

"Since you press me for an answer—yes, to some extent."

"Then why do you let that go on?"

No answer.

"Why do you let it go on?"

"Because—I can't help it."

"Why?"

She looked up reproachfully. "That is unkind—it's not fair to press me so."

"But all the same you are going to tell me why."

"If you must have it, then—because my life has been smashed into pieces, and I have not the energy to start anything *real*, now. I am about fit to be a revolutionary cab-horse, and do the party's drudge-work. At least I do it conscientiously, and it must be done by somebody."

"Certainly it must be done by somebody; but not always by the same person."

"It's about all I'm fit for."

He looked at her with half-shut eyes, inscrutably. Presently she raised her head.

"We are returning to the old subject; and this was to be a business talk. It is quite useless, I assure you, to tell me I might have done all sorts of things. I shall never do them now. But I may be able to help you in thinking out your plan. What is it?"

"You begin by telling me that it is useless for me to suggest anything, and then ask what I want to suggest. My plan requires your help in action, not only in thinking out."

"Let me hear it and then we will discuss."

"Tell me first whether you have heard anything about schemes for a rising in Venetia."

"I have heard of nothing but schemes for ris-

ings and Sanfedist plots ever since the amnesty, and I fear I am as sceptical about the one as about the other."

"So am I, in most cases; but I am speaking of really serious preparations for a rising of the whole province against the Austrians. A good many young fellows in the Papal States—particularly in the Four Legations—are secretly preparing to get across there and join as volunteers. And I hear from my friends in the Romagna——"

"Tell me," she interrupted, "are you quite sure that these friends of yours can be trusted?"

"Quite sure. I know them personally, and have worked with them."

"That is, they are members of the 'sect' to which you belong? Forgive my scepticism, but I am always a little doubtful as to the accuracy of information received from secret societies. It seems to me that the habit——"

"Who told you I belonged to a 'sect'?" he interrupted sharply.

"No one; I guessed it."

"Ah!" He leaned back in his chair and looked at her, frowning. "Do you always guess people's private affairs?" he said after a moment.

"Very often. I am rather observant, and have a habit of putting things together. I tell you that so that you may be careful when you don't want me to know a thing."

"I don't mind your knowing anything so long as it goes no further. I suppose this has not——"

She lifted her head with a gesture of half-offended surprise. "Surely that is an unnecessary question!" she said.

"Of course I know you would not speak of any-

thing to outsiders; but I thought that perhaps, to the members of your party——”

“The party’s business is with facts, not with my personal conjectures and fancies. Of course I have never mentioned the subject to anyone.”

“Thank you. Do you happen to have guessed which sect I belong to?”

“I hope—you must not take offence at my frankness; it was you who started this talk, you know—— I do hope it is not the ‘Knifers.’”

“Why do you hope that?”

“Because you are fit for better things.”

“We are all fit for better things than we ever do. There is your own answer back again. However, it is not the ‘Knifers’ that I belong to, but the ‘Red Girdles.’ They are a steadier lot, and take their work more seriously.”

“Do you mean the work of knifing?”

“That, among other things. Knives are very useful in their way; but only when you have a good, organized propaganda behind them. That is what I dislike in the other sect. They think a knife can settle all the world’s difficulties; and that’s a mistake. It can settle a good many, but not all.”

“Do you honestly believe that it settles any?”

He looked at her in surprise.

“Of course,” she went on, “it eliminates, for the moment, the practical difficulty caused by the presence of a clever spy or objectionable official; but whether it does not create worse difficulties in place of the one removed is another question. It seems to me like the parable of the swept and garnished house and the seven devils. Every assassination only makes the police more vicious and

the people more accustomed to violence and brutality, and the last state of the community may be worse than the first.”

“What do you think will happen when the revolution comes? Do you suppose the people won’t have to get accustomed to violence then? War is war.”

“Yes, but open revolution is another matter. It is one moment in the people’s life, and it is the price we have to pay for all our progress. No doubt fearful things will happen; they must in every revolution. But they will be isolated facts—exceptional features of an exceptional moment. The horrible thing about this promiscuous knifing is that it becomes a habit. The people get to look upon it as an every-day occurrence, and their sense of the sacredness of human life gets blunted. I have not been much in the Romagna, but what little I have seen of the people has given me the impression that they have got, or are getting, into a mechanical habit of violence.”

“Surely even that is better than a mechanical habit of obedience and submission.”

“I don’t think so. All mechanical habits are bad and slavish, and this one is ferocious as well. Of course, if you look upon the work of the revolutionist as the mere wresting of certain definite concessions from the government, then the secret sect and the knife must seem to you the best weapons, for there is nothing else which all governments so dread. But if you think, as I do, that to force the government’s hand is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end, and that what we really need to reform is the relation between man and man, then you must go differently to work. Accustoming ignorant people to the sight of blood

is not the way to raise the value they put on human life."

"And the value they put on religion?"

"I don't understand."

He smiled.

"I think we differ as to where the root of the mischief lies. You place it in a lack of appreciation of the value of human life."

"Rather of the sacredness of human personality."

"Put it as you like. To me the great cause of our muddles and mistakes seems to lie in the mental disease called religion."

"Do you mean any religion in particular?"

"Oh, no! That is a mere question of external symptoms. The disease itself is what is called a religious attitude of mind. It is the morbid desire to set up a fetich and adore it, to fall down and worship something. It makes little difference whether the something be Jesus or Buddha or a tum-tum tree. You don't agree with me, of course. You may be atheist or agnostic or anything you like, but I could feel the religious temperament in you at five yards. However, it is of no use for us to discuss that. But you are quite mistaken in thinking that I, for one, look upon the knifing as merely a means of removing objectionable officials—it is, above all, a means, and I think the best means, of undermining the prestige of the Church and of accustoming people to look upon clerical agents as upon any other vermin."

"And when you have accomplished that; when you have roused the wild beast that sleeps in the people and set it on the Church; then——"

"Then I shall have done the work that makes it worth my while to live."

"Is *that* the work you spoke of the other day?"

"Yes, just that."

She shivered and turned away.

"You are disappointed in me?" he said, looking up with a smile.

"No; not exactly that. I am—I think—a little afraid of you."

She turned round after a moment and said in her ordinary business voice:

"This is an unprofitable discussion. Our standpoints are too different. For my part, I believe in propaganda, propaganda, and propaganda; and when you can get it, open insurrection."

"Then let us come back to the question of my plan; it has something to do with propaganda and more with insurrection."

"Yes?"

"As I tell you, a good many volunteers are going from the Romagna to join the Venetians. We do not know yet how soon the insurrection will break out. It may not be till the autumn or winter; but the volunteers in the Apennines must be armed and ready, so that they may be able to start for the plains directly they are sent for. I have undertaken to smuggle the firearms and ammunition on to Papal territory for them——"

"Wait a minute. How do you come to be working with that set? The revolutionists in Lombardy and Venetia are all in favour of the new Pope. They are going in for liberal reforms, hand in hand with the progressive movement in the Church. How can a 'no-compromise' anti-clerical like you get on with them?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "What is it to me if they like to amuse themselves with a rag-doll,

so long as they do their work? Of course they will take the Pope for a figurehead. What have I to do with that, if only the insurrection gets under way somehow? Any stick will do to beat a dog with, I suppose, and any cry to set the people on the Austrians."

"What is it you want me to do?"

"Chiefly to help me get the firearms across."

"But how could I do that?"

"You are just the person who could do it best. I think of buying the arms in England, and there is a good deal of difficulty about bringing them over. It's impossible to get them through any of the Pontifical sea-ports; they must come by Tuscany, and go across the Apennines."

"That makes two frontiers to cross instead of one."

"Yes; but the other way is hopeless; you can't smuggle a big transport in at a harbour where there is no trade, and you know the whole shipping of Civita Vecchia amounts to about three row-boats and a fishing smack. If we once get the things across Tuscany, I can manage the Papal frontier; my men know every path in the mountains, and we have plenty of hiding-places. The transport must come by sea to Leghorn, and that is my great difficulty; I am not in with the smugglers there, and I believe you are."

"Give me five minutes to think."

She leaned forward, resting one elbow on her knee, and supporting the chin on the raised hand. After a few moments' silence she looked up.

"It is possible that I might be of some use in that part of the work," she said; "but before we go any further, I want to ask you a question. Can you give me your word that this business is not

connected with any stabbing or secret violence of any kind?"

"Certainly. It goes without saying that I should not have asked you to join in a thing of which I know you disapprove."

"When do you want a definite answer from me?"

"There is not much time to lose; but I can give you a few days to decide in."

"Are you free next Saturday evening?"

"Let me see—to-day is Thursday; yes."

"Then come here. I will think the matter over and give you a final answer."

On the following Sunday Gemma sent in to the committee of the Florentine branch of the Mazzinian party a statement that she wished to undertake a special work of a political nature, which would for a few months prevent her from performing the functions for which she had up till now been responsible to the party.

Some surprise was felt at this announcement, but the committee raised no objection; she had been known in the party for several years as a person whose judgment might be trusted; and the members agreed that if Signora Bolla took an unexpected step, she probably had good reasons for it.

To Martini she said frankly that she had undertaken to help the Gadfly with some "frontier work." She had stipulated for the right to tell her old friend this much, in order that there might be no misunderstanding or painful sense of doubt and mystery between them. It seemed to her that she owed him this proof of confidence. He made no comment when she told him; but she saw, with-

out knowing why, that the news had wounded him deeply.

They were sitting on the terrace of her lodging, looking out over the red roofs to Fiesole. After a long silence, Martini rose and began tramping up and down with his hands in his pockets, whistling to himself—a sure sign with him of mental agitation. She sat looking at him for a little while.

“Cesare, you are worried about this affair,” she said at last. “I am very sorry you feel so despondent over it; but I could decide only as seemed right to me.”

“It is not the affair,” he answered, sullenly; “I know nothing about it, and it probably is all right, once you have consented to go into it. It’s the *man* I distrust.”

“I think you misunderstand him; I did till I got to know him better. He is far from perfect, but there is much more good in him than you think.”

“Very likely.” For a moment he tramped to and fro in silence, then suddenly stopped beside her.

“Gemma, give it up! Give it up before it is too late! Don’t let that man drag you into things you will repent afterwards.”

“Cesare,” she said gently, “you are not thinking what you are saying. No one is dragging me into anything. I have made this decision of my own will, after thinking the matter well over alone. You have a personal dislike to Rivarez, I know; but we are talking of politics now, not of persons.”

“Madonna! Give it up! That man is dangerous; he is secret, and cruel, and unscrupulous—and he is in love with you!”

She drew back.

“Cesare, how can you get such fancies into your head?”

“He is in love with you,” Martini repeated. “Keep clear of him, Madonna!”

“Dear Cesare, I can’t keep clear of him; and I can’t explain to you why. We are tied together—not by any wish or doing of our own.”

“If you are tied, there is nothing more to say,” Martini answered wearily.

He went away, saying that he was busy, and tramped for hours up and down the muddy streets. The world looked very black to him that evening. One poor ewe-lamb—and this slippery creature had stepped in and stolen it away.

CHAPTER X.

TOWARDS the middle of February the Gadfly went to Leghorn. Gemma had introduced him to a young Englishman there, a shipping-agent of liberal views, whom she and her husband had known in England. He had on several occasions performed little services for the Florentine radicals: had lent money to meet an unforeseen emergency, had allowed his business address to be used for the party’s letters, etc.; but always through Gemma’s mediumship, and as a private friend of hers. She was, therefore, according to party etiquette, free to make use of the connexion in any way that might seem good to her. Whether any use could be got out of it was quite another question. To ask a friendly sympathizer to lend his address for letters from Sicily or to keep a few documents in a corner of his counting-house