassonne in the estimation of Madame Duchambre, an elderly lady with a game leg, and a singularly plain countenance, who had seen better days, and had a strong sense of the proprieties of life. In general she professed no great affection for men of the sword, whom she considered too much addicted to strong drink and profane oaths, and who did not always, she said, respect la pudeur de la maison. The captain, however, had
completely won her heart--not by any particular meekness or abstinence, for he consumed far more cognac than spring water, had a voice like a deep-mouthed mastiff, and swore, when incensed, till the very rafters trembled. Nevertheless he had somehow or other gained her affections; partly, perhaps, by the regularity with which, upon all his visits to Paris during the previous fifteen years, he had lodged in her house and paid his bills; partly, doubtless, by the engaging familiarity with which he helped himself from her snuff-box, and addressed her as "Maman Duchambre."

It was eight o'clock at night, and, contrary to his wont, Captain Carcassonne, instead of contesting a pool at billiards in his accustomed cafe, or occupying a stall at his favourite Palais Royal theatre, was seated in his room alone, a coffee-cup and a bottle on the table beside him, the amber mouth-piece of a huge meerschaum pipe disappearing under his heavy dark mustache, smoking steadily, and reading the *Sentinelle de l'Armee*. He was a powerful active man, about forty years of age, with a red-brown complexion, martial features, and a cavalier air, in whom Algerine climate and fatigues had mitigated, if it had not wholly checked, that tendency to corpulence early observable in many French cavalry officers, for the most part a sedentary and full-feeding race. Of a most gregarious disposition, no slight cause would have induced the captain to pass in slow solitude those evening hours, which, according to his creed, ought invariably, in Paris, to dance merrily by in the broad light of gas, and in the excitement of a theatre or coffee-house. Neither was it, in his eyes, a trifle that had placed him, as he expressed it, under close arrest for the evening. He was paying a small instalment of a debt of gratitude, which many would have held expunged by lapse of time, but which Carcassonne still remembered and willingly acknowledged. Many years previously--within a twelvemonth after his promotion from a sergeantcy in a crack hussar regiment to a cornetcy in a corps of chasseurs, newly formed for African service, and in which he had since sabred his way to the command of a troop--Godibert Carcassonne, when on leave of absence at Paris, had been led, by thoughtlessness and by evil associates, rather than by innate vice, into a scrape which threatened to blast his prospects in the army, and consequently in life, and of his extrication from which there was no possibility, unless he could immediately procure five thousand francs. The sum was trifling, but to him it seemed immense, for he estimated it by the difficulty of obtaining it. Driven to desperation, thoughts of suicide beset him, when at that critical moment a friend came to the rescue. By the merest chance he stumbled upon a former school-fellow, a native of the same department as himself, and his accomplice in many a boyish frolic. They had not seen each other for years. When Carcassonne was taken by the conscription, his schoolmate had already departed to seek fortune at Paris, the Eldorado of provincials, and there, whilst the smart but penniless young soldier was slowly working his way to a commission, he had taken root and prospered. He was not yet a wealthy man, but neither was he a needy or a niggardly one; for, on hearing the tale of his friend's difficulties, he offered him, after a few moments' internal calculation, the loan of the sum on which his fate depended, and gruffly cut short the impetuous expression of gratitude with which the generous offer was joyfully accepted. The loan was in fact a gift; for when, sometime afterwards, Carcassonne remitted to his friend a small instalment of his debt, scraped together by a pinching economy that did him honour, out of his slender pay, the little draft was returned to him, with the words, "You shall pay me when you are colonel." And as all subsequent attempts were met by the same answer, the money was still unpaid. But never did loan bear better interest of gratitude. Carcassonne had never forgotten the obligation, was never weary of seeking opportunities of requiting it. These were hard to find, for his friend was now a rich man, and there was little the dragoon could do for him beyond choosing his
horses, and giving his grooms valuable veterinary hints, derived from his long experience of the chevaline race in the stables of the 1st Chasseurs. Once only was he fortunate enough to hear his benefactor slightingly spoken of at a public table in Paris. That was a happy day for Carcassonne, and a sad one for the offender, who was taken home a few hours afterwards with a pistol bullet in his shoulder.

The object of this devoted attachment, on the part of the rough but honest-hearted soldier, was not insensible to the sincerity and value of such friendship, and returned it after his own fashion, that is to say, somewhat as the owner of a noble dog permits its demonstrations of affection, and requites them by an occasional caress. When Carcassonne came to Paris, which he did as often as he could get leave of absence from his duties in Africa, his first visit was always for his benefactor, who invariably got up a dinner for him—not at his own house, which the dragoon would have considered a tame proceeding, but at some renowned restaurant—a regular bamboche, as the African styled it, where champagne corks flew and punch flamed from six in the evening till any hour after midnight. Then, the civilian's occupations being numerous, and his sphere of life quite different from that of the soldier, the two saw but little of each other, except through a casual meeting in the rich man's stables, or on the boulevard, or when—but this was very rare—Carcassonne was surprised in his room, at the Northern Eagle, by an unexpected but most welcome visit from his friend, come to smoke a passing cigar, and have ten minutes' chat over boyish days and reminiscences.

These visits were a great treat to the captain; and it was the anticipation of one of them that now kept him in his room. To his astonishment, he had received that morning a note from his friend, requesting him to remain at home in the evening, as he would call upon and crave a service of him. Carcassonne was delighted at the intimation, and not feeling quite certain when evening might be said to begin, he shut himself up in his room at four o'clock, ordered in dinner from a neighbouring traiteur, sipped his coffee in contented solitude, and now awaited, with the dutiful patience of a soldier on sentry, the promised coming of his friend. At last a cough and a heavy footstep were heard upon the stairs; the captain took up a candle, opened the door, and stepping out into the gloomy corridor, the light fell upon the tall ungainly figure and sullen features of Sigismund Fatello.

"Come in, my dear fellow," cried Carcassonne, in his stentorian tones, and with a soldier's oath. "I've expected you these three hours. What--wet? Snow? Come to the fire, and take a sup of cognac till the punch is made."

It snowed heavily outside, and the banker's upper-coat had caught a few large flakes in crossing the court. He heeded them not, but putting down, untasted, the glass of brandy handed to him by the captain, he took a chair, and motioned Carcassonne to another.

"What the deuce is the matter with you, Sigismund?" said the captain, looking hard at his friend. "Are you ill?"

"Better than I have for a long time been. Fresh from a wedding."
"Oho!" said Carcassonne. "I thought you had not put on full dress to visit your old comrade in his den at the Northern Eagle. And whose wedding was it?"

"A singular one," replied the banker, parrying the question. "Strangely brought about, certainly. Would you like to hear its history, Carcassonne?"

"By all means," said the captain, who always liked whatever Fatello proposed. "But the business you came about?--you said I could do something for you. What is it?"

"Plenty of time for that. It will keep. Let me tell you of this marriage."

"Delighted to listen," said Carcassonne, settling himself in his chair, and filling his pipe from a huge embroidered bag, once the property of an Arabian Emir's lady, but which a razzia had degraded into a receptacle for tobacco.

"You must know, then, Carcassonne," said Fatello, "that a friend of mine, named Oliver, a man of middle age, more calculated to shine in a counting-house than in a boudoir, was fool enough, not very long ago, to fall in love with a beautiful girl, twenty years younger than himself; and as he was rich, and her father avaricious, the marriage was brought about, although not altogether with her good will."

"Bad," quoth the captain, between two puffs of his pipe. "An unwilling bride is apt to prove a sour wife."

"Once married," continued Fatello, without heeding his friend's interruption, "Oliver, who knew he had not his wife's love, spared no pains to obtain her friendship. He was not such a man, either by person, manners, or temper, as women are apt to fancy; but, to atone for his deficiencies, he covered her with gold, was the slave of her caprices, forestalled her slightest wish. Her amusement and happiness were the whole study of his life; and after a while his efforts seemed crowned with success. She treated him as a friend, and appeared contented with her lot. This was all he had dared to hope, and, having attained this, he was happy. His existence, from boyhood upwards, had been agitated and laborious, but riches had rewarded his toils, and he could now look forward to a long period of happiness and repose. At the very moment he indulged these visions of a bright future, a single word, whispered in his ear by a physician of high repute, crumbled the entire fabric. That word was Consumption, and when he heard it he knew his doom was sealed. His father, his elder brother, his sisters, all had been carried off, in the prime of their strength, by the insidious disease, whose germ, implanted in their system before they saw the light, was ineradicable by the resources of art. The shock was severe--it could not be otherwise--for most of the things were his for which men prize life. But he was no poltroon, to pine at the approach of death; and he nerved himself to meet like a man his inevitable fate. Although with scarce a shadow of hope, he neglected no means of combating the deadly malady; and, enjoining secrecy to his physician, he concealed from every one his belief that his days were numbered and his race wellnigh run. He was calm and resigned, if not hopeful, when he one day received a letter that chilled his very soul. His wife, it told him, loved another, whom she would meet that night at a masquerade. Although anonymous, its indications were so precise, that Oliver, spurred by fiercest jealousy, disguised himself and went
secretly to the ball. There he discovered his wife, in the company of a foreign fopling, who, for some
time previously, had been a frequent visitor at his house. He kept near them, occasionally catching a
sentence confirmatory of his suspicions, until they withdrew from the crowd, and sought a retired nook,
where to converse uninterrupted. He found means to secrete himself in their vicinity, and overheard--no
evidence of his dishonour, for then he had stabbed them where they stood--but words whence he
gathered the existence of the most heartless, perfidious, and cold-blooded calculation.

"The wife of his bosom, to gain whose affection he had squandered millions, and changed his very
nature, impatiently awaited his death to bestow her hand, and the fortune he should bequeath her, on the
smooth-tongued seducer whose arts had beguiled her. The secret of his fatal malady had been divulged
by the physician, to whom alone it was known, in the hearing of this foreign adventurer, who, ever
upon the watch to redeem his broken fortunes by a wealthy marriage, profited by the disclosure. He
obtained an introduction to Oliver's house, and applied every art and energy to gain his wife's
affections. He was but too successful. She listened to his protestations, and on learning her husband's
impending death, pledged herself to become his, when she should be released by it from ties she
abhorred. All this, and more, Oliver gathered from their conversation, to which he had the courage to
listen to the end, although each sentence went to his heart like a stab, leaving in the wound the venom
of hate and jealousy, to rankle there until the latest moment of his life. What had you done,
Carcassonne, had you been in his place?"

"Pardieu!" said the captain, who had listened with profound attention, and great expenditure of smoke,
to his friend's narrative; "I can hardly say, Sigismund. If I had kept my hands off the butterfly
scoundrel, when I heard him courting my wife, I should have followed him when he had had his chat
out, and requested the pleasure of crossing swords with him at his earliest convenience; and had I got
one good cut at him, he should not have needed another. What did your friend?"

"Very nearly what you have said. He went home and destroyed his will, and made another. Then he
sought his enemy, to challenge him to an instant encounter. The mean villain denied his treachery, and
swore that she, to whom his vows of love were addressed, was not Oliver's wife, but his sister-in-law.
Oliver well knew this to be a lie, but he affected to believe he had been deceived by similarity of dress
and imperfect hearing, for the subterfuge had suddenly suggested to him a sure means of punishing his
faithless wife, and defeating her seducer's aim. He declared himself willing to aid the views of the
 foreigners--one Baron Steinfeld, an Austrian of high family, but ruined fortunes--and to urge his
sister-in-law to accept his hand. Disagreeably surprised at such willingness, where he had wished and
expected opposition, Steinfeld strove to recede, but found extrication impossible from the trap he had
rushed into. Finally he was compelled to yield; the less unwillingly because the bride thus given him
was not without fortune, which Oliver exaggerated, the better to allure him. So that when Oliver left
him, it was to convey his formal proposals to the lady, who was nothing loath, and to-day they were
married."

"To-day!" exclaimed Carcassonne. "This, then, is the wedding you come from. And what said Madame
Oliver?"
"What could she say? Made all the secret opposition she could, no doubt; and then, finding it in vain--for her sister seemed as much fascinated by the Austrian Lothario as she was herself--she took ill and kept her bed. It needed all her woman's pride and her fear of malicious comment to carry her calmly through to-day's ceremonies and festivities."

"A very strange tale!" cried the captain. "And all true, eh?"

"To the letter. But that is not all. To-day, after the marriage, Oliver sought five minutes' conversation with his newly-made brother-in-law; and his first act, when they were alone, was to hand him the anonymous letter he had received on the day of the masquerade, in which was mentioned the colour of the ribbons worn by Madame Oliver at the ball, as a sign by which Steinfeld was to distinguish her amongst the crowd of dominoes."

"Good!" said Carcassonne, emphatically, "And what said the Kaiserlie?"

"Denied everything, until Oliver recapitulated, word for word, certain phrases of the conversation he had overheard. This struck him dumb; but soon he recovered his effrontery, and expressed surprise at Oliver's reviving the subject, especially at that moment."

"Since you deemed it advisable to overlook the offence at the time, and to promote my marriage with your sister-in-law, he said, 'I cannot understand your motive for now raking up the grievance.'

"I will explain,' replied Oliver. 'I married you to my sister-in-law that you might never be my widow's husband, whether I die a few months hence, by the hand of God, or to-morrow by yours, in the duel which shall no longer be delayed."

"The devil!" shouted the captain, at this announcement. "Your friend Oliver is the wrong man to jest with, I see that. But will he really fight his sister's husband?"

"He really will," replied Fatello, calmly. "Should you scruple, in his place?"

"By my soul, it's hard to say, till one is tried. We are used in Africa to hear fellows reckoning on our boots before we think of leaving them off. But that hurts neither us nor the boots, whilst a man's wife----It is aggravating, certainly, particularly to a man of your Oliver's temper. A saint or a priest might not approve, but, as a soldier and sinner, I must say revenge, in such a case, seems sweet and natural."

"Then," said Fatello, "I may reckon on your assistance to-morrow?"

"On my assistance!--I--you! What the devil do you mean?" cried Carcassonne, dropping his pipe, and starting from his seat in extraordinary perturbation.
"Merely that my friend Oliver and your friend Fatello are one and the same person, whose business here to-night is to ask you to second him in his duel to-morrow with Baron Ernest von Steinfeld, married this morning to Mademoiselle Sebastiana Gonfalon."
CHAPTER V.

THE DAY AFTER THE WEDDING.

It may easily be imagined that Steinfeld, brave as he unquestionably was, did not feel particularly pleased at finding himself called upon to risk his life in a profitless duel, at the very moment when that life had acquired fresh value in his eyes, through his acquisition of a pretty wife and a handsome fortune. The former, it is true, the baron, whose utter selfishness made him incapable of love in the higher sense of the word, prized only as a child does a new plaything, or an epicure a fresh dish presented to his sated palate. Pretty and attractive as his bride was, her personal charms weighed far less with him than her golden ones. Even in these he had been somewhat disappointed. Although considerable, they were less than Fatello's round-numbered generalities had led him to expect; and, moreover, when the time came to discuss the settlements, the banker fought hard to secure his sister-in-law's fortune upon her own head and that of her children. This, however, Steinfeld vigorously resisted, urging the necessity of extricating his estates from pawn; and Sebastiana, enamoured of her handsome bridegroom, and whose ardent and jealous imagination drew a romantic picture of a tête-à-tête existence in a secluded chateau, far from the rivalries of a capital, expressed so strongly her will to apply her fortune in the manner Steinfeld desired, that Fatello, after much opposition, and with no good grace, was compelled to yield the point. The sum thus placed in the Austrian's power, although less than he had anticipated, was yet so large to a man in his position, that its possession threw a pleasant rose-coloured tint over his existence, of which the prospect of poverty and the annoyances of duns had for some time past deprived it. So that when, upon his wedding-day, Fatello fiercely taxed him with his perfidy, repeated the words of insult he had addressed to him on the morrow of the masquerade, and insisted upon a duel, the baron did all in his power to pacify him, urging their new but near connection as an insuperable obstacle to a quarrel, and even humbling himself to express contrition for his offence, which he persisted, however, would have been viewed as but a venial one by any but so morbid, jealous, and vindictive a person as Fatello, and which, in no case, considering the relation they now stood in to each other, could be held to justify them in seeking each other's life. But to his expostulations, apologies, and arguments, Fatello replied with such savage invective and ungovernable violence, taunting the baron with cowardice, and threatening him, if he refused the reparation demanded, with public exposure and manual chastisement—threats, of whose execution Fatello's intemperate character and colossal frame (the latter still muscular and powerful in spite of the disease mining it) allowed very little doubt—that Steinfeld saw there was no alternative but to accept the meeting; and, assuming the cold and haughty tone of an injured man, he briefly arranged with Fatello its principal conditions. To avoid scandal, and to insure, as far as possible, the safety of the survivor, the duel was to take place in the grounds of a country-house belonging to the banker, at about a league from Paris, and the seconds and surgeon were to be pledged to the strictest secrecy. Fatello named Captain Carcassonne, and Steinfeld the Viscount Arthur de Mellay, between whom the details of the affair were to be settled.

Both the principals, however, in this singular duel, were destined to experience difficulties from the friends they had fixed upon to second them. Captain Carcassonne, who himself cared no more for a duel than an English prizefighter does for a round with the gloves, and who never slept a wink the
fewer, or ate a mouthful less breakfast before going out to fight one, was seized with a sudden
trepidation when he learned that his friend, whom he well knew to be unskilled in fence and fire, was to
enter the field with a man reputed expert in both. At first he would not hear of the meeting taking place,
swearing, in direct opposition to what he had just before said, that he should not think of fighting for
such a trifle. When this plea was overruled, a bright idea struck him. He would pick a quarrel with
Steinfeld, and wing him with a pistol-shot, or spoil his beauty with a sabre cut, just as Fatello chose; ay,
would kill him outright, if nothing less would satisfy his vindictive friend. But Fatello, whose morbid
desire of revenge had assumed the character of a monomania, rejected all the captain's plans; and
Carcassonne, whose affection and deference for his old companion and benefactor were unbounded,
ceased to make objections, and fixed his thoughts solely upon the necessary preliminaries. As to
Fatello's announcement of the danger his life was in from lurking disease (a danger more remote, but
also more certain than that he would incur upon the morrow), it would deeply have grieved the worthy
captain had he attached the least credit to it; but his contempt for doctors and their prognostications
prevented his dwelling on it longer than to give a smile to the credulity of his friend. Meanwhile
Steinfeld had some trouble with de Mellay. It not being the fashion in France for newly-married
couples to escape from the place of their wedding as fast as four posters can carry them, the baron had
taken his bride to his house in the Rue St Lazare, which a little arrangement had adapted for their
residence during the few days that were to elapse before their departure for Germany. There, upon the
evening of his wedding-day, he had a conference with the viscount, who, startled, like Carcassonne, at
the news of the projected duel, insisted on full explanations before consenting to render Steinfeld the
service required of him. These explanations Steinfeld was compelled to give; and although he spread
over them a varnish favourable to himself, de Mellay plainly saw that the part the Austrian had played
in the whole affair did him no credit, and that Fatello's extraordinary vindictiveness, if not justified, was
in some degree extenuated, by his adversary's perfidious manoeuvres and gross breach of hospitality.

He at first insisted on attempting a reconciliation, but Steinfeld having convinced him of its
impossibility, he would not refuse to stand by an intimate friend and companion, who had more than
once gone upon the ground with him. He suggested, however--almost, indeed, made it a condition--that
the baron should fire wide, or not at all, the first time, in doing which he ran little risk, for Fatello was
known to be unskilled with the pistol. De Mellay resolved to place the duellists as far apart as possible,
and to make them fire together. He made sure Fatello would miss the first shot, and that then, if
Steinfeld had not fired, the affair could easily be made up.

It was three in the afternoon, and the snow lay thick upon the ground, when Steinfeld and his second
entered a small door in the paling of the banker's park, at a short distance from which they had
dismissed their hackney coach. Fatello, Carcassonne, and Dr Pilori, had preceded them in the banker's
carriage. The five men met upon a bowling-green surrounded by trees, which, although leafless, were
so thickly planted as to form an impervious screen. More for form's sake and the satisfaction of
conscience, than with hope of success, the seconds essayed a reconciliation. The attempt was rendered
fruitless by Fatello's firm determination; and after a brief conference between the viscount and
Carcassonne, the combatants were placed at twenty paces. It was agreed they were to fire together,
when six had been counted. The seconds stepped aside. Carcassonne counted. When he came to "six," a
"Nothing," said the baron. "My dear brother-in-law shoots better than I thought, that is all." And he showed a rent made by Fatello's bullet in the front of his tightly-buttoned surtout, near the waist. A button had been cut away, and the ball had grazed the skin, but without drawing blood.

"This shall not avail you, sir," cried Fatello, in a tone of indescribable exasperation. "We came to fight, not to play. Fire, sir!" And he stood sideways, expecting his adversary's bullet.

Steinfeld smiled bitterly. Then, raising his pistol, he took aim at a redbreast, which, scared from the bough by Fatello's fire, had again settled, tamed by cold and hunger, upon a sapling five-and-twenty paces off. Bark and feathers flew at the same time, and the unlucky little bird lay disembowelled upon the snow. Carcassonne and de Mellay exchanged a word or two, and advanced towards Fatello.

"Enough done, my dear Sigismund," said the captain. "After the baron's forbearance, this can go no farther."

Fatello's reply was a torrent of imprecations. His eyes were bloodshot, his cheeks pale as death; he was insane with passion. The captain in vain endeavoured to soothe and calm him. He raged and stormed like a madman.

"Monsieur Fatello," said de Mellay with surprise--almost with disgust--"for heaven's sake compose yourself. This persistence is unworthy of you. What injury have you received to justify such malignity? Neither your second nor myself can let this affair proceed, otherwise than to a reconciliation."

There was a decision in the young man's tone and manner that seemed to strike Fatello and check his fury. For a moment or two he gazed silently at the viscount, as if recalled to reason by his remonstrance. It was the trick of the maniac, to put the keeper off his guard. Suddenly pushing Carcassonne aside, he reached, in two bounds, a pistol-case that lay open at a short distance, and, seizing one of the weapons, levelled it at Steinfeld. With a cry of horror, de Mellay and Carcassonne threw themselves before the baron.

"This is murder!" exclaimed the viscount.

"Stop!" said Steinfeld, pale, but quite calm. "Wait a moment, sir, and you shall be satisfied. There is no alternative, my dear de Mellay. Monsieur Fatello insists. Give me the other pistol."

De Mellay hesitated, and looked at the captain.

"Ma foi!" said Carcassonne, shrugging his shoulders, as if he thought a bullet more or less hardly worth so much discussion--"if they will have it!" The principals resumed their ground, and the word was again given. This time both pistols were discharged. Steinfeld stirred not, but Fatello fell to the ground and lay there without motion. Dr Pilori ran forward, and, kneeling beside him, unbuttoned his coat. There was a small blue spot on the breast, from which oozed a drop or two of blood. The doctor seized the wrist of the fallen man. Steinfeld and the seconds gazed anxiously in his face, awaiting his verdict.
"I aimed at his arm," said Steinfeld gloomily, "but the cold made my hand shake."

Carcassonne seemed not to hear the remark. De Mellay glanced at the baron, and then at the bird that lay upon the blood-sprinkled snow more than twenty yards off.

"Quite dead," said Pilori, letting the arm fall. "It is a painful thing to kill a man," added the materialist doctor to Steinfeld, who stood regarding his victim with a moody and regretful gaze. "It may be satisfactory to you to know that he could not have lived six months longer."

In France, a few years ago, duels, even when fatal in result, did not necessarily entail strict judicial investigation, unless such investigation was provoked by the friends of the fallen man. In the instance here recorded no one thought proper to take vindictive steps. Fatello's coachman was instructed, and largely bribed, to say that his master had been struck with apoplexy in his carriage, and that, on discovering his condition, he had at once driven him to Dr Pilori. The physician's arrival at the house, in company with the corpse, and the absence of hemorrhage from the wound, rendered it easy to conceal the latter, and gave plausibility to the story, which found general credit. It was not till several days afterwards that a report spread of the real cause of the banker's death. Even then it attained little publicity, and by many was looked upon as a malicious fabrication. Before it got wind, however, the survivors of the domestic drama we have narrated, were far from its scene. By a will made a month before his death, Fatello had left the whole of his great riches, with the exception of some munificent donations to public charities, and of an ample legacy to Captain Carcassonne, to a cousin of his own name in Alsace. But he could not alienate his wife's fortune, or deprive her of the splendid jointure secured to her by her father's cautious greediness; and these constituted very large wealth, with which his widow, shortly after his death, left Paris for her native country. Her Parisian friends and acquaintances were edified, in the highest degree, by the grief she displayed at Fatello's decease. She was disconsolate; and, for at least a day and a half, "cette pauvre Madame Fatello" was the prevailing topic of conversation, and the object of universal sympathy. Henpecked husbands held her up as a model of conjugal affection; and wicked wives secretly wondered at the poignant regret shown by such a young, rich, and handsome widow, for so ugly, unprepossessing, and morose a man. But it occurred to no one to seek the cause of her excessive grief in a bridal wreath instead of in a funeral shroud; to trace the source of her sorrow to the loss of an expected husband whom she passionately loved, not to that of a departed one, whom she never regretted.

Although little apprehensive of persecution, many motives concurred to render Paris an undesirable residence for the survivor of the duel in which Fatello met his death. The day after the fatal meeting, a travelling carriage left Paris by the road to Brussels. It contained Ernest von Steinfeld and his bride. In spite of some practice in duelling, and of the triple armour of selfishness in which he was habitually cased, there was a cloud upon the baron's brow which change of scene and the caresses of his young wife did not always suffice to dissipate. And, although sensible to his bride's beauty and fascination, and grateful, as far as it was in his nature to be so, for the passionate affection she showed him, it may be doubted whether he would not have repulsed her endearments, and spurned her from him, had he detected a secret that lay buried in the innermost recesses of her heart--had he recognised, in Sebastiana Gonfalon, the writer of the two anonymous letters that tended so materially to bring about her marriage,
and the violent death of Sigismund Fatello.

As it was, the Baroness von Steinfeld had not long to congratulate herself on the success of her culpable manoeuvres, whose sole extenuation was to be found in the fiery passions of her race, and in a moral education totally neglected. Doubtless, when planning and carrying out her guilty scheme, the possibility of so terrible a result never occurred to her; and it were attributing improbable depravity to one so young to doubt that she felt remorse at the catastrophe. She did not long await her punishment. Bright as were her hopes of happiness when led to the altar by the man she adored, she soon was bitterly convinced, that no true or permanent felicity could be the consequence of a union achieved by guilty artifice, and sealed with a brother's blood. A few months were sufficient to darken her destiny and blight her joys. Her fortune swallowed up by Steinfeld's debts and extravagance, her person speedily became indifferent to the sated and cold-hearted voluptuary; and whilst her reckless husband, faithful to nothing but to his hatred of matrimonial ties, again galloped upon the road to ruin, in the most dissipated circles of the Austrian capital, she saw herself condemned to solitude and unavailing regrets, in the very castle where she had anticipated an existence of unalloyed bliss.

THE BOXES.

[MAGA. FEBRUARY 1829.]

Sir,—In the course of my study in the English language, which I made now for three years, I always read your periodically, and now think myself capable to write at your Magazin. I love always the modesty, or you shall have a letter of me very long time past. But, never mind. I would well tell you, that I am come to this country to instruct me in the manners, the customs, the habits, the policies, and the other affairs general of Great Britain. And truly I think me good fortunate, being received in many families, so as I can to speak your language now with so much facility as the French.

But, never mind. That what I would you say, is not only for the Englishes, but for the strangers, who come at your country from all the other kingdoms, polite and instructed; because, they tell me, that they are abonnements[B] for you in all the kingdoms in Europe, so well as in the Orientals and Occidentals.

[Footnote B: Abonnements--subscriptions.]

No, sir, upon my honour, I am not egotist. I not proud myself with chateaux en Espagne. I am but a particular gentleman, come here for that what I said; but, since I learn to comprehend the language, I discover that I am become an object of pleasantry, and for himself to mock, to one of your comedians even before I put my foot upon the ground at Douvres. He was Mr Mathew, who tell of some contretemps of me and your word detestable, Box. Well, never mind. I know at present how it happen, because I see him since in some parties and dinners; and he confess he love much to go travel and mix himself altogether up with the stage-coach and vapouring[C] boat for fun, what he bring at his theatre.

[Footnote C: Bateau a vapeur--a steamboat.]
Well, never mind. He see me, perhaps, to ask a question in the paquebot—but he not confess after, that he goed and bribe the garcon at the hotel and the coachman to mystify me with all the boxes; but, very well, I shall tell you how it arrived, so as you shall see that it was impossible that a stranger could miss to be perplexed, and to advertise the travellers what will come after, that they shall converse with the gentlemen and not with the badinstructs.

But it must that I begin. I am a gentleman, and my goods are in the public rentes, and a chateau with a handsome propriety on the bank of the Loire, which I lend to a merchant English, who pay me very well in London for my expenses. Very well. I like the peace, nevertheless that I was force, at other time, to go to war with Napoleon. But it is passed. So I come to Paris in my proper post-chaise, where I selled him, and hire one, for almost nothing at all, for bring me to Calais all alone, because I will not bring my valet to speak French here where all the world is ignorant.

[Footnote D: Rentes--public funds.]

The morning following, I get upon the vapouring boat to walk so far as Douvres. It was fine day—and, after I am recover myself of a malady of the sea, I walk myself about the shep, and I see a great mechanic of wood, with iron wheel, and thing to push up inside, and handle to turn. It seemed to be ingenuous, and proper to hoist great burdens. They use it for shoving the timber, what come down of the vessel, into the place; and they tell me it was call "Jaques in the box:" and I was very much please with the invention so novel.

Very well. I go again promenade upon the board of the vessel, and I look at the compass, and little boy sailor come and sit him down, and begin to chatter like the little monkey. Then the man what turns a wheel about and about laugh, and say, "Very well, Jacques," but I not understand one word the little fellow say. So I make inquiere, and they tell me he was "box the compass." I was surprise, but I tell myself, "well, never mind;" and so we arrive at Douvres. I find myself enough well in the hotel, but as there has been no table-d'hote, I ask for some dinner, and it was long time I wait: and so I walk myself to the customary house, and give the key to my portmanteau to the Douaniers, or excisemen, as you call, for them to see as I had not no smuggles in my equipage. Very well--I return at my hotel, and meet one of the waiters, who tell me (after I stand little moment to the door to see the world what pass by upon the top of a coach at the instant), "Sir," he say, "your dinner is ready." "Very well," I make response, "where was it?" "This way, sir," he answer, "I have put in a box in the cafe room."

"Well--never mind," I say to myself, "when a man himself finds in a stranger country, he must be never surprised. 'Nil admirari.' Keep the eyes opened, and stare at nothing at all."

I found my dinner only there there, because I was so soon come from France; but I learn another sort of the box was a partition and table particular in a saloon, and I keep there when I eated some good sole fritted, and some not cooked mutton cutlet; and a gentleman what was put in another box, perhaps Mr Mathew, because nobody not can know him twice, like a cameleon he is, call for the "pepper box." Very well. I take a cup of coffee, and then all my hardes and portmanteau come with a wheelbarrow; and, because it was my intention to voyage up at London with the coach, and I find my many little things was not convenient, I ask the waiter where I may buy a night sack, or get them tie up all together
in a burden. He was well attentive at my cares, and responded, that he shall find me a box to put them all into. Well, I say nothing of all but, "Yes," for fear to discover my ignorance: so he bring the little box for the clothes and things into the great box what I was put into; and he did my affairs in it very well. Then I ask him for some spectacle in the town, and he send boot-boy with me so far as the Theatre, and I go in to pay. It was shabby poor little place, but the man what set to have the money, when I say "how much," asked me if I would not go into the boxes. "Very well," I say, "never mind--oh yes--to be sure;" and I find very soon the box was the loge, same thing. I had not understanding sufficient in your tongue then to comprehend all what I hear--only one poor maigre doctor, what had been to give his physic too long time at a cavalier old man, was condemned to swallow up a whole box of his proper pills. "Very well," I say, "that must be egregious. It is cannot be possible;" but they bring little a box not more grand nor my thumb. It seem to be to me very ridiculous; so I returned to my hotel at despair how I could possibility learn a language what meant so many differents in one word.

[Footnote E: La, la, signifies passable, indifferent.]

I found the same waiter, who, so soon as I come in, tell me, "Sir, did you not say that you would go by the coach to-morrow morning?" I replied "Yes--and I have bespeaked a seat out of the side, because I shall wish to amuse myself with the country, and you have no cabriolets[F] in your coaches." "Sir," he say, very polite, "if you shall allow me, I would recommend you the box, and then the coachman shall tell everything." "Very well," I reply, "yes; to be sure--I shall have a box then--yes;" and then I demanded a fire into my chamber, because I think myself enrhumed upon the sea, and the maid of the chamber come to send me in bed: but I say, "No so quick, if you please; I will write to some friend how I find myself in England. Very well--here is the fire, but perhaps it shall go out before I have finish." She was pretty laughing young woman, and say, "Oh no, sir, if you pull the bell, the porter, who sit up all night, will come, unless you like to attend to it yourself, and then you will find the coal-box in the closet." Well--I say nothing but "yes--oh yes." But when she is gone, I look direct into the closet, and see a box not no more like none of the other boxes what I see all day than nothing.

[Footnote F: The cabriolet is the front part of the old French diligence, with a hood and apron, holding three persons, including the guard, or "conducteur."]

Well--I write at my friends, and then I tumble about when I wake, and dream in the sleep what should possible be the description of the box what I must be put in to-morrow for my voyage.

In the morning, it was very fine time, I see the coach at the door, and I walk all round before they bring the horses; but I see nothing what they can call boxes, only the same kind as what my little business was put into. So I ask for the post of letters at a little boots boy, who showed me by the Quay, and tell me, pointing by his finger at a window--"There see, there was the letter-box," and I perceive a crevice. "Very well--all box again to-day," I say, and give my letter to the master of postes, and go away again at the coach, where I very soon find out what was coach-box, and mount myself upon it. Then come the coachman, habilitated like the gentleman, and the first word he say was--"Keep, horses! Bring my box-coat!" and he push up a grand capote with many scrapes.
"But--never mind," I say; "I shall see all the boxes in time." So he kick his leg upon the board, and cry "cheat!" and we are out into the country in lesser than one minute, and roll at so grand pace, what I have had fear we will be reversed. But after little times, I take courage, and we begin to entertain together: but I hear one of the wheels cry squeak, so I tell him, "Sir--one of the wheel would be greased;" then he make reply, nonchalancely, "Oh--it is nothing but one of the boxes what is too tight." But it is very long time after as I learn that wheel a box was pipe of iron what go turn round upon the axle.

Well--we fly away at the pace of charge. I see great castles many; then come a pretty house of country well ornated, and I make inquire what it should be. "Oh!" responsed he, "I not remember the gentleman's name, but it is what we call a snug country box."

Then I feel myself abymed at despair, and begin to suspect that he amused himself. But, still I tell myself, "Well--never mind; we shall see." And then after some times, there come another house, all alone in a forest, not ornated at all. "What, how you call that?" I demand of him. "Oh!" he responded again, "that is a shooting box of Lord Killfots." "Oh!" I cry at last out, "that is little too strong;" but he hoisted his shoulders and say nothing. Well, we come at a house of country ancient, with the trees cut like some peacocks, and I demand, "What you call these trees?" "Box, sir," he tell me. "Devil is in the box!" I say at myself. "But--never mind; we shall see." So I myself refreshed with a pinch of snuff, and offer him, and he take very polite, and remark upon an instant, "That is a very handsome box of yours, sir."

"Morbleu!" I exclaimed with inadvertencyness, but I stop myself. Then he pull out his snuff-box, and I take a pinch, because I like at home to be sociable when I am out at voyages, and not show some pride with inferior. It was of wood beautiful with turnings, and colour of yellowish. So I was pleased to admire very much, and inquire the name of the wood, and again he say, "Box, sir!" Well--I hold myself with patience, but it was difficilly; and we keep with great gallop, till we come at a great crowd of the people. Then I say, "What for all so large concourse?"--"Oh!" he response again, "there is one grand boxing match--a battle here to-day."--"Peste!" I tell myself, "a battle of boxes! Well, never mind! I hope it can be a combat at the outrance, and they all shall destroy one another, for I am fatigued."

Well--we arrive at an hotel, very superb, all as it ought, and I demand a morsel to refresh myself. I go into a salon, but, before I finish, great noise come into the passage, and I pull the bell's rope to demand why so great tapage? The waiter tell me, and he laugh at same time, but very civil no less, "Oh, sir, it is only two of the women what quarrel, and one has given another a box on the ear."

Well--we go back on the coach-box, but I look, as I pass, at all the women ear, for the box; but not none I see. "Well," I tell myself once more, "never mind, we shall see;" and we drive on very passable and agreeable times till we approached ourselves near London; but then come one another coach of the opposition to pass by, and the coachman say, "No, my boy, it shan't do!" and then he whip his horses, and made some traverse upon the road, and tell to me, all the times, a long explication what the other coachmen have done otherwhiles, and finish not till we stop, and the coach of opposition come behind him in one narrow place. Well--then he twist himself round, and with full voice, cry himself out at the
another man, who was so angry as himself, "I'll tell you what, my hearty! if you comes some more of your gammon at me, I shan't stand, and you shall yourself find in the wrong box." It was not for many weeks after as I find out the wrong box meaning.

Well--we get at London, at the coaches office, and I unlightened from my seat, and go at the bureau for pay my passage, and gentleman very polite demanded if I had some friend at London. I converse with him very little time in voyaging, because he was in the interior; but I perceive he is real gentleman. So, I say, "No, sir, I am stranger." Then he very honestly recommend me at an hotel, very proper, and tell me, "Sir, because I have some affairs in the Banque, I must sleep in the City this night; but to-morrow I shall come at the hotel, where you shall find some good attentions if you make the use of my name." "Very well," I tell myself, "this is best." So we exchange the cards, and I have hackney-coach to come at my hotel, where they say, "No room, sir,--very sorry,--no room." But I demand to stop the moment, and produce the card what I could not read before, in the movements of the coach with the darkness. The master of the hotel take it from my hand, and become very polite at the instant, and whisper to the ear of some waiters, and then come at me, and say, "Oh yes, sir, I know Mr Box very well. Worthy gentleman, Mr Box. Very proud to incommode any friend of Mr Box--pray inlight yourself, and walk in my house." So I go in, and find myself very proper, and soon come so as if I was in my own particular chamber; and Mr Box come next day, and I find very soon that he was the right Box, and not the wrong box. Ha, ha!--You shall excuse my badinage,--eh? But never mind--I am going at Leicestershire to see the foxes hunting, and perhaps will get upon a coach-box in the spring, and go at Edinburgh; but I have fear I cannot come at your "Noctes," because I have not learnt yet to eat so great supper. I always read what they speak there twice over, except what Monsieur Le "Shepherd" say, what I read three time; but never could comprehend exactly what he say, though I discern some time the grand idea, what walk in darkness almost "visible," as your divine Milton say. I am particular fond of the poetry. I read three books of the "Paradise Lost" to Mr Box, but he not hear me no more--he pronounce me perfect.

After one such compliment, it would be almost the same as ask you for another, if I shall make apology in case I have not find the correct ideotism of your language in this letter; so I shall not make none at all--only throw myself at your mercy, like a great critic. But, never mind--we shall see. If you take this letter as it ought, I shall not promise if I would not write you one other some time.

I conclude in presenting at you my compliments very respectful. I am sorry for your gout and crutchedness, and hope you shall miss them in the spring.

I have the honour of subscribe myself,

SIR, Your very humble and much obedient Servant, LOUIS LE CHEMINANT.

P.S.--Ha, ha!--It is very droll!--I tell my valet, we go at Leicestershire for the hunting fox.--Very well.--So soon as I finish this letter, he come and demand what I shall leave behind in orders for some presents, to give what people will come at my lodgments for Christmas Boxes.
CHAPTER V.

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