

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-



nelli had let fall. It had been kissed and wept over all night, as though it were a living thing. Now he looked wan and spiritless, and the traces of tears were still about his eyelids; but the words: "to be shot," did not seem to affect him much. When they were uttered, the pupils of his eyes dilated, but that was all.

"Take him back to his cell," the Governor said, when all the formalities were over; and the sergeant, who was evidently near to breaking down, touched the motionless figure on the shoulder. The Gadfly looked round him with a little start.

"Ah, yes!" he said. "I forgot."

There was something almost like pity in the Governor's face. He was not a cruel man by nature, and was secretly a little ashamed of the part he had been playing during the last month. Now that his main point was gained he was willing to make every little concession in his power.

"You needn't put the irons on again," he said, glancing at the bruised and swollen wrists. "And he can stay in his own cell. The condemned cell is wretchedly dark and gloomy," he added, turning to his nephew; "and really the thing's a mere formality."

He coughed and shifted his feet in evident embarrassment; then called back the sergeant, who was leaving the room with his prisoner.

"Wait, sergeant; I want to speak to him."

The Gadfly did not move, and the Governor's voice seemed to fall on unresponsive ears.

"If you have any message you would like conveyed to your friends or relatives—— You have relatives, I suppose?"

There was no answer.

"Well, think it over and tell me, or the priest.

I will see it is not neglected. You had better give your messages to the priest; he shall come at once, and stay the night with you. If there is any other wish——"

The Gadfly looked up.

"Tell the priest I would rather be alone. I have no friends and no messages."

"But you will want to confess."

"I am an atheist. I want nothing but to be left in peace."

He said it in a dull, quiet voice, without defiance or irritation; and turned slowly away. At the door he stopped again.

"I forgot, colonel; there is a favour I wanted to ask. Don't let them tie me or bandage my eyes to-morrow, please. I will stand quite still."

At sunrise on Wednesday morning they brought him out into the courtyard. His lameness was more than usually apparent, and he walked with evident difficulty and pain, leaning heavily on the sergeant's arm; but all the weary submission had gone out of his face. The spectral terrors that had crushed him down in the empty silence, the visions and dreams of the world of shadows, were gone with the night which gave them birth; and once the sun was shining and his enemies were present to rouse the fighting spirit in him, he was not afraid.

The six carabineers who had been told off for the execution were drawn up in line against the ivied wall; the same crannied and crumbling wall down which he had climbed on the night of his unlucky attempt. They could hardly refrain from weeping as they stood together, each man with his carbine in his hand. It seemed to them a horror



beyond imagination that they should be called out to kill the Gadfly. He and his stinging repartees, his perpetual laughter, his bright, infectious courage, had come into their dull and dreary lives like a wandering sunbeam; and that he should die, and at their hands, was to them as the darkening of the clear lamps of heaven.

Under the great fig-tree in the courtyard, his grave was waiting for him. It had been dug in the night by unwilling hands; and tears had fallen on the spade. As he passed he looked down, smiling, at the black pit and the withering grass beside it; and drew a long breath, to smell the scent of the freshly turned earth.

Near the tree the sergeant stopped short, and the Gadfly looked round with his brightest smile.

"Shall I stand here, sergeant?"

The man nodded silently; there was a lump in his throat, and he could not have spoken to save his life. The Governor, his nephew, the lieutenant of carabineers who was to command, a doctor and a priest were already in the courtyard, and came forward with grave faces, half abashed under the radiant defiance of the Gadfly's laughing eyes.

"G-good morning, gentlemen! Ah, and his reverence is up so early, too! How do you do, captain? This is a pleasanter occasion for you than our former meeting, isn't it? I see your arm is still in a sling; that's because I bungled my work. These good fellows will do theirs better—won't you, lads?"

He glanced round at the gloomy faces of the carabineers.

"There'll be no need of slings this time, any way. There, there, you needn't look so doleful over it! Put your heels together and show how straight

you can shoot. Before long there'll be more work cut out for you than you'll know how to get through, and there's nothing like practice beforehand."

"My son," the priest interrupted, coming forward, while the others drew back to leave them alone together; "in a few minutes you must enter into the presence of your Maker. Have you no other use but this for these last moments that are left you for repentance? Think, I entreat you, how dreadful a thing it is to die without absolution, with all your sins upon your head. When you stand before your Judge it will be too late to repent. Will you approach His awful throne with a jest upon your lips?"

"A jest, your reverence? It is your side that needs that little homily, I think. When our turn comes we shall use field-guns instead of half a dozen second-hand carbines, and then you'll see how much we're in jest."

"You will use field-guns! Oh, unhappy man! Have you still not realized on what frightful brink you stand?"

The Gadfly glanced back over his shoulder at the open grave.

"And s-s-so your reverence thinks that, when you have put me down there, you will have done with me? Perhaps you will lay a stone on the top to pre-v-vent a r-resurrection 'after three days'? No fear, your reverence! I shan't poach on the monopoly in cheap theatricals; I shall lie as still as a m-mouse, just where you put me. And all the same, *we* shall use field-guns."

"Oh, merciful God," the priest cried out; "forgive this wretched man!"

"Amen!" murmured the lieutenant of carabin-



eers, in a deep bass growl, while the colonel and his nephew crossed themselves devoutly.

As there was evidently no hope of further insistence producing any effect, the priest gave up the fruitless attempt and moved aside, shaking his head and murmuring a prayer. The short and simple preparations were made without more delay, and the Gadfly placed himself in the required position, only turning his head to glance up for a moment at the red and yellow splendour of the sunrise. He had repeated the request that his eyes might not be bandaged, and his defiant face had wrung from the colonel a reluctant consent. They had both forgotten what they were inflicting on the soldiers.

He stood and faced them, smiling, and the carbines shook in their hands.

"I am quite ready," he said.

The lieutenant stepped forward, trembling a little with excitement. He had never given the word of command for an execution before.

"Ready—present—fire!"

The Gadfly staggered a little and recovered his balance. One unsteady shot had grazed his cheek, and a little blood fell on to the white cravat. Another ball had struck him above the knee. When the smoke cleared away the soldiers looked and saw him smiling still and wiping the blood from his cheek with the mutilated hand.

"A bad shot, men!" he said; and his voice cut in, clear and articulate, upon the dazed stupor of the wretched soldiers. "Have another try."

A general groan and shudder passed through the row of carabineers. Each man had aimed aside, with a secret hope that the death-shot would come from his neighbour's hand, not his; and there the

Gadfly stood and smiled at them; they had only turned the execution into a butchery, and the whole ghastly business was to do again. They were seized with sudden terror, and, lowering their carbines, listened hopelessly to the furious curses and reproaches of the officers, staring in dull horror at the man whom they had killed and who somehow was not dead.

The Governor shook his fist in their faces, savagely shouting to them to stand in position, to present arms, to make haste and get the thing over. He had become as thoroughly demoralized as they were, and dared not look at the terrible figure that stood, and stood, and would not fall. When the Gadfly spoke to him he started and shuddered at the sound of the mocking voice.

"You have brought out the awkward squad this morning, colonel! Let me see if I can manage them better. Now, men! Hold your tool higher there, you to the left. Bless your heart, man, it's a carbine you've got in your hand, not a frying-pan! Are you all straight? Now then! Ready—present——"

"Fire!" the colonel interrupted, starting forward. It was intolerable that this man should give the command for his own death.

There was another confused, disorganized volley, and the line broke up into a knot of shivering figures, staring before them with wild eyes. One of the soldiers had not even discharged his carbine; he had flung it away, and crouched down, moaning under his breath: "I can't—I can't!"

The smoke cleared slowly away, floating up into the glimmer of the early sunlight; and they saw that the Gadfly had fallen; and saw, too, that he was still not dead. For the first moment soldiers



and officials stood as if they had been turned to stone, and watched the ghastly thing that writhed and struggled on the ground; then both doctor and colonel rushed forward with a cry, for he had dragged himself up on one knee and was still facing the soldiers, and still laughing.

"Another miss! Try—again, lads—see—if you can't——"

He suddenly swayed and fell over sideways on the grass.

"Is he dead?" the colonel asked under his breath; and the doctor, kneeling down, with a hand on the bloody shirt, answered softly:

"I think so—God be praised!"

"God be praised!" the colonel repeated. "At last!"

His nephew was touching him on the arm.

"Uncle! It's the Cardinal! He's at the gate and wants to come in."

"What? He can't come in—I won't have it! What are the guards about? Your Eminence——"

The gate had opened and shut, and Montanelli was standing in the courtyard, looking before him with still and awful eyes.

"Your Eminence! I must beg of you—this is not a fit sight for you! The execution is only just over; the body is not yet——"

"I have come to look at him," Montanelli said. Even at the moment it struck the Governor that his voice and bearing were those of a sleep-walker.

"Oh, my God!" one of the soldiers cried out suddenly; and the Governor glanced hastily back. Surely——

The blood-stained heap on the grass had once more begun to struggle and moan. The doctor

flung himself down and lifted the head upon his knee.

"Make haste!" he cried in desperation. "You savages, make haste! Get it over, for God's sake! There's no bearing this!"

Great jets of blood poured over his hands, and the convulsions of the figure that he held in his arms shook him, too, from head to foot. As he looked frantically round for help, the priest bent over his shoulder and put a crucifix to the lips of the dying man.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son——"

The Gadfly raised himself against the doctor's knee, and, with wide-open eyes, looked straight upon the crucifix.

Slowly, amid hushed and frozen stillness, he lifted the broken right hand and pushed away the image. There was a red smear across its face.

"Padre—is your—God—satisfied?"

His head fell back on the doctor's arm.

"Your Eminence!"

As the Cardinal did not awake from his stupor, Colonel Ferrari repeated, louder:

"Your Eminence!"

Montanelli looked up.

"He is dead."

"Quite dead, your Eminence. Will you not come away? This is a horrible sight."

"He is dead," Montanelli repeated, and looked down again at the face. "I touched him; and he is dead."

"What does he expect a man to be with half a dozen bullets in him?" the lieutenant whispered contemptuously; and the doctor whispered back, "I think the sight of the blood has upset him."



The Governor put his hand firmly on Montanelli's arm.

"Your Eminence—you had better not look at him any longer. Will you allow the chaplain to escort you home?"

"Yes—I will go."

He turned slowly from the blood-stained spot and walked away, the priest and sergeant following. At the gate he paused and looked back, with a ghostlike, still surprise.

"He is dead."

A few hours later Marcone went up to a cottage on the hillside to tell Martini that there was no longer any need for him to throw away his life.

All the preparations for a second attempt at rescue were ready, as the plot was much more simple than the former one. It had been arranged that on the following morning, as the Corpus Domini procession passed along the fortress hill, Martini should step forward out of the crowd, draw a pistol from his breast, and fire in the Governor's face. In the moment of wild confusion which would follow twenty armed men were to make a sudden rush at the gate, break into the tower, and, taking the turnkey with them by force, to enter the prisoner's cell and carry him bodily away, killing or overpowering everyone who interfered with them. From the gate they were to retire fighting, and cover the retreat of a second band of armed and mounted smugglers, who would carry him off into a safe hiding-place in the hills. The only person in the little group who knew nothing of the plan was Gemma; it had been kept from her at Martini's special desire. "She

will break her heart over it soon enough," he had said.

As the smuggler came in at the garden gate Martini opened the glass door and stepped out on to the verandah to meet him.

"Any news, Marcone? Ah!"

The smuggler had pushed back his broad-brimmed straw hat.

They sat down together on the verandah. Not a word was spoken on either side. From the instant when Martini had caught sight of the face under the hat-brim he had understood.

"When was it?" he asked after a long pause; and his own voice, in his ears, was as dull and wearisome as everything else.

"This morning, at sunrise. The sergeant told me. He was there and saw it."

Martini looked down and flicked a stray thread from his coat-sleeve.

Vanity of vanities; this also is vanity. He was to have died to-morrow. And now the land of his heart's desire had vanished, like the fairyland of golden sunset dreams that fades away when the darkness comes; and he was driven back into the world of every day and every night—the world of Grassini and Galli, of ciphering and pamphleteering, of party squabbles between comrades and dreary intrigues among Austrian spies—of the old revolutionary mill-round that maketh the heart sick. And somewhere down at the bottom of his consciousness there was a great empty place; a place that nothing and no one would fill any more, now that the Gadfly was dead.

Someone was asking him a question, and he raised his head, wondering what could be left that was worth the trouble of talking about.



"What did you say?"

"I was saying that of course you will break the news to her."

Life, and all the horror of life, came back into Martini's face.

"How can I tell her?" he cried out. "You might as well ask me to go and stab her. Oh, how can I tell her—how can I!"

He had clasped both hands over his eyes; but, without seeing, he felt the smuggler start beside him, and looked up. Gemma was standing in the doorway.

"Have you heard, Cesare?" she said. "It is all over. They have shot him."

#### CHAPTER VIII.

"INTROIBO ad altare Dei." Montanelli stood before the high altar among his ministers and acolytes and read the Introit aloud in steady tones. All the Cathedral was a blaze of light and colour; from the holiday dresses of the congregation to the pillars with their flaming draperies and wreaths of flowers there was no dull spot in it. Over the open spaces of the doorway fell great scarlet curtains, through whose folds the hot June sunlight glowed, as through the petals of red poppies in a corn-field. The religious orders with their candles and torches, the companies of the parishes with their crosses and flags, lighted up the dim side-chapels; and in the aisles the silken folds of the processional banners drooped, their gilded staves and tassels glinting under the arches. The surplices of the choristers gleamed, rainbow-tinted, beneath the coloured windows; the sunlight lay on the chancel floor in chequered stains of

orange and purple and green. Behind the altar hung a shimmering veil of silver tissue; and against the veil and the decorations and the altar-lights the Cardinal's figure stood out in its trailing white robes like a marble statue that had come to life.

As was customary on processional days, he was only to preside at the Mass, not to celebrate, so at the end of the Indulgentiam he turned from the altar and walked slowly to the episcopal throne, celebrant and ministers bowing low as he passed.

"I'm afraid His Eminence is not well," one of the canons whispered to his neighbour; "he seems so strange."

Montanelli bent his head to receive the jewelled mitre. The priest who was acting as deacon of honour put it on, looked at him for an instant, then leaned forward and whispered softly:

"Your Eminence, are you ill?"

Montanelli turned slightly towards him. There was no recognition in his eyes.

"Pardon, Your Eminence!" the priest whispered, as he made a genuflexion and went back to his place, reproaching himself for having interrupted the Cardinal's devotions.

The familiar ceremony went on; and Montanelli sat erect and still, his glittering mitre and gold-brocaded vestments flashing back the sunlight, and the heavy folds of his white festival mantle sweeping down over the red carpet. The light of a hundred candles sparkled among the sapphires on his breast, and shone into the deep, still eyes that had no answering gleam; and when, at the words: "Benedicite, pater eminentissime," he stooped to bless the incense, and the sunbeams played among the diamonds, he might have recalled some splendid and fearful ice-spirit of the mountains, crowned