

talk over everything with him; he would advise her well.

Then a wild longing seized her to leave Rome for a while, to breathe the air of the country, to get away from the scene of all her troubles, of all the terrible emotions that had swept over her life in the last three weeks, to be alone in the hills or by the sea. It seemed dreadful to be tied to her great house in the city, in her mourning, shut off suddenly from the world, and bound down by the chain of conventionality to a fixed method of existence. She would give anything to go away. Why not? She suddenly realised what was so hard to understand, that she was free to go where she pleased—if only, by accident, she could chance to meet Giovanni Saracinesca before she left. No—the thought was unworthy. She would leave town at once—surely she could have nothing to say to Giovanni—she would leave to-morrow morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Corona found it impossible to leave town so soon as she had wished. She had indeed sent out great cart-loads of furniture, servants, horses, and all the paraphernalia of an establishment in the country, and she believed herself ready to move at once, when she received an exceedingly courteous note from Cardinal Antonelli requesting the honour of being received by her the next day at twelve o'clock. It was impossible to refuse, and to her great annoyance she was obliged to postpone her departure another twenty-four hours. She guessed that the great man was the bearer of some message from the Holy Father himself; and in her present frame of mind, such words of comfort could not fail to be acceptable from one whom she revered and loved, as all who knew Pius IX. did sincerely revere and love him. She did not like the

Cardinal, it is true; but she did not confound the ambassador with him who sent the embassy. The Cardinal was a most courteous and accomplished man of the world, and Corona could not easily have explained the aversion she felt for him. It is very likely that if she could have understood the part he was sustaining in the great European struggle of those days, she would have accorded him at least the admiration he deserved as a statesman. He had his faults, and they were faults little becoming a cardinal of the Holy Roman Church. But few are willing to consider that, though a cardinal, he was not a priest—that he was practically a layman who, by his own unaided genius, had attained to great power, and that those faults which have been charged against him with such virulence would have passed, nay, actually pass, unnoticed and uncensured in many a great statesman of those days and of these. He was a brave man, who fought a desperate and hopeless fight to his last breath, and who fought almost alone—a man most bitterly hated by many, at whose death many rejoiced loudly and few mourned; and to the shame of many be it said, that his most obstinate adversaries, those who unsparingly heaped abuse upon him during his lifetime, and most unseemingly exulted over his end, were the very men among whom he should have found the most willing supporters and the firmest friends. But in 1865 he was feared, and those who reckoned without him in the game of politics reckoned badly.

Corona was a woman, and very young. She had not the knowledge or the experience to understand his value, and she had taken a personal dislike to him when she first appeared in society. He was too smooth for her; she thought him false. She preferred a rougher type. Her husband, on the other hand, had a boundless admiration for the cardinal-statesman; and perhaps the way in which Astrardente constantly tried to impress his wife with a sense of the great man's virtues, indirectly contributed to increase her aversion. Nevertheless, when he sent word that he desired to be received by her, she did not hesitate

a moment, but expressed her willingness at once. Punctually as the gun of Sant Angelo roared out the news that the sun was on the meridian, Cardinal Antonelli entered Corona's house. She received him in the great drawing-room. There was an air of solemnity about the meeting. The room itself, divested of a thousand trifles which had already been sent into the country, looked desolate and formal; the heavy curtains admitted but little light; there was no fire on the hearth; Corona stood all in black—a very incarnation of mourning—as her visitor trod softly across the dark carpet towards her.

The Cardinal's expressive face was softened by a look of gentle sympathy, as he came forward and took her hand in both of his, and gazed for a moment into her beautiful eyes.

"I am an ambassador, Duchessa," he said softly. "I come to tell you how deeply our Holy Father sympathises in your great sorrow."

Corona bent her head respectfully, and motioned to the Cardinal to be seated.

"I beg that your Eminence will convey to his Holiness my most sincere gratitude for this expression of his paternal kindness to one so unhappy."

"Indeed I will not fail to deliver your message, Duchessa," answered the Cardinal, seating himself by her side in one of the great arm-chairs which had been placed together in the middle of the room. "His Holiness has promised to remember you in his august prayers; and I also, for my own part, entreat you to believe that my poor sympathy is wholly with you in your distress."

"Your Eminence is most kind," replied Corona, gravely.

It seemed as though there were little more to be said in such a case. There was no friendship between the two, no bond of union or fellowship: it was simply a formal visit of condolence, entailed as a necessity by Corona's high position. The Pope had sent her a gift at her wedding; he sent her a message of sympathy at her husband's death. Half-a-dozen phrases would be ex-

changed, and the Cardinal would take his leave, accompanied by a file of the Duchessa's lackeys—and so it would all be over. But the Cardinal was a statesman, a diplomatist, and one of the best talkers in Europe; moreover, he never allowed an opportunity of pursuing his ends to pass unimproved.

"Ah, Duchessa!" he said, folding his hands upon his knee and looking down, "there is but one Consoler in sorrow such as yours. It is vain for us mortals to talk of any such thing as alleviating real mental suffering. There are consolations—many of them—for some people, but they are not for you. To many the accidents of wealth, of youth, of beauty, seem to open the perspective of a brilliant future at the very moment when all the present appears to be shrouded in darkness; but if you will permit me, who know you so little, to say it frankly, I do not believe that any of these things which you possess in such plentiful abundance will lessen the measure of your grief. It is not right that they should, I suppose. It is not fitting that noble minds should even possess the faculty of forgetting real suffering in the unreal trifles of a great worldly possession, which so easily restore the weak to courage, and flatter the vulgar into the forgetfulness of honourable sorrow. I am no moraliser, no pedantic philosopher. The stoic may have shrugged his heavy shoulders in sullen indifference to fate; the epicurean may have found such bodily ease in his excessive refinement of moderate enjoyment as to overlook the deepest afflictions in anticipating the animal pleasure of the next meal. I cannot conceive of such men as those philosophising diners; nor can I imagine by what arguments the wisest of mankind could induce a fellow-creature in distress to forget his sufferings. Sorrow is sorrow still to all finely organised natures. The capacity for feeling sorrow is one of the highest tests of nobility—a nobility of nature not found always in those of high blood and birth, but existing in the people, wherever the people are good."

The Cardinal's voice became even more gentle as he spoke. He was himself of very humble origin, and spoke feelingly. Corona listened, though she only heard half of what he said; but his soft tone soothed her almost unconsciously.

"There is little consolation for me—I am quite alone," she said.

"You are not of those who find relief in worldly greatness," continued the Cardinal. "But I have seen women, young, rich, and beautiful, wear their mourning with wonderful composure. Youth is so much, wealth is so much more, beauty is such a power in the world—all three together are resistless. Many a young widow is not ashamed to think of marriage before her husband has been dead a month. Indeed they do not always make bad wives. A woman who has been married young and is early deprived of her husband, has great experience, great knowledge of the world. Many feel that they have no right to waste the goods given them in a life of solitary mourning. Wealth is given to be used, and perhaps many a rich young widow thinks she can use it more wisely in the company of a husband young as herself. It may be; I cannot tell. These are days when power of any sort should be used, and perhaps no one should even for a moment think of withdrawing from the scene where such great battles are being fought. But one may choose wisely a way of using power, or one may choose unwisely. There is much to be done."

"How?" asked Corona, catching at his expression of an idea which pursued her. "Here am I, rich, alone, idle—above all, very unhappy. What can I do? I wish I knew, for I would try and do it."

"Ah! I was not speaking of you, Duchessa," answered the statesman. "You are too noble a woman to be easily consoled. And yet, though you may not find relief from your great sorrow, there are many things within your reach which you might do, and feel that in your mourning you have done honour to your departed husband as well as to

yourself. You have great estates—you can improve them, and especially you can improve the condition of your peasants, and strengthen their loyalty to you and to the State. You can find many a village on your lands where a school might be established, an asylum built, a road opened—anything which shall give employment to the poor, and which, when finished, shall benefit their condition. Especially about Astrardente they are very poor; I know the country well. In six months you might change many things; and then you might return to Rome next winter. If it pleases you, you can do anything with society. You can make your house a centre for a new party—the oldest of all parties it is, but it would now be thought new here. We have no centre. There is no *salon* in the good old sense of the word—no house where all that is intelligent, all that is powerful, all that is influential, is irresistibly drawn. To make a centre of that kind would be a worthy object, it seems to me. You would surround yourself with men of genius; you would bring those together who cannot meet elsewhere; you would give a vigorous tone to a society which is fast falling to decay from inaction; you could become a power, a real power, not only in Rome, but in Europe; you could make your house famous as the point from which, in Rome, all that is good and great should radiate to the very ends of the earth. You could do all this in your young widowhood, and you would not dishonour the memory of him you loved so dearly."

Corona looked earnestly at the Cardinal as he enlarged upon the possibilities of her life. What he said seemed true and good. It opened to her a larger field than she had dreamed of half an hour ago. Especially the plan of working for the improvement of her estates and people attracted her. She wanted to do something at once—something good, and something worth doing.

"I believe you are right," she said. "I shall die if I am idle."

"I know I am right," returned the Cardinal, in a tone of

conviction. "Not that I propose all this as an unalterable plan for you. I would not have you think I mean to lay down any system, or even to advise you at all. I was merely thinking aloud. I am too happy if my thoughts please you—if anything I say can even for a moment relieve your mind from the pressure of this sudden grief. It is not consolation I offer you. I am not a priest, but a man of action; and it is action I propose to you, not as an anodyne for sorrow, but simply because it is right that in these days we should all strive with a good will. Your peasants are many of them in an evil case: you can save them and make them happy, even though you find no happiness for yourself. Our social world here is falling to pieces, going astray after strange gods, and especially after Madame Mayer and her *lares* and *penates*, young Valdarno and Del Ferice: it is in your power to create a new life here, or at least to contribute greatly towards re-establishing the social balance. I say, do this thing, if you will, for it is a good thing to do. At all events, while you are building roads—and perhaps schools—at Astrardente, you can think over the course you will afterwards pursue. And now, my dear Duchessa, I have detained you far too long. Forgive me if I have wearied you, for I have great things at heart, and must sometimes speak of them though I speak feebly. Count on me always for any assistance you may require. Bear with me if I weary you, for I was a good friend of him we both mourn."

"Thank you—you have given me good thoughts," said Corona, simply.

So the courtly Cardinal rose and took his leave, and once more Corona was left alone. It was a strange thing that, while he disclaimed all power to comfort her, and denied that consolation was possible in her case, she had nevertheless listened to him with interest, and now found herself thinking seriously of what he had said. He seemed to have put her thoughts into shape, and to have given direction to that sense of power she had already

begun to feel. For the first time in her life she felt something like sympathy for the Cardinal, and she lingered for some minutes alone in the great reception-room, wondering whether she could accomplish any of the things he had proposed to her. At all events, there was nothing now to hinder her departure; and she thought with something like pleasure of the rocky Sabines, the solitude of the mountains, the simple faces of the people about her place, and of the quiet life she intended to lead there during the next six months.

But the Cardinal went on his way, rolling along through the narrow streets in his great coach. Leaning far back in his cushioned seat, he could just catch a glimpse of the people as he passed, and his quick eyes recognised many, both high and low. But he did not care to show himself, for he felt himself disliked, and deep in his finely organised nature there lay a sensitiveness which was wounded by the popular hatred. It hurt him to see the lowering glances of the poor man, and to return the forced bow of the rich man who feared him. He often longed to be able to explain many things to them both, to the rich and to the poor; and then, knowing how impossible it was that he should be understood by either, he sighed somewhat bitterly, and hid himself still deeper in his carriage. Few men in the midst of the world have stood so wholly alone as Cardinal Antonelli.

To-day, however, he had an appointment which he anticipated with a sort of interest quite new to him. Anastase Gouache was coming to begin his portrait, and Anastase was an object of curiosity to him. It would have surprised the young Frenchman had he guessed how carefully he was watched, for he was a modest fellow, and did not think himself of very much importance. He allowed Donna Tullia and her friends to come to his studio whenever they pleased, and he listened to their shallow talk, and joined occasionally in the conversation, letting them believe that he sympathised with them, simply because his own ideas were unsettled. It was a

good thing for him to paint a portrait of Donna Tullia, for it made him the fashion, and he had small scruple in agreeing with her views so long as he had no fixed convictions of his own. She and her set regarded him as a harmless boy, and looked upon his little studio as a convenience, in payment whereof they pushed him into society, and spread abroad the rumour that he was the rising artist of the day. But the great Cardinal had seen him more than once, and had conceived a liking for his delicate intellectual face and unobtrusive manner. He had watched him and caused him to be watched, and his interest had increased, and finally he had taken a fancy to have a portrait of himself painted by the young fellow. This was the day appointed for the first sitting; and when the Cardinal reached his lodgings, high up in the Vatican pile, he found Anastase Gouache waiting for him in the small ante-chamber.

The prime minister was not luxuriously lodged. Four rooms sufficed him—to wit, the said ante-chamber, bare and uncarpeted, and furnished with three painted wooden box benches; a comfortable study lined throughout with shelves and lockers, furnished with half-a-dozen large chairs and a single writing-table, whereon stood a crucifix and an inkstand; beyond this a bedroom and a small dining-room: that was all. The drawers of the lockers and bookcases contained a correspondence which would have astonished Europe, and a collection of gems and precious stones unrivalled in the world; but there was nothing in the shape of ornament visible to the eye, unless one were to class under that head a fairly good bust of Pius IX., which stood upon a plain marble pedestal in one corner. Gouache followed the great man into this study. He was surprised by the simplicity of the apartment; but he felt in sympathy with it, and with the Cardinal himself; and with the intuitive knowledge of a true artist, he foresaw that he was to paint a successful portrait.

The Cardinal busied himself with some papers while the painter silently made his preparations.

“If your Eminence is ready?” suggested Gouache.

“At your service, my friend,” replied the Cardinal, blandly. “How shall I sit? The portrait must be taken in full face, I think.”

“By all means. Here, I think—so; the light is very good at this hour, but a little later we shall have the sun. If your Eminence will look at me—a little more to the left—I think that will do. I will draw it in in charcoal, and your Eminence can judge.”

“Precisely,” returned the Cardinal. “You will paint the devil even blacker than he is.”

“The devil?” repeated Gouache, raising his eyebrows with a slight smile. “I was not aware—”

“And yet you have been in Rome four years!”

“I am very careful,” returned Gouache. “I never by any chance hear any evil of those whom I am to paint.”

“You have very well-bred ears, Monsieur Gouache. I fear that if I had attended some of the meetings in your studio while Donna Tullia was having her portrait painted, I should have heard strange things. Have they all escaped you?”

Gouache was silent for a moment. It did not surprise him to learn that the omniscient Cardinal was fully acquainted with the doings in his studio, but he looked curiously at the great man before he answered. The Cardinal’s small gleaming eyes met his with the fearlessness of superiority.

“I remember nothing but good of your Eminence,” the painter replied at last, with a laugh; and applying himself to his work, he began to draw in the outline of the Cardinal’s head. The words he had just heard, implying as they did a thorough knowledge of the minutest details of social life, would have terrified Madame Mayer, and would perhaps have driven Del Ferice out of the Papal States in fear of his life. Even the good-natured and foolish Valdarno might reasonably have been startled; but Anastase was made of different stuff. His grandfather had helped to storm the Bastille, his father had

been among the men of 1848; there was revolutionary blood in his veins, and he distinguished between real and imaginary conspiracy with the unerring certainty of instinct, as the bloodhound knows the track of man from the slot of meaner game. He laughed at Donna Tullia, he distrusted Del Ferice, and to some extent he understood the Cardinal. And the statesman understood him, too, and was interested by him.

"You may as well forget their chatter. It does me no harm, and it amuses them. It does not seem to surprise you that I should know all about it, however. You have good nerves, Monsieur Gouache."

"Of course your Eminence can send me out of Rome tomorrow, if you please," answered Gouache, with perfect unconcern. "But the portrait will not be finished so soon."

"No—that would be a pity. You shall stay. But the others—what would you advise me to do with them?" asked the Cardinal, his bright eyes twinkling with amusement.

"If by the others your Eminence means my friends," replied Gouache, quietly, "I can assure you that none of them will ever cause you the slightest inconvenience."

"I believe you are right—their ability to annoy me is considerably inferior to their inclination. Is it not so?"

"If your Eminence will allow me," said Gouache, rising suddenly and laying down his charcoal pencil, "I will pin this curtain across the window. The sun is beginning to come in."

He had no intention of answering any questions. If the Cardinal knew of the meetings in the Via San Basilio, that was not Gouache's fault; Gouache would certainly not give any further information. The statesman had expected as much, and was not at all surprised at the young man's silence.

"One of those young gentlemen seems to have met his match, at all events," he remarked, presently. "I am sorry it should have come about in that way."

"Your Eminence might easily have prevented the duel."

"I knew nothing about it," answered the Cardinal, glancing keenly at Anastase.

"Nor I," said the artist, simply.

"You see my information is not always so good as people imagine, my friend."

"It is a pity," remarked Gouache. "It would have been better had poor Del Ferice been killed outright. The matter would have terminated there."

"Whereas——"

"Whereas Del Ferice will naturally seek an occasion for revenge."

"You speak as though you were a friend of Don Giovanni's," said the Cardinal.

"No; I have a very slight acquaintance with him. I admire him, he has such a fine head. I should be sorry if anything happened to him."

"Do you think Del Ferice is capable of murdering him?"

"Oh no! He might annoy him a great deal."

"I think not," answered the Cardinal, thoughtfully. "Del Ferice was afraid that Don Giovanni would marry Donna Tullia and spoil his own projects. But Giovanni will not think of that again."

"No; I suppose Don Giovanni will marry the Duchessa d'Astrardente."

"Of course," replied the Cardinal. For some minutes there was silence. Gouache, while busy with his pencil, was wondering at the interest the great man took in such details of the Roman social life. The Cardinal was thinking of Corona, whom he had seen but half an hour ago, and was revolving in his mind the advantages that might be got by allying her to Giovanni. He had in view for her a certain Serene Highness whom he wished to conciliate, and whose circumstances were not so splendid as to make Corona's fortune seem insignificant to him. But on the other hand, the Cardinal had no Serene Highness ready for Giovanni, and feared lest he should after all marry Donna Tullia, and get into the opposite camp.

"You are from Paris, Monsieur Gouache, I believe," said the Cardinal at last.

"Parisian of the Parisians, your Eminence."

"How can you bear to live in exile so long? You have not been to your home these four years, I think."

"I would rather live in Rome for the present. I will go to Paris some day. It will always be a pleasant recollection to have seen Rome in these days. My friends write me that Paris is gay, but not pleasant."

"You think there will soon be nothing of this time left but the recollection of it?" suggested the Cardinal.

"I do not know what to think. The times seem unsettled, and so are my ideas. I was told that your Eminence would help me to decide what to believe." Gouache smiled pleasantly, and looked up.

"And who told you that?"

"Don Giovanni Saracinesca."

"But I must have some clue to what your ideas are," said the Cardinal. "When did Don Giovanni say that?"

"At Prince Frangipani's. He had been talking with your Eminence—perhaps he had come to some conclusion in consequence," suggested Gouache.

"Perhaps so," answered the great man, with a look of considerable satisfaction. "At all events I am flattered by the opinion he gave you of me. Perhaps I may help you to decide. What are your opinions? or rather, what would you like your opinions to be?"

"I am an ardent republican," said Gouache, boldly. It needed no ordinary courage to make such a statement to the incarnate chief of reactionary politics in those days—within the walls of the Vatican, not a hundred yards from the private apartments of the Holy Father. But Cardinal Antonelli smiled blandly, and seemed not in the least surprised nor offended.

"Republicanism is an exceedingly vague term, Monsieur Gouache," he said. "But with what other opinions do you wish to reconcile your republicanism?"

"With those held by the Church. I am a good Catholic,

and I desire to remain one—indeed I cannot help remaining one."

"Christianity is not vague, at all events," answered the Cardinal, who, to tell the truth, was somewhat astonished at the artist's juxtaposition of two such principles. "In the first place, allow me to observe, my friend, that Christianity is the purest form of a republic which the world has ever seen, and that it therefore only depends upon your good sense to reconcile in your own mind two ideas which from the first have been indissolubly bound together."

It was Gouache's turn to be startled at the Cardinal's confidence.

"I am afraid I must ask your Eminence for some further explanation," he said. "I had no idea that Christianity and republicanism were the same thing."

"Republicanism," returned the statesman, "is a vague term, invented in an abortive attempt to define by one word the mass of inextricable disorder arising in our times from the fusion of socialistic ideas with ideas purely republican. If you mean to speak of this kind of thing, you must define precisely your position in regard to socialism, and in regard to the pure theory of a commonwealth. If you mean to speak of a real republic in any known form, such as the ancient Roman, the Dutch, or the American, I understand you without further explanation."

"I certainly mean to speak of the pure republic. I believe that under a pure republic the partition of wealth would take care of itself."

"Very good, my friend. Now, with regard to the early Christians, should you say that their communities were monarchic, or aristocratic, or oligarchic?"

"None of those three, I should think," said Gouache.

"There are only two systems left, then—democracy and hierarchy. You will probably say that the government of the early Christians was of the latter kind—that they were governed by priests, in fact. But on the other hand, there is no doubt that both those who governed,

and those who were governed by them, had all things in common, regarded no man as naturally superior to another, and preached a fraternity and equality at least as sincere as those inculcated by the first French Republic. I do not see how you can avoid calling such community a republic, seeing that there was an equal partition of wealth; and defining it as a democratic one, seeing that they all called each other brethren."

"But the hierarchy—what became of it?" inquired Gouache.

"The hierarchy existed within the democracy, by common consent and for the public good, and formed a second democracy of smaller extent but greater power. Any man might become a priest, any priest might become a bishop, any bishop might become pope, as surely as any born citizen of Rome could become consul, or any native of New York may be elected President of the United States. Now in theory this was beautiful, and in practice the democratic spirit of the hierarchy, the smaller republic, has survived in undiminished vigour to the present day. In the original Christian theory the whole world should now be one vast republic, in which all Christians should call each other brothers, and support each other in worldly as well as spiritual matters. Within this should exist the smaller republic of the hierarchy, by common consent,—an elective body, recruiting its numbers from the larger, as it does now; choosing its head, the sovereign Pontiff, as it does now, to be the head of both Church and State; eminently fitted for that position, for the very simple reason that in a community organised and maintained upon such principles, in which, by virtue of the real and universal love of religion, the best men would find their way into the Church, and would ultimately find their way to the papal throne."

"Your Eminence states the case very convincingly," answered Gouache. "But why has the larger republic, which was to contain the smaller one, ceased to exist? or rather, why did it never come into existence?"

"Because man has not yet fulfilled his part in the great contract. The matter lies in a nutshell. The men who enter the Church are sufficiently intelligent and well educated to appreciate the advantages of Christian democracy, fellowship, solidarity, and brotherly love. The republic of the Church has therefore survived, and will survive for ever. The men who form the majority, on the other hand, have never had either the intelligence or the education to understand that democracy is the ultimate form of government: instead of forming themselves into a federation, they have divided themselves into hostile factions, calling themselves nations, and seeking every occasion for destroying and plundering each other, frequently even turning against the Church herself. The Church has committed faults in history, without doubt, but on the whole she has nobly fulfilled her contract, and reaps the fruits of fidelity in the vigour and unity she displays after eighteen centuries. Man, on the other hand, has failed to do his duty, and all races of men are consequently suffering for their misdeeds; the nations are divided against each other, and every nation is a house divided against itself, which sooner or later shall fall."

"But," objected Gouache, "allowing, as one easily may, that all this is true, your Eminence is always called reactionary in politics. Does that accord with these views?"

Gouache believed the question unanswerable, but as he put it he worked calmly on with his pencil, labouring hard to catch something of the Cardinal's striking expression in the rough drawing he was making.

"Nothing is easier, my friend," replied the statesman. "The republic of the Church is driven to bay. We are on a war footing. For the sake of strength we are obliged to hold together so firmly that for the time we can only think of maintaining old traditions without dreaming of progress or spending time in experiments. When we have weathered the storm we shall have leisure for improving much that needs improvement. Do not think that if I am alive twenty years hence I shall advise

what I advise now. We are fighting now, and we have no time to think of the arts of peace. We shall have peace some day. We shall lose an ornament or two from our garments in the struggle, but our body will not be injured, and in time of peace our ornaments will be restored to us fourfold. But now there is war and rumour of war. There is a vast difference between the ideal republic which I was speaking of, and the real anarchy and confusion which would be brought about by what is called republicanism."

"In other words, if the attack upon the Church were suddenly abandoned, your Eminence would immediately abandon your reactionary policy," said Gouache, "and adopt progressive views?"

"Immediately," replied the Cardinal.

"I see," said Gouache. "A little more towards me—just so that I can catch that eye. Thank you—that will do."

CHAPTER XIX.

When Del Ferice was thought sufficiently recovered of his wound to hear some of the news of the day, which was about three weeks after the duel, he learned that Astrardente was dead, that the Duchessa had inherited all his fortune, and that she was on the point of leaving Rome. It would be hard to say how the information of her approaching departure had got abroad; it might be merely a clever guess of the gossips, or it might be the report gleaned from her maid by all the other maids in town. Be that as it may, when Del Ferice heard it he ground his teeth as he lay upon his bed, and swore that if it were possible to prevent the Duchessa d'Astrardente from leaving town he would do it. In his judgment it would be a dangerous thing to let Corona and Giovanni part, and to allow Donna Tullia free play in her matri-

monial designs. Of course Giovanni would never marry Madame Mayer, especially as he was now at liberty to marry the Astrardente; but Madame Mayer herself might become fatally interested in him, as she already seemed inclined to be, and this would be bad for Del Ferice's own prospects. It would not do to squander any of the advantages gained by the death of the old Duca. Giovanni must be hastened into a marriage with Corona; it would be time enough to think of revenge upon him afterwards for the ghastly wound that took so long to heal.

It was a pity that Del Ferice and Donna Tullia were not allies, for if Madame Mayer hated Corona d'Astrardente, Ugo del Ferice detested Giovanni with equal virulence, not only because he had been so terribly worsted by him in the duel his own vile conduct had made inevitable, but because Donna Tullia loved him and was doing her very best to marry him. Evidently the best thing to be done was to produce a misunderstanding between the two; but it would be dangerous to play any tricks with Giovanni, for he held Del Ferice in his power by his knowledge of that disagreeable scene behind the plants in the conservatory. Saracinesca was a great man in society and celebrated for his honesty; people would believe him rather than Del Ferice, if the story got abroad. This would not do. The next best thing was to endeavour to draw Giovanni and Corona together as quickly as possible, to precipitate their engagement, and thus to clear the field of a dangerous rival. Del Ferice was a very obstinate and a very intelligent man. He meant more than ever to marry Donna Tullia himself, and he would not be hindered in the accomplishment of his object by an insignificant scruple.

He was not allowed to speak much, lest the effort should retard the healing of his throat; but in the long days and nights, when he lay silent in his quiet lodging, he had ample time to revolve many schemes in his brain. At last he no longer needed the care of the Sister of