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.

"I—can't tell you—at least, it's very difficult; but please come if you can."

He raised his eyes suddenly from the ground, and she saw how strange their expression was.

"There is something the matter with you," she said gently. He pulled a leaf from the flower in his button-hole, and began tearing it to pieces. Who was it that he was so oddly like? Someone who had that same trick of the fingers and hurried, nervous gesture.

"I am in trouble," he said, looking down at his hands and speaking in a hardly audible voice. "I—don't want to be alone this evening. Will you come?"

"Yes, certainly, unless you would rather go to my lodgings."

"No; come and dine with me at a restaurant. There's one on the Signoria. Please don't refuse, now; you've promised!"

They went into a restaurant, where he ordered dinner, but hardly touched his own share, and remained obstinately silent, crumbling the bread over the cloth, and fidgetting with the fringe of his table napkin. Gemma felt thoroughly uncomfortable, and began to wish she had refused to come; the silence was growing awkward; yet she could not begin to make small-talk with a person who seemed to have forgotten her presence. At last he looked up and said abruptly:

"Would you like to see the variety show?"

She stared at him in astonishment. What had he got into his head about variety shows?

"Have you ever seen one?" he asked before she had time to speak.

"No; I don't think so. I didn't suppose they were interesting."

"They are very interesting. I don't think anyone can study the life of the people without seeing them. Let us go back to the Porta alla Croce."

When they arrived the mountebanks had set up their tent beside the town gate, and an abominable scraping of fiddles and banging of drums announced that the performance had begun.

The entertainment was of the roughest kind. A few clowns, harlequins, and acrobats, a circus-rider jumping through hoops, the painted columbine, and the hunchback performing various dull and foolish antics, represented the entire force of the company. The jokes were not, on the whole, coarse or offensive; but they were very tame and stale, and there was a depressing flatness about the whole thing. The audience laughed and clapped from their innate Tuscan courtesy; but the only part which they seemed really to enjoy was the performance of the hunchback, in which Gemma could find nothing either witty or skilful. It was merely a series of grotesque and hideous contortions, which the spectators mimicked, holding up children on their shoulders that the little ones might see the "ugly man."

"Signor Rivarez, do you really think this attractive?" said Gemma, turning to the Gadfly, who was standing beside her, his arm round one of the wooden posts of the tent. "It seems to me——"

She broke off and remained looking at him silently. Except when she had stood with Montanelli at the garden gate in Leghorn, she had never seen a human face express such fathomless, hopeless misery. She thought of Dante's hell as she watched him.

Presently the hunchback, receiving a kick from

one of the clowns, turned a somersault and tumbled in a grotesque heap outside the ring. A dialogue between two clowns began, and the Gadfly seemed to wake out of a dream.

"Shall we go?" he asked; "or would you like to see more?"

"I would rather go."

They left the tent, and walked across the dark green to the river. For a few moments neither spoke.

"What did you think of the show?" the Gadfly asked presently.

"I thought it rather a dreary business; and part of it seemed to me positively unpleasant."

"Which part?"

"Well, all those grimaces and contortions. They are simply ugly; there is nothing clever about them."

"Do you mean the hunchback's performance?"

Remembering his peculiar sensitiveness on the subject of his own physical defects, she had avoided mentioning this particular bit of the entertainment; but now that he had touched upon the subject himself, she answered: "Yes; I did not like that part at all."

"That was the part the people enjoyed most."

"I dare say; and that is just the worst thing about it."

"Because it was inartistic?"

"N-no; it was all inartistic. I meant—because it was cruel."

He smiled.

"Cruel? Do you mean to the hunchback?"

"I mean—— Of course the man himself was quite indifferent; no doubt, it is to him just a way of getting a living, like the circus-rider's way or

the columbine's. But the thing makes one feel unhappy. It is humiliating; it is the degradation of a human being."

"He probably is not any more degraded than he was to start with. Most of us are degraded in one way or another."

"Yes; but this—I dare say you will think it an absurd prejudice; but a human body, to me, is a sacred thing; I don't like to see it treated irreverently and made hideous."

"And a human soul?"

He had stopped short, and was standing with one hand on the stone balustrade of the embankment, looking straight at her.

"A soul?" she repeated, stopping in her turn to look at him in wonder.

He flung out both hands with a sudden, passionate gesture.

"Has it never occurred to you that that miserable clown may have a soul—a living, struggling, human soul, tied down into that crooked hulk of a body and forced to slave for it? You that are so tender-hearted to everything—you that pity the body in its fool's dress and bells—have you never thought of the wretched soul that has not even motley to cover its horrible nakedness? Think of it shivering with cold, stifled with shame and misery, before all those people—feeling their jeers that cut like a whip—their laughter, that burns like red-hot iron on the bare flesh! Think of it looking round—so helpless before them all—for the mountains that will not fall on it—for the rocks that have not the heart to cover it—envying the rats that can creep into some hole in the earth and hide; and remember that a soul is dumb—it has no voice to cry out—it must endure, and en-

dure, and endure. Oh! I'm talking nonsense! Why on earth don't you laugh? You have no sense of humour!"

Slowly and in dead silence she turned and walked on along the river side. During the whole evening it had not once occurred to her to connect his trouble, whatever it might be, with the variety show; and now that some dim picture of his inner life had been revealed to her by this sudden outburst, she could not find, in her overwhelming pity for him, one word to say. He walked on beside her, with his head turned away, and looked into the water.

"I want you, please, to understand," he began suddenly, turning to her with a defiant air, "that everything I have just been saying to you is pure imagination. I'm rather given to romancing, but I don't like people to take it seriously."

She made no answer, and they walked on in silence. As they passed by the gateway of the Uffizi, he crossed the road and stooped down over a dark bundle that was lying against the railings.

"What is the matter, little one?" he asked, more gently than she had ever heard him speak. "Why don't you go home?"

The bundle moved, and answered something in a low, moaning voice. Gemma came across to look, and saw a child of about six years old, ragged and dirty, crouching on the pavement like a frightened animal. The Gadfly was bending down with his hand on the unkempt head.

"What is it?" he said, stooping lower to catch the unintelligible answer. "You ought to go home to bed; little boys have no business out of doors at night; you'll be quite frozen! Give me

your hand and jump up like a man! Where do you live?"

He took the child's arm to raise him. The result was a sharp scream and a quick shrinking away.

"Why, what is it?" the Gadfly asked, kneeling down on the pavement. "Ah! Signora, look here!"

The child's shoulder and jacket were covered with blood.

"Tell me what has happened?" the Gadfly went on caressingly. "It wasn't a fall, was it? No? Someone's been beating you? I thought so! Who was it?"

"My uncle."

"Ah, yes! And when was it?"

"This morning. He was drunk, and I—I——"

"And you got in his way—was that it? You shouldn't get in people's way when they are drunk, little man; they don't like it. What shall we do with this poor mite, signora? Come here to the light, sonny, and let me look at that shoulder. Put your arm round my neck; I won't hurt you. There we are!"

He lifted the boy in his arms, and, carrying him across the street, set him down on the wide stone balustrade. Then, taking out a pocket-knife, he deftly ripped up the torn sleeve, supporting the child's head against his breast, while Gemma held the injured arm. The shoulder was badly bruised and grazed, and there was a deep gash on the arm.

"That's an ugly cut to give a mite like you," said the Gadfly, fastening his handkerchief round the wound to prevent the jacket from rubbing against it. "What did he do it with?"

"The shovel. I went to ask him to give me a soldo to get some polenta at the corner shop, and he hit me with the shovel."

The Gadfly shuddered. "Ah!" he said softly, "that hurts; doesn't it, little one?"

"He hit me with the shovel—and I ran away—I ran away—because he hit me."

"And you've been wandering about ever since, without any dinner?"

Instead of answering, the child began to sob violently. The Gadfly lifted him off the balustrade.

"There, there! We'll soon set all that straight. I wonder if we can get a cab anywhere. I'm afraid they'll all be waiting by the theatre; there's a grand performance going on to-night. I am sorry to drag you about so, signora; but——"

"I would rather come with you. You may want help. Do you think you can carry him so far? Isn't he very heavy?"

"Oh, I can manage, thank you."

At the theatre door they found only a few cabs waiting, and these were all engaged. The performance was over, and most of the audience had gone. Zita's name was printed in large letters on the wall-placards; she had been dancing in the ballet. Asking Gemma to wait for him a moment, the Gadfly went round to the performers' entrance, and spoke to an attendant.

"Has Mme. Reni gone yet?"

"No, sir," the man answered, staring blankly at the spectacle of a well-dressed gentleman carrying a ragged street child in his arms, "Mme. Reni is just coming out, I think; her carriage is waiting for her. Yes; there she comes."

Zita descended the stairs, leaning on the arm of

a young cavalry officer. She looked superbly handsome, with an opera cloak of flame-coloured velvet thrown over her evening dress, and a great fan of ostrich plumes hanging from her waist. In the entry she stopped short, and, drawing her hand away from the officer's arm, approached the Gadfly in amazement.

"Felice!" she exclaimed under her breath, "what *have* you got there?"

"I have picked up this child in the street. It is hurt and starving; and I want to get it home as quickly as possible. There is not a cab to be got anywhere, so I want to have your carriage."

"Felice! you are not going to take a horrid beggar-child into your rooms! Send for a policeman, and let him carry it to the Refuge or whatever is the proper place for it. You can't have all the paupers in the town——"

"It is hurt," the Gadfly repeated; "it can go to the Refuge to-morrow, if necessary, but I must see to the child first and give it some food."

Zita made a little grimace of disgust. "You've got its head right against your shirt! How *can* you? It is dirty!"

The Gadfly looked up with a sudden flash of anger.

"It is hungry," he said fiercely. "You don't know what that means, do you?"

"Signor Rivarez," interposed Gemma, coming forward, "my lodgings are quite close. Let us take the child in there. Then, if you cannot find a vettura, I will manage to put it up for the night."

He turned round quickly. "You don't mind?"

"Of course not. Good-night, Mme. Reni!"

The gipsy, with a stiff bow and an angry shrug

of her shoulders, took her officer's arm again, and, gathering up the train of her dress, swept past them to the contested carriage.

"I will send it back to fetch you and the child, if you like, M. Rivarez," she said, pausing on the doorstep.

"Very well; I will give the address." He came out on to the pavement, gave the address to the driver, and walked back to Gemma with his burden.

Katie was waiting up for her mistress; and, on hearing what had happened, ran for warm water and other necessaries. Placing the child on a chair, the Gadfly knelt down beside him, and, deftly slipping off the ragged clothing, bathed and bandaged the wound with tender, skilful hands. He had just finished washing the boy, and was wrapping him in a warm blanket, when Gemma came in with a tray in her hands.

"Is your patient ready for his supper?" she asked, smiling at the strange little figure. "I have been cooking it for him."

The Gadfly stood up and rolled the dirty rags together. "I'm afraid we have made a terrible mess in your room," he said. "As for these, they had better go straight into the fire, and I will buy him some new clothes to-morrow. Have you any brandy in the house, signora? I think he ought to have a little. I will just wash my hands, if you will allow me."

When the child had finished his supper, he immediately went to sleep in the Gadfly's arms, with his rough head against the white shirt-front. Gemma, who had been helping Katie to set the disordered room tidy again, sat down at the table.

"Signor Rivarez, you must take something

before you go home—you had hardly any dinner, and it's very late."

"I should like a cup of tea in the English fashion, if you have it. I'm sorry to keep you up so late."

"Oh! that doesn't matter. Put the child down on the sofa; he will tire you. Wait a minute; I will just lay a sheet over the cushions. What are you going to do with him?"

"To-morrow? Find out whether he has any other relations except that drunken brute; and if not, I suppose I must follow Mme. Reni's advice, and take him to the Refuge. Perhaps the kindest thing to do would be to put a stone round his neck and pitch him into the river there; but that would expose me to unpleasant consequences. Fast asleep! What an odd little lump of ill-luck you are, you mite—not half as capable of defending yourself as a stray cat!"

When Katie brought in the tea-tray, the boy opened his eyes and sat up with a bewildered air. Recognizing the Gadfly, whom he already regarded as his natural protector, he wriggled off the sofa, and, much encumbered by the folds of his blanket, came up to nestle against him. He was by now sufficiently revived to be inquisitive; and, pointing to the mutilated left hand, in which the Gadfly was holding a piece of cake, asked: "What's that?"

"That? Cake; do you want some? I think you've had enough for now. Wait till to-morrow, little man."

"No—that!" He stretched out his hand and touched the stumps of the amputated fingers and the great scar on the wrist. The Gadfly put down his cake.

"Oh, that! It's the same sort of thing as what you have on your shoulder—a hit I got from someone stronger than I was."

"Didn't it hurt awfully?"

"Oh, I don't know—not more than other things. There, now, go to sleep again; you have no business asking questions at this time of night."

When the carriage arrived the boy was again asleep; and the Gadfly, without awaking him, lifted him gently and carried him out on to the stairs.

"You have been a sort of ministering angel to me to-day," he said to Gemma, pausing at the door. "But I suppose that need not prevent us from quarrelling to our heart's content in future."

"I have no desire to quarrel with anyone."

"Ah! but I have. Life would be unendurable without quarrels. A good quarrel is the salt of the earth; it's better than a variety show!"

And with that he went downstairs, laughing softly to himself, with the sleeping child in his arms.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE day in the first week of January Martini, who had sent round the forms of invitation to the monthly group-meeting of the literary committee, received from the Gadfly a laconic, pencil-scrawled "Very sorry; can't come." He was a little annoyed, as a notice of "important business" had been put into the invitation; this cavalier treatment seemed to him almost insolent. Moreover, three separate letters containing bad news arrived during the day, and the wind was in the east, so that Martini felt out of sorts and out

of temper; and when, at the group meeting, Dr. Riccardo asked, "Isn't Rivarez here?" he answered rather sulkily: "No; he seems to have got something more interesting on hand, and can't come, or doesn't want to."

"Really, Martini," said Galli irritably, "you are about the most prejudiced person in Florence. Once you object to a man, everything he does is wrong. How could Rivarez come when he's ill?"

"Who told you he was ill?"

"Didn't you know? He's been laid up for the last four days."

"What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know. He had to put off an appointment with me on Thursday on account of illness; and last night, when I went round, I heard that he was too ill to see anyone. I thought Riccardo would be looking after him."

"I knew nothing about it. I'll go round to-night and see if he wants anything."

The next morning Riccardo, looking very pale and tired, came into Gemma's little study. She was sitting at the table, reading out monotonous strings of figures to Martini, who, with a magnifying glass in one hand and a finely pointed pencil in the other, was making tiny marks in the pages of a book. She made with one hand a gesture requesting silence. Riccardo, knowing that a person who is writing in cipher must not be interrupted, sat down on the sofa behind her and yawned like a man who can hardly keep awake.

"2, 4; 3, 7; 6, 1; 3, 5; 4, 1;" Gemma's voice went on with machine-like evenness. "8, 4; 7, 2; 5, 1; that finishes the sentence, Cesare."

She stuck a pin into the paper to mark the exact place, and turned round.