

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-



ened his refractory prisoner with impossible punishments; but finally came, as James Burton had come long ago, to the conclusion that it was mere waste of breath and temper to argue with a person in so unreasonable a state of mind.

The Gadfly was once more taken back to his cell; and there lay down upon the pallet, in the mood of black and hopeless depression which always succeeded to his boisterous fits. He lay till evening without moving, without even thinking; he had passed, after the vehement emotion of the morning, into a strange, half-aphathetic state, in which his own misery was hardly more to him than a dull and mechanical weight, pressing on some wooden thing that had forgotten to be a soul. In truth, it was of little consequence how all ended; the one thing that mattered to any sentient being was to be spared unbearable pain, and whether the relief came from altered conditions or from the deadening of the power to feel, was a question of no moment. Perhaps he would succeed in escaping; perhaps they would kill him; in any case he should never see the Padre again, and it was all vanity and vexation of spirit.

One of the warders brought in supper, and the Gadfly looked up with heavy-eyed indifference.

"What time is it?"

"Six o'clock. Your supper, sir."

He looked with disgust at the stale, foul-smelling, half-cold mess, and turned his head away. He was feeling bodily ill as well as depressed; and the sight of the food sickened him.

"You will be ill if you don't eat," said the soldier hurriedly. "Take a bit of bread, anyway; it 'll do you good."

The man spoke with a curious earnestness of

tone, lifting a piece of sodden bread from the plate and putting it down again. All the conspirator awoke in the Gadfly; he had guessed at once that there was something hidden in the bread.

"You can leave it; I'll eat a bit by and by," he said carelessly. The door was open, and he knew that the sergeant on the stairs could hear every word spoken between them.

When the door was locked on him again, and he had satisfied himself that no one was watching at the spy-hole, he took up the piece of bread and carefully crumbled it away. In the middle was the thing he had expected, a bundle of small files. It was wrapped in a bit of paper, on which a few words were written. He smoothed the paper out carefully and carried it to what little light there was. The writing was crowded into so narrow a space, and on such thin paper, that it was very difficult to read.

"The door is unlocked, and there is no moon. Get the filing done as fast as possible, and come by the passage between two and three. We are quite ready and may not have another chance."

He crushed the paper feverishly in his hand. All the preparations were ready, then, and he had only to file the window bars; how lucky it was that the chains were off! He need not stop about filing them. How many bars were there? Two, four; and each must be filed in two places: eight. Oh, he could manage that in the course of the night if he made haste— How had Gemma and Martini contrived to get everything ready so quickly—disguises, passports, hiding-places? They must have worked like cart-horses to do



it— And it was her plan that had been adopted after all. He laughed a little to himself at his own foolishness; as if it mattered whether the plan was hers or not, once it was a good one! And yet he could not help being glad that it was she who had struck on the idea of his utilizing the subterranean passage, instead of letting himself down by a rope-ladder, as the smugglers had at first suggested. Hers was the more complex and difficult plan, but did not involve, as the other did, a risk to the life of the sentinel on duty outside the east wall. Therefore, when the two schemes had been laid before him, he had unhesitatingly chosen Gemma's.

The arrangement was that the friendly guard who went by the nickname of "The Cricket" should seize the first opportunity of unlocking, without the knowledge of his fellows, the iron gate leading from the courtyard into the subterranean passage underneath the ramparts, and should then replace the key on its nail in the guard-room. The Gadfly, on receiving information of this, was to file through the bars of his window, tear his shirt into strips and plait them into a rope, by means of which he could let himself down on to the broad east wall of the courtyard. Along this wall he was to creep on hands and knees while the sentinel was looking in the opposite direction, lying flat upon the masonry whenever the man turned towards him. At the southeast corner was a half-ruined turret. It was upheld, to some extent, by a thick growth of ivy; but great masses of crumbling stone had fallen inward and lay in the courtyard, heaped against the wall. From this turret he was to climb down by the ivy and the heaps of stone into the courtyard; and, softly opening the

unlocked gate, to make his way along the passage to a subterranean tunnel communicating with it. Centuries ago this tunnel had formed a secret corridor between the fortress and a tower on the neighbouring hill; now it was quite disused and blocked in many places by the falling in of the rocks. No one but the smugglers knew of a certain carefully-hidden hole in the mountain-side which they had bored through to the tunnel; no one suspected that stores of forbidden merchandise were often kept, for weeks together, under the very ramparts of the fortress itself, while the customs-officers were vainly searching the houses of the sullen, wrathful-eyed mountaineers. At this hole the Gadfly was to creep out on to the hillside, and make his way in the dark to a lonely spot where Martini and a smuggler would be waiting for him. The one great difficulty was that opportunities to unlock the gate after the evening patrol did not occur every night, and the descent from the window could not be made in very clear weather without too great a risk of being observed by the sentinel. Now that there was really a fair chance of success, it must not be missed.

He sat down and began to eat some of the bread. It at least did not disgust him like the rest of the prison food, and he must eat something to keep up his strength.

He had better lie down a bit, too, and try to get a little sleep; it would not be safe to begin filing before ten o'clock, and he would have a hard night's work.

And so, after all, the Padre had been thinking of letting him escape! That was like the Padre. But he, for his part, would never consent to it.



Anything rather than that! If he escaped, it should be his own doing and that of his comrades; he would have no favours from priests.

How hot it was! Surely it must be going to thunder; the air was so close and oppressive. He moved restlessly on the pallet and put the bandaged right hand behind his head for a pillow; then drew it away again. How it burned and throbbed! And all the old wounds were beginning to ache, with a dull, faint persistence. What was the matter with them? Oh, absurd! It was only the thundery weather. He would go to sleep and get a little rest before beginning his filing.

Eight bars, and all so thick and strong! How many more were there left to file? Surely not many. He must have been filing for hours,—interminable hours—yes, of course, that was what made his arm ache— And how it ached; right through to the very bone! But it could hardly be the filing that made his side ache so; and the throbbing, burning pain in the lame leg—was that from filing?

He started up. No, he had not been asleep; he had been dreaming with open eyes—dreaming of filing, and it was all still to do. There stood the window-bars, untouched, strong and firm as ever. And there was ten striking from the clock-tower in the distance. He must get to work.

He looked through the spy-hole, and, seeing that no one was watching, took one of the files from his breast.

No, there was nothing the matter with him—nothing! It was all imagination. The pain in his side was indigestion, or a chill, or some such

thing; not much wonder, after three weeks of this insufferable prison food and air. As for the aching and throbbing all over, it was partly nervous trouble and partly want of exercise. Yes, that was it, no doubt; want of exercise. How absurd not to have thought of that before!

He would sit down a little bit, though, and let it pass before he got to work. It would be sure to go over in a minute or two.

To sit still was worse than all. When he sat still he was at its mercy, and his face grew gray with fear. No, he must get up and set to work, and shake it off. It should depend upon his will to feel or not to feel; and he would not feel, he would force it back.

He stood up again and spoke to himself, aloud and distinctly:

“I am not ill; I have no time to be ill. I have those bars to file, and I am not going to be ill.”

Then he began to file.

A quarter-past ten—half-past ten—a quarter to eleven— He filed and filed, and every grating scrape of the iron was as though someone were filing on his body and brain. “I wonder which will be filed through first,” he said to himself with a little laugh; “I or the bars?” And he set his teeth and went on filing.

Half-past eleven. He was still filing, though the hand was stiff and swollen and would hardly grasp the tool. No, he dared not stop to rest; if he once put the horrible thing down he should never have the courage to begin again.

The sentinel moved outside the door, and the butt end of his carbine scratched against the lintel. The Gadfly stopped and looked round, the file still in his lifted hand. Was he discovered?