

unhappy. At every turn she expected to see Giovanni's figure and face, and the constant recurrence of the thought seemed to add magnitude to the crime of which she accused herself,—the crime of even thinking of any man save her old husband—of wishing that Giovanni might not marry Donna Tullia after all.

"I will go to Padre Filippo," she said to herself as she reached home.

CHAPTER V.

Valdarno took Donna Tullia by his side upon the front seat of the drag; and as luck would have it, Giovanni and Del Ferice sat together behind them. Half-a-dozen other men found seats somewhere, and among them were the melancholy Spicca, who was a famous duellist, and a certain Casalverde, a man of rather doubtful reputation. The others were members of what Donna Tullia called her "corps de ballet." In those days Donna Tullia's conduct was criticised, and she was thought to be emancipated, as the phrase went. Old people opened their eyes at the spectacle of the gay young widow going off into the Campagna to picnic with a party of men; but if any intimate enemy had ventured to observe to her that she was giving occasion for gossip, she would have raised her eyebrows, explaining that they were all just like her brothers, and that Giovanni was indeed a sort of cousin. She would perhaps have condescended to say that she would not have done such a thing in Paris, but that in dear old Rome one was in the bosom of one's family, and might do anything. At present she sat chatting with Valdarno, a tall and fair young man, with a weak mouth and a good-natured disposition: she had secured Giovanni, and though he sat sullenly smoking behind her, his presence gave her satisfaction. Del Ferice's smooth face wore an expression of ineffable calm, and his watery blue eyes gazed languidly

on the broad stretch of brown grass which bordered the highroad.

For some time the drag bowled along, and Giovanni was left to his own reflections, which were not of a very pleasing kind. The other men talked of the chances of luck with the hounds; and Spicca, who had been a great deal in England, occasionally put in a remark not very complimentary to the Roman hunt. Del Ferice listened in silence, and Giovanni did not listen at all, but buttoned his overcoat to the throat, half closed his eyes, and smoked one cigarette after another, leaning back in his seat. Suddenly Donna Tullia's laugh was heard as she turned half round to look at Valdarno.

"Do you really think so?" she cried. "How soon? What a dance we will lead them then!"

Del Ferice pricked his ears in the direction of her voice, like a terrier that suspects the presence of a rat. Valdarno's answer was inaudible, but Donna Tullia ceased laughing immediately.

"They are talking politics," said Del Ferice in a low voice, leaning towards Giovanni as he spoke. The latter shrugged his shoulders and went on smoking. He did not care to be drawn into a conversation with Del Ferice.

Del Ferice was a man who was suspected of revolutionary sympathies by the authorities in Rome, but who was not feared. He was therefore allowed to live his life much as he pleased, though he was conscious from time to time that he was watched. Being a man, however, who under all circumstances pursued his own interests with more attention than he bestowed on those of any party, he did not pretend to attach any importance to the distinction of being occasionally followed by a spy, as a more foolish man might have done. If he was watched, he did not care to exhibit himself to his friends as a martyr, to tell stories of the *sbirro* who sometimes dogged his footsteps, nor to cry aloud that he was unjustly persecuted. He affected a character above suspicion, and rarely allowed himself to express an opinion.

He was no propagator of new doctrines; that was too dangerous a trade for one of his temper. But he foresaw changes to come, and he determined that he would profit by them. He had little to lose, but he had everything to gain; and being a patient man, he resolved to gain all he could by circumspection—in other words, by acting according to his nature, rather than by risking himself in a bold course of action for which he was wholly unsuited. He was too wise to attempt wholly to deceive the authorities, knowing well that they were not easily deceived; and he accordingly steered a middle course, constantly speaking in favour of progress, of popular education, and of freedom of the press, but at the same time loudly proclaiming that all these things—that every benefit of civilisation, in fact—could be obtained without the slightest change in the form of government. He thus asserted his loyalty to the temporal power while affecting a belief in the possibility of useful reforms, and the position he thus acquired exactly suited his own ends; for he attracted to himself a certain amount of suspicion on account of his progressist professions, and then disarmed that suspicion by exhibiting a serene indifference to the espionage of which he was the object. The consequence was, that at the very time when he was most deeply implicated in much more serious matters—of which the object was invariably his own ultimate profit—at the time when he was receiving money for information he was able to obtain through his social position, he was regarded by the authorities, and by most of his acquaintances, as a harmless man, who might indeed injure himself by his foolish doctrines of progress, but who certainly could not injure any one else. Few guessed that his zealous attention to social duties, his occasional bursts of enthusiasm for liberal education and a free press, were but parts of his machinery for making money out of politics. He was so modest, so unostentatious, that no one suspected that the mainspring of his existence was the desire for money.

But, like many intelligent and bad men, Del Ferice had a weakness which was gradually gaining upon him and growing in force, and which was destined to hasten the course of the events which he had planned for himself. It is an extraordinary peculiarity in unbelievers that they are often more subject to petty superstitions than other men; and similarly, it often happens that the most cynical and coldly calculating of conspirators, who believe themselves proof against all outward influences, yield to some feeling of nervous dislike for an individual who has never harmed them, and are led on from dislike to hatred, until their soberest actions take colour from what in its earliest beginnings was nothing more than a senseless prejudice. Del Ferice's weakness was his unaccountable detestation of Giovanni Saracinesca; and he had so far suffered this abhorrence of the man to dominate his existence, that it had come to be one of his chiefest delights in life to thwart Giovanni wherever he could. How it had begun, or when, he no longer knew nor cared. He had perhaps thought Giovanni treated him superciliously, or even despised him; and his antagonism being roused by some fancied slight, he had shown a petty resentment, which, again, Saracinesca had treated with cold indifference. Little by little his fancied grievance had acquired great proportions in his own estimation, and he had learned to hate Giovanni more than any man living. At first it might have seemed an easy matter to ruin his adversary, or, at all event, to cause him great and serious injury; and but for that very indifference which Del Ferice so resented, his attempts might have been successful.

Giovanni belonged to a family who from the earliest times had been at swords-drawn with the Government. Their property had been more than once confiscated by the popes, had been seized again by force of arms, and had been ultimately left to them for the mere sake of peace. They seem to have quarrelled with everybody on every conceivable pretext, and to have generally got the best of

the struggle. No pope had ever reckoned upon the friendship of Casa Saracinesca. For generations they had headed the opposition whenever there was one, and had plotted to form one when there was none ready to their hands. It seemed to Del Ferice that in the stirring times that followed the annexation of Naples to the Italian crown, when all Europe was watching the growth of the new Power, it should be an easy matter to draw a Saracinesca into any scheme for the subversion of a Government against which so many generations of Saracinesca had plotted and fought. To involve Giovanni in some Liberal conspiracy, and then by betraying him to cause him to be imprisoned or exiled from Rome, was a plan which pleased Del Ferice, and which he desired earnestly to put into execution. He had often tried to lead his enemy into conversation, repressing and hiding his dislike for the sake of his end; but at the first mention of political subjects Giovanni became impenetrable, shrugged his shoulders, and assumed an air of the utmost indifference. No paradox could draw him into argument, no flattery could loose his tongue. Indeed those were times when men hesitated to express an opinion, not only because any opinion they might express was liable to be exaggerated and distorted by willing enemies—a consideration which would not have greatly intimidated Giovanni Saracinesca—but also because it was impossible for the wisest man to form any satisfactory judgment upon the course of events. It was clear to every one that ever since 1848 the temporal power had been sustained by France; and though no one in 1865 foresaw the downfall of the Second Empire, no one saw any reason for supposing that the military protectorate of Louis Napoleon in Rome could last for ever: what would be likely to occur if that protection were withdrawn was indeed a matter of doubt, but was not looked upon by the Government as a legitimate matter for speculation.

Del Ferice, however, did not desist from his attempts to make Giovanni speak out his mind, and whenever an

opportunity offered, tried to draw him into conversation. He was destined on the present occasion to meet with greater success than had hitherto attended his efforts. The picnic was noisy, and Giovanni was in a bad humour; he did not care for Donna Tullia's glances, nor for the remarks she constantly levelled at him; still less was he amused by the shallow gaiety of her party of admirers, tempered as their talk was by the occasional tonic of some outrageous cynicism from the melancholy Spicca. Del Ferice smiled, and talked, and smiled again, seeking to flatter and please Donna Tullia, as was his wont. By-and-by the clear north wind and the bright sun dried the ground, and Madame Mayer proposed that the party should walk a little on the road towards Rome—a proposal of such startling originality that it was carried by acclamation. Donna Tullia wanted to walk with Giovanni; but on pretence of having left something upon the drag, he gave Valdarno time to take his place. When Giovanni began to follow the rest, he found that Del Ferice had lagged behind, and seemed to be waiting for him.

Giovanni was in a bad humour that day. He had suffered himself to be persuaded into joining in a species of amusement for which he cared nothing, by a mere word from a woman for whom he cared less, but whom he had half determined to marry, and who had wholly determined to marry him. He, who hated vacillation, had been dangling for four-and-twenty hours like a pendulum, or, as he said to himself, like an ass between two bundles of hay. At one moment he meant to marry Donna Tullia, and at another he loathed the thought; now he felt that he would make any sacrifice to rid the Duchessa d'Astrardente of himself, and now again he felt how futile such a sacrifice would be. He was ashamed in his heart, for he was no boy of twenty to be swayed by a woman's look or a fit of Quixotism; he was a strong grown man who had seen the world. He had been in the habit of supposing his impulses to be good, and of following them naturally without much thought;

it seemed desperately perplexing to be forced into an analysis of those impulses in order to decide what he should do. He was in a thoroughly bad humour, and Del Ferice guessed that if Giovanni could ever be induced to speak out, it must be when his temper was not under control. In Rome, in the club—there was only one club in those days—in society, Ugo never got a chance to talk to his enemy; but here upon the Appian Way, with the broad Campagna stretching away to right and left and rear, while the remainder of the party walked three hundred yards in front, and Giovanni showed an evident reluctance to join them, it would go hard indeed if he could not be led into conversation.

"I should think," Del Ferice began, "that if you had your choice, you would walk anywhere rather than here."

"Why?" asked Giovanni, carelessly. "It is a very good road."

"I should think that our Roman Campagna would be anything but a source of satisfaction to its possessors—like yourself," answered Del Ferice.

"It is a very good grazing ground."

"It might be something better. When one thinks that in ancient times it was a vast series of villas——"

"The conditions were very different. We do not live in ancient times," returned Giovanni, drily.

"Ah, the conditions!" ejaculated Del Ferice, with a suave sigh. "Surely the conditions depend on man—not on nature. What our proud forefathers accomplished by law and energy, we could, we can accomplish, if we restore law and energy in our midst."

"You are entirely mistaken," answered Saracinesca. "It would take five times the energy of the ancient Romans to turn the Campagna into a garden, or even into a fertile productive region. No one is five times as energetic as the ancients. As for the laws, they do well enough."

Del Ferice was delighted. For the first time, Giovanni seemed inclined to enter upon an argument with him.

"Why are the conditions so different? I do not see. Here is the same undulating country, the same climate——"

"And twice as much water," interrupted Giovanni. "You forget that the Campagna is very low, and that the rivers in it have risen very much. There are parts of ancient Rome now laid bare which lie below the present water-mark of the Tiber. If the city were built upon its old level, much of it would be constantly flooded. The rivers have risen and have swamped the country. Do you think any amount of law or energy could drain this fever-stricken plain into the sea? I do not. Do you think that if I could be persuaded that the land could be improved into fertility I would hesitate, at any expenditure in my power, to reclaim the miles of desert my father and I own here? The plain is a series of swamps and stone quarries. In one place you find the rock a foot below the surface, and the soil burns up in summer; a hundred yards farther you find a bog hundreds of feet deep, which even in summer is never dry."

"But," suggested Del Ferice, who listened patiently enough, "supposing the Government passed a law forcing all of you proprietors to plant trees and dig ditches, it would have some effect."

"The law cannot force us to sacrifice men's lives. The Trappist monks at the Tre Fontane are trying it, and dying by scores. Do you think I, or any other Roman, would send peasants to such a place, or could induce them to go?"

"Well, it is one of a great many questions which will be settled some day," said Del Ferice. "You will not deny that there is room for much improvement in our country, and that an infusion of some progressist ideas would be wholesome."

"Perhaps so; but you understand one thing by progress, and I understand quite another," replied Giovanni, eyeing in the bright distance the figures of Donna Tullia and her friends, and regulating his pace so as not to lessen the dis-

tance which separated them from him. He preferred talking political economy with a man he disliked, to being obliged to make conversation for Madame Mayer.

"I mean by progress, positive improvement without revolutionary change," explained Del Ferice, using the phrase he had long since constructed as his profession of faith to the world. Giovanni eyed him keenly for a moment. He cared nothing for Ugo or his ideas, but he suspected him of very different principles.

"You will pardon me," he said, civilly, "if I venture to doubt whether you have frankly expressed your views. I am under the impression that you really connect the idea of improvement with a very positive revolutionary change."

Del Ferice did not wince, but he involuntarily cast a glance behind him. Those were times when people were cautious of being overheard. But Del Ferice knew his man, and he knew that the only way in which he could continue the interview was to accept the imputation as though trusting implicitly to the discretion of his companion.

"Will you give me a fair answer to a fair question?" he asked, very gravely.

"Let me hear the question," returned Giovanni, indifferently. He also knew his man, and attached no more belief to anything he said than to the chattering of a parrot. And yet Del Ferice had not the reputation of a liar in the world at large.

"Certainly," answered Ugo. "You are the heir of a family which from immemorial time has opposed the popes. You cannot be supposed to feel any kind of loyal attachment to the temporal power. I do not know whether you individually would support it or not. But frankly, how would you regard such a revolutionary change as you suspect me of desiring?"

"I have no objection to telling you that. I would simply make the best of it."

Del Ferice laughed at the ambiguous answer, affecting to consider it as a mere evasion.

"We should all try to do that," he answered; "but what I mean to ask is, whether you would personally take up arms to fight for the temporal power, or whether you would allow events to take their course? I fancy that would be the ultimate test of loyalty."

"My instinct would certainly be to fight, whether fighting were of any use or not. But the propriety of fighting in such a case is a very nice question of judgment. So long as there is anything to fight for, no matter how hopeless the odds, a gentleman should go to the front—but no longer. The question must be to decide the precise point at which the position becomes untenable. So long as France makes our quarrels hers, every man should give his personal assistance to the cause; but it is absurd to suppose that if we were left alone, a handful of Romans against a great Power, we could do more, or should do more, than make a formal show of resistance. It has been a rule in all ages that a general, however brave, who sacrifices the lives of his soldiers in a perfectly hopeless resistance, rather than accept the terms of an honourable capitulation, is guilty of a military crime."

"In other words," answered Del Ferice, quietly, "if the French troops were withdrawn, and the Italians were besieging Rome, you would at once capitulate?"

"Certainly—after making a formal protest. It would be criminal to sacrifice our fellow-citizens' lives in such a case."

"And then?"

"Then, as I said before, I would make the best of it—not omitting to congratulate Del Ferice upon obtaining a post in the new Government," added Giovanni, with a laugh.

But Del Ferice took no notice of the jest.

"Do you not think that, aside from any question of sympathy or loyalty to the holy Father, the change of government would be an immense advantage to Rome?"

"No, I do not. To Italy the advantage would be inestimable; to Rome it would be an injury. Italy would

consolidate the prestige she began to acquire when Cavour succeeded in sending a handful of troops to the Crimea eleven years ago; she would at once take a high position as a European Power—provided always that the smouldering republican element should not break out in opposition to the constitutional monarchy. But Rome would be ruined. She is no longer the geographical capital of Italy—she is not even the largest city; but in the course of a few years, violent efforts would be made to give her a fictitious modern grandeur, in the place of the moral importance she now enjoys as the headquarters of the Catholic world. Those efforts at a spurious growth would ruin her financially, and the hatred of Romans for Italians of the north would cause endless internal dissension. We should be subjected to a system of taxation which would fall more heavily on us than on other Italians, in proportion as our land is less productive. On the whole, we should grow rapidly poorer; for prices would rise, and we should have a paper currency instead of a metallic one. Especially we landed proprietors would suffer terribly by the Italian land system being suddenly thrust upon us. To be obliged to sell one's acres to any peasant who can scrape together enough to capitalise the pittance he now pays as rent, at five per cent, would scarcely be agreeable. Such a fellow, from whom I have the greatest difficulty in extracting his yearly bushel of grain, could borrow twenty bushels from a neighbour, or the value of them, and buy me out without my consent—acquiring land worth ten times the rent he and his father have paid for it, and his father before him. It would produce an extraordinary state of things, I can assure you. No—even putting aside what you call my sympathies and my loyalty to the Pope—I do not desire any change. Nobody who owns much property does; the revolutionary spirits are people who own nothing.”

“On the other hand, those who own nothing, or next to nothing, are the great majority.”

“Even if that is true, which I doubt, I do not see why the intelligent few should be ruled by that same ignorant majority.”

“But you forget that the majority is to be educated,” objected Del Ferice.

“Education is a term few people can define,” returned Giovanni. “Any good schoolmaster knows vastly more than you or I. Would you like to be governed by a majority of schoolmasters?”

“That is a plausible argument,” laughed Del Ferice, “but it is not sound.”

“It is not sound!” repeated Giovanni, impatiently. “People are so fond of exclaiming that what they do not like is not sound! Do you think that it would not be a fair case to put five hundred schoolmasters against five hundred gentlemen of average education? I think it would be very fair. The schoolmasters would certainly have the advantage in education: do you mean to say they would make better or wiser electors than the same number of gentlemen who cannot name all the cities and rivers in Italy, nor translate a page of Latin without a mistake, but who understand the conditions of property by practical experience as no schoolmaster can possibly understand them? I tell you it is nonsense. Education, of the kind which is of any practical value in the government of a nation, means the teaching of human motives, of humanising ideas, of some system whereby the majority of electors can distinguish the qualities of honesty and common-sense in the candidate they wish to elect. I do not pretend to say what that system may be, but I assert that no education which does not lead to that kind of knowledge is of any practical use to the voting majority of a constitutionally governed country.”

Del Ferice sighed rather sadly.

“I am afraid you will not discover that system in Europe,” he said. He was disappointed in Giovanni, and in his hopes of detecting in him some signs of a revolutionary spirit. Saracinesca was a gentleman of

the old school, who evidently despised majorities and modern political science as a whole, who for the sake of his own interests desired no change from the Government under which he lived, and who would surely be the first to draw the sword for the temporal power, and the last to sheathe it. His calm judgment concerning the fallacy of holding a hopeless position would vanish like smoke if his fiery blood were once roused. He was so honest a man that even Del Ferice could not suspect him of parading views he did not hold; and Ugo then and there abandoned all idea of bringing him into political trouble and disgrace, though he by no means gave up all hope of being able to ruin him in some other way.

"I agree with you there at least," said Saracinesca. "The only improvements worth having are certainly not to be found in Europe. Donna Tullia is calling us. We had better join that harmless flock of lambs, and give over speculating on the advantages of allying ourselves with a pack of wolves who will eat us up, house and home, bag and baggage."

So the whole party climbed again to their seats upon the drag, and Valdarno drove them back into Rome by the Porta San Giovanni.

CHAPTER VI.

Corona d'Astrardente had been educated in a convent—that is to say, she had been brought up in the strict practice of her religion; and during the five years which had elapsed since she had come out into the world, she had found no cause for forsaking the habits she had acquired in her girlhood. Some people find religion a burden; others regard it as an indifferently useless institution, in which they desire no share, and concerning which they never trouble themselves; others, again, look upon it as the mainstay of their lives.

It is natural to suppose that the mode of thought and the habits acquired by young girls in a religious institution will not disappear without a trace when they first go into the world, and it may even be expected that some memory of the early disposition thus cultivated will cling to them throughout their lives. But the multifarious interests of social existence do much to shake that young edifice of faith. The driving strength of stormy passions of all kinds undermines the walls of the fabric, and when at last the bolt of adversity strikes full upon the keystone of the arch, upon the self of man or woman, weakened and loosened by the tempests of years, the whole palace of the soul falls in, a hopeless wreck, wherein not even the memory of outline can be traced, nor the faint shadow of a beauty which is destroyed for ever.

But there are some whose interests in this world are not strong enough to shake their faith in the next; whose passions do not get the mastery, and whose self is sheltered from danger by something more than the feeble defence of an accomplished egotism. Corona was one of these, for her lot had not been happy, nor her path strewn with roses.

She was a friendless woman, destined to suffer much, and her suffering was the more intense that she seemed always upon the point of finding friends in the world where she played so conspicuous a part. There can be little happiness when a whole life has been placed upon a false foundation, even though so dire a mistake may have been committed willingly and from a sense of duty and obligation, such as drove Corona to marry old Astrardente. Consolation is not satisfaction; and though, when she reflected on what she had done, she knew that from her point of view she had done her best, she knew also that she had closed upon herself the gates of the earthly paradise, and that for her the prospect of happiness had been removed from the now to the hereafter—the dim and shadowy glass in which we love to see any reflection save that of our present lives. And to her, thus living in submission to the consequences of her choice, that faith in things better which