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Jack burst out into a laughter not to be controlled for some minutes, and then acknowledged that she had discovered him.

"At all events, Donna Agnes," said he at last, "acknowledge that, ragged as I am, I have seen you in a much greater dishabille."

Agnes sprang up and took to her heels, that she might hide her confusion, and at the same time go to her father and tell him who he had as his guest.

Although Don Rebiera had not yet finished his narrative, this announcement of Agnes, who ran in breathless to communicate it, immediately brought all the parties together, and Jack received their thanks.

"I little thought," said the Don, "that I should have been so doubly indebted to you, sir. Command my services as you please, both of you. My sons are at Palermo, and I trust you will allow them the pleasure of your friendship when you are tired of remaining with us."

Jack made his politest bow, and then with a shrug of his shoulders looked down upon his habiliments, which, to please Gascoigne, he had torn into ribands, as much as to say, "We are not provided for a lengthened stay."

"My brothers' clothes will fit them, I think," said Agnes to her father; "they have left plenty in their wardrobes."

"If the signors will condescend to wear them till they can replace their own."

Midshipmen are very condescending. They followed Don Rebiera, and condescended to put on clean shirts belonging to Don Philip and Don Martin. Also to put on their trousers, to select their best waistcoats and coats; in short, they condescended to have a regular fit-out—and it so happened that the fit-out was not far from a regular fit.

Having condescended, they then descended, and the intimacy between all parties became so great that it appeared as if they not only wore the young men's clothes but also stood in their shoes. Having thus made themselves presentable, Jack presented his hand to both ladies and led them into the garden, that Don Rebiera might finish his long story to Gascoigne without further interruption, and resuming their seats in the pavilion, he entertained the ladies with a history of his cruise in the ship after her capture. Agnes soon recovered

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from her reserve, and Jack had the forbearance not to allude again to the scene in the cabin, which was the only thing she dreaded. After dinner, when the family, according to custom, had retired for the siesta, Gascoigne and Jack, who had slept enough in the cart to last for a week, went out together in the garden.

"Well, Ned," said Jack, "do you wish yourself on board the *Harpy* again?"

"No," replied Gascoigne, "we have fallen on our feet at last, but still not without first being knocked about like peas in a rattle. What a lovely little creature that Agnes is! How strange that you should fall in with her again! How odd that we should come here!"

"My good fellow, we did not come here. Destiny brought us in a cart. She may take us to Tyburn in the same way."

"Yes, if you sport your philosophy as you did when we awoke this morning."

"Nevertheless, I'll be hanged if I'm not right. Suppose we argue the point?"

"Right or wrong, you will be hanged, Jack; so instead of arguing the point, suppose I tell you what the Don made such a long story about."

"With all my heart—let us go to the pavilion."

Our hero and his friend took their seats, and Gascoigne then communicated the history of Don Rebiera, to which we shall dedicate the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER XX

A long story, which the reader must listen to, as well as our hero.

I HAVE already made you acquainted with my name, and I have only to add that it is one of the most noble in Sicily, and that there are few families who possess such large estates. My father was a man who had no pleasure in the pursuits of most of the young men of his age; he was of a weakly constitution, and was with difficulty reared to manhood. When his studies were completed he retired to his country seat belonging to our family, which is about twenty miles from Palermo,

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and shutting himself up, devoted himself wholly to literary pursuits.

"As he was an only son, his parents were naturally very anxious that he should marry; the more so as his health did not promise him a very extended existence. Had he consulted his own inclinations he would have declined, but he felt that it was his duty to comply with their wishes; but he did not trouble himself with the choice, leaving it wholly to them. They selected a young lady of high family and certainly of most exquisite beauty. I only wish I could say more in her favour—for she was my mother—but it is impossible to narrate the history without exposing her conduct. The marriage took place, and my father—having woke up, as it were, at the celebration—again returned to his closet, to occupy himself in abstruse studies—the results of which have been published, and have fully established his reputation as a man of superior talent and deep research. But however much the public may appreciate the works of a man of genius, whether they be written to instruct or to amuse, certain it is that a literary man requires in his wife either a mind congenial to his own, or that pride in her husband's talents which induces her to sacrifice much of her own domestic enjoyment to the satisfaction of having his name extolled abroad. I mention this point as some extenuation of my mother's conduct. She was neglected, most certainly, but not neglected for frivolous amusements, or because another form had captivated his fancy; but in his desire to instruct others, and I may add his ambition for renown, he applied himself to his literary pursuits, became abstracted, answered without hearing, and left his wife to amuse herself in any way she might please. A literary husband is, without exception—although always at home—the least domestic husband in the world, and must try the best of tempers—not by unkindness, for my father was kind and indulgent to excess, but by that state of perfect abstraction and indifference which he showed to everything except the favourite pursuit which absorbed him. My mother had but to speak, and every wish was granted—a refusal was unknown. You may say, what could she want more? I reply, that anything to a woman is preferable to indifference. The immediate consent to every wish took away, in her opinion, all merit in the grant—the value of everything is only relative, and in proportion to the difficulty of obtaining it. The

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immediate assent to every opinion was tantamount to insult—it implied that he did not choose to argue with her.

"It is true that women like to have their own way—but they like at the same time to have difficulties to surmount and to conquer; otherwise half the gratification is lost. Although tempests are to be deplored, still a certain degree of oscillation and motion are requisite to keep fresh and clear the lake of matrimony, the waters of which otherwise soon stagnate and become foul, and without some contrary currents of opinion between a married couple such a stagnation must take place.

"A woman permitted always and invariably to have her own way without control is much in the same situation as the child who insists upon a whole instead of half a holiday, and before the evening closes is tired of himself and everything about him. In short, a little contradiction, like salt at dinner, seasons and appetises the repast, but too much, like the condiment in question, spoils the whole, and it becomes unpalatable in proportion to its excess.

"My mother was a vain woman in every sense of the word—vain of her birth and of her beauty, and accustomed to receive that homage to which she considered herself entitled. She had been spoiled in her infancy, and as she grew up had learnt nothing, because she was permitted to do as she pleased; she was therefore frivolous, and could not appreciate what she could not comprehend. There never was a more ill-assorted union."

"I have always thought that such must be the case," replied Gascoigne, "in Catholic countries, where a young person is taken out of a convent and mated according to what her family or her wealth may consider as the most eligible connection."

"On that subject there are many opinions, my friend," replied Don Rebiera. "It is true that when a marriage of convenience is arranged by the parents, the dispositions of the parties are made a secondary point; but then, again, it must be remembered, that when a choice is left to the parties themselves, it is at an age at which there is little worldly consideration; and led away, in the first place, by their passions, they form connections with those inferior in their station which are attended with eventual unhappiness; or, in the other, allowing that they do choose in their own rank of life, they

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make quite as bad or often a worse choice than if their partners were selected for them."

"I cannot understand that," replied Gascoigne.

"The reason is, because there are no means, or, if means, no wish, to study each other's disposition. A young man is attracted by person, and he admires; the young woman is flattered by the admiration, and is agreeable; if she has any faults she is not likely to display them—not concealing them from hypocrisy, but because they are not called out. The young man falls in love, so does the young woman; and when once in love, they can no longer see faults; they marry, imagining that they have found perfection. In the blindness of love each raises the other to a standard of perfection which human nature can never attain, and each becomes equally annoyed on finding, by degrees, that they were in error. The reaction takes place, and they then underrate, as much as before they had overrated each other. Now, if two young people marry without this violence of passion, they do not expect to find each other perfect, and perhaps have a better chance of happiness."

"I don't agree with you," thought Gascoigne; "but as you appear to be as fond of argument as my friend Jack, I shall make no reply, lest there be no end to the story."

Don Rebiera proceeded.

"My mother, finding that my father preferred his closet and his books to gaiety and dissipation, soon left him to himself, and amused herself after her own fashion, but not until I was born, which was ten months after their marriage. My father was confiding, and pleased that my mother should be amused, he indulged her in everything. Time flew on, and I had arrived at my fifteenth year, and came home from my studies, it being intended that I should enter the army, which you are aware is generally the only profession embraced in this country by the heirs of noble families. Of course I knew little of what had passed at home, but still I had occasionally heard my mother spoken lightly of, when I was not supposed to be present, and I always heard my father's name mentioned with compassion, as if an ill-used man, but I knew nothing more; still this was quite sufficient for a young man, whose blood boiled at the idea of anything like a stigma being cast upon his family. I arrived at my father's—I found him at his books; I paid my respects

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to my mother,—I found her with her confessor. I disliked the man at first sight; he was handsome, certainly: his forehead was high and white, his eyes large and fiery, and his figure commanding; but there was a dangerous, proud look about him which disgusted me,—nothing like humility or devotion. I might have admired him as an officer commanding a regiment of cavalry, but as a churchman he appeared to be most misplaced. She named me with kindness, but he appeared to treat me with disdain; he spoke authoritatively to my mother, who appeared to yield implicitly, and I discovered that he was lord of the whole household. My mother, too, it was said, had given up gaieties and become devout. I soon perceived more than a common intelligence between them, and before I had been two months at home I had certain proofs of my father's dishonour; and what was still more unfortunate for me, they were aware that such was the case. My first impulse was to acquaint my father; but, on consideration, I thought it better to say nothing, provided I could persuade my mother to dismiss Father Ignatio. I took an opportunity when she was alone to express my indignation at her conduct, and to demand his immediate dismissal, as a condition of my not divulging her crime. She appeared frightened, and gave her consent; but I soon found that her confessor had more power with her than I had, and he remained. I now resolved to acquaint my father, and I roused him from his studies that he might listen to his shame. I imagined that he would have acted calmly and discreetly; but, on the contrary, his violence was without bounds, and I had the greatest difficulty from preventing his rushing with his sword to sacrifice them both. At last he contented himself by turning Father Ignatio out of the house in the most ignominious manner, and desiring my mother to prepare for seclusion in a convent for the remainder of her days. But he fell their victim; three days afterwards, as my mother was, by his directions, about to be removed, he was seized with convulsions, and died. I need hardly say that he was carried off by poison; this, however, could not be established till long afterwards. Before he died he seemed to be almost supernaturally prepared for an event which never came into my thoughts. He sent for another confessor, who drew up his confession in writing at his own request, and afterwards inserted it in his will. My mother remained in the house, and Father Ignatio had the

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insolence to return. I ordered him away, and he resisted. He was turned out by the servants. I had an interview with my mother, who defied me, and told me that I should soon have a brother to share in the succession. I felt that, if so, it would be the illegitimate progeny of her adultery, and told her my opinion. She expressed her rage in the bitterest curses, and I left her. Shortly afterwards she quitted the house and retired to another of our country seats, where she lived with Father Ignatio as before. About four months afterwards, formal notice was sent to me of the birth of a brother; but as when my father's will was opened, he there had inserted his confession, or the substance of it, in which he stated, that aware of my mother's guilt, and supposing that consequences might ensue, he solemnly declared before God that he had for years lived apart, I cared little for this communication. I contented myself with replying that as the child belonged to the Church, it had better be dedicated to its service.

"I had, however, soon reason to acknowledge the vengeance of my mother and her paramour. One night I was attacked by bravos; and had I not fortunately received assistance, I should have forfeited my life; as it was, I received a severe wound.

"Against attempts of that kind I took every precaution in future, but still every attempt was made to ruin my character, as well as to take my life. A young sister disappeared from a convent in my neighbourhood, and on the ground near the window from which she descended was found a hat, recognised to be mine. I was proceeded against, and notwithstanding the strongest interest, it was with difficulty that the affair was arranged, although I had incontestably proved an *alibi*.

"A young man of rank was found murdered, with a stiletto, known to be mine, buried in his bosom, and it was with difficulty that I could establish my innocence.

"Part of a banditti had been seized, and on being asked the name of their chief, when they received absolution, they confessed that I was the chief of the band.

"Everything that could be attempted was put into practice; and if I did not lose my life, at all events I was avoided by almost everybody as a dangerous and doubtful character.

"At last a nobleman of rank, the father of Don Scipio, whom you disarmed, was assassinated; the bravos were taken,

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and they acknowledged that I was the person who hired them. I defended myself, but the king imposed upon me a heavy fine and banishment. I had just received the order, and was crying out against the injustice, and lamenting my hard fate, as I sat down to dinner. Latterly, aware of what my enemies would attempt, I had been accustomed to live much alone. My faithful valet Pedro was my only attendant. I was eating my dinner with little appetite, and had asked for some wine. Pedro went to the buffet behind him to give me what I required. Accidentally I lifted up my head, and there being a large pier-glass opposite to me, I saw the figure of my valet, and that he was pouring a powder in the flagon of wine which he was about to present to me. I recollected the hat being found at the nunnery, and also the stiletto in the body of the young man.

"Like lightning it occurred to me that I had been fostering the viper who had assisted to destroy me. He brought me the flagon. I rose, locked the door, and drawing my sword, I addressed him—

"'Villain! I know thee; down on your knees, for your life is forfeited.'

"He turned pale, trembled, and sank upon his knees.

"'Now, then,' continued I, 'you have but one chance—either drink off this flagon of wine, or I pass my sword through your body.' He hesitated, and I put the point to his breast,—even pierced the flesh a quarter of an inch.

"'Drink,' cried I—'is it so very unjust an order to tell you to drink old wine? Drink,' continued I, 'or my sword does its duty.'

"He drank, and would then have quitted the room. 'No, no,' said I, 'you remain here, and the wine must have its effect. If I have wronged you I will make amends to you—but I am suspicious.'

"In about a quarter of an hour, during which time I paced up and down the room, with my sword drawn, my servant fell down, and cried in mercy to let him have a priest. I sent for my own confessor, and he then acknowledged that he was an agent of my mother and Father Ignatio, and had been the means of making it appear that I was the committer of all the crimes and murders which had been perpetrated by them, with a view to my destruction. A strong emetic having been

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administered to him, he partially revived, and was taken to Palermo, where he gave his evidence before he expired.

"When this was made known, the king revoked his sentence, apologised to me, and I found that once more I was visited and courted by everybody. My mother was ordered to be shut up in a convent, where she died, I trust, in grace; and Father Ignatio fled to Italy, and I have been informed is since dead.

"Having thus rid myself of my principal enemies, I considered myself safe. I married the lady whom you have just seen, and before my eldest son was born, Don Silvio, for such was the name given to my asserted legitimate brother, came of age, and demanded his succession. Had he asked me for a proper support, as my uterine brother, I should not have refused; but that the son of Friar Ignatio, who had so often attempted my life, should, in case of my decease, succeed to the title and estates, was not to be borne. A lawsuit was immediately commenced, which lasted four or five years, during which Don Silvio married, and had a son, that young man whom you heard me address by the same name; but after much litigation, it was decided that my father's confessor and will had proved his illegitimacy, and the suit was in my favour. From that time to this, there has been a constant enmity. Don Silvio refused all my offers of assistance, and followed me with a pertinacity which often endangered my life. At last he fell by the hands of his own agents, who mistook him for me. Don Silvio died without leaving any provision for his family; his widow I pensioned, and his son I have had carefully brought up, and have indeed treated most liberally, but he appears to have imbibed the spirit of his father, and no kindness has been able to embue him with gratitude.

"He had lately been placed by me in the army, where he found out my two sons, and quarrelled with them both upon slight pretence; but, in both instances, he was wounded and carried off the field.

"My two sons have been staying with me these last two months, and did not leave till yesterday. This morning Don Silvio, accompanied by Don Scipio, came to the house, and after accusing me of being the murderer of both their parents, drew their rapiers to assassinate me. My wife and child, hearing the noise, came down to my assistance—you know the rest."

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CHAPTER XXI

In which our hero is brought up all standing under a press of sail.

OUR limits will not permit us to relate all that passed during our hero's stay of a fortnight at Don Rebiera's. He and Gascoigne were treated as if they were his own sons, and the kindness of the female part of the family was equally remarkable. Agnes, naturally perhaps, showed a preference or partiality for Jack; to which Gascoigne willingly submitted, as he felt that our hero had a prior and stronger claim, and during the time that they remained a feeling of attachment was created between Agnes and the philosopher, which, if not love, was at least something very near akin to it; but the fact was, that they were both much too young to think of marriage; and although they walked and talked, and laughed, and played together, they were always at home in time for their dinner. Still, the young lady thought she preferred our hero, even to her brothers, and Jack thought that the young lady was the prettiest and kindest girl that he had ever met with. At the end of the fortnight, our two midshipmen took their leave, furnished with letters of recommendation to many of the first nobility in Palermo, and mounted on two fine mules with bell bridles. The old Donna kissed them both—the Don showered down his blessings of good wishes, and Donna Agnes' lips trembled as she bade them adieu; and as soon as they were gone, she went up to her chamber and wept. Jack also was very grave, and his eyes moistened at the thoughts of leaving Agnes. Neither of them were aware, until the hour of parting, how much they had wound themselves together.

The first quarter of an hour our two midshipmen followed their guide in silence. Jack wished to be left to his own thoughts, and Gascoigne perceived it.

"Well, Easy," said Gascoigne, at last, "if I had been in your place, constantly in company of, and loved by, that charming girl, I could never have torn myself away."

"Loved by her, Ned!" replied Jack, "what makes you say that?"