

CHAPTER XXXII.

The old Prince was left alone, as he had often been left before, when Giovanni was gone to the ends of the earth in pursuit of his amusements. On such occasions old Saracinesca frequently packed up his traps and followed his son's example; but he rarely went further than Paris, where he had many friends, and where he generally succeeded in finding consolation for his solitude.

Now, however, he felt more than usually lonely. Giovanni had not gone far, it is true, for with good horses it was scarcely more than eight hours to the castle; but, for the first time in his life, old Saracinesca felt that if he had suddenly determined to follow his son, he would not be welcome. The boy was married at last, and must be left in peace for a few days with his bride. With the contrariety natural to him, old Saracinesca no sooner felt that his son was gone than he experienced the most ardent desire to be with him. He had often seen Giovanni leave the house at twenty-four hours' notice on his way to some distant capital, and had not cared to accompany him, simply because he knew he might do so if he pleased; but now he felt that some one else had taken his place, and that, for a time at least, he was forcibly excluded from Giovanni's society. It is very likely that but for the business which detained him in Rome he would have astonished the happy pair by riding into the gateway of the old castle on the day after the wedding: that business, however, was urgent, secret, and, moreover, very congenial to the old man's present temper.

He had discussed the matter fully with Giovanni, and they had agreed upon the course to be pursued. There was, nevertheless, much to be done before the end they both so earnestly desired could be attained. It seemed a

simple plan to go to Cardinal Antonelli and to demand the arrest of Del Ferice for his misdeeds; but as yet those misdeeds were undefined, and it was necessary to define them. The Cardinal rarely resorted to such measures except when the case was urgent, and Saracinesca knew perfectly well that it would be hard to prove anything more serious against Del Ferice than the crime of joining in the silly talk of Valdarno and his set. Giovanni had told his father plainly that he was sure Del Ferice derived his living from some illicit source, but he was wholly unable to show what that source was. Most people believed the story that Del Ferice had inherited money from an obscure relative; most people thought he was clever and astute, but were so far deceived by his frank and unaffected manner as to feel sure that he always said everything that came into his head; most people are so much delighted when an unusually clever man deigns to talk to them, that they cannot, for vanity's sake, suspect him of deceiving them. Saracinesca did not doubt that the mere statement of his own belief in regard to Del Ferice would have considerable weight with the Cardinal, for he was used to power of a certain kind, and was accustomed to see his judgment treated with deference; but he knew the Cardinal to be a cautious man, hating despotic measures, because by his use of them he had made himself so bitterly hated—loth always to do by force what might be accomplished by skill, and in the end far more likely to attempt the conversion of Del Ferice to the reactionary view, than to order his expulsion because his views were over liberal. Even if old Saracinesca had possessed a vastly greater diplomatic instinct than he did, coupled with an unscrupulous mendacity which he certainly had not, he would have found it hard to persuade the Cardinal against his will; but Saracinesca was, of all men, a man violent in action and averse to reflection before or after the fact. That he should ultimately be revenged upon Del Ferice and Donna Tullia for the part they had lately played, was a matter which it never entered his head to

doubt; but when he endeavoured to find means which should persuade the Cardinal to assist him, he seemed fenced in on all sides by impossibilities. One thing only helped him—namely, the conviction that if the statesman could be induced to examine Del Ferice's conduct seriously, the latter would prove to be not only an enemy to the State, but a bitter enemy to the Cardinal himself.

The more Saracinesca thought of the matter, the more convinced he was that he should go boldly to the Cardinal and state his belief that Del Ferice was a dangerous traitor, who ought to be summarily dealt with. If the Cardinal argued the case, the Prince would asseverate, after his manner, and some sort of result was sure to follow. As he thus determined upon his course, his doubts seemed to vanish, as they generally do in the mind of a strong man, when action becomes imminent, and the confidence the old man had exhibited to his son very soon became genuine. It was almost intolerable to have to wait so long, however, before doing anything. Giovanni and he had decided to allow Del Ferice's marriage to take place before producing the explosion, in order the more certainly to strike both the offenders; now it seemed best to strike at once. Supposing, he argued with himself, that Donna Tullia and her husband chose to leave Rome for Paris the day after their wedding, half the triumph would be lost; for half the triumph was to consist in Del Ferice's being imprisoned for a spy in Rome, whereas if he once crossed the frontier, he could at most be forbidden to return, which would be but a small satisfaction to Saracinesca, or to Giovanni.

A week passed by, and the gaiety of Carnival was again at its height; and again a week elapsed, and Lent was come. Saracinesca went everywhere and saw everybody as usual, and then after Ash-Wednesday he occasionally showed himself at some of those quiet evening receptions which his son so much detested. But he was restless and discontented. He longed to begin the

fight, and could not sleep for thinking of it. Like Giovanni, he was strong and revengeful; but Giovanni had from his mother a certain slowness of temperament, which often deterred him from action just long enough to give him time for reflection, whereas the father, when roused, and he was roused easily, loved to strike at once. It chanced one evening, in a great house, that Saracinesca came upon the Cardinal standing alone in an outer room. He was on his way into the reception; but he had stopped, attracted by a beautiful crystal cup of old workmanship, which stood, among other objects of the kind, upon a marble table in one of the drawing-rooms through which he had to pass. The cup itself, of deeply carved rock crystal, was set in chiselled silver, and if not the work of Cellini himself, must have been made by one of his pupils. Saracinesca stopped by the great man's side.

"Good evening, Eminence," he said.

"Good evening, Prince," returned the Cardinal, who recognised Saracinesca's voice without looking up. "Have you ever seen this marvellous piece of work? I have been admiring it for a quarter of an hour." He loved all objects of the kind, and understood them with rare knowledge.

"It is indeed exceedingly beautiful," answered Saracinesca, who longed to take advantage of the opportunity of speaking to Cardinal Antonelli upon the subject nearest to his heart.

"Yes—yes," returned the Cardinal rather vaguely, and made as though he would go on. He saw from Saracinesca's commonplace praise, that he knew nothing of the subject. The old Prince saw his opportunity slipping from him, and lost his head. He did not recollect that he could see the Cardinal alone whenever he pleased, by merely asking for an interview. Fate had thrust the Cardinal in his path, and fate was responsible.

"If your Eminence will allow me, I would like a word with you," he said suddenly.

"As many as you please," answered the statesman, blandly. "Let us sit down in that corner—no one will disturb us for a while."

He seemed unusually affable, as he sat himself down by Saracinesca's side, gathering the skirt of his scarlet mantle across his knee, and folding his delicate hands together in an attitude of restful attention.

"You know, I daresay, a certain Del Ferice, Eminence?" began the Prince.

"Very well—the *deus ex machina* who has appeared to carry off Donna Tullia Mayer. Yes, I know him."

"Precisely, and they will match very well together; the world cannot help applauding the union of the flesh and the devil."

The Cardinal smiled.

"The metaphor is apt," he said; "but what about them?"

"I will tell you in two words," replied Saracinesca. "Del Ferice is a scoundrel of the first water——"

"A jewel among scoundrels," interrupted the Cardinal, "for being a scoundrel he is yet harmless—a stage villain."

"I believe your Eminence is deceived in him."

"That may easily be," answered the statesman. "I am much more often deceived than people imagine." He spoke very mildly, but his small black eyes turned keenly upon Saracinesca. "What has he been doing?" he asked, after a short pause.

"He has been trying to do a great deal of harm to my son and to my son's wife. I suspect him strongly of doing harm to you."

Whether Saracinesca was strictly honest in saying "you" to the Cardinal, when he meant the whole State as represented by the prime minister, is a matter not easily decided. There is a Latin saying, to the effect that a man who is feared by many should himself fear many, and the saying is true. The Cardinal was personally a brave man; but he knew his danger, and the

memory of the murdered Rossi was fresh in his mind. Nevertheless, he smiled blandly as he answered—

"That is rather vague, my friend. How is he doing me harm, if I may ask?"

"I argue in this way," returned Saracinesca, thus pressed. "The fellow found a most ingenious way of attacking my son—he searched the whole country till he found that a man called Giovanni Saracinesca had been married some time ago in Aquila. He copied the certificates, and produced them as pretended proof that my son was already married. If I had not found the man myself, there would have been trouble. Now besides this, Del Ferice is known to hold Liberal views——"

"Of the feeblest kind," interrupted the statesman, who nevertheless became very grave.

"Those he exhibits are of the feeblest kind, and he takes no trouble to hide them. But a fellow so ingenious as to imagine the scheme he practised against us is not a fool."

"I understand, my good friend," said the Cardinal. "You have been injured by this fellow, and you would like me to revenge the injury by locking him up. Is that it?"

"Precisely," answered Saracinesca, laughing at his own simplicity. "I might as well have said so from the first."

"Much better. You would make a poor diplomatist, Prince. But what in the world shall I gain by revenging your wrongs upon that creature?"

"Nothing—unless when you have taken the trouble to examine his conduct, you find that he is really dangerous. In that case your Eminence will be obliged to look to your own safety. If you find him innocent, you will let him go."

"And in that case, what will you do?" asked the Cardinal with a smile.

"I will cut his throat," answered Saracinesca, unmoved. "Murder him?"

"No—call him out and kill him like a gentleman, which is a great deal better than he deserves."

"I have no doubt you would," said the Cardinal, gravely. "I think your proposition reasonable, however. If this man is really dangerous, I will look to him myself. But I must really beg you not to do anything rash. I have determined that this duelling shall stop, and I warn you that neither you nor any one else will escape imprisonment if you are involved in any more of these personal encounters."

Saracinesca suppressed a smile at the Cardinal's threat; but he perceived that he had gained his point, and was pleased accordingly. He had, he felt sure, sown in the statesman's mind a germ of suspicion which would before long bring forth fruit. In those days danger was plentiful, and people could not afford to overlook it, no matter in what form it presented itself, least of all such people as the Cardinal himself, who, while sustaining an unequal combat against superior forces outside the State, felt that his every step was encompassed by perils from within. That he had long despised Del Ferice as an idle chatterer did not prevent him from understanding that he might have been deceived, as Saracinesca suggested. He had caused Ugo to be watched, it is true, but only from time to time, and by men whose only duty was to follow him and to see whether he frequented suspicious society. The little nest of talkers at Gouache's studio in the Via San Basilio was soon discovered, and proved to be harmless enough. Del Ferice was then allowed to go on his way unobserved. But the half-dozen words in which Saracinesca had described Ugo's scheme for hindering Giovanni's marriage had set the Cardinal thinking, and the Cardinal seldom wasted time in thinking in vain. His interview with Saracinesca ended very soon, and the Prince and the statesman entered the crowded drawing-room and mixed in the throng. It was long before they met again in private.

The Cardinal on the following day gave orders that Del

Ferice's letters were to be stopped—by no means an uncommon proceeding in those times, nor so rare in our own day as is supposed. The post-office was then in the hands of a private individual so far as all management was concerned, and the Cardinal's word was law. Del Ferice's letters were regularly opened and examined.

The first thing that was discovered was that they frequently contained money, generally in the shape of small drafts on London signed by a Florentine banker, and that the envelopes which contained money never contained anything else. They were all posted in Florence. With regard to his letters, they appeared to be very innocent communications from all sorts of people, rarely referring to politics, and then only in the most general terms. If Del Ferice had expected to have his correspondence examined, he could not have arranged matters better for his own safety. To trace the drafts to the person who sent them was not an easy business; it was impossible to introduce a spy into the banking-house in Florence, and among the many drafts daily bought and sold, it was almost impossible to identify, without the aid of the banker's books, the person who chanced to buy any particular one. The addresses were, it is true, uniformly written by the same hand; but the writing was in no way peculiar, and was certainly not that of any prominent person whose autograph the Cardinal possessed.

The next step was to get possession of some letter written by Del Ferice himself, and, if possible, to intercept everything he wrote. But although the letters containing the drafts were regularly opened, and, after having been examined and sealed again, were regularly transmitted through the post-office to Ugo's address, the expert persons set to catch the letters he himself wrote were obliged to own, after three weeks' careful watching, that he never seemed to write any letters at all, and that he certainly never posted any. They acknowledged their failure to the Cardinal with timid anxiety, expecting to be reprimanded for their carelessness. But the Cardinal merely

told them not to relax their attention, and dismissed them with a bland smile. He knew, now, that he was on the track of mischief; for a man who never writes any letters at all, while he receives many, might reasonably be suspected of having a secret post-office of his own. For some days Del Ferice's movements were narrowly watched, but with no result whatever. Then the Cardinal sent for the police register of the district where Del Ferice lived, and in which the name, nationality, and residence of every individual in the "Rione" or quarter were carefully inscribed, as they still are.

Running his eye down the list, the Cardinal came upon the name of "Temistocle Fattorusso, of Naples, servant to Ugo dei Conti del Ferice:" an idea struck him.

"His servant is a Neapolitan," he reflected. "He probably sends his letters by way of Naples."

Accordingly Temistocle was watched instead of his master. It was found that he frequented the society of other Neapolitans, and especially that he was in the habit of going from time to time to the Ripa Grande, the port of the Tiber, where he seemed to have numerous acquaintances among the Neapolitan boatmen who constantly came up the coast in their "martingane"—heavy, sea-going, lateen-rigged vessels, bringing cargoes of oranges and lemons to the Roman market. The mystery was now solved. One day Temistocle was actually seen giving a letter into the hands of a huge fellow in a red woollen cap. The *sbirro* who saw him do it marked the sailor and his vessel, and never lost sight of him till he hoisted his jib and floated away down stream. Then the spy took horse and galloped down to Fiumicino, where he waited for the little vessel, boarded her from a boat, escorted by a couple of gendarmes, and had no difficulty in taking the letter from the terrified seaman, who was glad enough to escape without detention. During the next fortnight several letters were stopped in this way, carried by different sailors, and the whole correspondence went straight

to the Cardinal. It was not often that he troubled himself to play the detective in person, but when he did so, he was not easily baffled. And now he observed that about a week after the interception of the first letter the small drafts which used to come so frequently to Del Ferice's address from Florence suddenly ceased, proving beyond a doubt that each letter was paid for according to its value so soon as it was received.

With regard to the contents of these epistles little need be said. So sure was Del Ferice of his means of transmission that he did not even use a cipher, though he, of course, never signed any of his writings. The matter was invariably a detailed chronicle of Roman sayings and doings, a record as minute as Del Ferice could make it, of everything that took place, and even the Cardinal himself was astonished at the accuracy of the information thus conveyed. His own appearances in public—the names of those with whom he talked—even fragments of his conversation—were given with annoying exactness. The statesman learned with infinite disgust that he had for some time past been subjected to a system of espionage at least as complete as any of his own invention; and, what was still more annoying to his vanity, the spy was the man of all others whom he had most despised, calling him harmless and weak, because he cunningly affected weakness. Where or how Del Ferice procured so much information the Cardinal cared little enough, for he determined there and then that he should procure no more. That there were other traitors in the camp was more than likely, and that they had aided Del Ferice with their counsels; but though by prolonging the situation it might be possible to track them down, such delay would be valuable to enemies abroad. Moreover, if Del Ferice began to find out, as he soon must, that his private correspondence was being overhauled at the Vatican, he was not a man to hesitate about attempting his escape; and he would certainly not be an easy man to catch, if he could once succeed in putting a few miles

of Campagna between himself and Rome. There was no knowing what disguise he might not find in which to slip over the frontier; and indeed, as he afterwards proved, he was well prepared for such an emergency.

The Cardinal did not hesitate. He had just received the fourth letter, and if he waited any longer Del Ferice would take alarm, and slip through his fingers. He wrote with his own hand a note to the chief of police, ordering the immediate arrest of Ugo dei Conti del Ferice, with instructions that he should be taken in his own house, without any publicity, and conveyed in a private carriage to the Sant' Uffizio by men in plain clothes. It was six o'clock in the evening when he wrote the order, and delivered it to his private servant to be taken to its destination. The man lost no time, and within twenty minutes the chief of police was in possession of his orders, which he hastened to execute with all possible speed. Before seven o'clock two respectable-looking citizens were seated in the chief's own carriage, driving rapidly in the direction of Del Ferice's house. In less than half an hour the man who had caused so much trouble would be safely lodged in the prisons of the Holy Office, to be judged for his sins as a political spy. In a fortnight he was to have been married to Donna Tullia Mayer,—and her trousseau had just arrived from Paris.

It can hardly be said that the Cardinal's conduct was unjustifiable, though many will say that Del Ferice's secret doings were easily defensible on the ground of his patriotism. Cardinal Antonelli had precisely defined the situation in his talk with Anastase Gouache by saying that the temporal power was driven to bay. To all appearances Europe was at peace, but as a matter of fact the peace was but an armed neutrality. An amount of interest was concentrated upon the situation of the Papal States which has rarely been excited by events of much greater apparent importance than the occupation of a small principality by foreign troops. All Europe was arming. In a few months Austria was to sustain one of the most sudden and over-

whelming defeats recorded in military history. In a few years the greatest military power in the world was to be overtaken by an even more appalling disaster. And these events, then close at hand, were to deal the death-blow to papal independence. The papacy was driven to bay, and those to whom the last defence was confided were certainly justified in employing every means in their power for strengthening their position. That Rome herself was riddled with rotten conspiracies, and turned into a hunting-ground for political spies, while the support she received from Louis Napoleon had been already partially withdrawn, proves only how hard was the task of that man who, against such odds, maintained so gallant a fight. It is no wonder that he hunted down spies, and signed orders forcing suspicious characters to leave the city at a day's notice; for the city was practically in a state of siege, and any relaxation of the iron discipline by which the great Cardinal governed would at any moment in those twenty years have proved disastrous. He was hated and feared; more than once he was in imminent danger of his life, but he did his duty in his post. Had his authority fallen, it is impossible to say what evil might have ensued to the city and its inhabitants—evils vastly more to be feared than the entrance of an orderly Italian army through the Porta Pia. For the recollections of Count Rossi's murder, and of the short and lawless Republic of 1848, were fresh in the minds of the people, and before they had faded there were dangerous rumours of a rising even less truly Republican in theory, and far more fatal in the practical social anarchy which must have resulted from its success. Giuseppe Mazzini had survived his arch-enemy, the great Cavour, and his influence was incalculable.

But my business is not to write the history of those uncertain days, though no one who considers the social life of Rome, either then or now, can afford to overlook the influence of political events upon the everyday doings of men and women. We must follow the private carriage containing the two respectable citizens who were on their way to Del Ferice's house.