

ment's intentions? Is Rivarez likely to be tried in Brisighella or taken in to Ravenna?"

"That we don't know. Ravenna, of course, is the chief town of the Legation and by law cases of importance can be tried only there, in the Tribunal of First Instance. But law doesn't count for much in the Four Legations; it depends on the personal fancy of anybody who happens to be in power."

"They won't take him in to Ravenna," Michele interposed.

"What makes you think so?"

"I am sure of it. Colonel Ferrari, the military Governor at Brisighella, is uncle to the officer that Rivarez wounded; he's a vindictive sort of brute and won't give up a chance to spite an enemy."

"You think he will try to keep Rivarez here?"

"I think he will try to get him hanged."

Martini glanced quickly at Gemma. She was very pale, but her face had not changed at the words. Evidently the idea was no new one to her.

"He can hardly do that without some formality," she said quietly; "but he might possibly get up a court-martial on some pretext or other, and justify himself afterwards by saying that the peace of the town required it."

"But what about the Cardinal? Would he consent to things of that kind?"

"He has no jurisdiction in military affairs."

"No, but he has great influence. Surely the Governor would not venture on such a step without his consent?"

"He'll never get that," Marcone interrupted. "Montanelli was always against the military commissions, and everything of the kind. So long as they keep him in Brisighella nothing

serious can happen; the Cardinal will always take the part of any prisoner. What I am afraid of is their taking him to Ravenna. Once there, he's lost."

"We shouldn't let him get there," said Michele. "We could manage a rescue on the road; but to get him out of the fortress here is another matter."

"I think," said Gemma; "that it would be quite useless to wait for the chance of his being transferred to Ravenna. We must make the attempt at Brisighella, and we have no time to lose. Cesare, you and I had better go over the plan of the fortress together, and see whether we can think out anything. I have an idea in my head, but I can't get over one point."

"Come, Marcone," said Michele, rising; "we will leave them to think out their scheme. I have to go across to Fognano this afternoon, and I want you to come with me. Vincenzo hasn't sent those cartridges, and they ought to have been here yesterday."

When the two men had gone, Martini went up to Gemma and silently held out his hand. She let her fingers lie in his for a moment.

"You were always a good friend, Cesare," she said at last; "and a very present help in trouble. And now let us discuss plans."

CHAPTER III.

"AND I once more most earnestly assure Your Eminence that your refusal is endangering the peace of the town."

The Governor tried to preserve the respectful

tone due to a high dignitary of the Church; but there was audible irritation in his voice. His liver was out of order, his wife was running up heavy bills, and his temper had been sorely tried during the last three weeks. A sullen, disaffected populace, whose dangerous mood grew daily more apparent; a district honeycombed with plots and bristling with hidden weapons; an inefficient garrison, of whose loyalty he was more than doubtful, and a Cardinal whom he had pathetically described to his adjutant as the "incarnation of immaculate pig-headedness," had already reduced him to the verge of desperation. Now he was saddled with the Gadfly, an animated quintessence of the spirit of mischief.

Having begun by disabling both the Governor's favourite nephew and his most valuable spy, the "crooked Spanish devil" had followed up his exploits in the market-place by suborning the guards, browbeating the interrogating officers, and "turning the prison into a bear-garden." He had now been three weeks in the fortress, and the authorities of Brisighella were heartily sick of their bargain. They had subjected him to interrogation upon interrogation; and after employing, to obtain admissions from him, every device of threat, persuasion, and stratagem which their ingenuity could suggest, remained just as wise as on the day of his capture. They had begun to realize that it would perhaps have been better to send him into Ravenna at once. It was, however, too late to rectify the mistake. The Governor, when sending in to the Legate his report of the arrest, had begged, as a special favour, permission to superintend personally the investigation of this case; and, his request having been graciously acceded to, he

could not now withdraw without a humiliating confession that he was overmatched.

The idea of settling the difficulty by a court-martial had, as Gemma and Michele had foreseen, presented itself to him as the only satisfactory solution; and Cardinal Montanelli's stubborn refusal to countenance this was the last drop which made the cup of his vexations overflow.

"I think," he said, "that if Your Eminence knew what I and my assistants have put up with from this man you would feel differently about the matter. I fully understand and respect the conscientious objection to irregularities in judicial proceedings; but this is an exceptional case and calls for exceptional measures."

"There is no case," Montanelli answered, "which calls for injustice; and to condemn a civilian by the judgment of a secret military tribunal is both unjust and illegal."

"The case amounts to this, Your Eminence: The prisoner is manifestly guilty of several capital crimes. He joined the infamous attempt of Savigno, and the military commission nominated by Monsignor Spinola would certainly have had him shot or sent to the galleys then, had he not succeeded in escaping to Tuscany. Since that time he has never ceased plotting. He is known to be an influential member of one of the most pestilent secret societies in the country. He is gravely suspected of having consented to, if not inspired, the assassination of no less than three confidential police agents. He has been caught—one might almost say—in the act of smuggling firearms into the Legation. He has offered armed resistance to authority and seriously wounded two officials in the discharge of their duty, and he is

now a standing menace to the peace and order of the town. Surely, in such a case, a court-martial is justifiable."

"Whatever the man has done," Montanelli replied, "he has the right to be judged according to law."

"The ordinary course of law involves delay, Your Eminence, and in this case every moment is precious. Besides everything else, I am in constant terror of his escaping."

"If there is any danger of that, it rests with you to guard him more closely."

"I do my best, Your Eminence, but I am dependent upon the prison staff, and the man seems to have bewitched them all. I have changed the guard four times within three weeks; I have punished the soldiers till I am tired of it, and nothing is of any use. I can't prevent their carrying letters backwards and forwards. The fools are in love with him as if he were a woman."

"That is very curious. There must be something remarkable about him."

"There's a remarkable amount of devilry—I beg pardon, Your Eminence, but really this man is enough to try the patience of a saint. It's hardly credible, but I have to conduct all the interrogations myself, for the regular officer cannot stand it any longer."

"How is that?"

"It's difficult to explain, Your Eminence, but you would understand if you had once heard the way he goes on. One might think the interrogating officer were the criminal and he the judge."

"But what is there so terrible that he can do? He can refuse to answer your questions, of course; but he has no weapon except silence."

"And a tongue like a razor. We are all mortal, Your Eminence, and most of us have made mistakes in our time that we don't want published on the house-tops. That's only human nature, and it's hard on a man to have his little slips of twenty years ago raked up and thrown in his teeth——"

"Has Rivarez brought up some personal secret of the interrogating officer?"

"Well, really—the poor fellow got into debt when he was a cavalry officer, and borrowed a little sum from the regimental funds——"

"Stole public money that had been intrusted to him, in fact?"

"Of course it was very wrong, Your Eminence; but his friends paid it back at once, and the affair was hushed up,—he comes of a good family,—and ever since then he has been irreproachable. How Rivarez found out about it I can't conceive; but the first thing he did at interrogation was to bring up this old scandal—before the subaltern, too! And with as innocent a face as if he were saying his prayers! Of course the story's all over the Legation by now. If Your Eminence would only be present at one of the interrogations, I am sure you would realize—— He needn't know anything about it. You might overhear him from——"

Montanelli turned round and looked at the Governor with an expression which his face did not often wear.

"I am a minister of religion," he said; "not a police-spy; and eavesdropping forms no part of my professional duties."

"I—I didn't mean to give offence——"

"I think we shall not get any good out of

discussing this question further. If you will send the prisoner here, I will have a talk with him."

"I venture very respectfully to advise Your Eminence not to attempt it. The man is perfectly incorrigible. It would be both safer and wiser to overstep the letter of the law for this once, and get rid of him before he does any more mischief. It is with great diffidence that I venture to press the point after what Your Eminence has said; but after all I am responsible to Monsignor the Legate for the order of the town——"

"And I," Montanelli interrupted, "am responsible to God and His Holiness that there shall be no underhand dealing in my diocese. Since you press me in the matter, colonel, I take my stand upon my privilege as Cardinal. I will not allow a secret court-martial in this town in peace-time. I will receive the prisoner here, and alone, at ten to-morrow morning."

"As Your Eminence pleases," the Governor replied with sulky respectfulness; and went away, grumbling to himself: "They're about a pair, as far as obstinacy goes."

He told no one of the approaching interview till it was actually time to knock off the prisoner's chains and start for the palace. It was quite enough, as he remarked to his wounded nephew, to have this Most Eminent son of Balaam's ass laying down the law, without running any risk of the soldiers plotting with Rivarez and his friends to effect an escape on the way.

When the Gadfly, strongly guarded, entered the room where Montanelli was writing at a table covered with papers, a sudden recollection came over him, of a hot midsummer afternoon when he

had sat turning over manuscript sermons in a study much like this. The shutters had been closed, as they were here, to keep out the heat, and a fruitseller's voice outside had called: "Fragola! Fragola!"

He shook the hair angrily back from his eyes and set his mouth in a smile.

Montanelli looked up from his papers.

"You can wait in the hall," he said to the guards.

"May it please Your Eminence," began the sergeant, in a lowered voice and with evident nervousness, "the colonel thinks that this prisoner is dangerous and that it would be better——"

A sudden flash came into Montanelli's eyes.

"You can wait in the hall," he repeated quietly; and the sergeant, saluting and stammering excuses with a frightened face, left the room with his men.

"Sit down, please," said the Cardinal, when the door was shut. The Gadfly obeyed in silence.

"Signor Rivarez," Montanelli began after a pause, "I wish to ask you a few questions, and shall be very much obliged to you if you will answer them."

The Gadfly smiled. "My ch-ch-chief occupation at p-p-present is to be asked questions."

"And—not to answer them? So I have heard; but those questions are put by officials who are investigating your case and whose duty is to use your answers as evidence."

"And th-those of Your Eminence?" There was a covert insult in the tone more than in the words, and the Cardinal understood it at once; but his face did not lose its grave sweetness of expression.

"Mine," he said, "whether you answer them or not, will remain between you and me. If they should trench upon your political secrets, of course you will not answer. Otherwise, though we are complete strangers to each other, I hope that you will do so, as a personal favour to me."

"I am ent-t-tirely at the service of Your Eminence." He said it with a little bow, and a face that would have taken the heart to ask favours out of the daughters of the horse-leech.

"First, then, you are said to have been smuggling firearms into this district. What are they wanted for?"

"T-t-to k-k-kill rats with."

"That is a terrible answer. Are all your fellow-men rats in your eyes if they cannot think as you do?"

"S-s-some of them."

Montanelli leaned back in his chair and looked at him in silence for a little while.

"What is that on your hand?" he asked suddenly.

The Gadfly glanced at his left hand. "Old m-m-marks from the teeth of some of the rats."

"Excuse me; I was speaking of the other hand. That is a fresh hurt."

The slender, flexible right hand was badly cut and grazed. The Gadfly held it up. The wrist was swollen, and across it ran a deep and long black bruise.

"It is a m-m-mere trifle, as you see," he said. "When I was arrested the other day,—thanks to Your Eminence,"—he made another little bow,— "one of the soldiers stamped on it."

Montanelli took the wrist and examined it closely. "How does it come to be in such a state

now, after three weeks?" he asked. "It is all inflamed."

"Possibly the p-p-pressure of the iron has not done it much good."

The Cardinal looked up with a frown.

"Have they been putting irons on a fresh wound?"

"N-n-naturally, Your Eminence; that is what fresh wounds are for. Old wounds are not much use. They will only ache; you c-c-can't make them burn properly."

Montanelli looked at him again in the same close, scrutinizing way; then rose and opened a drawer full of surgical appliances.

"Give me the hand," he said.

The Gadfly, with a face as hard as beaten iron, held out the hand, and Montanelli, after bathing the injured place, gently bandaged it. Evidently he was accustomed to such work.

"I will speak about the irons," he said. "And now I want to ask you another question: What do you propose to do?"

"Th-th-that is very simply answered, Your Eminence. To escape if I can, and if I can't, to die."

"Why 'to die'?"

"Because if the Governor doesn't succeed in getting me shot, I shall be sent to the galleys, and for me that c-c-comes to the same thing. I have not got the health to live through it."

Montanelli rested his arm on the table and pondered silently. The Gadfly did not disturb him. He was leaning back with half-shut eyes, lazily enjoying the delicious physical sensation of relief from the chains.

"Supposing," Montanelli began again, "that

you were to succeed in escaping; what should you do with your life?"

"I have already told Your Eminence; I should k-k-kill rats."

"You would kill rats. That is to say, that if I were to let you escape from here now,—supposing I had the power to do so,—you would use your freedom to foster violence and bloodshed instead of preventing them?"

The Gadfly raised his eyes to the crucifix on the wall. "'Not peace, but a sword';—at least I should be in good company. For my own part, though, I prefer pistols."

"Signor Rivarez," said the Cardinal with unruffled composure, "I have not insulted you as yet, or spoken slightingly of your beliefs or friends. May I not expect the same courtesy from you, or do you wish me to suppose that an atheist cannot be a gentleman?"

"Ah, I q-uite forgot. Your Eminence places courtesy high among the Christian virtues. I remember your sermon in Florence, on the occasion of my c-controversy with your anonymous defender."

"That is one of the subjects about which I wished to speak to you. Would you mind explaining to me the reason of the peculiar bitterness you seem to feel against me? If you have simply picked me out as a convenient target, that is another matter. Your methods of political controversy are your own affair, and we are not discussing politics now. But I fancied at the time that there was some personal animosity towards me; and if so, I should be glad to know whether I have ever done you wrong or in any way given you cause for such a feeling."

Ever done him wrong! The Gadfly put up the bandaged hand to his throat. "I must refer Your Eminence to Shakspeare," he said with a little laugh. "It's as with the man who can't endure a harmless, necessary cat. My antipathy is a priest. The sight of the cassock makes my t-t-teeth ache."

"Oh, if it is only that——" Montanelli dismissed the subject with an indifferent gesture. "Still," he added, "abuse is one thing and perversion of fact is another. When you stated, in answer to my sermon, that I knew the identity of the anonymous writer, you made a mistake,—I do not accuse you of wilful falsehood,—and stated what was untrue. I am to this day quite ignorant of his name."

The Gadfly put his head on one side, like an intelligent robin, looked at him for a moment gravely, then suddenly threw himself back and burst into a peal of laughter.

"S-s-sancta simplicitas! Oh, you sweet, innocent, Arcadian people—and you never guessed! You n-never saw the cloven hoof?"

Montanelli stood up. "Am I to understand, Signor Rivarez, that you wrote both sides of the controversy yourself?"

"It was a shame, I know," the Gadfly answered, looking up with wide, innocent blue eyes. "And you s-s-swallowed everything whole; just as if it had been an oyster. It was very wrong; but oh, it w-w-was so funny!"

Montanelli bit his lip and sat down again. He had realized from the first that the Gadfly was trying to make him lose his temper, and had resolved to keep it whatever happened; but he was beginning to find excuses for the Governor's exaspera-

tion. A man who had been spending two hours a day for the last three weeks in interrogating the Gadfly might be pardoned an occasional swear-word.

"We will drop that subject," he said quietly. "What I wanted to see you for particularly is this: My position here as Cardinal gives me some voice, if I choose to claim my privilege, in the question of what is to be done with you. The only use to which I should ever put such a privilege would be to interfere in case of any violence to you which was not necessary to prevent you from doing violence to others. I sent for you, therefore, partly in order to ask whether you have anything to complain of,—I will see about the irons; but perhaps there is something else,—and partly because I felt it right, before giving my opinion, to see for myself what sort of man you are."

"I have nothing to complain of, Your Eminence. 'A la guerre comme à la guerre.' I am not a schoolboy, to expect any government to pat me on the head for s-s-smuggling firearms onto its territory. It's only natural that they should hit as hard as they can. As for what sort of man I am, you have had a romantic confession of my sins once. Is not that enough; or w-w-would you like me to begin again?"

"I don't understand you," Montanelli said coldly, taking up a pencil and twisting it between his fingers.

"Surely Your Eminence has not forgotten old Diego, the pilgrim?" He suddenly changed his voice and began to speak as Diego: "I am a miserable sinner——"

The pencil snapped in Montanelli's hand. "That is too much!" he said.

The Gadfly leaned his head back with a soft little laugh, and sat watching while the Cardinal paced silently up and down the room.

"Signor Rivarez," said Montanelli, stopping at last in front of him, "you have done a thing to me that a man who was born of a woman should hesitate to do to his worst enemy. You have stolen in upon my private grief and have made for yourself a mock and a jest out of the sorrow of a fellow-man. I once more beg you to tell me: Have I ever done you wrong? And if not, why have you played this heartless trick on me?"

The Gadfly, leaning back against the chair-cushions, looked up with his subtle, chilling, inscrutable smile.

"It am-m-mused me, Your Eminence; you took it all so much to heart, and it rem-m-minded me—a little bit—of a variety show——"

Montanelli, white to the very lips, turned away and rang the bell.

"You can take back the prisoner," he said when the guards came in.

After they had gone he sat down at the table, still trembling with unaccustomed indignation, and took up a pile of reports which had been sent in to him by the parish priests of his diocese.

Presently he pushed them away, and, leaning on the table, hid his face in both hands. The Gadfly seemed to have left some terrible shadow of himself, some ghostly trail of his personality, to haunt the room; and Montanelli sat trembling and cowering, not daring to look up lest he should see the phantom presence that he knew was not there. The spectre hardly amounted to a hallucination. It was a mere fancy of overwrought nerves; but he was seized with an unutterable dread of its

shadowy presence—of the wounded hand, the smiling, cruel mouth, the mysterious eyes, like deep sea water—

He shook off the fancy and settled to his work. All day long he had scarcely a free moment, and the thing did not trouble him; but going into his bedroom late at night, he stopped on the threshold with a sudden shock of fear. What if he should see it in a dream? He recovered himself immediately and knelt down before the crucifix to pray.

But he lay awake the whole night through.

CHAPTER IV.

MONTANELLI'S anger did not make him neglectful of his promise. He protested so emphatically against the manner in which the Gadfly had been chained that the unfortunate Governor, who by now was at his wit's end, knocked off all the fetters in the recklessness of despair. "How am I to know," he grumbled to the adjutant, "what His Eminence will object to next? If he calls a simple pair of handcuffs 'cruelty,' he'll be exclaiming against the window-bars presently, or wanting me to feed Rivarez on oysters and truffles. In my young days malefactors were malefactors and were treated accordingly, and nobody thought a traitor any better than a thief. But it's the fashion to be seditious nowadays; and His Eminence seems inclined to encourage all the scoundrels in the country."

"I don't see what business he has got to interfere at all," the adjutant remarked. "He is not

a Legate and has no authority in civil and military affairs. By law——"

"What is the use of talking about law? You can't expect anyone to respect laws after the Holy Father has opened the prisons and turned the whole crew of Liberal scamps loose on us! It's a positive infatuation! Of course Monsignor Montanelli will give himself airs; he was quiet enough under His Holiness the late Pope, but he's cock of the walk now. He has jumped into favour all at once and can do as he pleases. How am I to oppose him? He may have secret authorization from the Vatican, for all I know. Everything's topsy-turvy now; you can't tell from day to day what may happen next. In the good old times one knew what to be at, but nowadays——"

The Governor shook his head ruefully. A world in which Cardinals troubled themselves over trifles of prison discipline and talked about the "rights" of political offenders was a world that was growing too complex for him.

The Gadfly, for his part, had returned to the fortress in a state of nervous excitement bordering on hysteria. The meeting with Montanelli had strained his endurance almost to breaking-point; and his final brutality about the variety show had been uttered in sheer desperation, merely to cut short an interview which, in another five minutes, would have ended in tears.

Called up for interrogation in the afternoon of the same day, he did nothing but go into convulsions of laughter at every question put to him; and when the Governor, worried out of all patience, lost his temper and began to swear, he only laughed more immoderately than ever. The unlucky Governor fumed and stormed and threat-