

CHAPTER XXII.

Anastase Gouache worked hard at the Cardinal's portrait, and at the same time did his best to satisfy Donna Tullia. The latter, indeed, was not easily pleased, and Gouache found it hard to instil into his representation of her the precise amount of poetry she required, without doing violence to his own artistic sense of fitness. But the other picture progressed rapidly. The Cardinal was a restless man, and after the first two or three sittings, desired nothing so much as to be done with them altogether. Anastase amused him, it is true, and the statesman soon perceived that he had made a conquest of the young man's mind, and that, as Giovanni Saracinesca had predicted, he had helped Gouache to come to a decision. He was not prepared, however, for the practical turn that decision immediately took, and he was just beginning to wish the sittings at an end when Anastase surprised him by a very startling announcement.

As usual, they were in the Cardinal's study; the statesman was silent and thoughtful, and Gouache was working with all his might.

"I have made up my mind," said the latter, suddenly.

"Concerning what, my friend?" inquired the great man, rather absently.

"Concerning everything, Eminence," answered Gouache—"concerning politics, religion, life, death, and everything else which belongs to my career. I am going to enlist with the Zouaves."

The Cardinal looked at him for a moment, and then broke into a low laugh.

"*Extremis malis extrema remedia!*" he exclaimed.

"Precisely—*aux grands maux les grands remèdes*, as we say. I am going to join the Church militant. I am convinced that it is the best thing an honest man can do. I like fighting, and I like the Church—therefore I will fight for the Church."

"Very good logic, indeed," answered the Cardinal. But he looked at Anastase, and marking his delicate features and light frame, he almost wondered how the lad would look in the garb of a soldier. "Very good logic; but, my dear Monsieur Gouache, what is to become of your art?"

"I shall not be mounting guard all day, and the Zouaves are allowed to live in their own lodgings. I will live in my studio, and paint when I am not mounting guard."

"And my portrait?" inquired Cardinal Antonelli, much amused.

"Your Eminence will doubtless be kind enough to manage that I may have liberty to finish it."

"You could not put off enlisting for a week, I suppose?"

Gouache looked annoyed; he hated the idea of waiting. "I have taken too long to make up my mind already," he replied. "I must make the plunge at once. I am convinced—your Eminence has convinced me—that I have been very foolish."

"I certainly never intended to convince you of that," remarked the Cardinal, with a smile.

"Very foolish," repeated Gouache, not heeding the interruption. "I have talked great nonsense,—I scarcely know why—perhaps to try and find where the sense really lay. I have dreamed so many dreams, so long, that I sometimes think I am morbid. All artists are morbid, I suppose. It is better to do anything active than to lose one's self in the slums of a sickly imagination."

"I agree with you," answered the Cardinal; "but I do not think you suffered from a sickly imagination,—I should rather call it abundant than sickly. Frankly, I should be sorry to think that in following this new idea you were in any way injuring the great career which, I am sure, is before you; but, on the other hand, I cannot help wishing that a greater number of young men would follow your example."

"Your Eminence approves, then?"

"Do you think you will make a good soldier?"

"Other artists have been good soldiers. There was Cellini——"

"Benvenuto Cellini said he made a good soldier; he said it himself, but his reputation for veracity in other matters was doubtful, to say the least. If he did not shoot the Connétable de Bourbon, it is very certain that some one else did. Besides, a soldier in our times should be a very different kind of man from the self-armed citizen of the time of Clement the Ninth and the aforesaid Connétable. You will have to wear a uniform and sleep on boards in a guard-house; you will have to be up early to drill, and up late mounting guard, in wind and rain and cold. It is hard work; I do not believe you have the constitution for it. Nevertheless, the intention is good. You can try it, and if you fall ill I will see that you have no difficulty in returning to your artist life."

"I do not mean to give it up," replied Gouache, in a tone of conviction. "And as for my health, I am as strong as any one."

"Perhaps," said the Cardinal, doubtfully. "And when are you going to join the corps?"

"In about an hour," said Gouache, quietly.

And he kept his word. But he had told no one, save the Cardinal, of his intention; and for a day or two, though he passed many acquaintances in the street, no one recognised Anastase Gouache in the handsome young soldier with his grey Turco uniform, a red sash round his slender waist, and a small *képi* set jauntily upon one side.

It was one of the phenomena of those times. Foreigners swarmed in Rome, and many of them joined the cosmopolitan corps—gentlemen, noblemen, artists, men of the learned professions, adventurers, duellists driven from their country in a temporary exile, enthusiasts, strolling Irishmen, men of all sorts and conditions. But, take them all in all, they were a fine set of fellows, who set no value whatever on their lives, and who, as a whole, fought for an idea, in the old crusading spirit. There

were many who, like Gouache, joined solely from conviction; and there were few instances indeed of any who, having joined, deserted. It often happened that a stranger came to Rome for a mere visit, and at the end of a month surprised his friends by appearing in the grey uniform. You had met him the night before at a ball in the ordinary garb of civilisation, covered with cotillon favours, waltzing like a madman; the next morning he entered the Café de Rome in a braided jacket open at the throat, and told you he was a soldier—a private soldier, who touched his cap to every corporal of the French infantry, and was liable to be locked up for twenty-four hours if he was late to quarters.

Donna Tullia's portrait was not quite finished, and Gouache had asked for one or two more sittings. Three days after the artist had taken his great resolution, Madame Mayer and Del Ferice entered his studio. He had had no difficulty in being at liberty at the hour of the sitting, and had merely exchanged his jacket for an old painting-coat, not taking the trouble to divest himself of the remainder of his uniform.

"Where have you been all this time?" asked Donna Tullia, as she lifted the curtain and entered the studio. He had kept out of her way during the past few days.

"Good heavens, Gouache!" cried Del Ferice, starting back, as he caught sight of the artist's grey trousers and yellow gaiters. "What is the meaning of this comedy?"

"What?" asked Gouache, coolly. Then, glancing at his legs, he answered, "Oh, nothing. I have turned Zouave—that is all. Will you sit down, Donna Tullia? I was waiting for you."

"Turned Zouave!" exclaimed Madame Mayer and Del Ferice in a breath. "Turned Zouave!"

"Well?" said Gouache, raising his eyebrows and enjoying their surprise. "Well—why not?"

Del Ferice struck a fine attitude, and, laying one hand upon Donna Tullia's arm, whispered hoarsely in her ear—

"*Siamo traditi*—we are betrayed!" he said. Whereupon Donna Tullia turned a little pale.

"Betrayed!" she repeated, "and by Gouache!"

Gouache laughed, as he drew out the battered old carved chair on which Madame Mayer was accustomed to sit when he painted.

"Calm yourself, Madame," he said. "I have not the least intention of betraying you. I have made a counter-revolution—but I am perfectly frank. I will not tell of the ferocious deeds I have heard discussed."

Del Ferice scowled and drew back, partly acting, partly in earnest. It lay in his schemes to make Donna Tullia believe herself involved in a genuine plot, and from this point of view he felt that he must pretend the greatest horror and surprise. On the other hand, he knew that Gouache had been painting the Cardinal's portrait, and guessed that the statesman had acquired a strong influence over the artist's mind—an influence which was already showing itself in a way that looked dangerous. It had never struck him until quite lately that Anastase, a republican by descent and conviction, could suddenly step into the reactionary camp.

"Pardon me, Donna Tullia," said Ugo, in serious tones, "pardon me—but I think we should do well to leave Monsieur Gouache to the contemplation of his new career. This is no place for us—the company of traitors—"

"Look here, Del Ferice," said Gouache, suddenly going up to him and looking him in the face,—“do you seriously believe that anything you have ever said in this room is worth betraying? or, if you do, do you really think that I would betray it?"

"Bah!" exclaimed Donna Tullia, interposing, "it is nonsense! Gouache is a gentleman, of course—and besides, I mean to have my portrait, politics or no politics."

With this round statement Donna Tullia sat down, and Del Ferice had no choice but to follow her example. He was profoundly disgusted, but he saw at a glance that it

would be hopeless to attempt to dissuade Madame Mayer when she had once made up her mind.

"And now you can tell us all about it," said Donna Tullia. "What, in the name of all that is senseless, has induced you to join the Zouaves? It really makes me very nervous to see you."

"That lends poetry to your expression," interrupted Gouache. "I wish you were always nervous. You really want to know why I am a Zouave? It is very simple. You must know that I always follow my impulses."

"Impulses!" ejaculated Del Ferice, moodily.

"Yes; because my impulses are always good,—whereas when I reflect much, my judgment is always bad. I felt a strong impulse to wear the grey uniform, so I walked into the recruiting office and wrote my name down."

"I feel a strong impulse to walk out of your studio, Monsieur Gouache," said Donna Tullia, with a rather nervous laugh.

"Then allow me to tell you that, whereas my impulses are good, yours are not," replied Anastase, quietly painting. "Because I have a new dress—"

"And new convictions," interrupted Del Ferice; "you who were always arguing about convictions!"

"I had none; that is the reason I argued about them. I have plenty now—I argue no longer."

"You are wise," retorted Ugo. "Those you have got will never bear discussion."

"Excuse me," answered Gouache; "if you will take the trouble to be introduced to his Eminence Cardinal Antonelli—"

Donna Tullia held up her hands in horror.

"That horrible man! That Mephistopheles!" she cried.

"That Macchiavelli! That arch-enemy of our holy Liberty!" exclaimed Del Ferice, in theatrical tones.

"Exactly," answered Gouache. "If he could be induced to devote a quarter of an hour of his valuable time to talking with you, he would turn your convictions round his finger."

"This is too much!" cried Del Ferice, angrily.

"I think it is very amusing," said Donna Tullia. "What a pity that all Liberals are not artists, whom his Eminence could engage to paint his portrait and be converted at so much an hour!"

Gouache smiled quietly, and went on with his work.

"So he told you to go and turn Zouave," remarked Donna Tullia, after a pause, "and you submitted like a lamb."

"So far was the Cardinal from advising me to turn soldier, that he expressed the greatest surprise when I told him of my intention," returned Gouache, rather coldly.

"Indeed it is enough to take away even a cardinal's breath," answered Madame Mayer. "I was never, never so surprised in my life!"

Gouache stood up to get a view of his work, and Donna Tullia looked at him critically.

"*Tiens!*" she exclaimed, "it is rather becoming—what small ankles you have, Gouache!"

Anastase laughed. It was impossible to be grave in the face of such utterly frivolous inconsistency.

"You will allow your expression to change so often, Donna Tullia! It is impossible to catch it."

"Like your convictions," murmured Del Ferice from his corner. Indeed Ugo did not know what to make of the scene. He had miscalculated the strength of Donna Tullia's fears as compared with her longing to possess a flattering portrait of herself. Rather than leave the picture unfinished, she exhibited a cynical indifference to danger which would have done honour to a better man than Del Ferice. Perhaps, too, she understood Gouache well enough to know that he might be trusted. Indeed any one would have trusted Gouache. Even Del Ferice was less disturbed at the possibility of the artist's repeating any of the trivial liberal talk which he had listened to, than at the indifference to discovery shown by Donna Tullia. To Del Ferice, the whole thing had been but a

harmless play; but he wanted Madame Mayer to believe that it had all been in solemn earnest, and that she was really implicated in a dangerous plot; for it gave him a stronger hold upon her for his own ends.

"So you are going to fight for Pio Nono," remarked Ugo, scornfully, after another pause.

"I am," replied Gouache. "And, no offence to you, my friend, if I meet you in a red shirt among the Garibaldini, I will kill you. It would be very unpleasant, so I hope that you will not join them."

"Take care, Del Ferice," laughed Donna Tullia; "your life is in danger! You had better join the Zouaves instead."

"I cannot paint his Eminence's portrait," returned Ugo, with a sneer, "so there is no chance of that."

"You might assist him with wholesome advice, I should think," answered Gouache. "I have no doubt you could tell him much that would be very useful."

"And turn traitor to—"

"Hush! Do not be so silly, Del Ferice," interrupted Donna Tullia, who began to fear that Del Ferice's taunts would make trouble. She had a secret conviction that it would not be good to push the gentle Anastase too far. He was too quiet, too determined, and too serious not to be a little dangerous if roused.

"Do not be absurd," she repeated. "Whatever Gouache may choose to do, he is a gentleman, and I will not have you talk of traitors like that. He does not quarrel with you—why do you try to quarrel with him?"

"I think he has done quite enough to justify a quarrel, I am sure," replied Del Ferice, moodily.

"My dear sir," said Gouache, desisting from his work and turning towards Ugo, "Madame is quite right. I not only do not quarrel, but I refuse to be quarrelled with. You have my most solemn assurance that whatever has previously passed here, whatever I have heard said by you, by Donna Tullia, by Valdarno, by any of your friends, I regard as an inviolable secret. You formerly

said I had no convictions, and you were right. I had none, and I listened to your exposition of your own with considerable interest. My case is changed. I need not tell you what I believe, for I wear the uniform of a Papal Zouave. When I put it on, I certainly did not contemplate offending you; I do not wish to offend you now—I only beg that you will refrain from offending me. For my part, I need only say that henceforth I do not desire to take a part in your councils. If Donna Tullia is satisfied with her portrait, there need be no further occasion for our meeting. If, on the contrary, we are to meet again, I beg that we may meet on a footing of courtesy and mutual respect."

It was impossible to say more; and Gouache's speech terminated the situation so far as Del Ferice was concerned. Donna Tullia smilingly expressed her approval.

"Quite right, Gouache," she said. "You know it would be impossible to leave the portrait as it is now. The mouth, you know—you promised to do something to it—just the expression, you know."

Gouache bowed his head a little, and set to work again without a word. Del Ferice did not speak again during the sitting, but sat moodily staring at the canvas, at Donna Tullia, and at the floor. It was not often that he was moved from his habitual suavity of manner, but Gouache's conduct had made him feel particularly uncomfortable.

The next time Donna Tullia came to sit, she brought her old Countess, and Del Ferice did not appear. The portrait was ultimately finished to the satisfaction of all parties, and was hung in Donna Tullia's drawing-room, to be admired and criticised by all her friends. But Gouache rejoiced when the thing was finally removed from his studio, for he had grown to hate it, and had been almost willing to flatter it out of all likeness to Madame Mayer, for the sake of not being eternally confronted by the cold stare of her blue eyes. He finished the Cardinal's portrait too; and the statesman not only paid for it

with unusual liberality, but gave the artist what he called a little memento of the long hours they had spent together. He opened one of the lockers in his study, and from a small drawer selected an ancient ring, in which was set a piece of crystal with a delicate intaglio of a figure of Victory. He took Gouache's hand and slipped the ring upon his finger. He had taken a singular liking to Anastase.

"Wear it as a little souvenir of me," he said kindly. "It is a Victory; you are a soldier now, so I pray that victory may go with you; and I give Victory herself into your hands."

"And I," said Gouache, "will pray that it may be a symbol in my hand of the real victories you are to win."

"Only a symbol," returned the Cardinal, thoughtfully. "Nothing but a symbol. I was not born to conquer, but to lead a forlorn-hope—to deceive vanquished men with a hope not real, and to deceive the victors with an unreal fear. Nevertheless, my friend," he added, grasping Gouache's hand, and fixing upon him his small bright eyes,— "nevertheless, let us fight, fight—fight to the very end!"

"We will fight to the end, Eminence," said Gouache. He was only a private of Zouaves, and the man whose hand he held was great and powerful; but the same spirit was in the hearts of both, the same courage, the same devotion to the failing cause—and both kept their words, each in his own way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Astrardente was in some respects a picturesque place. The position of the little town gave it a view in both directions from where it stood; for it was built upon a precipitous eminence rising suddenly out of the midst of the narrow strip of fertile land, the long and rising valley