

could possibly come to. 'If thy r-right hand offend thee,' etc. I have n-not the honour to be the right hand of Your Eminence, and I have offended you; the c-c-conclusion is plain. Couldn't you tell me that without so much preamble?"

The Gadfly spoke with languid indifference and contempt, like a man weary of the whole subject.

"Well?" he added after a little pause. "Was that the decision, Your Eminence?"

"No."

The Gadfly shifted his position, putting both hands behind his head, and looked at Montanelli with half-shut eyes. The Cardinal, with his head sunk down as in deep thought, was softly beating one hand on the arm of his chair. Ah, that old, familiar gesture!

"I have decided," he said, raising his head at last, "to do, I suppose, an utterly unprecedented thing. When I heard that you had asked to see me, I resolved to come here and tell you everything, as I have done, and to place the matter in your own hands."

"In—my hands?"

"Signor Rivarez, I have not come to you as cardinal, or as bishop, or as judge; I have come to you as one man to another. I do not ask you to tell me whether you know of any such scheme as the colonel apprehends. I understand quite well that, if you do, it is your secret and you will not tell it. But I do ask you to put yourself in my place. I am old, and, no doubt, have not much longer to live. I would go down to my grave without blood on my hands."

"Is there none on them as yet, Your Eminence?"

Montanelli grew a shade paler, but went on quietly:

"All my life I have opposed repressive measures and cruelty wherever I have met with them. I have always disapproved of capital punishment in all its forms; I have protested earnestly and repeatedly against the military commissions in the last reign, and have been out of favour on account of doing so. Up till now such influence and power as I have possessed have always been employed on the side of mercy. I ask you to believe me, at least, that I am speaking the truth. Now, I am placed in this dilemma. By refusing, I am exposing the town to the danger of riots and all their consequences; and this to save the life of a man who blasphemes against my religion, who has slandered and wronged and insulted me personally (though that is comparatively a trifle), and who, as I firmly believe, will put that life to a bad use when it is given to him. But—it is to save a man's life."

He paused a moment, and went on again:

"Signor Rivarez, everything that I know of your career seems to me bad and mischievous; and I have long believed you to be reckless and violent and unscrupulous. To some extent I hold that opinion of you still. But during this last fortnight you have shown me that you are a brave man and that you can be faithful to your friends. You have made the soldiers love and admire you, too; and not every man could have done that. I think that perhaps I have misjudged you, and that there is in you something better than what you show outside. To that better self in you I appeal, and solemnly entreat you, on your conscience, to tell me truthfully—in my place, what would you do?"

A long silence followed; then the Gadfly looked up.

"At least, I would decide my own actions for myself, and take the consequences of them. I would not come sneaking to other people, in the cowardly Christian way, asking them to solve my problems for me!"

The onslaught was so sudden, and its extraordinary vehemence and passion were in such startling contrast to the languid affectation of a moment before, that it was as though he had thrown off a mask.

"We atheists," he went on fiercely, "understand that if a man has a thing to bear, he must bear it as best he can; and if he sinks under it—why, so much the worse for him. But a Christian comes whining to his God, or his saints; or, if they won't help him, to his enemies—he can always find a back to shift his burdens on to. Isn't there a rule to go by in your Bible, or your Missal, or any of your canting theology books, that you must come to me to tell you what to do? Heavens and earth, man! Haven't I enough as it is, without your laying your responsibilities on my shoulders? Go back to your Jesus; he expected the uttermost farthing, and you'd better do the same. After all, you'll only be killing an atheist—a man who boggles over 'shibboleth'; and that's no great crime, surely!"

He broke off, panting for breath, and then burst out again:

"And *you* to talk of cruelty! Why, that p-p-pudding-headed ass couldn't hurt me as much as you do if he tried for a year; he hasn't got the brains. All he can think of is to pull a strap tight, and when he can't get it any tighter he's at the end of his resources. Any fool can do that! But you—— 'Sign your own death sentence, please;

I'm too tender-hearted to do it myself.' Oh! it would take a Christian to hit on that—a gentle, compassionate Christian, that turns pale at the sight of a strap pulled too tight! I might have known when you came in, like an angel of mercy—so shocked at the colonel's 'barbarity'—that the real thing was going to begin! Why do you look at me that way? Consent, man, of course, and go home to your dinner; the thing's not worth all this fuss. Tell your colonel he can have me shot, or hanged, or whatever comes handiest—roasted alive, if it's any amusement to him—and be done with it!"

The Gadfly was hardly recognizable; he was beside himself with rage and desperation, panting and quivering, his eyes glittering with green reflections like the eyes of an angry cat.

Montanelli had risen, and was looking down at him silently. He did not understand the drift of the frenzied reproaches, but he understood out of what extremity they were uttered; and, understanding that, forgave all past insults.

"Hush!" he said. "I did not want to hurt you so. Indeed, I never meant to shift my burden on to you, who have too much already. I have never consciously done that to any living creature——"

"It's a lie!" the Gadfly cried out with blazing eyes. "And the bishopric?"

"The—bishopric?"

"Ah! you've forgotten that? It's so easy to forget! 'If you wish it, Arthur, I will say I cannot go. I was to decide your life for you—I, at nineteen! If it weren't so hideous, it would be funny.'"

"Stop!" Montanelli put up both hands to his

head with a desperate cry. He let them fall again, and walked slowly away to the window. There he sat down on the sill, resting one arm on the bars, and pressing his forehead against it. The Gadfly lay and watched him, trembling.

Presently Montanelli rose and came back, with lips as pale as ashes.

"I am very sorry," he said, struggling piteously to keep up his usual quiet manner, "but I must go home. I—am not quite well."

He was shivering as if with ague. All the Gadfly's fury broke down.

"Padre, can't you see——"

Montanelli shrank away, and stood still.

"Only not that!" he whispered at last. "My God, anything but that! If I am going mad——"

The Gadfly raised himself on one arm, and took the shaking hands in his.

"Padre, will you never understand that I am not really drowned?"

The hands grew suddenly cold and stiff. For a moment everything was dead with silence, and then Montanelli knelt down and hid his face on the Gadfly's breast.

When he raised his head the sun had set, and the red glow was dying in the west. They had forgotten time and place, and life and death; they had forgotten, even, that they were enemies.

"Arthur," Montanelli whispered, "are you real? Have you come back to me from the dead?"

"From the dead——" the Gadfly repeated, shivering. He was lying with his head on Montanelli's arm, as a sick child might lie in its mother's embrace.

"You have come back—you have come back at last!"

The Gadfly sighed heavily. "Yes," he said; "and you have to fight me, or to kill me."

"Oh, hush, carino! What is all that now? We have been like two children lost in the dark, mistaking one another for phantoms. Now we have found each other, and have come out into the light. My poor boy, how changed you are—how changed you are! You look as if all the ocean of the world's misery had passed over your head—you that used to be so full of the joy of life! Arthur, is it really you? I have dreamed so often that you had come back to me; and then have waked and seen the outer darkness staring in upon an empty place. How can I know I shall not wake again and find it all a dream? Give me something tangible—tell me how it all happened."

"It happened simply enough. I hid on a goods vessel, as stowaway, and got out to South America."

"And there?"

"There I—lived, if you like to call it so, till—oh, I have seen something else besides theological seminaries since you used to teach me philosophy! You say you have dreamed of me—yes, and much! You say you have dreamed of me—yes, and I of you——"

He broke off, shuddering.

"Once," he began again abruptly, "I was working at a mine in Ecuador——"

"Not as a miner?"

"No, as a miner's fag—odd-jobbing with the coolies. We had a barrack to sleep in at the pit's mouth; and one night—I had been ill, the same

as lately, and carrying stones in the blazing sun—I must have got light-headed, for I saw you come in at the door-way. You were holding a crucifix like that one on the wall. You were praying, and brushed past me without turning. I cried out to you to help me—to give me poison or a knife—something to put an end to it all before I went mad. And you—ah——!”

He drew one hand across his eyes. Montanelli was still clasping the other.

“I saw in your face that you had heard, but you never looked round; you went on with your prayers. When you had finished, and kissed the crucifix, you glanced round and whispered: ‘I am very sorry for you, Arthur; but I daren’t show it; He would be angry.’ And I looked at Him, and the wooden image was laughing.

“Then, when I came to my senses, and saw the barrack and the coolies with their leprosy, I understood. I saw that you care more to curry favour with that devilish God of yours than to save me from any hell. And I have remembered that. I forgot just now when you touched me; I—have been ill, and I used to love you once. But there can be nothing between us but war, and war, and war. What do you want to hold my hand for? Can’t you see that while you believe in your Jesus we can’t be anything but enemies?”

Montanelli bent his head and kissed the mutilated hand.

“Arthur, how can I help believing in Him? If I have kept my faith through all these frightful years, how can I ever doubt Him any more, now that He has given you back to me? Remember, I thought I had killed you.”

“You have that still to do.”

“Arthur!” It was a cry of actual terror; but the Gadfly went on, unheeding:

“Let us be honest, whatever we do, and not shilly-shally. You and I stand on two sides of a pit, and it’s hopeless trying to join hands across it. If you have decided that you can’t, or won’t, give up that thing”—he glanced again at the crucifix on the wall—“you must consent to what the colonel——”

“Consent! My God—consent—Arthur, but I love you!”

The Gadfly’s face contracted fearfully.

“Which do you love best, me or that thing?”

Montanelli slowly rose. The very soul in him withered with dread, and he seemed to shrivel up bodily, and to grow feeble, and old, and wilted, like a leaf that the frost has touched. He had awaked out of his dream, and the outer darkness was staring in upon an empty place.

“Arthur, have just a little mercy on me——”

“How much had you for me when your lies drove me out to be slave to the blacks on the sugar-plantations? You shudder at that—ah, these tender-hearted saints! This is the man after God’s own heart—the man that repents of his sin and lives. No one dies but his son. You say you love me,—your love has cost me dear enough! Do you think I can blot out everything, and turn back into Arthur at a few soft words—I, that have been dish-washer in filthy half-caste brothels and stable-boy to Credle farmers that were worse brutes than their own cattle? I, that have been zany in cap and bells for a strolling variety show—drudge and Jack-of-all-trades to the matadors in the bull-fighting ring; I, that have been slave to every black

beast who cared to set his foot on my neck; I, that have been starved and spat upon and trampled under foot; I, that have begged for mouldy scraps and been refused because the dogs had the first right? Oh, what is the use of all this! How can I *tell* you what you have brought on me? And now—you love me! How much do you love me? Enough to give up your God for me? Oh, what has He done for you, this everlasting Jesus,—what has He suffered for you, that you should love Him more than me? Is it for the pierced hands He is so dear to you? Look at mine! Look here, and here, and here——”

He tore open his shirt and showed the ghastly scars.

“Padre, this God of yours is an impostor, His wounds are sham wounds, His pain is all a farce! It is I that have the right to your heart! Padre, there is no torture you have not put me to; if you could only know what my life has been! And yet I would not die! I have endured it all, and have possessed my soul in patience, because I would come back and fight this God of yours. I have held this purpose as a shield against my heart, and it has saved me from madness, and from the second death. And now, when I come back, I find Him still in my place—this sham victim that was crucified for six hours, forsooth, and rose again from the dead! Padre, I have been crucified for five years, and I, too, have risen from the dead. What are you going to do with me? What are you going to do with me?”

He broke down. Montanelli sat like some stone image, or like a dead man set upright. At first, under the fiery torrent of the Gadfly's despair, he had quivered a little, with the auto-

matic shrinking of the flesh, as under the lash of a whip; but now he was quite still. After a long silence he looked up and spoke, lifelessly, patiently:

“Arthur, will you explain to me more clearly? You confuse and terrify me so, I can't understand. What is it you demand of me?”

The Gadfly turned to him a spectral face.

“I demand nothing. Who shall compel love? You are free to choose between us two the one who is most dear to you. If you love Him best, choose Him.”

“I can't understand,” Montanelli repeated wearily. “What is there I can choose? I cannot undo the past.”

“You have to choose between us. If you love me, take that cross off your neck and come away with me. My friends are arranging another attempt, and with your help they could manage it easily. Then, when we are safe over the frontier, acknowledge me publicly. But if you don't love me enough for that,—if this wooden idol is more to you than I,—then go to the colonel and tell him you consent. And if you go, then go at once, and spare me the misery of seeing you. I have enough without that.”

Montanelli looked up, trembling faintly. He was beginning to understand.

“I will communicate with your friends, of course. But—to go with you—it is impossible—I am a priest.”

“And I accept no favours from priests. I will have no more compromises, Padre; I have had enough of them, and of their consequences. You must give up your priesthood, or you must give up me.”

"How can I give you up? Arthur, how can I give you up?"

"Then give up Him. You have to choose between us. Would you offer me a share of your love—half for me, half for your fiend of a God? I will not take His leavings. If you are His, you are not mine."

"Would you have me tear my heart in two? Arthur! Arthur! Do you want to drive me mad?"

The Gadfly struck his hand against the wall.

"You have to choose between us," he repeated once more.

Montanelli drew from his breast a little case containing a bit of soiled and crumpled paper.

"Look!" he said.

*"I believed in you, as I believed in God. God is a thing made of clay, that I can smash with a hammer; and you have fooled me with a lie."*

The Gadfly laughed and handed it back. "How d-d-delightfully young one is at nineteen! To take a hammer and smash things seems so easy. It's that now—only it's I that am under the hammer. As for you, there are plenty of other people you can fool with lies—and they won't even find you out."

"As you will," Montanelli said. "Perhaps in your place I should be as merciless as you—God knows. I can't do what you ask, Arthur; but I will do what I can. I will arrange your escape, and when you are safe I will have an accident in the mountains, or take the wrong sleeping-draught by mistake—whatever you like to choose. Will that content you? It is all I can do. It is a

great sin; but I think He will forgive me. He is more merciful——"

The Gadfly flung out both hands with a sharp cry.

"Oh, that is too much! That is too much! What have I done that you should think of me that way? What right have you—— As if I wanted to be revenged on you! Can't you see that I only want to save you? Will you never understand that I love you?"

He caught hold of Montanelli's hands and covered them with burning kisses and tears.

"Padre, come away with us! What have you to do with this dead world of priests and idols? They are full of the dust of bygone ages; they are rotten; they are pestilent and foul! Come out of this plague-stricken Church—come away with us into the light! Padre, it is we that are life and youth; it is we that are the everlasting springtime; it is we that are the future! Padre, the dawn is close upon us—will you miss your part in the sunrise? Wake up, and let us forget the horrible nightmares,—wake up, and we will begin our life again! Padre, I have always loved you—always, even when you killed me—will you kill me again?"

Montanelli tore his hands away. "Oh, God have mercy on me!" he cried out. "*You have your mother's eyes!*"

A strange silence, long and deep and sudden, fell upon them both. In the gray twilight they looked at each other, and their hearts stood still with fear.

"Have you anything more to say?" Montanelli whispered. "Any—hope to give me?"

"No. My life is of no use to me except to fight priests. I am not a man; I am a knife. If you let me live, you sanction knives."

Montanelli turned to the crucifix. "God! Listen to this——!"

His voice died away into the empty stillness without response. Only the mocking devil awoke again in the Gadfly.

"'C-c-call him louder; perchance he s-s-sleep-eth'——"

Montanelli started up as if he had been struck. For a moment he stood looking straight before him;—then he sat down on the edge of the pallet, covered his face with both hands, and burst into tears. A long shudder passed through the Gadfly, and the damp cold broke out on his body. He knew what the tears meant.

He drew the blanket over his head that he might not hear. It was enough that he had to die—he who was so vividly, magnificently alive. But he could not shut out the sound; it rang in his ears, it beat in his brain, it throbbed in all his pulses. And still Montanelli sobbed and sobbed, and the tears dripped down between his fingers.

He left off sobbing at last, and dried his eyes with his handkerchief, like a child that has been crying. As he stood up the handkerchief slipped from his knee and fell to the floor.

"There is no use in talking any more," he said. "You understand?"

"I understand," the Gadfly answered, with dull submission. "It's not your fault. Your God is hungry, and must be fed."

Montanelli turned towards him. The grave that was to be dug was not more still than they were. Silent, they looked into each other's eyes, as two lovers, torn apart, might gaze across the barrier they cannot pass.

It was the Gadfly whose eyes sank first. He

shrank down, hiding his face; and Montanelli understood that the gesture meant "Go!" He turned, and went out of the cell. A moment later the Gadfly started up.

"Oh, I can't bear it! Padre, come back! Come back!"

The door was shut. He looked around him slowly, with a wide, still gaze, and understood that all was over. The Galilean had conquered.

All night long the grass waved softly in the courtyard below—the grass that was so soon to wither, uprooted by the spade; and all night long the Gadfly lay alone in the darkness, and sobbed.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE court-martial was held on Tuesday morning. It was a very short and simple affair; a mere formality, occupying barely twenty minutes. There was, indeed, nothing to spend much time over; no defence was allowed, and the only witnesses were the wounded spy and officer and a few soldiers. The sentence was drawn up beforehand; Montanelli had sent in the desired informal consent; and the judges (Colonel Ferrari, the local major of dragoons, and two officers of the Swiss guards) had little to do. The indictment was read aloud, the witnesses gave their evidence, and the signatures were affixed to the sentence, which was then read to the condemned man with befitting solemnity. He listened in silence; and when asked, according to the usual form, whether he had anything to say, merely waved the question aside with an impatient movement of his hand. Hidden on his breast was the handkerchief which Monta-