SARACINESCA.

CHAPTER I.

In the year 1865 Rome was still in a great measure its old self. It had not then acquired that modern air which is now beginning to pervade it. The Corso had not been widened and whitewashed; the Villa Aldobrandini had not been cut through to make the Via Nazionale; the south wing of the Palazzo Colonna still looked upon a narrow lane through which men hesitated to pass after dark; the Tiber's course had not then been corrected below the Farnesina; the Farnesina itself was but just under repair; the iron bridge at the Ripetta was not dreamed of; and the Prati di Castello were still, as their name implies, a series of waste meadows. At the southern extremity of the city, the space between the fountain of Moses and the newly erected railway station, running past the Baths of Diocletian, was still an exercising-ground for the French cavalry. Even the people in the streets then presented an appearance very different from that which is now observed by the visitors and foreigners who come to Rome in the winter. French dragoons and hussars, French infantry and French officers, were everywhere to be seen in great numbers, mingled with a goodly sprinkling of the Papal Zouaves, whose grey Turco uni-

forms with bright red facings, red sashes, and short yellow gaiters, gave colour to any crowd. A fine corps of men they were, too, counting hundreds of gentlemen in their ranks, and officered by some of the best blood in France and Austria. In those days also were to be seen the great coaches of the cardinals, with their gorgeous footmen and magnificent black horses, the huge red umbrellas lying upon the top, while from the open windows the stately princes of the Church from time to time returned the salutations of the pedestrians in the street. And often in the afternoon there was heard the tramp of horse as a detachment of the noble guards trotted down the Corso on their great chargers, escorting the holy Father himself, while all who met him dropped upon one knee and uncovered their heads to receive the benediction of the mild-eyed old man with the beautiful features, the head of Church and State. Many a time, too, Pius IX. would descend from his coach and walk upon the Pincio, all clothed in white, stopping sometimes to talk with those who accompanied him, or to lay his gentle hand on the fair curls of some little English child that paused from its play in awe and admiration as the Pope went by. For he loved children well, and most of all, children with golden hair—angels, not Angles, as Gregory said.

As for the fashions of those days, it is probable that most of us would suffer severe penalties rather than return to them, beautiful as they then appeared to us by contrast with the exaggerated crinoline and flower-garden bonnet, which had given way to the somewhat milder form of hoop-skirt madness, but had not yet flown to the opposite extreme in the invention of the close-fitting *princesse* garments of 1868. But, to each other, people looked then as they look now. Fashion in dress, concerning which nine-tenths of society gives itself so much trouble, appears to exercise less influence upon men and women in their relations towards each other than does any other product of human ingenuity. Provided every one is

in the fashion, everything goes on in the age of high heels and gowns tied back precisely as it did five-and-twenty years ago, when people wore flat shoes, and when gloves with three buttons had not been dreamed of—when a woman of most moderate dimensions occupied three or four square yards of space upon a ball-room floor, and men wore peg-top trousers. Human beings since the days of Adam seem to have retired like caterpillars into cocoons of dress, expecting constantly the wondrous hour when they shall emerge from their self-woven prison in the garb of the angelic butterfly, having entered into the chrysalis state as mere human grubs. But though they both toil and spin at their garments, and vie with Solomon in his glory to outshine the lily of the field, the humanity of the grub shows no signs of developing either in character or appearance in the direction of anything particularly angelic.

It was not the dress of the period which gave to the streets of Rome their distinctive feature. It would be hard to say, now that so much is changed, wherein the peculiar charm of the old-time city consisted; but it was there, nevertheless, and made itself felt so distinctly beyond the charm of any other place, that the very fascination of Rome was proverbial. Perhaps no spot in Europe has ever possessed such an attractive individuality. In those days there were many foreigners, too, as there are to-day, both residents and visitors; but they seemed to belong to a different class of humanity. They seemed less inharmonious to their surroundings then than now, less offensive to the general air of antiquity. Probably they were more in earnest; they came to Rome with the intention of liking the place, rather than of abusing the cookery in the hotels. They came with a certain knowledge of the history, the literature, and the manners of the ancients, derived from an education which in those days taught more through the classics and less through handy text-books and shallow treatises concerning the Renaissance; they came with preconceived no-

tions which were often strongly dashed with old-fashioned prejudice, but which did not lack originality: they come now in the smattering mood, imbued with no genuine beliefs, but covered with exceeding thick varnish. Old gentlemen then visited the sights in the morning, and quoted Horace to each other, and in the evening endeavoured by associating with Romans to understand something of Rome; young gentlemen now spend one or two mornings in finding fault with the architecture of Bramante, and "in the evening," like David's enemies, "they grin like a dog and run about the city:" young women were content to find much beauty in the galleries and in the museums, and were simple enough to admire what they liked; young ladies of the present day can find nothing to admire except their own perspicacity in detecting faults in Raphael's drawing or Michael Angelo's colouring. This is the age of incompetent criticism in matters artistic, and no one is too ignorant to volunteer an opinion. It is sufficient to have visited half-a-dozen Italian towns, and to have read a few pages of fashionable æsthetic literature—no other education is needed to fit the intelligent young critic for his easy task. The art of paradox can be learned in five minutes, and practised by any child; it consists chiefly in taking two expressions of opinion from different authors, halving them, and uniting the first half of the one with the second half of the other. The result is invariably startling, and generally incomprehensible. When a young society critic knows how to be startling and incomprehensible, his reputation is soon made, for people readily believe that what they cannot understand is profound, and anything which astonishes is agreeable to a taste deadened by a surfeit of spices. But in 1865 the taste of Europe was in a very different state. The Second Empire was in its glory. M. Emile Zola had not written his 'Assommoir.' Count Bismarck had only just brought to a successful termination the first part of his trimachy; Sadowa and Sedan were yet unfought. Garibaldi had won Naples, and Cavour

had said, "If we did for ourselves what we are doing for Italy, we should be great scoundrels;" but Garibaldi had not yet failed at Mentana, nor had Austria ceded Venice. Cardinal Antonelli had yet ten years of life before him in which to maintain his gallant struggle for the remnant of the temporal power; Pius IX. was to live thirteen years longer, just long enough to outlive by one month the "honest king," Victor Emmanuel. Antonelli's influence pervaded Rome, and to a great extent all the Catholic Courts of Europe; yet he was far from popular with the Romans. The Jesuits, however, were even less popular than he, and certainly received a much larger share of abuse. For the Romans love faction more than party, and understand it better; so that popular opinion is too frequently represented by a transitory frenzy, violent and pestilent while it lasts, utterly insignificant when it has spent its fury.

But Rome in those days was peopled solely by Romans, whereas now a large proportion of the population consists of Italians from the north and south, who have been attracted to the capital by many interests—races as different from its former citizens as Germans or Spaniards, and unfortunately not disposed to show overmuch good-fellowship or loving-kindness to the original inhabitants. The Roman is a grumbler by nature, but he is also a "peace-at-any-price" man. Politicians and revolutionary agents have more than once been deceived by these traits, supposing that because the Roman grumbled he really desired change, but realising too late, when the change has been begun, that that same Roman is but a lukewarm partisan. The Papal Government repressed grumbling as a nuisance, and the people consequently took a delight in annoying the authorities by grumbling in secret places and calling themselves conspirators. The harmless whispering of petty discontent was mistaken by the Italian party for the low thunder of a smothered volcano; but, the change being brought about, the Italians find to their disgust that the Roman meant nothing by his murmurings, and that he

now not only still grumbles at everything, but takes the trouble to fight the Government at every point which concerns the internal management of the city. In the days before the change, a paternal Government directed the affairs of the little State, and thought it best to remove all possibility of strife by giving the grumblers no voice in public or economic matters. The grumblers made a grievance of this; and then, as soon as the grievance had been redressed, they redoubled their complaints and retrenched themselves within the infallibility of inaction, on the principle that men who persist in doing nothing cannot possibly do wrong.

Those were the days, too, of the old school of artists—men who, if their powers of creation were not always proportioned to their ambition for excellence, were as superior to their more recent successors in their pure conceptions of what art should be as Apelles was to the Pompeian wall-painters, and as the Pompeians were to modern house-decorators. The age of Overbeck and the last religious painters was almost past, but the age of fashionable artistic debauchery had hardly begun. Water-colour was in its infancy; wood-engraving was hardly yet a great profession; but the "Dirty Boy" had not yet taken a prize at Paris, nor had indecency become a fine art. The French school had not demonstrated the startling distinction between the nude and the naked, nor had the English school dreamed nightmares of anatomical distortion.

Darwin's theories had been propagated, but had not yet been passed into law, and very few Romans had heard of them; still less had any one been found to assert that the real truth of these theories would be soon demonstrated retrogressively by the rapid degeneration of men into apes, while apes would hereafter have cause to congratulate themselves upon not having developed into men. Many theories also were then enjoying vast popularity which have since fallen low in the popular estimation. Prussia was still, in theory, a Power of the second class, and the empire of Louis Napoleon was supposed to possess ele-

ments of stability. The great civil war in the United States had just been fought, and people still doubted whether the republic would hold together. It is hard to recall the common beliefs of those times. A great part of the political creed of twenty years ago seems now a mass of idiotic superstition, in no wise preferable, as Macaulay would have said, to the Egyptian worship of cats and onions. Nevertheless, then, as now, men met together secretly in cellars and dens, as well as in drawing-rooms and clubs, and whispered together, and said their theories were worth something, and ought to be tried. The word republic possessed then, as now, a delicious attraction for people who had grievances; and although, after the conquest of Naples, Garibaldi had made a sort of public abjuration of republican principles, so far as Italy was concerned, the plotters of all classes persisted in coupling his name with the idea of a commonwealth erected on the plan of "sois mon frère ou je te tue." Profound silence on the part of Governments, and a still more guarded secrecy on the part of conspiring bodies, were practised as the very first principle of all political operations. No copyist, at half-a-crown an hour, had yet betrayed the English Foreign Office; and it had not dawned upon the clouded intellects of European statesmen that deliberate national perjury, accompanied by public meetings of sovereigns, and much blare of many trumpets, could be practised with such triumphant success as events have since shown. In the beginning of the year 1865 people crossed the Alps in carriages; the Suez Canal had not been opened; the first Atlantic cable was not laid; German unity had not been invented; Pius IX. reigned in the Pontifical States; Louis Napoleon was the idol of the French; President Lincoln had not been murdered,—is anything needed to widen the gulf which separates those times from these? The difference between the States of the world in 1865 and in 1885 is nearly as great as that which divided the Europe of 1789 from the Europe of 1814.

But my business is with Rome, and not with Europe at large. I intend to tell the story of certain persons, of their good and bad fortune, their adventures, and the complications in which they found themselves placed during a period of about twenty years. The people of whom I tell this story are chiefly patricians; and in the first part of their history they have very little to do with any but their own class—a class peculiar and almost unique in the world.

Speaking broadly, there is no one at once so thoroughly Roman and so thoroughly non-Roman as the Roman noble. This is no paradox, no play on words. Roman nobles are Roman by education and tradition; by blood they are almost cosmopolitans. The practice of intermarrying with the great families of the rest of Europe is so general as to be almost a rule. One Roman prince is an English peer; most of the Roman princes are grandees of Spain; many of them have married daughters of great French houses, of reigning German princes, of ex-kings and ex-queens. In one princely house alone are found the following combinations: There are three brothers: the eldest married first the daughter of a great English peer, and secondly the daughter of an even greater peer of France; the second brother married first a German "serene highness," and secondly the daughter of a great Hungarian noble; the third brother married the daughter of a French house of royal Stuart descent. This is no solitary instance. A score of families might be cited who, by constant foreign marriages, have almost eliminated from their blood the original Italian element; and this great intermixture of races may account for the strangely un-Italian types that are found among them, for the undying vitality which seems to animate races already a thousand years old, and above all, for a very remarkable cosmopolitanism which pervades Roman society. A set of people whose near relations are socially prominent in every capital of Europe, could hardly be expected to have anything provincial about them in appearance or manners; still less can they be considered to be types of their own nation. And yet such is

the force of tradition, of the patriarchal family life, of the early surroundings in which are placed these children of a mixed race, that they acquire from their earliest years the unmistakable outward manner of Romans, the broad Roman speech, and a sort of clannish and federative spirit, which has not its like in the same class anywhere in Europe. They grow up together, go to school together, go together into the world, and together discuss all the social affairs of their native city. Not a house is bought or sold, not a hundred francs won at écarté, not a marriage contract made, without being duly considered and commented upon by the whole of society. And yet, though there is much gossip, there is little scandal; there was even less twenty years ago than there is now—not, perhaps, because the increment of people attracted to the new capital have had any bad influence, but simply because the city has grown much larger, and in some respects has outgrown a certain simplicity of manners it once possessed, and which was its chief safeguard. For, in spite of a vast number of writers of all nations who have attempted to describe Italian life, and who, from an imperfect acquaintance with the people, have fallen into the error of supposing them to live perpetually in a highly complicated state of mind, the foundation of the Italian character is simple—far more so than that of his hereditary antagonist, the northern European. It is enough to notice that the Italian habitually expresses what he feels, while it is the chief pride of Northern men that whatever they may feel they express nothing. The chief object of most Italians is to make life agreeable; the chief object of the Teutonic races is to make it profitable. Hence the Italian excels in the art of pleasing, and in pleasing by means of the arts; whereas the Northern man is pre-eminent in the faculty of producing wealth under any circumstances, and when he has amassed enough possessions to think of enjoying his leisure, has generally been under the necessity of employing Southern art as a means to that end. But Southern simplicity

carried to its ultimate expression leads not uncommonly to startling results; for it is not generally a satisfaction to an Italian to be paid a sum of money as damages for an injury done. When his enemy has harmed him, he desires the simple retribution afforded by putting his enemy to death, and he frequently exacts it by any means that he finds ready to his hand. Being simple, he reflects little, and often acts with violence. The Northern mind, capable of vast intricacy of thought, seeks to combine revenge of injury with personal profit, and in a spirit of cold, far-sighted calculation, reckons up the advantages to be got by sacrificing an innate desire for blood to a civilised greed of money.

Dr Johnson would have liked the Romans—for in general they are good lovers and good haters, whatever faults they may have. The patriarchal system, which was all but universal twenty years ago, and is only now beginning to yield to more modern institutions of life, tends to foster the passions of love and hate. Where father and mother sit at the head and foot of the table, their sons with their wives and their children each in his or her place, often to the number of twenty souls—all living under one roof, one name, and one bond of family unity—there is likely to be a great similarity of feeling upon all questions of family pride, especially among people who discuss everything with vehemence, from European politics to the family cook. They may bicker and squabble among themselves,—and they frequently do,—but in their outward relations with the world they act as one individual, and the enemy of one is the enemy of all; for the pride of race and name is very great. There is a family in Rome who, since the memory of man, have not failed to dine together twice every week, and there are now more than thirty persons who take their places at the patriarchal board. No excuse can be pleaded for absence, and no one would think of violating the rule. Whether such a mode of life is good or not is a matter of opinion; it is, at all events, a fact, and one not generally understood or even known by persons who make studies

of Italian character. Free and constant discussion of all manner of topics should certainly tend to widen the intelligence; but, on the other hand, where the dialecticians are all of one race, and name, and blood, the practice may often merely lead to an undue development of prejudice. In Rome, particularly, where so many families take a distinct character from the influence of a foreign mother, the opinions of a house are associated with its mere name. Casa Borghese thinks so and so, Casa Colonna has diametrically opposite views, while Casa Altieri may differ wholly from both; and in connection with most subjects the mere names Borghese, Altieri, Colonna are associated in the minds of Romans of all classes with distinct sets of principles and ideas, with distinct types of character, and with distinctly different outward and visible signs of race. Some of these conditions exist among the nobility of other countries, but not, I believe, to the same extent. In Germany, the aristocratic body takes a certain uniform hue, so to speak, from the army, in which it plays so important a part, and the patriarchal system is broken up by the long absences from the ancestral home of the soldier-sons. In France, the main divisions of republicans, monarchists, and imperialists have absorbed and unified the ideas and principles of large bodies of families into bodies politic. In England, the practice of allowing younger sons to shift for themselves, and the division of the whole aristocracy into two main political parties, destroy the patriarchal spirit; while it must also be remembered, that at a period when in Italy the hand of every house was against its neighbour, and the struggles of Guelph and Ghibelline were but an excuse for the prosecution of private feuds, England was engaged in great wars which enlisted vast bodies of men under a common standard for a common principle. Whether the principle involved chanced to be that of English domination in France, or whether men flocked to the standards of the White Rose of York or the Red Rose of Lancaster, was of little importance;

the result was the same,—the tendency of powerful families to maintain internecine traditional feuds was stamped out, or rather was absorbed in the maintenance of the perpetual feud between the great principles of Tory and Whig—of the party for the absolute monarch, and the party for the freedom of the people.

Be the causes what they may, the Roman nobility has many characteristics peculiar to it and to no other aristocracy. It is cosmopolitan by its foreign marriages, renewed in every generation; it is patriarchal and feudal by its own unbroken traditions of family life; and it is only essentially Roman by its speech and social customs. It has undergone great vicissitudes during twenty years; but most of these features remain in spite of new and larger parties, new and bitter political hatreds, new ideas of domestic life, and new fashions in dress and cookery.

In considering an account of the life of Giovanni Saracinesca from the time when, in 1865, he was thirty years of age, down to the present day, it is therefore just that he should be judged with a knowledge of some of these peculiarities of his class. He is not a Roman of the people like Giovanni Cardegna, the great tenor, and few of his ideas have any connection with those of the singer; but he has, in common with him, that singular simplicity of character which he derives from his Roman descent upon the male side, and in which will be found the key to many of his actions both good and bad—a simplicity which loves peace, but cannot always refrain from sudden violence, which loves and hates strongly and to some purpose.

CHAPTER II.

The hour was six o'clock, and the rooms of the Embassy were as full as they were likely to be that day. There would doubtless have been more people had the weather

been fine; but it was raining heavily, and below, in the vast court that formed the centre of the palace, the lamps of fifty carriages gleamed through the water and the darkness, and the coachmen, of all dimensions and characters, sat beneath their huge umbrellas and growled to each other, envying the lot of the footmen who were congregated in the ante-chamber up-stairs around the great bronze braziers. But in the reception-rooms there was much light and warmth; there were bright fires and softly shaded lamps; velvet-footed servants stealing softly among the guests, with immense burdens of tea and cake; men of more or less celebrity chatting about politics in corners; women of more or less beauty gossiping over their tea, or flirting, or wishing they had somebody to flirt with; people of many nations and ideas, with a goodly leaven of Romans. They all seemed endeavouring to get away from the men and women of their own nationality, in order to amuse themselves with the difficulties of conversation in languages not their own. Whether they amused themselves or not is of small importance; but as they were all willing to find themselves together twice a-day for the five months of the Roman season—from the first improvised dance before Christmas, to the last set ball in the warm April weather after Easter—it may be argued that they did not dislike each other's society. In case the afternoon should seem dull, his Excellency had engaged the services of Signor Strillone, the singer. From time to time he struck a few chords upon the grand piano, and gave forth a song of his own composition in loud and passionate tones, varied with very sudden effects of extreme pianissimo, which occasionally surprised some one who was trying to make his conversation heard above the music.

There was a little knot of people standing about the door of the great drawing-room. Some of them were watching their opportunity to slip away unperceived; others had just arrived, and were making a survey of the scene to ascertain the exact position of their Excellencies,