

SANT' ILARIO.

CHAPTER I.

Two years of service in the Zouaves had wrought a change in Anastase Gouache, the painter. He was still a light man, nervously built, with small hands and feet, and a delicate face; but constant exposure to the weather had browned his skin, and a life of unceasing activity had strengthened his sinews and hardened his compact frame. The clustering black curls were closely cropped, too, while the delicate dark moustache had slightly thickened. He had grown to be a very soldierly young fellow, straight and alert, quick of hand and eye, inured to that perpetual readiness which is the first characteristic of the good soldier, whether in peace or war. The dreamy look that was so often in his face in the days when he sat upon a high stool painting the portrait of Donna Tullia Mayer, had given place to an expression of wide-awake curiosity in the world's doings.

Anastase was an artist by nature and no amount of military service could crush the chief aspirations of his intelligence. He had not abandoned work since he had joined the Zouaves, for his hours of leisure from duty were passed in his studio. But the change in his outward appearance was connected with a similar development in his character. He himself sometimes wondered how he could have ever taken any interest in the half-hearted political fumbling which Donna Tullia, Ugo Del Ferice, and others of their set used to dignify by the name of conspiracy. It seemed to him that his ideas must at that time have been deplorably confused and lamentably unsettled. He sometimes took out the old sketch of Madame Mayer's portrait, and setting it upon

his easel, tried to realise and bring back those times when she had sat for him. He could recall Del Ferice's mock heroics, Donna Tullia's ill-expressed invectives, and his own half-sarcastic sympathy in the liberal movement; but the young fellow in an old velveteen jacket who used to talk glibly about the guillotine, about stringing-up the clericals to street-lamps and turning the churches into popular theatres, was surely not the energetic, sunburnt Zouave who had been hunting down brigands in the Samnite hills last summer, who spent three-fourths of his time among soldiers like himself, and who had pledged his honour to follow the gallant Charette and defend the Pope as long as he could carry a musket.

There is a sharp dividing line between youth and manhood. Sometimes we cross it early, and sometimes late, but we do not know that we are passing from one life to another as we step across the boundary. The world seems to us the same for a while, as we knew it yesterday and shall know it to-morrow. Suddenly, we look back and start with astonishment when we see the past, which we thought so near, already vanishing in the distance, shapeless, confused, and estranged from our present selves. Then we know that we are men, and acknowledge, with something like a sigh, that we have put away childish things.

When Gouache put on the gray jacket, the red sash and the yellow gaiters, he became a man and speedily forgot Donna Tullia and her errors, and for some time afterwards he did not care to recall them. When he tried to remember the scenes at the studio in the Via San Basilio, they seemed very far away. One thing alone constantly reminded him disagreeably of the past, and that was his unfortunate failure to catch Del Ferice when the latter had escaped from Rome in the disguise of a mendicant friar. Anastase had never been able to understand how he had missed the fugitive. It had soon become known that Del Ferice had escaped by the very pass which Gouache was patrolling, and the young Zouave had felt the bitterest mortification in losing so valuable and so easy a prey. He often thought of it and promised himself that he would visit his anger on

Del Ferice if he ever got a chance; but Del Ferice was out of reach of his vengeance, and Donna Tullia Mayer had not returned to Rome since the previous year. It had been rumoured of late that she had at last fulfilled the engagement contracted some time earlier, and had consented to be called the Contessa Del Ferice; this piece of news, however, was not yet fully confirmed. Gouache had heard the gossip, and had immediately made a lively sketch on the back of a half-finished picture, representing Donna Tullia, in her bridal dress, leaning upon the arm of Del Ferice, who was arrayed in a capuchin's cowl, and underneath, with his brush, he scrawled a legend, "*Finis coronat opus.*"

It was nearly six o'clock in the afternoon of the 23d of September. The day had been rainy, but the sky had cleared an hour before sunset, and there was a sweet damp freshness in the air, very grateful after the long weeks of late summer. Anastase Gouache had been on duty at the Serristori barracks in the Borgo Santo Spirito and walked briskly up to the bridge of Sant' Angelo. There was not much movement in the streets, and the carriages were few. A couple of officers were lounging at the gate of the castle and returned Gouache's salute as he passed. In the middle of the bridge he stopped and looked westward, down the short reach of the river which caught a lurid reflection of the sunset on its eddying yellow surface. He mused a moment, thinking more of the details of his duty at the barracks than of the scene before him. Then he thought of the first time he had crossed the bridge in his Zouave uniform, and a faint smile flickered on his brown features. It happened almost every day that he stopped at the same place, and as particular spots often become associated with ideas that seem to belong to them, the same thought almost always recurred to his mind as he stood there. Then followed the same daily wondering as to how all these things were to end; whether he should for years to come wear the red sash and the yellow gaiters, a corporal of Zouaves, and whether for years he should ask himself every day the same question. Presently, as the light faded from the houses of the Borgo, he turned away with an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders and

continued his walk upon the narrow pavement at the side of the bridge. As he descended the step at the end, to the level of the square, a small bright object in a crevice of the stones attracted his attention. He stooped and picked it up.

It was a little gold pin, some two inches long, the head beaten out and twisted into the shape of the letter C. Gouache examined it attentively, and saw that it must have been long used, for it was slightly bent in more than one place as though it had often been thrust through some thick material. It told no other tale of its possessor, however, and the young man slipped it into his pocket and went on his way, idly wondering to whom the thing belonged. He reflected that if he had been bent on any important matter he would probably have considered the finding of a bit of gold as a favourable omen; but he was merely returning to his lodging as usual, and had no engagement for the evening. Indeed, he expected no event in his life at that time, and following the train of his meditation he smiled a little when he thought that he was not even in love. For a Frenchman, nearly thirty years of age, the position was an unusual one enough. In Gouache's case it was especially remarkable. Women liked him, he liked them, and he was constantly in the society of some of the most beautiful in the world. Nevertheless, he turned from one to another and found a like pleasure in the conversation of them all. What delighted him in the one was not what charmed him most in the next, but the equilibrium of satisfaction was well maintained between the dark and the fair, the silent beauty and the pretty woman of intelligence. There was indeed one whom he thought more noble in heart and grander in symmetry of form and feature, and stronger in mind than the rest; but she was immeasurably removed from the sphere of his possible devotion by her devoted love of her husband, and he admired her from a distance, even while speaking with her.

As he passed the Apollo theatre and ascended the Via di Tordinona the lights were beginning to twinkle in the low doorways, and the gas-lamps, then a very recent innovation in Rome, shone out one by one in the distance.

The street is narrow, and was full of traffic, even in the evening. Pedestrians elbowed their way along in the dusk, every now and then flattening themselves against the dingy walls to let a cab or a carriage rush past them, not without real risk of accident. Before the deep, arched gateway of the Orso, one of the most ancient inns in the world, the empty wine-carts were getting ready for the return journey by night across the Campagna, the great bunches of little bells jingling loudly in the dark as the carters buckled the harness on their horses' backs.

Just as Gouache reached this place, the darkest and most crowded through which he had to pass, a tremendous clatter and rattle from the Via dell' Orso made the hurrying people draw back to the shelter of the door-steps and arches. It was clear that a runaway horse was not far off. One of the carters, the back of whose waggon was half-way across the opening of the street, made desperate efforts to make his beast advance and clear the way; but the frightened animal only backed farther up. A moment later the runaway charged down past the tail of the lumbering vehicle. The horse himself just cleared the projecting timbers of the cart, but the cab he was furiously dragging caught upon them while going at full speed and was shivered to pieces, throwing the horse heavily upon the stones, so that he slid along several feet on his head and knees with the fragments of the broken shafts and the wreck of the harness about him. The first man to spring from the crowd and seize the beast's head was Anastase. He did not see that the same instant a large private carriage, drawn by a pair of powerful horses, emerged quickly from the Vicolo dei Soldati, the third of the streets which meet the Via di Tordinona at the Orso. The driver, who owing to the darkness had not seen the disaster which had just taken place, did his best to stop in time; but before the heavy equipage could be brought to a stand Anastase had been thrown to the ground, between the hoofs of the struggling cab-horse and the feet of the startled pair of bays. The crowd closed in as near as was safe, while the confusion and the shouts of the people and the carters increased every minute.

The coachman of the private carriage threw the reins

to the footman and sprang down to go to the horses' heads.

"You have run over a Zouave!" some one shouted from the crowd.

"Meno male! Thank goodness it was not one of us!" exclaimed another voice.

"Where is he? Get him out, some of you!" cried the coachman as he seized the reins close to the bit.

By this time a couple of stout gendarmes and two or three soldiers of the Antibes legion had made their way to the front and were dragging away the fallen cab-horse. A tall, thin, elderly gentleman, of a somewhat sour countenance, descended from the carriage and stooped over the injured soldier.

"It is only a Zouave, Excellency," said the coachman, with a sort of sigh of relief.

The tall gentleman lifted Gouache's head a little so that the light from the carriage-lamp fell upon his face. He was quite insensible, and there was blood upon his pale forehead and white cheeks. One of the gendarmes came forward.

"We will take care of him, Signore," he said, touching his three-cornered hat. "But I must beg to know your revered name," he added, in the stock Italian phrase. "Capirà—I am very sorry—but they say your horses

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"Put him into my carriage," answered the elderly gentleman shortly. "I am the Principe Montevarchi."

"But, Excellency—the Signorina——" protested the coachman. The prince paid no attention to the objection and helped the gendarme to deposit Anastase in the interior of the vehicle. Then he gave the man a silver scudo.

"Send some one to the Serristori barracks to say that a Zouave has been hurt and is at my house," he said. Therewith he entered the carriage and ordered the coachman to drive home.

"In heaven's name, what has happened, papa?" asked a young voice in the darkness, tremulous with excitement.

"My dear child, there has been an accident in the street, and this young man has been wounded, or killed——"

"Killed! A dead man in the carriage!" cried the young girl in some terror, and shrinking away into the corner.

"You should really control your nerves, Faustina," replied her father in austere tones. "If the young man is dead, it is the will of Heaven. If he is alive we shall soon find it out. Meanwhile I must beg you to be calm—to be calm, do you understand?"

Donna Faustina Montevarchi made no answer to this parental injunction, but withdrew as far as she could into the corner of the back seat, while her father supported the inanimate body of the Zouave as the carriage swung over the uneven pavement. In a few minutes they rolled beneath a deep arch and stopped at the foot of a broad marble staircase.

"Bring him upstairs carefully, and send for a surgeon," said the prince to the men who came forward. Then he offered his arm to his daughter to ascend the steps, as though nothing had happened, and without bestowing another look on the injured soldier.

Donna Faustina was just eighteen years old, and had only quitted the convent of the Sacro Cuore a month earlier. It might have been said that she was too young to be beautiful, for she evidently belonged to that class of women who do not attain their full development until a later period. Her figure was almost too slender, her face almost too delicate and ethereal. There was about her a girlish look, an atmosphere of half-saintly maidenhood, which was not so much the expression of her real nature as the effect produced by her being at once very thin and very fresh. There was indeed nothing particularly angelic about her warm brown eyes, shaded by unusually long black lashes; and little wayward locks of chestnut hair, curling from beneath the small round hat of the period, just before the small pink ears, softened as with a breath of worldliness the grave outlines of the serious face. A keen student of women might have seen that the dim religious halo of convent life which still clung to the young girl would soon fade and give way to the brilliancy of the woman of the world. She was not tall, though of fully average height, and although the dress of that time was ill-adapted to show to advantage either the figure or the movements, it was evident, as she

stepped lightly from the carriage, that she had a full share of ease and grace. She possessed that unconscious certainty in motion which proceeds naturally from the perfect proportion of all the parts, and which exercises a far greater influence over men than a faultless profile or a dazzling skin.

Instead of taking her father's arm, Donna Faustina turned and looked at the face of the wounded Zouave, whom three men had carefully taken from the carriage and were preparing to carry upstairs. Poor Gouache was hardly recognisable for the smart soldier who had crossed the bridge of Sant' Angelo half an hour earlier. His uniform was all stained with mud, there was blood upon his pale face, and his limbs hung down, powerless and limp. But as the young girl looked at him, consciousness returned, and with it came the sense of acute suffering. He opened his eyes suddenly, as men often do when they revive after being stunned, and a short groan escaped from his lips. Then, as he realised that he was in the presence of a lady, he made an effort as though to release himself from the hands of those who carried him, and to stand upon his feet.

"Pardon me, Madame," he began to say, but Faustina checked him by a gesture.

Meanwhile old Montevarchi had carefully scrutinised the young man's face, and had recognised him, for they had often met in society.

"Monsieur Gouache!" he exclaimed in surprise. At the same time he made the men move on with their burden.

"You know him, papa?" whispered Donna Faustina as they followed together. "He is a gentleman? I was right?"

"Of course, of course," answered her father. "But really, Faustina, had you nothing better to do than to go and look into his face? Imagine, if he had known you! Dear me! If you begin like this, as soon as you are out of the convent——"

Montevarchi left the rest of the sentence to his daughter's imagination, merely turning up his eyes a little as though deprecating the just vengeance of heaven upon his daughter's misconduct.

"Really, papa——" protested Faustina.

"Yes——really, my daughter——I am much surprised," returned her incensed parent, still speaking in an undertone lest the injured man should overhear what was said.

They reached the head of the stairs and the men carried Gouache rapidly away; not so quickly, however, as to prevent Faustina from getting another glimpse of his face. His eyes were open and met hers with an expression of mingled interest and gratitude which she did not forget. Then he was carried away and she did not see him again.

The Montevarchi household was conducted upon the patriarchal principle, once general in Rome, and not quite abandoned even now, twenty years later than the date of Gouache's accident. The palace was a huge square building facing upon two streets, in front and behind, and opening inwards upon two courtyards. Upon the lower floor were stables, coach-houses, kitchens, and offices innumerable. Above these there was built a half story, called a mezzanino——in French, entresol, containing the quarters of the unmarried sons of the house, of the household chaplain, and of two or three tutors employed in the education of the Montevarchi grandchildren. Next above, came the "piano nobile," or state apartments, comprising the rooms of the prince and princess, the dining-room, and a vast suite of reception-rooms, each of which opened into the next in such a manner that only the last was not necessarily a passage. In the huge hall was the dais and canopy with the family arms embroidered in colours once gaudy but now agreeably faded to a softer tone. Above this floor was another, occupied by the married sons, their wives and children; and high over all, above the cornice of the palace, were the endless servants' quarters and the roomy garrets. At a rough estimate the establishment comprised over a hundred persons, all living under the absolute and despotic authority of the head of the house, Don Lotario Montevarchi, Principe Montevarchi, and sole possessor of forty or fifty other titles. From his will and upon his pleasure depended every act of every member of his household, from his eldest son and heir, the Duca di Bellegra, to that of Pietro Paolo, the under-cook's scullion's boy. There

were three sons and four daughters. Two of the sons were married, to wit, Don Ascanio, to whom his father had given his second title, and Don Onorato, who was allowed to call himself Principe di Cantalupo, but who would have no legal claim to that distinction after his father's death. Last of the three came Don Carlo, a young fellow of twenty years, but not yet emancipated from the supervision of his tutor. Of the daughters, the two eldest, Bianca and Laura, were married and no longer lived in Rome, the one having been matched with a Neapolitan and the other with a Florentine. There remained still at home, therefore, the third, Donna Flavia, and the youngest of all the family, Donna Faustina. Though Flavia was not yet two and twenty years of age, her father and mother were already beginning to despair of marrying her, and dropped frequent hints about the advisability of making her enter religion, as they called it; that is to say, they thought she had better take the veil and retire from the world.

The old princess Montevarchi was English by birth and education, but thirty-three years of life in Rome had almost obliterated all traces of her nationality. That all-pervading influence, which so soon makes Romans of foreigners who marry into Roman families, had done its work effectually. The Roman nobility, by intermarriage with the principal families of the rest of Europe, has lost many Italian characteristics; but its members are more essentially Romans than the full-blooded Italians of the other classes who dwell side by side with the aristocracy in Rome.

When Lady Gwendoline Fontenoy married Don Lotario Montevarchi in the year 1834, she, no doubt, believed that her children would grow up as English as she herself, and that her husband's house would not differ materially from an establishment of the same kind in England. She laughed merrily at the provisions of the marriage contract, which even went so far as to stipulate that she was to have at least two dishes of meat at dinner, and an equivalent on fast-days, a drive every day — the traditional *trottata* — two new gowns every year, and a woman to wait upon her. After these and similar provisions had been agreed upon, her dowry, which was

a large one for those days, was handed over to the keeping of her father-in-law and she was duly married to Don Lotario, who at once assumed the title of Duca di Bellegra. The wedding journey consisted of a fortnight's retirement in the Villa Montevarchi at Frascati, and at the end of that time the young couple were installed under the paternal roof in Rome. Before she had been in her new abode a month the young Duchessa realised the utter hopelessness of attempting to change the existing system of patriarchal government under which she found herself living. She discovered, in the first place, that she would never have five scudi of her own in her pocket, and that if she needed a handkerchief or a pair of stockings it was necessary to obtain from the head of the house not only the permission to buy such necessities, but the money with which to pay for them. She discovered, furthermore, that if she wanted a cup of coffee or some bread and butter out of hours, those things were charged to her daily account in the steward's office, as though she had been in an inn, and were paid for at the end of the year out of the income arising from her dowry. Her husband's younger brother, who had no money of his own, could not even get a lemonade in his father's house without his father's consent.

Moreover, the family life was of such a nature as almost to preclude all privacy. The young Duchessa and her husband had their bedroom in the upper story, but Don Lotario's request that his wife might have a sitting-room of her own was looked upon as an attempt at a domestic revolution, and the privilege was only obtained at last through the formidable intervention of the Duke of Agincourt, the Duchessa's own father. All the family meals, too, were eaten together in the solemn old dining-hall, hung with tapestries and dingy with the dust of ages. The order of precedence was always strictly observed, and though the cooking was of a strange kind, no plate or dish was ever used which was not of solid silver, battered indeed, and scratched, and cleaned only after Italian ideas, but heavy and massive withal. The Duchessa soon learned that the old Roman houses all used silver plates from motives of economy, for the simple reason that metal did not break. But the sensible Eng-

lish woman saw also that although the most rigid economy was practised in many things, there was lavish expenditure in many departments of the establishment. There were magnificent horses in the stables, gorgeously gilt carriages in the coach-houses, scores of domestics in bright liveries at every door. The pay of the servants did not, indeed, exceed the average earnings of a shoe-black in London, but the coats they wore were exceeding glorious with gold lace.

It was clear from the first that nothing was expected of Don Lotario's wife but to live peaceably under the patriarchal rule, making no observations and offering no suggestions. Her husband told her that he was powerless to introduce any changes, and added, that since his father and all his ancestors had always lived in the same way, that way was quite good enough for him. Indeed, he rather looked forward to the time when he should be master of the house, having children under him whom he might rule as absolutely and despotically as he was ruled himself.

In the course of years the Duchessa absorbed the traditions of her new home, so that they became part of her, and as everything went on unchanged from year to year she acquired unchanging habits which corresponded with her surroundings. Then, when at last the old prince and princess were laid side by side in the vault of the family chapel and she was princess in her turn, she changed nothing, but let everything go on in the same groove, educating her children and managing them, as her husband had been educated and as she herself had been managed by the old couple. Her husband grew more and more like his father, punctilious, rigid; a strict observant in religious matters, a pedant in little things, prejudiced against all change; too satisfied to desire improvement, too scrupulously conscientious to permit any retrogression from established rule, a model of the immutability of an ancient aristocracy, a living paradigm of what always had been and a stubborn barrier against all that might be.

Such was the home to which Donna Faustina Montevarchi returned to live after spending eight years in the convent of the Sacro Cuore. During that time she had

acquired the French language, a slight knowledge of music, a very limited acquaintance with the history of her own country, a ready memory for prayers and litanies—and her manners. Manners among the Italians are called education. What we mean by the latter word, namely, the learning acquired, is called, more precisely, instruction. An educated person means a person who has acquired the art of politeness. An instructed person means some one who has learnt rather more than the average of what is generally learnt by the class of people to whom he belongs. Donna Faustina was extremely well educated, according to Roman ideas, but her instruction was not, and was not intended to be, any better than that imparted to the young girls with whom she was to associate in the world.

As far as her character was concerned, she herself knew very little of it, and would probably have found herself very much embarrassed if called upon to explain what character meant. She was new and the world was very old. The nuns had told her that she must never care for the world, which was a very sinful place, full of thorns, ditches, pitfalls and sinners, besides the devil and his angels. Her sister Flavia, on the contrary, assured her that the world was very agreeable, when mamma happened to go to sleep in a corner during a ball; that all men were deceivers, but that when a man danced well it made no difference whether he were a deceiver or not, since he danced with his legs and not with his conscience; that there was no happiness equal to a good cotillon, and that there were a number of these in every season; and, finally, that provided one did not spoil one's complexion one might do anything, so long as mamma was not looking.

To Donna Faustina, these views, held by the nuns on the one hand and by Flavia on the other, seemed very conflicting. She would not, indeed, have hesitated in choosing, even if she had been permitted any choice; for it was clear that, since she had seen the convent side of the question, it would be very interesting to see the other. But, having been told so much about sinners, she was on the look-out for them, and looked forward to making the acquaintance of one of them with a pardon-

able excitement. Doubtless she would hate a sinner if she saw one, as the nuns had taught her, although the sinner of her imagination was not a very repulsive personage. Flavia probably knew a great many, and Flavia said that society was very amusing. Faustina wished that the autumn months would pass a little more quickly, so that the carnival season might begin.

Prince Montevarchi, for his part, intended his youngest daughter to be a model of prim propriety. He attributed to Flavia's frivolity of behaviour the difficulty he experienced in finding her a husband, and he had no intention of exposing himself to a second failure in the case of Faustina. She should marry in her first season, and if she chose to be gay after that, the responsibility thereof might fall upon her husband, or her father-in-law, or upon whomsoever it should most concern; he himself would have fulfilled his duty so soon as the nuptial benediction was pronounced. He knew the fortune and reputation of every marriageable young man in society, and was therefore eminently fitted for the task he undertook. To tell the truth, Faustina herself expected to be married before Easter, for it was eminently fitting that a young girl should lose no time in such matters. But she meant to choose a man after her own heart, if she found one; at all events, she would not submit too readily to the paternal choice nor appear satisfied with the first tolerable suitor who should be presented to her.

Under these circumstances it seemed probable that Donna Faustina's first season, which had begun with the unexpected adventure at the corner of the old Orso, would not come to a close without some passage of arms between herself and her father, even though the ultimate conclusion should lead to the steps of the altar.

The men carried the wounded Zouave away to a distant room, and Faustina entered the main apartments by the side of the old prince. She sighed a little as she went.

"I hope the poor man will get well!" she exclaimed.

"Do not disturb your mind about the young man," answered her father. "He will be attended by the proper persons, and the doctor will bleed him and the will of Heaven will be done. It is not the duty of a

well-conducted young woman to be thinking of such things, and you may dismiss the subject at once."

"Yes, papa," said Faustina submissively. But in spite of the dutiful tone of voice in which she spoke, the dim light of the tall lamps in the antechambers showed a strange expression of mingled amusement and contrariety in the girl's ethereal face.

CHAPTER II.

"You know Gouache?" asked old Prince Saracinesca, in a tone which implied that he had news to tell. He looked from his daughter-in-law to his son as he put the question, and then went on with his breakfast.

"Very well," answered Giovanni. "What about him?"

"He was knocked down by a carriage last night. The carriage belonged to Montevarchi, and Gouache is at his house, in danger of his life."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Corona in ready sympathy. "I am so sorry! I am very fond of Gouache."

Giovanni Saracinesca, known to the world since his marriage as Prince of Sant' Ilario, glanced quickly at his wife, so quickly that neither she nor the old gentleman noticed the fact.

The three persons sat at their midday breakfast in the dining-room of the Palazzo Saracinesca. After much planning and many discussions the young couple had determined to take up their abode with Giovanni's father. There were several reasons which had led them to this decision, but the two chief ones were that they were both devotedly attached to the old man; and secondly, that such a proceeding was strictly fitting and in accordance with the customs of Romans. It was true that Corona, while her old husband, the Duca d'Astrardente, was alive, had grown used to having an establishment exclusively her own, and both the Saracinesca had at first feared that she would be unwilling to live in her father-in-law's house. Then, too, there was the Astrardente