ness and precision which characterised him when he used any sharp instrument. The head just fitted the frame. He fastened it in with drops of sealing-wax and carefully burned the rest of the picture in the embers.

The face of Maria Consuelo smiled at him in the lamp-light, as he turned it in different ways so as to find the best aspect of it. Then he hung it on a nail above the mantelpiece just under a pair of crossed foils.

"That man Gouache is a very clever fellow," he said aloud. "Between them, he and nature have made a good likeness."

He sat down again and it was a long time before he made up his mind to take away the lamp and go to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

Del Ferice kept his word and arranged matters for Orsino with a speed and skill which excited the latter's admiration. The affair was not indeed very complicated though it involved a deed of sale, the transfer of a mortgage and a deed of partnership between Orsino Saracinesca and Andrea Contini, architect, under the style "Andrea Contini and Company," besides a contract between this firm of the one party and the bank in which Del Ferice was a director, of the other, the partners agreeing to continue the building of the half-finished house, and the bank binding itself to advance small sums up to a certain amount for current expenses of material and workmen's wages. Orsino signed everything required of him after reading the documents, and Andrea Contini followed his example.

The architect was a tall man with bright brown eyes, a dark and somewhat ragged beard, close cropped hair, a prominent, bony forehead and large, coarsely shaped, thin ears oddly set upon his head. He habitually wore a

dark overcoat, of which the collar was generally turned up on one side and not on the other. Judging from the appearance of his strong shoes he had always been walking a long distance over bad roads, and when it had rained within the week his trousers were generally bespattered with mud to a considerable height above the heel. He habitually carried an extinguished cigar between his teeth of which he chewed the thin black end uneasily. Orsino fancied that he might be about eight and twenty years old, and was not altogether displeased with his appearance. He was not at all like the majority of his kind, who, in Rome at least, usually affect a scrupulous dandyism of attire and an uncommon refinement of manner. Whatever Contini's faults might prove to be, Orsino did not believe that they would turn out to be those of idleness or vanity. How far he was right in his judgment will appear before long, but he conceived his partner to be gifted, frank, enthusiastic and careless of outward forms.

As for the architect himself, he surveyed Orsino with a sort of sympathetic curiosity which the latter would have thought unpleasantly familiar if he had understood it. Contini had never spoken before with any more exalted personage than Del Ferice, and he studied the young aristocrat as though he were a being from another world. He hesitated some time as to the proper mode of addressing him and at last decided to call him "Signor Principe." Orsino seemed quite satisfied with this, and the architect was inwardly pleased when the young man said "Signor Contini" instead of Contini alone. It was quite clear that Del Ferice had already acquainted him with all the details of the situation, for he seemed to understand all the documents at a glance, picking out and examining the important clauses with unfailing acuteness, and pointing with his finger to the place where Orsino was to sign his name.

At the end of the interview Orsino shook hands with Del Ferice and thanked him warmly for his kindness,

after which he and his partner went out together. They stood side by side upon the pavement for a few seconds, each wondering what the other was going to say.

"Perhaps we had better go and look at the house, Signor Principe," observed Contini, in the midst of an ineffectual effort to light the stump of his cigar.

"I think so, too," answered Orsino, realising that since he had acquired the property it would be as well to know how it looked. "You see I have trusted my adviser entirely in the matter, and I am ashamed to say I do not know where the house is."

Andrea Contini looked at him curiously.

"This is the first time that you have had anything to do with business of this kind, Signor Principe," he observed. "You have fallen into good hands."

"Yours?" inquired Orsino, a little stiffly.

"No. I mean that Count Del Ferice is a good adviser in this matter."

"I hope so."

"I am sure of it," said Contini with conviction. "It would be a great surprise to me if we failed to make a handsome profit by this contract."

"There is luck and ill-luck in everything," answered Orsino, signalling to a passing cab.

The two men exchanged few words as they drove up to the new quarter in the direction indicated to the driver by Contini. The cab entered a sort of broad lane, the sketch of a future street, rough with the unrolled metalling of broken stones, the space set apart for the pavement being an uneven path of trodden brown earth. Here and there tall detached houses rose out of the wilderness, mostly covered by scaffoldings and swarming with workmen, but hideous where so far finished as to be visible in all the isolation of their six-storied nakedness. A strong smell of lime, wet earth and damp masonry was blown into Orsino's nostrils by the scirocco wind. Contini stopped the cab before an unpromising and deserted erection of poles, boards and tattered matting.

"This is our house," he said, getting out and immediately making another attempt to light his cigar.

"May I offer you a cigarette?" asked Orsino, holding out his case.

Contini touched his hat, bowed a little awkwardly and took one of the cigarettes, which he immediately transferred to his coat pocket.

"If you will allow me I will smoke it by and by," he said. "I have not finished my cigar."

Orsino stood on the slippery ground beside the stones and contemplated his purchase. All at once his heart sank and he felt a profound disgust for everything within the range of his vision. He was suddenly aware of his own total and hopeless ignorance of everything connected with building, theoretical or practical. The sight of the stiff, angular scaffoldings, draped with torn straw mattings that flapped fantastically in the south-east wind, the apparent absence of anything like a real house behind them, the blades of grass sprouting abundantly about the foot of each pole and covering the heaps of brown pozzolana earth prepared for making mortar, even the detail of a broken wooden hod before the boarded entrance—all these things contributed at once to increase his dismay and to fill him with a bitter sense of inevitable failure. He found nothing to say, as he stood with his hands in his pockets staring at the general desolation, but he understood for the first time why women cry for disappointment. And moreover, this desolation was his own peculiar property, by deed of purchase, and he could not get rid of it.

Meanwhile Andrea Contini stood beside him, examining the scaffoldings with his bright brown eyes, in no way disconcerted by the prospect.

"Shall we go in?" he asked at last.

"Do unfinished houses always look like this?" inquired Orsino, in a hopeless tone, without noticing his companion's proposition.

"Not always," answered Contini cheerfully. "It de-

pends upon the amount of work that has been done, and upon other things. Sometimes the foundations sink and the buildings collapse."

"Are you sure nothing of the kind has happened here?" asked Orsino with increasing anxiety.

"I have been several times to look at it since the baker died and I have not noticed any cracks yet," answered the architect, whose coolness seemed almost exasperating.

"I suppose you understand these things, Signor Contini?"

Contini laughed, and felt in his pockets for a crumpled paper box of wax-lights.

"It is my profession," he answered. "And then, I built this house from the foundations. If you will come in, Signor Principe, I will show you how solidly the work is done."

He took a key from his pocket and thrust it into a hole in the boarding, which latter proved to be a rough door and opened noisily upon rusty hinges. Orsino followed him in silence. To the young man's inexperienced eye the interior of the building was even more depressing than the outside. It smelt like a vault, and a dim grey light entered the square apertures from the curtained scaffoldings without, just sufficient to help one to find a way through the heaps of rubbish that covered the unpaved floors. Contini explained rapidly and concisely the arrangement of the rooms, calling one cave familiarly a dining-room and another a "conjugal bedroom," as he expressed it, and expatiating upon the facilities of communication which he himself had carefully planned. Orsino listened in silence and followed his guide patiently from place to place, in and out of dark passages and up flights of stairs as yet unguarded by any rail, until they emerged upon a sort of flat terrace intersected by low walls, which was indeed another floor and above which another story and a garret were yet to be built to complete the house. Orsino looked gloomily about him, lighted a cigarette and sat down upon a bit of masonry.

"To me, it looks very like failure," he remarked. "But I suppose there is something in it."

"It will not look like failure next month," said Contini carelessly. "Another story is soon built, and then the attic, and then, if you like, a Gothic roof and a turret at one corner. That always attracts buyers first and respectable lodgers afterwards."

"Let us have a turret, by all means," answered Orsino, as though his tailor had proposed to put an extra button on the cuff of his coat. "But how in the world are you going to begin? Everything looks to me as though it were falling to pieces."

"Leave all that to me, Signor Principe. We will begin to-morrow. I have a good overseer and there are plenty of workmen to be had. We have material for a week at least, and paid for, excepting a few cartloads of lime. Come again in ten days and you will see something worth looking at."

"In ten days? And what am I to do in the meantime?" asked Orsino, who fancied that he had found an occupation.

Andrea Contini looked at him in some surprise, not understanding in the least what he meant.

"I mean, am I to have nothing to do with the work?" asked Orsino.

"Oh—as far as that goes, you will come every day, Signor Principe, if it amuses you, though as you are not a practical architect, your assistance is not needed until questions of taste have to be considered, such as the Gothic roof for instance. But there are the accounts to be kept, of course, and there is the business with the bank from week to week, office work of various kinds. That becomes naturally your department, as the practical superintendence of the building is mine, but you will of course leave it to the steward of the Signor Principe di Sant' Ilario, who is a man of affairs."

"I will do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Orsino. "I will do it myself. I will learn how it is done. I want occupation."

"What an extraordinary wish!" Andrea Contini opened his eyes in real astonishment.

"Is it? You work. Why should not I?"

"I must, and you need not, Signor Principe," observed the architect. "But if you insist, then you had better get a clerk to explain the details to you at first."

"Do you not understand them? Can you not teach me?" asked Orsino, displeased with the idea of employing a third person.

"Oh yes—I have been a clerk myself. I should be too much honoured but—the fact is, my spare time——"

He hesitated and seemed reluctant to explain.

"What do you do with your spare time?" asked Orsino, suspecting some love affair.

"The fact is—I play a second violin at one of the theatres—and I give lessons on the mandolin, and sometimes I do copying work for my uncle who is a clerk in the Treasury. You see, he is old, and his eyes are not as good as they were."

Orsino began to think that his partner was a very odd person. He could not help smiling at the enumeration of his architect's secondary occupations.

"You are very fond of music, then?" he asked.

"Eh—yes—as one can be, without talent—a little by necessity. To be an architect one must have houses to build. You see the baker died unexpectedly. One must live somehow."

"And could you not—how shall I say? Would you not be willing to give me lessons in book-keeping instead of teaching some one else to play the mandolin?"

"You would not care to learn the mandolin yourself, Signor Principe? It is a very pretty instrument, especially for country parties, as well as for serenading."

Orsino laughed. He did not see himself in the character of a mandolinist.

"I have not the slightest ear for music," he answered. "I would much rather learn something about business."

"It is less amusing," said Andrea Contini regretfully.

"But I am at your service. I will come to the office when work is over and we will do the accounts together. You will learn in that way very quickly."

"Thank you. I suppose we must have an office. It is necessary, is it not?"

"Indispensable—a room, a garret—anything. A habitation, a legal domicile, so to say."

"Where do you live, Signor Contini? Would not your lodging do?"

"I am afraid not, Signor Principe. At least not for the present. I am not very well lodged and the stairs are badly lighted."

"Why not here, then?" asked Orsino, suddenly growing desperately practical, for he felt unaccountably reluctant to hire an office in the city.

"We should pay no rent," said Contini. "It is an idea. But the walls are dry downstairs, and we only need a pavement, and plastering, and doors and windows, and papering and some furniture to make one of the rooms quite habitable. It is an idea, undoubtedly. Besides, it would give the house an air of being inhabited, which is valuable."

"How long will all that take? A month or two?"

"About a week. It will be a little fresh, but if you are not rheumatic, Signor Principe, we can try it."

"I am not rheumatic," laughed Orsino, who was pleased with the idea of having his office on the spot, and apparently in the midst of a wilderness. "And I suppose you really do understand architecture, Signor Contini, though you do play the fiddle."

In this exceedingly sketchy way was the firm of Andrea Contini and Company established and lodged, being at the time in a very shadowy state, theoretically and practically, though it was destined to play a more prominent part in affairs than either of the young partners anticipated. Orsino discovered before long that his partner was a man of skill and energy, and his spirits rose by degrees as the work began to advance. Contini

was restless, untiring and gifted, such a character as Orsino had not yet met in his limited experience of the world. The man seemed to understand his business to the smallest details and could show the workmen how to mix mortar in the right proportions, or how to strengthen a scaffolding at the weak point much better than the overseer or the master builder. At the books he seemed to be infallible, and he possessed, moreover, such a power of stating things clearly and neatly that Orsino actually learnt from him in a few weeks what he would have needed six months to learn anywhere else. As soon as the first dread of failure wore off, Orsino discovered that he was happier than he had ever been in the course of his life before. What he did was not, indeed, of much use in the progress of the office work and rather hindered than helped Contini, who was obliged to do everything slowly and sometimes twice over in order to make his pupil understand; but Orsino had a clear and practical mind, and did not forget what he had learned once. An odd sort of friendship sprang up between the two men, who under ordinary circumstances would never have met, or known each other by sight. The one had expected to find in his partner an overbearing, ignorant patrician; the other had supposed that his companion would turn out a vulgar, sordid, half-educated builder. Both were equally surprised when each discovered the truth about the other.

Though Orsino was reticent by nature, he took no especial pains to conceal his goings and comings, but as his occupation took him out of the ordinary beat followed by his idle friends, it was a long time before any of them discovered that he was engaged in practical business. In his own home he was not questioned, and he said nothing. The Saracinesca were considered eccentric, but no one interfered with them nor ventured to offer them suggestions. If they chose to allow their heir absolute liberty of action, merely because he had passed his twenty-first birthday, it was their own concern, and his

ruin would be upon their own heads. No one cared to risk a savage retort from the aged prince, or a cutting answer from Sant' Ilario for the questionable satisfaction of telling either that Orsino was going to the bad. The only person who really knew what Orsino was about, and who could have claimed the right to speak to his family of his doings was San Giacinto, and he held his peace, having plenty of important affairs of his own to occupy him and being blessed with an especial gift for leaving other people to themselves.

Sant' Ilario never spied upon his son, as many of his contemporaries would have done in his place. He preferred to trust him to his own devices so long as these led to no great mischief. He saw that Orsino was less restless than formerly, that he was less at the club, and that he was stirring earlier in the morning than had been his wont, and he was well satisfied.

It was not to be expected, however, that Orsino should take Maria Consuelo literally at her word, and cease from visiting her all at once. If not really in love with her, he was at least so much interested in her that he sorely missed the daily half hour or more which he had been used to spend in her society.

Three several times he went to her hotel at the accustomed hour, and each time he was told by the porter that she was at home; but on each occasion, also, when he sent up his card, the hotel servant returned with a message from the maid to the effect that Madame d'Aranjuez was tired and did not receive. Orsino's pride rebelled equally against making a further attempt and against writing a letter requesting an explanation. Once only, when he was walking alone she passed him in a carriage, and she acknowledged his bow quietly and naturally, as though nothing had happened. He fancied she was paler than usual, and that there were shadows under her eyes which he had not formerly noticed. Possibly, he thought, she was really not in good health, and the excuses made through her maid were not wholly

invented. He was conscious that his heart beat a little faster as he watched the back of the brougham disappearing in the distance, but he did not feel an irresistible longing to make another and more serious attempt to see her. He tried to analyse his own sensations, and it seemed to him that he rather dreaded a meeting than desired it, and that he felt a certain humiliation for which he could not account. In the midst of his analysis, his cigarette went out and he sighed. He was startled by such an expression of feeling, and tried to remember whether he had ever sighed before in his life, but if he had, he could not recall the circumstances. He tried to console himself with the absurd supposition that he was sleepy and that the long-drawn breath had been only a suppressed yawn. Then he walked on, gazing before him into the purple haze that filled the deep street just as the sun was setting, and a vague sadness and longing touched him which had no place in his catalogue of permissible emotions and which were as far removed from the cold cynicism which he admired in others and affected in himself as they were beyond the sphere of his analysis.

There is an age, not always to be fixed exactly, at which the really masculine nature craves the society of womankind, in one shape or another, as a necessity of existence, and by the society of womankind no one means merely the daily and hourly social intercourse which consists in exchanging the same set of remarks half a dozen times a day with as many beings of gentle sex who, to the careless eye of ordinary man, differ from each other in dress rather than in face or thought. There are eminently manly men, that is to say men fearless, strong, honourable and active, to whom the common five o'clock tea presents as much distraction and offers as much womanly sympathy as they need; who choose their intimate friends among men, rather than among women, and who die at an advanced age without ever having been more than comfortably in love—and of

such is the Kingdom of Heaven. The masculine man may be as brave, as strong and as scrupulously just in all his dealings, but on the other hand he may be weak, cowardly and a cheat, and he is apt to inherit the portion of sinners, whatever his moral characteristics may be, good or bad.

Orsino was certainly not unmanly, but he was also eminently masculine and he began to suffer from the loss of Maria Consuelo's conversation in a way that surprised himself. His acquaintance with her, to give it a mild name, had been the first of the kind which he had enjoyed, and it contrasted too strongly with the crude experiences of his untried youth not to be highly valued by him and deeply regretted. He might pretend to laugh at it, and repeat to himself that his Egeria had been but a very superficial person, fervent in the reading of the daily novel and possibly not even worldly wise; he did not miss her any the less for that. A little sympathy and much patience in listening will go far to make a woman of small gifts indispensable even to a man of superior talent, especially when he thinks himself misunderstood in his ordinary surroundings. The sympathy passes for intelligence and the patience for assent and encouragement—a touch of the hand, and there is friendship, a tear, a sigh, and devotion stands upon the stage, bearing in her arms an infant love who learns to walk his part at the first suspicion of a kiss.

Orsino did not imagine that he had exhausted the world's capabilities of happiness. The age of Byronism, as it used to be called, is over. Possibly tragedies are more real and frequent in our day than when the century was young; at all events those which take place seem to draw a new element of horror from those undefinable, mechanical, prosaic, psuedo-scientific conditions which make our lives so different from those of our fathers. Everything is terribly sudden nowadays, and alarmingly quick. Lovers make love across Europe by telegraph, and poetic justice arrives in less than forty-eight hours

by the Oriental Express. Divorce is our weapon of precision, and every pack of cards at the gaming table can distil a poison more destructive than that of the Borgia. The unities of time and place are preserved by wire and rail in a way which would have delighted the hearts of the old French tragics. Perhaps men seek dramatic situations in their own lives less readily since they have found out means of making the concluding act more swift, sudden and inevitable. At all events we all like tragedy less and comedy more than our fathers did, which, I think, shows that we are sadder and possibly wiser men than they.

However this may be, Orsino was no more inclined to fancy himself unhappy than any of his familiar companions, though he was quite willing to believe that he understood most of life's problems, and especially the heart of woman. He continued to go into the world, for it was new to him and if he did not find exactly the sort of sympathy he secretly craved, he found at least a great deal of consideration, some flattery and a certain amount of amusement. But when he was not actually being amused, or really engaged in the work which he had undertaken with so much enthusiasm, he felt lonely and missed Maria Consuelo more than ever. By this time she had taken a position in society from which there could be no drawing back, and he gave up for ever the hope of seeing her in his own circle. She seemed to avoid even the grey houses where they might have met on neutral ground, and Orsino saw that his only chance of finding her in the world lay in going frequently and openly to Del Ferice's house. He had called on Donna Tullia after the dinner, of course, but he was not prepared to do more, and Del Ferice did not seem to expect it.

Three or four weeks after he had entered into partnership with Andrea Contini, Orsino found himself alone with his mother in the evening. Corona was seated near the fire in her favourite boudoir, with a book in her hand, and Orsino stood warming himself on one side of the

chimney-piece, staring into the flames and occasionally glancing at his mother's calm, dark face. He was debating whether he should stay at home or not.

Corona became conscious that he looked at her from time to time and dropped her novel upon her knee.

"Are you going out, Orsino?" she asked.

"I hardly know," he answered. "There is nothing particular to do, and it is too late for the theatre."

"Then stay with me. Let us talk." She looked at him affectionately and pointed to a low chair near her.

He drew it up until he could see her face as she spoke, and then sat down.

"What shall we talk about, mother?" he asked, with a smile.

"About yourself, if you like, my dear. That is, if you have anything that you know I would like to hear. I am not curious, am I, Orsino? I never ask you questions about yourself."

"No, indeed. You never tease me with questions—nor does my father either, for that matter. Would you really like to know what I am doing?"

"If you will tell me."

"I am building a house," said Orsino, looking at her to see the effect of the announcement.

"A house?" repeated Corona in surprise. "Where? Does your father know about it?"

"He said he did not care what I did." Orsino spoke rather bitterly.

"That does not sound like him, my dear. Tell me all about it. Have you quarrelled with him, or had words together?"

Orsino told his story quickly, concisely and with a frankness he would perhaps not have shown to any one else in the world, for he did not even conceal his connection with Del Ferice. Corona listened intently, and her deep eyes told him plainly enough that she was interested. On his part he found an unexpected pleasure in telling her the tale, and he wondered why it had never

struck him that his mother might sympathise with his plans and aspirations. When he had finished, he waited for her first word almost as anxiously as he would have waited for an expression of opinion from Maria Consuelo.

Corona did not speak at once. She looked into his eyes, smiled, patted his lean brown hand lovingly and smiled again before she spoke.

"I like it," she said at last. "I like you to be independent and determined. You might perhaps have chosen a better man than Del Ferice for your adviser. He did something once—well, never mind! It was long ago and it did us no harm."

"What did he do, mother? I know my father wounded him in a duel before you were married——"

"It was not that. I would rather not tell you about it —it can do no good, and after all, it has nothing to do with the present affair. He would not be so foolish as to do you an injury now. I know him very well. He is far too clever for that."

"He is certainly clever," said Orsino. He knew that it would be quite useless to question his mother further after what she had said. "I am glad that you do not think I have made a mistake in going into this business."

"No. I do not think you have made a mistake, and I do not believe that your father will think so either when he knows all about it."

"He need not have been so icily discouraging," observed Orsino.

"He is a man, my dear, and I am a woman. That is the difference. Was San Giacinto more encouraging than he? No. They think alike, and San Giacinto has an immense experience besides. And yet they are both wrong. You may succeed, or you may fail—I hope you will succeed—but I do not care much for the result. It is the principle I like, the idea, the independence of the thing. As I grow old, I think more than I used to do when I was young."

"How can you talk of growing old!" exclaimed Orsino indignantly.

"I think more," said Corona again, not heeding him. "One of my thoughts is that our old restricted life was a mistake for us, and that to keep it up would be a sin for you. The world used to stand still in those days, and we stood at the head of it, or thought we did. But it is moving now and you must move with it or you will not only have to give up your place, but you will be left behind altogether."

"I had no idea that you were so modern, dearest mother," laughed Orsino. He felt suddenly very happy and in the best of humours with himself.

"Modern—no, I do not think that either your father or I could ever be that. If you had lived our lives you would see how impossible it is. The most I can hope to do is to understand you and your brothers as you grow up to be men. But I hate interference and I hate curiosity —the one breeds opposition and the other dishonesty— and if the other boys turn out to be as reticent as you, Orsino, I shall not always know when they want me. You do not realise how much you have been away from me since you were a boy, nor how silent you have grown when you are at home."

"Am I, mother? I never meant to be."

"I know it, dear, and I do not want you to be always confiding in me. It is not a good thing for a young man. You are strong and the more you rely upon yourself, the stronger you will grow. But when you want sympathy, if you ever do, remember that I have my whole heart full of it for you. For that, at least, come to me. No one can give you what I can give you, dear son."

Orsino was touched and pressed her hand, kissing it more than once. He did not know whether in her last words she had meant any allusion to Maria Consuelo, or whether, indeed, she had been aware of his intimacy with the latter. But he did not ask the question of her nor of himself. For the moment he felt that a want in his nature had been satisfied, and he wondered again why he had never thought of confiding in his mother.

They talked of his plans until it was late, and from that time they were more often together than before, each growing daily more proud of the other, though perhaps Orsino had better reasons for his pride than Corona could have found, for the love of mother for son is more comprehensive and not less blind than the passion of woman for man.

CHAPTER XIV.

The short Roman season was advancing rapidly to its premature fall, which is on Ash Wednesday, after which it struggles to hold up its head against the overwhelming odds of a severely observed Lent, to revive only spasmodically after Easter and to die a natural death on the first warm day. In that year, too, the fatal day fell on the fifteenth of February, and progressive spirits talked of the possibility of fixing the movable Feasts and Fasts of the Church in a more convenient part of the calendar. Easter might be made to fall in June, for instance, and society need not be informed of its inevitable and impending return to dust and ashes until it had enjoyed a good three months, or even four, of what an eminent American defines as "brass, sass, lies and sin."

Rome was very gay that year, to compensate for the shortness of its playtime. Everything was successful, and every one was rich. People talked of millions less soberly than they had talked of thousands a few years earlier, and with less respect than they mentioned hundreds twelve months later. Like the vanity-struck frog, the franc blew itself up to the bursting point, in the hope of being taken for the louis, and momentarily succeeded, even beyond its own expectations. No one walked, though horse-flesh was enormously dear and a good coachman's wages amounted to just twice the salary of a government clerk. Men who, six months earlier, had

climbed ladders with loads of brick or mortar, were now transformed into flourishing sub-contractors, and drove about in smart pony-carts, looking the picture of Italian prosperity, rejoicing in the most flashy of ties and smoking the blackest and longest of long black cigars. During twenty hours out of the twenty-four the gates of the city roared with traffic. From all parts of the country labourers poured in, bundle in hand and tools on shoulder to join in the enormous work and earn their share of the pay that was distributed so liberally. A certain man who believed in himself stood up and said that Rome was becoming one of the greatest of cities, and he smacked his lips and said that he had done it, and that the Triple Alliance was a goose which would lay many golden eggs. The believing bulls roared everything away before them, opposition, objections, financial experience, and the vanquished bears hibernated in secret places, sucking their paws and wondering what, in the name of Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, would happen next. Distinguished men wrote pamphlets in the most distinguished language to prove that wealth was a baby capable of being hatched artificially and brought up by hand. Every unmarried swain who could find a bride, married her forthwith; those who could not followed the advice of an illustrious poet and, being over-anxious to take wives, took those of others. Everybody was decorated. It positively rained decorations and hailed grand crosses and enough commanders' ribbons were reeled out to have hanged half the population. The periodical attempt to revive the defunct carnival in the Corso was made, and the yet unburied corpse of ancient gaiety was taken out and painted, and gorgeously arrayed, and propped up in its seat to be a posthumous terror to its enemies, like the dead Cid. Society danced frantically and did all those things which it ought not to have done—and added a few more, unconsciously imitating Pico della Mirandola.

Even those comparatively few families who, like the Saracinesca, had scornfully declined to dabble in the