

headache in ten minutes. He is like an incarnate demon of unrest."

"I thought you wouldn't like him; and, to tell the truth, no more do I. The man's as slippery as an eel; I don't trust him."

### CHAPTER III.

THE Gadfly took lodgings outside the Roman gate, near to which Zita was boarding. He was evidently somewhat of a sybarite; and, though nothing in the rooms showed any serious extravagance, there was a tendency to luxuriousness in trifles and to a certain fastidious daintiness in the arrangement of everything which surprised Galli and Riccardo. They had expected to find a man who had lived among the wildernesses of the Amazon more simple in his tastes, and wondered at his spotless ties and rows of boots, and at the masses of flowers which always stood upon his writing table. On the whole they got on very well with him. He was hospitable and friendly to everyone, especially to the local members of the Mazzinian party. To this rule Gemma, apparently, formed an exception; he seemed to have taken a dislike to her from the time of their first meeting, and in every way avoided her company. On two or three occasions he was actually rude to her, thus bringing upon himself Martini's most cordial detestation. There had been no love lost between the two men from the beginning; their temperaments appeared to be too incompatible for them to feel anything but repugnance for each other. On Martini's part this was fast developing into hostility.

"I don't care about his not liking me," he said one day to Gemma with an aggrieved air. "I don't like him, for that matter; so there's no harm done. But I can't stand the way he behaves to you. If it weren't for the scandal it would make in the party first to beg a man to come and then to quarrel with him, I should call him to account for it."

"Let him alone, Cesare; it isn't of any consequence, and after all, it's as much my fault as his."

"What is your fault?"

"That he dislikes me so. I said a brutal thing to him when we first met, that night at the Grassinis'."

"You said a brutal thing? That's hard to believe, Madonna."

"It was unintentional, of course, and I was very sorry. I said something about people laughing at cripples, and he took it personally. It had never occurred to me to think of him as a cripple; he is not so badly deformed."

"Of course not. He has one shoulder higher than the other, and his left arm is pretty badly disabled, but he's neither hunchbacked nor club-footed. As for his lameness, it isn't worth talking about."

"Anyway, he shivered all over and changed colour. Of course it was horribly tactless of me, but it's odd he should be so sensitive. I wonder if he has ever suffered from any cruel jokes of that kind."

"Much more likely to have perpetrated them, I should think. There's a sort of internal brutality about that man, under all his fine manners, that is perfectly sickening to me."

"Now, Cesare, that's downright unfair. I

don't like him any more than you do, but what is the use of making him out worse than he is? His manner is a little affected and irritating—I expect he has been too much lionized—and the everlasting smart speeches are dreadfully tiring; but I don't believe he means any harm."

"I don't know what he means, but there's something not clean about a man who sneers at everything. It fairly disgusted me the other day at Fabrizi's debate to hear the way he cried down the reforms in Rome, just as if he wanted to find a foul motive for everything."

Gemma sighed. "I am afraid I agreed better with him than with you on that point," she said. "All you good people are so full of the most delightful hopes and expectations; you are always ready to think that if one well-meaning middle-aged gentleman happens to get elected Pope, everything else will come right of itself. He has only got to throw open the prison doors and give his blessing to everybody all round, and we may expect the millennium within three months. You never seem able to see that he can't set things right even if he would. It's the principle of the thing that's wrong, not the behaviour of this man or that."

"What principle? The temporal power of the Pope?"

"Why that in particular? That's merely a part of the general wrong. The bad principle is that any man should hold over another the power to bind and loose. It's a false relationship to stand in towards one's fellows."

Martini held up his hands. "That will do, Madonna," he said, laughing. "I am not going to discuss with you, once you begin talking rank

Antinomianism in that fashion. I'm sure your ancestors must have been English Levellers in the seventeenth century. Besides, what I came round about is this MS."

He pulled it out of his pocket.

"Another new pamphlet?"

"A stupid thing this wretched man Rivarez sent in to yesterday's committee. I knew we should come to loggerheads with him before long."

"What is the matter with it? Honestly, Cesare, I think you are a little prejudiced. Rivarez may be unpleasant, but he's not stupid."

"Oh, I don't deny that this is clever enough in its way; but you had better read the thing yourself."

The pamphlet was a skit on the wild enthusiasm over the new Pope with which Italy was still ringing. Like all the Gadfly's writing, it was bitter and vindictive; but, notwithstanding her irritation at the style, Gemma could not help recognizing in her heart the justice of the criticism.

"I quite agree with you that it is detestably malicious," she said, laying down the manuscript. "But the worst thing about it is that it's all true."

"Gemma!"

"Yes, but it is. The man's a cold-blooded eel, if you like; but he's got the truth on his side. There is no use in our trying to persuade ourselves that this doesn't hit the mark—it does!"

"Then do you suggest that we should print it?"

"Ah! that's quite another matter. I certainly don't think we ought to print it as it stands; it would hurt and alienate everybody and do no good. But if he would rewrite it and cut out the personal attacks, I think it might be made into a

really valuable piece of work. As political criticism it is very fine. I had no idea he could write so well. He says things which need saying and which none of us have had the courage to say. This passage, where he compares Italy to a tipsy man weeping with tenderness on the neck of the thief who is picking his pocket, is splendidly written."

"Gemma! The very worst bit in the whole thing! I hate that ill-natured yelping at everything and everybody!"

"So do I; but that's not the point. Rivarez has a very disagreeable style, and as a human being he is not attractive; but when he says that we have made ourselves drunk with processions and embracing and shouting about love and reconciliation, and that the Jesuits and Sanfedists are the people who will profit by it all, he's right a thousand times. I wish I could have been at the committee yesterday. What decision did you finally arrive at?"

"What I have come here about: to ask you to go and talk it over with him and persuade him to soften the thing."

"Me? But I hardly know the man; and besides that, he detests me. Why should I go, of all people?"

"Simply because there's no one else to do it to-day. Besides, you are more reasonable than the rest of us, and won't get into useless arguments and quarrel with him, as we should."

"I shan't do that, certainly. Well, I will go if you like, though I have not much hope of success."

"I am sure you will be able to manage him if you try. Yes, and tell him that the committee all admired the thing from a literary point of view.

That will put him into a good humour, and it's perfectly true, too."

The Gadfly was sitting beside a table covered with flowers and ferns, staring absently at the floor, with an open letter on his knee. A shaggy collie dog, lying on a rug at his feet, raised its head and growled as Gemma knocked at the open door, and the Gadfly rose hastily and bowed in a stiff, ceremonious way. His face had suddenly grown hard and expressionless.

"You are too kind," he said in his most chilling manner. "If you had let me know that you wanted to speak to me I would have called on you."

Seeing that he evidently wished her at the end of the earth, Gemma hastened to state her business. He bowed again and placed a chair for her.

"The committee wished me to call upon you," she began, "because there has been a certain difference of opinion about your pamphlet."

"So I expected." He smiled and sat down opposite to her, drawing a large vase of chrysanthemums between his face and the light.

"Most of the members agreed that, however much they may admire the pamphlet as a literary composition, they do not think that in its present form it is quite suitable for publication. They fear that the vehemence of its tone may give offence, and alienate persons whose help and support are valuable to the party."

He pulled a chrysanthemum from the vase and began slowly plucking off one white petal after another. As her eyes happened to catch the movement of the slim right hand dropping the petals, one by one, an uncomfortable sensation

came over Gemma, as though she had somewhere seen that gesture before.

"As a literary composition," he remarked in his soft, cold voice, "it is utterly worthless, and could be admired only by persons who know nothing about literature. As for its giving offence, that is the very thing I intended it to do."

"That I quite understand. The question is whether you may not succeed in giving offence to the wrong people."

He shrugged his shoulders and put a torn-off petal between his teeth. "I think you are mistaken," he said. "The question is: For what purpose did your committee invite me to come here? I understood, to expose and ridicule the Jesuits. I fulfil my obligation to the best of my ability."

"And I can assure you that no one has any doubt as to either the ability or the good-will. What the committee fears is that the liberal party may take offence, and also that the town workmen may withdraw their moral support. You may have meant the pamphlet for an attack upon the Sanfedists; but many readers will construe it as an attack upon the Church and the new Pope; and this, as a matter of political tactics, the committee does not consider desirable."

"I begin to understand. So long as I keep to the particular set of clerical gentlemen with whom the party is just now on bad terms, I may speak sooth if the fancy takes me; but directly I touch upon the committee's own pet priests—'truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped out, when the—Holy Father may stand by the fire and—' Yes, the fool was right; I'd rather be any kind of a thing than a fool. Of course I must bow to the committee's decision, but I

continue to think that it has pared its wit o' both sides and left—M-mon-signor M-m-montan-n-nelli in the middle."

"Montanelli?" Gemma repeated. "I don't understand you. Do you mean the Bishop of Brisighella?"

"Yes; the new Pope has just created him a Cardinal, you know. I have a letter about him here. Would you care to hear it? The writer is a friend of mine on the other side of the frontier."

"The Papal frontier?"

"Yes. This is what he writes——" He took up the letter which had been in his hand when she entered, and read aloud, suddenly beginning to stammer violently:

"Y-o-you will s-s-s-soon have the p-pleasure of m-m-meeting one of our w-w-worst enemies, C-cardinal Lorenzo M-montan-n-nelli, the B-b-bishop of Brisig-g-hella. He int-t——"

He broke off, paused a moment, and began again, very slowly and drawling insufferably, but no longer stammering:

"He intends to visit Tuscany during the coming month on a mission of reconciliation. He will preach first in Florence, where he will stay for about three weeks; then will go on to Siena and Pisa, and return to the Romagna by Pistoja. He ostensibly belongs to the liberal party in the Church, and is a personal friend of the Pope and Cardinal Feretti. Under Gregory he was out of favour, and was kept out of sight in a little hole in the Apennines. Now he has come suddenly to the front. Really, of course, he is as much pulled by Jesuit wires as any Sanfedist in the country. This mission was suggested by some of the Jesuit fathers. He is one of the most brilliant preachers

in the Church, and as mischievous in his way as Lambruschini himself. His business is to keep the popular enthusiasm over the Pope from subsiding, and to occupy the public attention until the Grand Duke has signed a project which the agents of the Jesuits are preparing to lay before him. What this project is I have been unable to discover.' Then, further on, it says: 'Whether Montanelli understands for what purpose he is being sent to Tuscany, or whether the Jesuits are playing on him, I cannot make out. He is either an uncommonly clever knave, or the biggest ass that was ever foaled. The odd thing is that, so far as I can discover, he neither takes bribes nor keeps mistresses—the first time I ever came across such a thing.'

He laid down the letter and sat looking at her with half-shut eyes, waiting, apparently, for her to speak.

"Are you satisfied that your informant is correct in his facts?" she asked after a moment.

"As to the irreproachable character of Monsignor M-mon-tan-nelli's private life? No; but neither is he. As you will observe, he puts in the s-s-saving clause: 'So far as I c-can discover——'"

"I was not speaking of that," she interposed coldly, "but of the part about this mission."

"I can fully trust the writer. He is an old friend of mine—one of my comrades of '43, and he is in a position which gives him exceptional opportunities for finding out things of that kind."

"Some official at the Vatican," thought Gemma quickly. "So that's the kind of connections you have? I guessed there was something of that sort."

"This letter is, of course, a private one," the

Gadfly went on; "and you understand that the information is to be kept strictly to the members of your committee."

"That hardly needs saying. Then about the pamphlet: may I tell the committee that you consent to make a few alterations and soften it a little, or that——"

"Don't you think the alterations may succeed in spoiling the beauty of the 'literary composition,' signora, as well as in reducing the vehemence of the tone?"

"You are asking my personal opinion. What I have come here to express is that of the committee as a whole."

"Does that imply that y-y-you disagree with the committee as a whole?" He had put the letter into his pocket and was now leaning forward and looking at her with an eager, concentrated expression which quite changed the character of his face. "You think——"

"If you care to know what I personally think—I disagree with the majority on both points. I do not at all admire the pamphlet from a literary point of view, and I do think it true as a presentation of facts and wise as a matter of tactics."

"That is——"

"I quite agree with you that Italy is being led away by a will-o'-the-wisp and that all this enthusiasm and rejoicing will probably land her in a terrible bog; and I should be most heartily glad to have that openly and boldly said, even at the cost of offending or alienating some of our present supporters. But as a member of a body the large majority of which holds the opposite view, I cannot insist upon my personal opinion; and I certainly think that if things of that kind are to be

said at all, they should be said temperately and quietly; not in the tone adopted in this pamphlet."

"Will you wait a minute while I look through the manuscript?"

He took it up and glanced down the pages. A dissatisfied frown settled on his face.

"Yes, of course, you are perfectly right. The thing's written like a *cafe chantant* skit, not a political satire. But what's a man to do? If I write decently the public won't understand it; they will say it's dull if it isn't spiteful enough."

"Don't you think spitefulness manages to be dull when we get too much of it?"

He threw a keen, rapid glance at her, and burst out laughing.

"Apparently the signora belongs to the dreadful category of people who are always right! Then if I yield to the temptation to be spiteful, I may come in time to be as dull as Signora Grassini? Heavens, what a fate! No, you needn't frown. I know you don't like me, and I am going to keep to business. What it comes to, then, is practically this: if I cut out the personalities and leave the essential part of the thing as it is, the committee will very much regret that they can't take the responsibility of printing it. If I cut out the political truth and make all the hard names apply to no one but the party's enemies, the committee will praise the thing up to the skies, and you and I will know it's not worth printing. Rather a nice point of metaphysics: Which is the more desirable condition, to be printed and not be worth it, or to be worth it and not be printed? Well, signora?"

"I do not think you are tied to any such alternative. I believe that if you were to cut out the

personalities the committee would consent to print the pamphlet, though the majority would, of course, not agree with it; and I am convinced that it would be very useful. But you would have to lay aside the spitefulness. If you are going to say a thing the substance of which is a big pill for your readers to swallow, there is no use in frightening them at the beginning by the form."

He sighed and shrugged his shoulders resignedly. "I submit, signora; but on one condition. If you rob me of my laugh now, I must have it out next time. When His Eminence, the irreproachable Cardinal, turns up in Florence, neither you nor your committee must object to my being as spiteful as I like. It's my due!"

He spoke in his lightest, coldest manner, pulling the chrysanthemums out of their vase and holding them up to watch the light through the translucent petals. "What an unsteady hand he has," she thought, seeing how the flowers shook and quivered. "Surely he doesn't drink!"

"You had better discuss the matter with the other members of the committee," she said, rising. "I cannot form any opinion as to what they will think about it."

"And you?" He had risen too, and was leaning against the table, pressing the flowers to his face.

She hesitated. The question distressed her, bringing up old and miserable associations. "I—hardly know," she said at last. "Many years ago I used to know something about Monsignor Montanelli. He was only a canon at that time, and Director of the theological seminary in the province where I lived as a girl. I heard a great deal about him from—someone who knew him

very intimately; and I never heard anything of him that was not good. I believe that, in those days at least, he was really a most remarkable man. But that was long ago, and he may have changed. Irresponsible power corrupts so many people."

The Gadfly raised his head from the flowers, and looked at her with a steady face.

"At any rate," he said, "if Monsignor Montanelli is not himself a scoundrel, he is a tool in scoundrelly hands. It is all one to me which he is—and to my friends across the frontier. A stone in the path may have the best intentions, but it must be kicked out of the path, for all that. Allow me, signora!" He rang the bell, and, limping to the door, opened it for her to pass out.

"It was very kind of you to call, signora. May I send for a vettura? No? Good-afternoon, then! Bianca, open the hall-door, please."

Gemma went out into the street, pondering anxiously. "My friends across the frontier"—who were they? And how was the stone to be kicked out of the path? If with satire only, why had he said it with such dangerous eyes?

#### CHAPTER IV.

MONSIGNOR MONTANELLI arrived in Florence in the first week of October. His visit caused a little flutter of excitement throughout the town. He was a famous preacher and a representative of the reformed Papacy; and people looked eagerly to him for an exposition of the "new doctrine," the gospel of love and reconciliation which was to cure the sorrows of Italy. The nomination of Cardinal Gizzi to the Roman State Secretaryship

in place of the universally detested Lambruschini had raised the public enthusiasm to its highest pitch; and Montanelli was just the man who could most easily sustain it. The irreproachable strictness of his life was a phenomenon sufficiently rare among the high dignitaries of the Roman Church to attract the attention of people accustomed to regard blackmailing, speculation, and disreputable intrigues as almost invariable adjuncts to the career of a prelate. Moreover, his talent as a preacher was really great; and with his beautiful voice and magnetic personality, he would in any time and place have made his mark.

Grassini, as usual, strained every nerve to get the newly arrived celebrity to his house; but Montanelli was no easy game to catch. To all invitations he replied with the same courteous but positive refusal, saying that his health was bad and his time fully occupied, and that he had neither strength nor leisure for going into society.

"What omnivorous creatures those Grassinis are!" Martini said contemptuously to Gemma as they crossed the Signoria square one bright, cold Sunday morning. "Did you notice the way Grassini bowed when the Cardinal's carriage drove up? It's all one to them who a man is, so long as he's talked about. I never saw such lion-hunters in my life. Only last August it was the Gadfly; now it's Montanelli. I hope His Eminence feels flattered at the attention; a precious lot of adventurers have shared it with him."

They had been hearing Montanelli preach in the Cathedral; and the great building had been so thronged with eager listeners that Martini, fearing a return of Gemma's troublesome headaches, had persuaded her to come away before the Mass