

weather after the rain, is it not? Have you been to hear the n-new Savonarola, too?"

Martini turned round sharply. The Gadfly, with a cigar in his mouth and a hot-house flower in his buttonhole, was holding out to him a slender, carefully-gloved hand. With the sunlight reflected in his immaculate boots and glancing back from the water on to his smiling face, he looked to Martini less lame and more conceited than usual. They were shaking hands, affably on the one side and rather sulkily on the other, when Riccardo hastily exclaimed:

"I am afraid Signora Bolla is not well!"

She was so pale that her face looked almost livid under the shadow of her bonnet, and the ribbon at her throat fluttered perceptibly from the violent beating of the heart.

"I will go home," she said faintly.

A cab was called and Martini got in with her to see her safely home. As the Gadfly bent down to arrange her cloak, which was hanging over the wheel, he raised his eyes suddenly to her face, and Martini saw that she shrank away with a look of something like terror.

"Gemma, what is the matter with you?" he asked, in English, when they had started. "What did that scoundrel say to you?"

"Nothing, Cesare; it was no fault of his. I—I—had a fright——"

"A fright?"

"Yes; I fancied——" She put one hand over her eyes, and he waited silently till she should recover her self-command. Her face was already regaining its natural colour.

"You are quite right," she said at last, turning to him and speaking in her usual voice; "it is

worse than useless to look back at a horrible past. It plays tricks with one's nerves and makes one imagine all sorts of impossible things. We will *never* talk about that subject again, Cesare, or I shall see fantastic likenesses to Arthur in every face I meet. It is a kind of hallucination, like a nightmare in broad daylight. Just now, when that odious little fop came up, I fancied it was Arthur."

CHAPTER V.

THE Gadfly certainly knew how to make personal enemies. He had arrived in Florence in August, and by the end of October three-fourths of the committee which had invited him shared Martini's opinion. His savage attacks upon Montanelli had annoyed even his admirers; and Galli himself, who at first had been inclined to uphold everything the witty satirist said or did, began to acknowledge with an aggrieved air that Montanelli had better have been left in peace. "Decent cardinals are none so plenty. One might treat them politely when they do turn up."

The only person who, apparently, remained quite indifferent to the storm of caricatures and pasquinades was Montanelli himself. It seemed, as Martini said, hardly worth while to expend one's energy in ridiculing a man who took it so good-humouredly. It was said in the town that Montanelli, one day when the Archbishop of Florence was dining with him, had found in the room one of the Gadfly's bitter personal lampoons against himself, had read it through and handed the paper to the Archbishop, remarking: "That is rather cleverly put, is it not?"

One day there appeared in the town a leaflet, headed: "The Mystery of the Annunciation." Even had the author omitted his now familiar signature, a sketch of a gadfly with spread wings, the bitter, trenchant style would have left in the minds of most readers no doubt as to his identity. The skit was in the form of a dialogue between Tuscany as the Virgin Mary, and Montanelli as the angel who, bearing the lilies of purity and crowned with the olive branch of peace, was announcing the advent of the Jesuits. The whole thing was full of offensive personal allusions and hints of the most risky nature, and all Florence felt the satire to be both ungenerous and unfair. And yet all Florence laughed. There was something so irresistible in the Gadfly's grave absurdities that those who most disapproved of and disliked him laughed as immoderately at all his squibs as did his warmest partisans. Repulsive in tone as the leaflet was, it left its trace upon the popular feeling of the town. Montanelli's personal reputation stood too high for any lampoon, however witty, seriously to injure it, but for a moment the tide almost turned against him. The Gadfly had known where to sting; and, though eager crowds still collected before the Cardinal's house to see him enter or leave his carriage, ominous cries of "Jesuit!" and "Sanfedist spy!" often mingled with the cheers and benedictions.

But Montanelli had no lack of supporters. Two days after the publication of the skit, the *Churchman*, a leading clerical paper, brought out a brilliant article, called: "An Answer to 'The Mystery of the Annunciation,'" and signed: "A Son of the Church." It was an impassioned defence of Montanelli against the Gadfly's slander-

ous imputations. The anonymous writer, after expounding, with great eloquence and fervour, the doctrine of peace on earth and good will towards men, of which the new Pontiff was the evangelist, concluded by challenging the Gadfly to prove a single one of his assertions, and solemnly appealing to the public not to believe a contemptible slanderer. Both the cogency of the article as a bit of special pleading and its merit as a literary composition were sufficiently far above the average to attract much attention in the town, especially as not even the editor of the newspaper could guess the author's identity. The article was soon reprinted separately in pamphlet form; and the "anonymous defender" was discussed in every coffee-shop in Florence.

The Gadfly responded with a violent attack on the new Pontificate and all its supporters, especially on Montanelli, who, he cautiously hinted, had probably consented to the panegyric on himself. To this the anonymous defender again replied in the *Churchman* with an indignant denial. During the rest of Montanelli's stay the controversy raging between the two writers occupied more of the public attention than did even the famous preacher himself.

Some members of the liberal party ventured to remonstrate with the Gadfly about the unnecessary malice of his tone towards Montanelli; but they did not get much satisfaction out of him. He only smiled affably and answered with a languid little stammer: "R-really, gentlemen, you are rather unfair. I expressly stipulated, when I gave in to Signora Bolla, that I should be allowed a l-little chuckle all to myself now. It is so nominated in the bond!"

At the end of October Montanelli returned to his see in the Romagna, and, before leaving Florence, preached a farewell sermon in which he spoke of the controversy, gently deprecating the vehemence of both writers and begging his unknown defender to set an example of tolerance by closing a useless and unseemly war of words. On the following day the *Churchman* contained a notice that, at Monsignor Montanelli's publicly expressed desire, "A Son of the Church" would withdraw from the controversy.

The last word remained with the Gadfly. He issued a little leaflet, in which he declared himself disarmed and converted by Montanelli's Christian meekness and ready to weep tears of reconciliation upon the neck of the first Sanfedist he met. "I am even willing," he concluded; "to embrace my anonymous challenger himself; and if my readers knew, as his Eminence and I know, what that implies and why he remains anonymous, they would believe in the sincerity of my conversion."

In the latter part of November he announced to the literary committee that he was going for a fortnight's holiday to the seaside. He went, apparently, to Leghorn; but Dr. Riccardo, going there soon after and wishing to speak to him, searched the town for him in vain. On the 5th of December a political demonstration of the most extreme character burst out in the States of the Church, along the whole chain of the Apennines; and people began to guess the reason of the Gadfly's sudden fancy to take his holidays in the depth of winter. He came back to Florence when the riots had been quelled, and, meeting Riccardo in the street, remarked affably:

"I hear you were inquiring for me in Leghorn;

I was staying in Pisa. What a pretty old town it is! There's something quite Arcadian about it."

In Christmas week he attended an afternoon meeting of the literary committee which was held in Dr. Riccardo's lodgings near the Porta alla Croce. The meeting was a full one, and when he came in, a little late, with an apologetic bow and smile, there seemed to be no seat empty. Riccardo rose to fetch a chair from the next room, but the Gadfly stopped him. "Don't trouble about it," he said; "I shall be quite comfortable here"; and crossing the room to a window beside which Gemma had placed her chair, he sat down on the sill, leaning his head indolently back against the shutter.

As he looked down at Gemma, smiling with half-shut eyes, in the subtle, sphinx-like way that gave him the look of a Leonardo da Vinci portrait, the instinctive distrust with which he inspired her deepened into a sense of unreasoning fear.

The proposal under discussion was that a pamphlet be issued setting forth the committee's views on the dearth with which Tuscany was threatened and the measures which should be taken to meet it. The matter was a somewhat difficult one to decide, because, as usual, the committee's views upon the subject were much divided. The more advanced section, to which Gemma, Martini, and Riccardo belonged, was in favour of an energetic appeal to both government and public to take adequate measures at once for the relief of the peasantry. The moderate division—including, of course, Grassini—feared that an over-emphatic tone might irritate rather than convince the ministry.

"It is all very well, gentlemen, to want the

people helped at once," he said, looking round upon the red-hot radicals with his calm and pitying air. "We most of us want a good many things that we are not likely to get; but if we start with the tone you propose to adopt, the government is very likely not to begin any relief measures at all till there is actual famine. If we could only induce the ministry to make an inquiry into the state of the crops it would be a step in advance."

Galli, in his corner by the stove, jumped up to answer his enemy.

"A step in advance—yes, my dear sir; but if there's going to be a famine, it won't wait for us to advance at that pace. The people might all starve before we got to any actual relief."

"It would be interesting to know——" Sacconi began; but several voices interrupted him.

"Speak up; we can't hear!"

"I should think not, with such an infernal row in the street," said Galli, irritably. "Is that window shut, Riccardo? One can't hear one's self speak!"

Gemma looked round. "Yes," she said, "the window is quite shut. I think there is a variety show, or some such thing, passing."

The sounds of shouting and laughter, of the tinkling of bells and trampling of feet, resounded from the street below, mixed with the braying of a villainous brass band and the unmerciful banging of a drum.

"It can't be helped these few days," said Riccardo; "we must expect noise at Christmas time. What were you saying, Sacconi?"

"I said it would be interesting to hear what is thought about the matter in Pisa and Leghorn.

Perhaps Signor Rivarez can tell us something; he has just come from there."

The Gadfly did not answer. He was staring out of the window and appeared not to have heard what had been said.

"Signor Rivarez!" said Gemma. She was the only person sitting near to him, and as he remained silent she bent forward and touched him on the arm. He slowly turned his face to her, and she started as she saw its fixed and awful immobility. For a moment it was like the face of a corpse; then the lips moved in a strange, lifeless way.

"Yes," he whispered; "a variety show."

Her first instinct was to shield him from the curiosity of the others. Without understanding what was the matter with him, she realized that some frightful fancy or hallucination had seized upon him, and that, for the moment, he was at its mercy, body and soul. She rose quickly and, standing between him and the company, threw the window open as if to look out. No one but herself had seen his face.

In the street a travelling circus was passing, with mountebanks on donkeys and harlequins in parti-coloured dresses. The crowd of holiday masqueraders, laughing and shoving, was exchanging jests and showers of paper ribbon with the clowns and flinging little bags of sugar-plums to the columbine, who sat in her car, tricked out in tinsel and feathers, with artificial curls on her forehead and an artificial smile on her painted lips. Behind the car came a motley string of figures—street Arabs, beggars, clowns turning somersaults, and costermongers hawking their wares. They were jostling, pelting, and applauding a figure which at first Gemma could not see for the push-

ing and swaying of the crowd. The next moment, however, she saw plainly what it was—a hunchback, dwarfish and ugly, grotesquely attired in a fool's dress, with paper cap and bells. He evidently belonged to the strolling company, and was amusing the crowd with hideous grimaces and contortions.

"What is going on out there?" asked Riccardo, approaching the window. "You seem very much interested."

He was a little surprised at their keeping the whole committee waiting to look at a strolling company of mountebanks. Gemma turned round.

"It is nothing interesting," she said; "only a variety show; but they made such a noise that I thought it must be something else."

She was standing with one hand upon the window-sill, and suddenly felt the Gadfly's cold fingers press the hand with a passionate clasp. "Thank you!" he whispered softly; and then, closing the window, sat down again upon the sill.

"I'm afraid," he said in his airy manner, "that I have interrupted you, gentlemen. I was l-looking at the variety show; it is s-such a p-pretty sight."

"Sacconi was asking you a question," said Martini gruffly. The Gadfly's behaviour seemed to him an absurd piece of affectation, and he was annoyed that Gemma should have been tactless enough to follow his example. It was not like her.

The Gadfly disclaimed all knowledge of the state of feeling in Pisa, explaining that he had been there "only on a holiday." He then plunged at once into an animated discussion, first of agricultural prospects, then of the pamphlet question; and continued pouring out a flood of stammering

talk till the others were quite tired. He seemed to find some feverish delight in the sound of his own voice.

When the meeting ended and the members of the committee rose to go, Riccardo came up to Martini.

"Will you stop to dinner with me? Fabrizi and Sacconi have promised to stay."

"Thanks; but I was going to see Signora Bolla home."

"Are you really afraid I can't get home by myself?" she asked, rising and putting on her wrap. "Of course he will stay with you, Dr. Riccardo; it's good for him to get a change. He doesn't go out half enough."

"If you will allow me, I will see you home," the Gadfly interposed; "I am going in that direction."

"If you really are going that way——"

"I suppose you won't have time to drop in here in the course of the evening, will you, Rivarez?" asked Riccardo, as he opened the door for them.

The Gadfly looked back over his shoulder, laughing. "I, my dear fellow? I'm going to see the variety show!"

"What a strange creature that is; and what an odd affection for mountebanks!" said Riccardo, coming back to his visitors.

"Case of a fellow-feeling, I should think," said Martini; "the man's a mountebank himself, if ever I saw one."

"I wish I could think he was only that," Fabrizi interposed, with a grave face. "If he is a mountebank I am afraid he's a very dangerous one."

"Dangerous in what way?"

"Well, I don't like those mysterious little pleasure trips that he is so fond of taking. This is the

third time, you know; and I don't believe he has been in Pisa at all."

"I suppose it is almost an open secret that it's into the mountains he goes," said Sacconi. "He has hardly taken the trouble to deny that he is still in relations with the smugglers he got to know in the Savigno affair, and it's quite natural he should take advantage of their friendship to get his leaflets across the Papal frontier."

"For my part," said Riccardo; "what I wanted to talk to you about is this very question. It occurred to me that we could hardly do better than ask Rivarez to undertake the management of our own smuggling. That press at Pistoja is very inefficiently managed, to my thinking; and the way the leaflets are taken across, always rolled in those everlasting cigars, is more than primitive."

"It has answered pretty well up till now," said Martini contumaciously. He was getting wearied of hearing Galli and Riccardo always put the Gadfly forward as a model to copy, and inclined to think that the world had gone well enough before this "lackadaisical buccaneer" turned up to set everyone to rights.

"It has answered so far well that we have been satisfied with it for want of anything better; but you know there have been plenty of arrests and confiscations. Now I believe that if Rivarez undertook the business for us, there would be less of that."

"Why do you think so?"

"In the first place, the smugglers look upon us as strangers to do business with, or as sheep to fleece, whereas Rivarez is their personal friend, very likely their leader, whom they look up to and trust. You may be sure every smuggler in the

Apennines will do for a man who was in the Savigno revolt what he will not do for us. In the next place, there's hardly a man among us that knows the mountains as Rivarez does. Remember, he has been a fugitive among them, and knows the smugglers' paths by heart. No smuggler would dare to cheat him, even if he wished to, and no smuggler could cheat him if he dared to try."

"Then is your proposal that we should ask him to take over the whole management of our literature on the other side of the frontier—distribution, addresses, hiding-places, everything—or simply that we should ask him to put the things across for us?"

"Well, as for addresses and hiding-places, he probably knows already all the ones that we have and a good many more that we have not. I don't suppose we should be able to teach him much in that line. As for distribution, it's as the others prefer, of course. The important question, to my mind, is the actual smuggling itself. Once the books are safe in Bologna, it's a comparatively simple matter to circulate them."

"For my part," said Martini, "I am against the plan. In the first place, all this about his skilfulness is mere conjecture; we have not actually seen him engaged in frontier work and do not know whether he keeps his head in critical moments."

"Oh, you needn't have any doubt of that!" Riccardo put in. "The history of the Savigno affair proves that he keeps his head."

"And then," Martini went on; "I do not feel at all inclined, from what little I know of Rivarez, to intrust him with all the party's secrets. He seems to me feather-brained and theatrical. To give the whole management of a party's contra-

band work into a man's hands is a serious matter. Fabrizi, what do you think?"

"If I had only such objections as yours, Martini," replied the professor, "I should certainly waive them in the case of a man really possessing, as Rivarez undoubtedly does, all the qualifications Riccardo speaks of. For my part, I have not the slightest doubt as to either his courage, his honesty, or his presence of mind; and that he knows both mountains and mountaineers we have had ample proof. But there is another objection. I do not feel sure that it is only for the smuggling of pamphlets he goes into the mountains. I have begun to doubt whether he has not another purpose. This is, of course, entirely between ourselves. It is a mere suspicion. It seems to me just possible that he is in connexion with some one of the 'sects,' and perhaps with the most dangerous of them."

"Which one do you mean—the 'Red Girdles'?"

"No; the 'Occoltellatori.'"

"The 'Knifers'! But that is a little body of outlaws—peasants, most of them, with neither education nor political experience."

"So were the insurgents of Savigno; but they had a few educated men as leaders, and this little society may have the same. And remember, it's pretty well known that most of the members of those more violent sects in the Romagna are survivors of the Savigno affair, who found themselves too weak to fight the Churchmen in open insurrection, and so have fallen back on assassination. Their hands are not strong enough for guns, and they take to knives instead."

"But what makes you suppose Rivarez to be connected with them?"

"I don't suppose, I merely suspect. In any case, I think we had better find out for certain before we intrust our smuggling to him. If he attempted to do both kinds of work at once he would injure our party most terribly; he would simply destroy its reputation and accomplish nothing. However, we will talk of that another time. I wanted to speak to you about the news from Rome. It is said that a commission is to be appointed to draw up a project for a municipal constitution."

CHAPTER VI.

GEMMA and the Gadfly walked silently along the Lung'Arno. His feverish talkativeness seemed to have quite spent itself; he had hardly spoken a word since they left Riccardo's door, and Gemma was heartily glad of his silence. She always felt embarrassed in his company, and today more so than usual, for his strange behaviour at the committee meeting had greatly perplexed her.

By the Uffizi palace he suddenly stopped and turned to her.

"Are you tired?"

"No; why?"

"Nor especially busy this evening?"

"No."

"I want to ask a favour of you; I want you to come for a walk with me."

"Where to?"

"Nowhere in particular; anywhere you like."

"But what for?"

He hesitated.