the family meant that it should last his lifetime, and longer too, if care could preserve it. The princess herself had been made to remember for five and twenty years that since she had obtained a carpet she must expect nothing else in the way of modern improvements. It was the monument of a stupendous energy which she had expended entirely in that one struggle, and the sight of it reminded her of her youth. Long ago she had submitted once and for ever to the old Roman ways, and though she knew that a very little saved from the expense of maintaining a score of useless servants and a magnificent show equipage would suffice to make at least one room in the house comfortable for her use, she no longer sighed at the reflection, but consoled herself with making her children put up with the inconveniences she herself had borne so long and so patiently.

Prince Montevarchi's private room was as comfortless as the rest of the house. Narrow, high, dim, carpetless, insufficiently warmed in winter by a brazier of coals, and at present not warmed at all, though the weather was chilly; furnished shabbily with dusty shelves, a writing-table, and a few chairs with leather seats, musty with an ancient mustiness which seemed to be emitted by the rows of old books and the moth-eaten baize cover of the table — the whole place looked more like the office of a decayed notary than the study of a wealthy nobleman of ancient lineage. The old gentleman himself entered the room a few seconds after San Giacinto had been ushered in, having slipped out to change his coat when his visitor was announced. It was a fixed principle of his life to dress as well as his neighbours when they could see him, but to wear threadbare garments whenever he could do so unobserved. He greeted San Giacinto with a grave dignity which contrasted strangely with the weakness and excitement he had shown on the previous night.

"I wish to speak to you upon a delicate subject," began the younger man, after seating himself upon one of the high-backed chairs which cracked ominously under his weight.

"I am at your service," replied the old gentleman, inclining his head politely.

"I feel," continued San Giacinto, "that although my

personal acquaintance with you has unfortunately been of short duration, the familiarity which exists between your family and mine will entitle what I have to say to a share of your consideration. The proposal which I have to make has perhaps been made by others before me and has been rejected. I have the honour to ask of you the hand of your daughter."

"Faustina, I suppose?" asked the old prince in an indifferent tone, but looking sharply at his companion out of his small keen eyes.

"Pardon me, I refer to Donna Flavia Montevarchi."

"Flavia?" repeated the prince, in a tone of unmistakable surprise, which however was instantly moderated to the indifferent key again as he proceeded. "You see, we have been thinking so much about my daughter Faustina since last night that her name came to my lips quite naturally."

"Most natural, I am sure," answered San Giacinto; who, however, had understood at once that his suit was to have a hearing. He then remained silent.

"You wish to marry Flavia, I understand," remarked the prince after a pause. "I believe you are a widower, Marchese. I have heard that you have children."

"Two boys."

"Two boys, eh? I congratulate you. Boys, if brought up in Christian principles, are much less troublesome than girls. But, my dear Marchese, these same boys are an obstacle — a very serious obstacle."

"Less serious than you may imagine, perhaps. My fortune does not come under the law of primogeniture. There is no *fidei commissum*. I can dispose of it as I please."

"Eh, eh! But there must be a provision," said Montevarchi, growing interested in the subject.

"That shall be mutual," replied San Giacinto, gravely.

"I suppose you mean to refer to my daughter's portion," returned the other with more indifference. "It is not much, you know — scarcely worth mentioning. I am bound to tell you that, in honour."

"We must certainly discuss the matter, if you are inclined to consider my proposal."

"Well, you know what young women's dowries are

in these days, my dear Marchese. We are none of us very rich."

"I will make a proposal," said San Giacinto. "You shall give your daughter a portion. Whatever be the amount, up to a reasonable limit, which you choose to give, I will settle a like sum in such a manner that at my death it shall revert to her, and to her children by me, if she have any."

"That amounts merely to settling upon herself the dowry I give her," replied Montevarchi, sharply. "I give you a scudo for your use. You settle my scudo upon your wife, that is all."

"Not at all," returned San Giacinto. "I do not wish to have control of her dowry ——"

"The devil! Oh — I see — how stupid of me — I am indeed so old that I cannot count any more! How could I make such a mistake? Of course, it would be exactly as you say. Of course it would."

"It would not be so as a general rule," said San Giacinto, calmly, "because most men would not consent to such an arrangement. That, however, is my proposal."

"Oh! For the sake of Flavia, a man would do much, I am sure," answered the prince, who began to think that his visitor was in love with the girl, incredible as such a thing appeared to him. The younger man made no answer to this remark, however, and waited for Montevarchi to state his terms.

"How much shall we say?" asked the latter at length.

"That shall be for you to decide. Whatever you give I will give, if I am able."

"Ah, yes! But how am I to know what you are able to give, dear Marchese?" The prince suspected that San Giacinto's offer, if he could be induced to make one, would not be very large.

"Am I to understand," inquired San Giacinto, "that, if I name the amount to be settled so that at my death it goes to my wife and her children by me for ever, you will agree to settle a like sum upon Donna Flavia in her own right? If so, I will propose what I think fair."

Montevarchi looked keenly at his visitor for some moments, then looked away and hesitated. He was very

anxious to marry Flavia at once, and he had many reasons for supposing that San Giacinto was not very rich.

"How about the title?" he asked suddenly.

"My title, of course, goes to my eldest son by my first marriage. But if you are anxious on that score I think my cousin would willingly confer one of his upon the eldest son of your daughter. It would cost him nothing, and would be a sort of compensation to me for my great-grandfather's folly."

"How?" asked Montevarchi. "I do not understand."

"I supposed you knew the story. I am the direct descendant of the elder branch. There was an agreement between two brothers of the family, by which the elder resigned the primogeniture in favour of the younger who was then married. The elder, who took the San Giacinto title, married late in life and I am his great-grandson. If he had not acted so foolishly I should be in my cousin's shoes. You see it would be natural for him to let me have some disused title for one of my children in consideration of this fact. He has about a hundred, I believe. You could ask him, if you please."

San Giacinto's grave manner assured Montevarchi of the truth of the story. He hesitated a moment longer, and then made up his mind.

"I agree to your proposal, my dear Marchese," he said, with unusual blandness of manner.

"I will settle one hundred and fifty thousand scudi in the way I stated," said San Giacinto, simply. The prince started from his chair.

"One — hundred — and — fifty — thousand!" he repeated slowly. "Why, it is a fortune in itself! Dear me! I had no idea you would name anything so large ——"

"Seven thousand five hundred scudi a year, at five per cent," remarked the younger man in a businesslike tone. "You give the same. That will insure our children an income of fifteen thousand scudi. It is not colossal, but it should suffice. Besides, I have not said that I would not leave them more, if I chanced to have more to leave."

The prince had sunk back into his chair, and sat drumming on the table with his long thin fingers. His

face wore an air of mingled surprise and bewilderment. To tell the truth, he had expected that San Giacinto would name about fifty thousand as the sum requisite. He did not know whether to be delighted at the prospect of marrying his daughter so well or angry at the idea of having committed himself to part with so much money.

"That is much more than I gave my other daughters," he said at last, in a tone of hesitation.

"Did you give the money to them or to their husbands?" inquired San Giacinto.

"To their husbands, of course."

"Then allow me to point out that you will now be merely settling money in your own family, and that the case is very different. Not only that, but I am settling the same sum upon your family, instead of taking your money for my own use. You are manifestly the gainer by the transaction."

"It would be the same, then, if I left Flavia the money at my death, since it remains in the family," suggested the prince, who sought an escape from his bargain.

"Not exactly," argued San Giacinto. "First there is the yearly interest until your death, which I trust is yet very distant. And then there is the uncertainty of human affairs. It will be necessary that you invest the money in trust, as I shall do, at the time of signing the contract. Otherwise there would be no fairness in the arrangement."

"So you say that you are descended from the elder branch of the Saracinesca. How strange are the ways of Providence, my dear Marchese!"

"It was a piece of great folly on the part of my great-grandfather," replied the other, shrugging his shoulders. "You should never say that a man will not marry until he is dead."

"Ah no! The ways of heaven are inscrutable! It is not for us poor mortals to attempt to change them. I suppose that agreement of which you speak was made in proper form and quite regular."

"I presume so, since no effort was ever made to change the dispositions established by it."

"I suppose so — I suppose so, dear Marchese. It would be very interesting to see those papers."

"My cousin has them," said San Giacinto. "I daresay he will not object. But, pardon me if I return to a subject which is very near my heart. Do I understand that you consent to the proposal I have made? If so, we might make arrangements for a meeting to take place between our notaries."

"One hundred and fifty thousand," said Montevarchi, slowly rubbing his pointed chin with his bony fingers. "Five per cent — seven thousand five hundred — a mint of money, Signor Marchese, a mint of money! And these are hard times. What a rich man you must be, to talk so lightly about such immense sums! Well, well — you are very eloquent, I must consent, and by strict economy I may perhaps succeed in recovering the loss."

"You must be aware that it is not really a loss," argued San Giacinto, "since it is to remain with your daughter and her children, and consequently with your family."

"Yes, I know. But money is money, my friend," exclaimed the prince, laying his right hand on the old green tablecover and slowly drawing his crooked nails over the cloth, as though he would like to squeeze gold out of the dusty wool. There was something almost fierce in his tone, too, as he uttered the words, and his small eyes glittered unpleasantly. He knew well enough that he was making a good bargain and that San Giacinto was a better match than he had ever hoped to get for Flavia. So anxious was he, indeed, to secure the prize that he entirely abstained from asking any questions concerning San Giacinto's past life, whereby some obstacle might have been raised to the intended marriage. He promised himself that the wedding should take place at once.

"It is understood," he continued, after a pause, "that we or our notaries shall appear with the money in cash, and that it shall be immediately invested as we shall jointly decide, the settlements being made at the same time and on the spot."

"Precisely so," replied San Giacinto. "No money, no contract."

"In that case I will inform my daughter of my decision."

"I shall be glad to avail myself of an early opportunity to pay my respects to Donna Flavia."

"The wedding might take place on the 30th of November, my dear Marchese. The 1st of December is Advent Sunday, and no marriages are permitted during Advent without a special licence."

"An expensive affair, doubtless," remarked San Giacinto, gravely, in spite of his desire to laugh.

"Yes. Five scudi at least," answered Montevarchi, impressively.

"Let us by all means be economical."

"The Holy Church is very strict about these matters, and you may as well keep the money."

"I will," replied San Giacinto, rising to go. "Do not let me detain you any longer. Pray accept my warmest thanks, and allow me to say that I shall consider it a very great honour to become your son-in-law."

"Ah, indeed, you are very good, my dear Marchese. As for me I need consolation. Consider a father's feelings, when he consigns his beloved daughter — Flavia is an angel upon earth, my friend — when, I say, a father gives his dear child, whom he loves as the apple of his eye, to be carried off by a man — a man even of your worth! When your children are grown up, you will understand what I suffer."

"I quite understand," said San Giacinto in serious tones. "It shall be the endeavour of my life to make you forget your loss. May I have the honour of calling to-morrow at this time?"

"Yes, my dear Marchese, yes, my dear son — forgive a father's tenderness. To-morrow at this time, and ——" he hesitated. "And then — some time before the ceremony, perhaps — you will give us the pleasure of your company at breakfast, I am sure, will you not? We are very simple people, but we are hospitable in our quiet way. Hospitality is a virtue," he sighed a little. "A necessary virtue," he added with some emphasis upon the adjective.

"It will give me great pleasure," replied San Giacinto.

Therewith he left the room and a few moments later was walking slowly homewards, revolving in his mind the probable results of his union with the Montevarchi family.

When Montevarchi was alone, he smiled pleasantly to himself, and took out of a secret drawer a large book of accounts, in the study of which he spent nearly half an hour, with evident satisfaction. Having carefully locked up the volume, and returned the sliding panel to its place, he sent for his wife, who presently appeared.

"Sit down, Guendalina," he said. "I will change my coat, and then I have something important to say to you."

He had quite forgotten the inevitable change in his satisfaction over the interview with San Giacinto, but the sight of the princess recalled the necessity for economy. It had been a part of the business of his life to set her a good example in this respect. When he came back he seated himself before her.

"My dear, I have got a husband for Flavia," were his first words.

"At last!" exclaimed the princess. "I hope he is presentable," she added. She knew that she could trust her husband in the matter of fortune.

"The new Saracinesca — the Marchese di San Giacinto."

Princess Montevarchi's ruddy face expressed the greatest astonishment, and her jaw dropped as she stared at the old gentleman.

"A pauper!" she exclaimed when she had recovered herself enough to speak.

"Perhaps, Guendalina mia — but he settles a hundred and fifty thousand scudi on Flavia and her heirs for ever, the money to be paid on the signing of the contract. That does not look like pauperism. Of course, under the circumstances I agreed to do the same. It is settled on Flavia, do you understand? He does not want a penny of it, not a penny! Trust your husband for a serious man of business, Guendalina."

"Have you spoken to Flavia? It certainly looks like a good match. There is no doubt about his being of the Saracinesca, of course. How could there be? They have taken him to their hearts. But how will Flavia behave?"

"What a foolish question, my dear!" exclaimed Montevarchi. "How easily one sees that you are English! She will be delighted, I presume. And if not, what difference does it make?"

"I would not have married you against my will, Lotario," observed the princess.

"For my part, I had no choice. My dear father said simply, 'My son, you will pay your respects to that young lady, who is to be your wife. If you wish to marry any one else, I will lock you up.' And so I did. Have I not been a faithful husband to you, Guendalina, through more than thirty years?"

The argument was unanswerable, and Montevarchi had employed it each time one of his children was married. In respect of faithfulness, at least, he had been a model husband.

"It is sufficient," he added, willing to make a concession to his wife's foreign notions, "that there should be love on the one side, and Christian principles on the other. I can assure you that San Giacinto is full of love, and as for Flavia, my dear, has she not been educated by you?"

"As for Flavia's Christian principles, my dear Lotario, I only hope they may suffice for her married life. She is a terrible child to have at home. But San Giacinto looks like a determined man. I shall never forget his kindness in searching for Faustina last night. He was devotion itself, and I should not have been surprised had he wished to marry her instead."

"That exquisite creature is reserved for a young friend of ours, Guendalina. Do me the favour never to speak of her marrying any one else."

The princess was silent for a moment, and then began to make a series of inquiries concerning the proposed bridegroom, which it is unnecessary to recount.

"And now we will send for Flavia," said Montevarchi, at last.

"Would it not be best that I should tell her?" asked his wife.

"My dear," he replied sternly, "when matters of grave importance have been decided it is the duty of the head of the house to communicate the decision to the persons concerned."

So Flavia was sent for, and appeared shortly, her pretty face and wicked black eyes expressing both surprise and anticipation. She was almost as dark as San

Giacinto himself, though of a very different type. Her small nose had an upward turn which disturbed her mother's ideas of the fitness of things, and her thick black hair waved naturally over her forehead. Her figure was graceful and her movements quick and spontaneous. The redness of her lips showed a strong vitality, which was further confirmed by the singular brightness of her eyes. She was no beauty, especially in a land where the dark complexion predominates, but she was very pretty and possessed something of that mysterious quality which charms without exciting direct admiration.

"Flavia," said her father, addressing her in solemn tones, "you are to be married, my dear child. I have sent for you at once, because there was no time to be lost, seeing that the wedding must take place before the beginning of Advent. The news will probably give you pleasure, but I trust you will reflect upon the solemnity of such engagements and lay aside ——"

"Would you mind telling me the name of my husband?" inquired Flavia, interrupting the paternal lecture.

"The man I have selected for my son-in-law is one whom all women would justly envy you, were it not that envy is an atrocious sin, and one which I trust you will henceforth endeavour ——"

"To drown, crush out and stamp upon in the pursuit of true Christian principles," said Flavia with a laugh. "I know all about envy. It is one of the seven deadlies. I can tell you them all, if you like."

"Flavia, I am amazed!" cried the princess, severely.

"I had not expected this conduct of my daughter," said Montevarchi. "And though I am at present obliged to overlook it, I can certainly not consider it pardonable. You will listen with becoming modesty and respect to what I have to say."

"I am all modesty, respect and attention — but I would like to know his name, papa — please consider that pardonable!"

"I do not know why I should not tell you that, and I shall certainly give you all such information concerning him as it is proper that you should receive. The fact that he is a widower need not surprise you, for in the

inscrutable ways of Providence some men are deprived of their wives sooner than others. Nor should his age appear to you in the light of an obstacle — indeed there are no obstacles ——"

"A widower — old — probably bald — I can see him already. Is he fat, papa?"

"He approaches the gigantic; but as I have often told you, Flavia, the qualities a wise father should seek in choosing a husband for his child are not dependent upon outward ——"

"For heaven's sake, mamma," cried Flavia, "tell me the creature's name!"

"The Marchese di San Giacinto — let your father speak, and do not interrupt him."

"While you both insist on interrupting me," said Montevarchi, "it is impossible for me to express myself."

"I wish it were!" observed Flavia, under her breath. "You are speaking of the Saracinesca cousin, San Giacinto? Not so bad after all."

"It is very unbecoming in a young girl to speak of men by their last names ——"

"Giovanni, then. Shall I call him Giovanni?"

"Flavia!" exclaimed the princess. "How can you be so undutiful! You should speak of him as the Marchese di San Giacinto."

"Silence!" cried the prince. "I will not be interrupted! The Marchese di San Giacinto will call to-morrow, after breakfast, and will pay his respects to you. You will receive him in a proper spirit."

"Yes, papa," replied Flavia, suddenly growing meek, and folding her hands submissively.

"He has behaved with unexampled liberality," continued Montevarchi, "and I need hardly say that as the honour of our house was concerned I have not allowed myself to be outdone. Since you refuse to listen to the words of fatherly instruction which it is natural I should speak on this occasion, you will at least remember that your future husband is entirely such a man as I would have chosen, that he is a Saracinesca, as well as a rich man, and that he has been accustomed in the women of his family to a greater refinement of manner than you

generally think fit to exhibit in the presence of your father."

"Yes, papa. May I go, now?"

"If your conscience will permit you to retire without a word of gratitude to your parents, who in spite of the extreme singularities of your behaviour have at last provided you with a suitable husband; if, I say, you are capable of such ingratitude, then, Flavia, you may certainly go."

"I was going to say, papa, that I thank you very much for my husband, and mamma, too."

Thereupon she kissed her father's and her mother's hands with great reverence and turned to leave the room. Her gravity forsook her, however, before she reached the door.

"Evviva! Hurrah!" she cried, suddenly skipping across the intervening space and snapping her small fingers like a pair of castanets. "Evviva! Married at last! Hurrah!" And with this parting salute she disappeared.

When she was gone, her father and mother looked at each other, as they had looked many times before in the course of Flavia's life. They had found little difficulty in bringing up their other children, but Flavia was a mystery to them both. The princess would have understood well enough a thorough English girl, full of life and animal spirits, though shy and timid in the world, as the elderly lady had herself been in her youth. But Flavia's character was incomprehensible to her northern soul. Montevarchi understood the girl better, but loved her even less. What seemed odd in her to his wife, to him seemed vulgar and ill-bred, for he would have had her like the rest, silent and respectful in his presence, and in awe of him as the head of the house, if not in fact, at least in manner. But Flavia's behaviour was in the eyes of Romans a very serious objection to her as a wife for any of their sons, for in their view moral worth was necessarily accompanied by outward gravity and decorum, and a light manner could only be the visible sign of a giddy heart.

"If only he does not find out what she is like!" exclaimed the princess at last.

"I devoutly trust that heaven in its mercy may avert such a catastrophe from our house," replied Montevarchi, who, however, seemed to be occupied in adding together certain sums upon his fingers.

San Giacinto understood Flavia better than either of her parents; and although his marriage with her was before all things a part of his plan for furthering his worldly interests, it must be confessed that he had a stronger liking for the girl than her father would have considered indispensable in such affairs. The matter was decided at once, and in a few days the preliminaries were settled between the lawyers, while Flavia exerted the utmost pressure possible upon the parental purse in the question of the trousseau.

It may seem strange that at the time when all Rome was convulsed by an internal revolution, and when the temporal power appeared to be in very great danger, Montevarchi and San Giacinto should have been able to discuss so coolly the conditions of the marriage, and even to fix the wedding day. The only possible explanation of this fact is that neither of them believed in the revolution at all. It is a noticeable characteristic of people who are fond of money that they do not readily believe in any great changes. They are indeed the most conservative of men, and will count their profits at moments of peril with a coolness which would do honour to veteran soldiers. Those who possess money put their faith in money and give no credence to rumours of revolution which are not backed by cash. Once or twice in history they have been wrong, but it must be confessed that they have very generally been right.

As for San Giacinto, his own interests were infinitely more absorbing to his attention than those of the world at large, and being a man of uncommonly steady nerves, it seems probable that he would have calmly pursued his course in the midst of much greater disturbances than those which affected Rome at that time.

CHAPTER VIII.

When Anastase Gouache was at last relieved from duty and went home in the gray dawn of the twenty-third, he lay down to rest expecting to reflect upon the events of the night. The last twelve hours had been the most eventful of his life; indeed less than that time had elapsed since he had bid farewell to Faustina in the drawing-room of the Palazzo Saracinesca, and yet the events which had occurred in that short space had done much towards making him another man. The change had begun two years earlier, and had progressed slowly until it was completed all at once by a chain of unforeseen circumstances. He realised the fact, and as this change was not disagreeable to him he set himself to think about it. Instead of reviewing what had happened, however, he did what was much more natural in his case, he turned upon his pillow and fell fast asleep. He was younger than his years, though he counted less than thirty, and his happy nature had not yet formed that horrible habit of wakefulness which will not yield even to bodily fatigue. He lay down and slept like a boy, disturbed by no dreams and troubled by no shadowy revival of dangers or emotions past.

He had placed a gulf between himself and his former life. What had passed between him and Faustina, might under other circumstances have become but a romantic episode in the past, to be thought of with a certain tender regret, half fatuous, half genuine, whenever the moonlight chanced to cast the right shadow and the artist's mind was in the contemplative mood. The peculiar smell of broken masonry, when it is a little damp, would recall the impression, perhaps; an old wall knocked to pieces by builders would, through his nostrils, bring vividly before him that midnight meeting amid the ruins of the barracks, just as the savour of a certain truffle might bring back the memory of a supper at Voisin's, or as, twenty years hence, the pasty grittiness of rough maize bread would make him remember the days when he was chasing brigands in the Samnite hills. But this was not