

the hammer still in his hand, and the fragments of the broken image scattered on the floor about his feet.

He threw down the hammer. "So easy!" he said, and turned away. "And what an idiot I am!"

He sat down by the table, panting heavily for breath, and rested his forehead on both hands. Presently he rose, and, going to the wash-stand, poured a jugful of cold water over his head and face. He came back quite composed, and sat down to think.

And it was for such things as these—for these false and slavish people, these dumb and soulless gods—that he had suffered all these tortures of shame and passion and despair; had made a rope to hang himself, forsooth, because one priest was a liar. As if they were not all liars! Well, all that was done with; he was wiser now. He need only shake off these vermin and begin life afresh.

There were plenty of goods vessels in the docks; it would be an easy matter to stow himself away in one of them, and get across to Canada, Australia, Cape Colony—anywhere. It was no matter for the country, if only it was far enough; and, as for the life out there, he could see, and if it did not suit him he could try some other place.

He took out his purse. Only thirty-three paoli; but his watch was a good one. That would help him along a bit; and in any case it was of no consequence—he should pull through somehow. But they would search for him, all these people; they would be sure to make inquiries at the docks. No; he must put them on a false scent—make them believe him dead; then he should be quite free—quite free. He laughed softly to himself at the

thought of the Burtons searching for his corpse. What a farce the whole thing was!

Taking a sheet of paper, he wrote the first words that occurred to him:

"I believed in you as I believed in God. God is a thing made of clay, that I can smash with a hammer; and you have fooled me with a lie."

He folded up the paper, directed it to Montanelli, and, taking another sheet, wrote across it: "Look for my body in Darsena." Then he put on his hat and went out of the room. Passing his mother's portrait, he looked up with a laugh and a shrug of his shoulders. She, too, had lied to him.

He crept softly along the corridor, and, slipping back the door-bolts, went out on to the great, dark, echoing marble staircase. It seemed to yawn beneath him like a black pit as he descended.

He crossed the courtyard, treading cautiously for fear of waking Gian Battista, who slept on the ground floor. In the wood-cellar at the back was a little grated window, opening on the canal and not more than four feet from the ground. He remembered that the rusty grating had broken away on one side; by pushing a little he could make an aperture wide enough to climb out by.

The grating was strong, and he grazed his hands badly and tore the sleeve of his coat; but that was no matter. He looked up and down the street; there was no one in sight, and the canal lay black and silent, an ugly trench between two straight and slimy walls. The untried universe might prove a dismal hole, but it could hardly be more flat and sordid than the corner which he was



leaving behind him. There was nothing to regret; nothing to look back upon. It had been a pestilent little stagnant world, full of squalid lies and clumsy cheats and foul-smelling ditches that were not even deep enough to drown a man.

He walked along the canal bank, and came out upon the tiny square by the Medici palace. It was here that Gemma had run up to him with her vivid face, her outstretched hands. Here was the little flight of wet stone steps leading down to the moat; and there the fortress scowling across the strip of dirty water. He had never noticed before how squat and mean it looked.

Passing through the narrow streets he reached the Darsena shipping-basin, where he took off his hat and flung it into the water. It would be found, of course, when they dragged for his body. Then he walked on along the water's edge, considering perplexedly what to do next. He must contrive to hide on some ship; but it was a difficult thing to do. His only chance would be to get on to the huge old Medici breakwater and walk along to the further end of it. There was a low-class tavern on the point; probably he should find some sailor there who could be bribed.

But the dock gates were closed. How should he get past them, and past the customs officials? His stock of money would not furnish the high bribe that they would demand for letting him through at night and without a passport. Besides they might recognize him.

As he passed the bronze statue of the "Four Moors," a man's figure emerged from an old house on the opposite side of the shipping basin and approached the bridge. Arthur slipped at once into the deep shadow behind the group of statu-

ary and crouched down in the darkness, peeping cautiously round the corner of the pedestal.

It was a soft spring night, warm and starlit. The water lapped against the stone walls of the basin and swirled in gentle eddies round the steps with a sound as of low laughter. Somewhere near a chain creaked, swinging slowly to and fro. A huge iron crane towered up, tall and melancholy in the dimness. Black on a shimmering expanse of starry sky and pearly cloud-wreaths, the figures of the fettered, struggling slaves stood out in vain and vehement protest against a merciless doom.

The man approached unsteadily along the water side, shouting an English street song. He was evidently a sailor returning from a carouse at some tavern. No one else was within sight. As he drew near, Arthur stood up and stepped into the middle of the roadway. The sailor broke off in his song with an oath, and stopped short.

"I want to speak to you," Arthur said in Italian. "Do you understand me?"

The man shook his head. "Its no use talking that patter to me," he said; then, plunging into bad French, asked sullenly: "What do you want? Why can't you let me pass?"

"Just come out of the light here a minute; I want to speak to you."

"Ah! wouldn't you like it? Out of the light! Got a knife an, where about you?"

"No, no, man! Can't you see I only want your help? I'll pay you for it?"

"Eh? What? And dressed like a swell, too——" The sailor had relapsed into English. He now moved into the shadow and leaned against the railing of the pedestal.



"Well," he said, returning to his atrocious French; "and what is it you want?"

"I want to get away from here——"

"Aha! Stowaway! Want me to hide you? Been up to something, I suppose. Stuck a knife into somebody, eh? Just like these foreigners! And where might you be wanting to go? Not to the police station, I fancy?"

He laughed in his tipsy way, and winked one eye.

"What vessel do you belong to?"

"*Carlotta*—Leghorn to Buenos Ayres; shipping oil one way and hides the other. She's over there"—pointing in the direction of the break-water—"beastly old hulk!"

"Buenos Ayres—yes! Can you hide me anywhere on board?"

"How much can you give?"

"Not very much; I have only a few paoli."

"No. Can't do it under fifty—and cheap at that, too—a swell like you."

"What do you mean by a swell? If you like my clothes you may change with me, but I can't give you more money than I have got."

"You have a watch there. Hand it over."

Arthur took out a lady's gold watch, delicately chased and enamelled, with the initials "G. B." on the back. It had been his mother's—but what did that matter now?

"Ah!" remarked the sailor with a quick glance at it. "Stolen, of course! Let me look!"

Arthur drew his hand away. "No," he said. "I will give you the watch when we are on board; not before."

"You're not such a fool as you look, after all! I'll bet it's your first scrape, though, eh?"

"That is my business. Ah! there comes the watchman."

They crouched down behind the group of statuary and waited till the watchman had passed. Then the sailor rose, and, telling Arthur to follow him, walked on, laughing foolishly to himself. Arthur followed in silence.

The sailor led him back to the little irregular square by the Medici palace; and, stopping in a dark corner, mumbled in what was intended for a cautious whisper:

"Wait here; those soldier fellows will see you if you come further."

"What are you going to do?"

"Get you some clothes. I'm not going to take you on board with that bloody coatsleeve."

Arthur glanced down at the sleeve which had been torn by the window grating. A little blood from the grazed hand had fallen upon it. Evidently the man thought him a murderer. Well, it was of no consequence what people thought.

After some time the sailor came back, triumphant, with a bundle under his arm.

"Change," he whispered; "and make haste about it. I must get back, and that old Jew has kept me bargaining and haggling for half an hour."

Arthur obeyed, shrinking with instinctive disgust at the first touch of second-hand clothes. Fortunately these, though rough and coarse, were fairly clean. When he stepped into the light in his new attire, the sailor looked at him with tipsy solemnity and gravely nodded his approval.

"You'll do," he said. "This way, and don't make a noise." Arthur, carrying his discarded clothes, followed him through a labyrinth of wind-



ing canals and dark narrow alleys; the mediæval slum quarter which the people of Leghorn call "New Venice." Here and there a gloomy old palace, solitary among the squalid houses and filthy courts, stood between two noisome ditches, with a forlorn air of trying to preserve its ancient dignity and yet of knowing the effort to be a hopeless one. Some of the alleys, he knew, were notorious dens of thieves, cut-throats, and smugglers; others were merely wretched and poverty-stricken.

Beside one of the little bridges the sailor stopped, and, looking round to see that they were not observed, descended a flight of stone steps to a narrow landing stage. Under the bridge was a dirty, crazy old boat. Sharply ordering Arthur to jump in and lie down, he seated himself in the boat and began rowing towards the harbour's mouth. Arthur lay still on the wet and leaky planks, hidden by the clothes which the man had thrown over him, and peeping out from under them at the familiar streets and houses.

Presently they passed under a bridge and entered that part of the canal which forms a moat for the fortress. The massive walls rose out of the water, broad at the base and narrowing upward to the frowning turrets. How strong, how threatening they had seemed to him a few hours ago! And now——

He laughed softly as he lay in the bottom of the boat.

"Hold your noise," the sailor whispered, "and keep your head covered! We're close to the custom house."

Arthur drew the clothes over his head. A few yards further on the boat stopped before a row of

masts chained together, which lay across the surface of the canal, blocking the narrow waterway between the custom house and the fortress wall. A sleepy official came out yawning and bent over the water's edge with a lantern in his hand.

"Passports, please."

The sailor handed up his official papers. Arthur, half stifled under the clothes, held his breath, listening.

"A nice time of night to come back to your ship!" grumbled the customs official. "Been out on the spree, I suppose. What's in your boat?"

"Old clothes. Got them cheap." He held up the waistcoat for inspection. The official, lowering his lantern, bent over, straining his eyes to see.

"It's all right, I suppose. You can pass."

He lifted the barrier and the boat moved slowly out into the dark, heaving water. At a little distance Arthur sat up and threw off the clothes.

"Here she is," the sailor whispered, after rowing for some time in silence. "Keep close behind me and hold your tongue."

He clambered up the side of a huge black monster, swearing under his breath at the clumsiness of the landsman, though Arthur's natural agility rendered him less awkward than most people would have been in his place. Once safely on board, they crept cautiously between dark masses of rigging and machinery, and came at last to a hatchway, which the sailor softly raised.

"Down here!" he whispered. "I'll be back in a minute."

The hold was not only damp and dark, but intolerably foul. At first Arthur instinctively drew back, half choked by the stench of raw hides and rancid oil. Then he remembered the "punish-



ment cell," and descended the ladder, shrugging his shoulders. Life is pretty much the same everywhere, it seemed; ugly, putrid, infested with vermin, full of shameful secrets and dark corners. Still, life is life, and he must make the best of it.

In a few minutes the sailor came back with something in his hands which Arthur could not distinctly see for the darkness.

"Now, give me the watch and money. Make haste!"

Taking advantage of the darkness, Arthur succeeded in keeping back a few coins.

"You must get me something to eat," he said; "I am half starved."

"I've brought it. Here you are." The sailor handed him a pitcher, some hard biscuit, and a piece of salt pork. "Now mind, you must hide in this empty barrel, here, when the customs officers come to examine to-morrow morning. Keep as still as a mouse till we're right out at sea. I'll let you know when to come out. And won't you just catch it when the captain sees you—that's all! Got the drink safe? Good-night!"

The hatchway closed, and Arthur, setting the precious "drink" in a safe place, climbed on to an oil barrel to eat his pork and biscuit. Then he curled himself up on the dirty floor; and, for the first time since his babyhood, settled himself to sleep without a prayer. The rats scurried round him in the darkness; but neither their persistent noise nor the swaying of the ship, nor the nauseating stench of oil, nor the prospect of to-morrow's sea-sickness, could keep him awake. He cared no more for them all than for the broken and dishonoured idols that only yesterday had been the gods of his adoration.

PART II.

THIRTEEN YEARS LATER.

