

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ALEXIS ORLOFF.

Two things principally occupied the Romans during the next weeks and months, offering them rich material for conversation. In talking of these they had forgotten all other events; they spoke no more of the giant fish which had destroyed the friendship of France and Spain; they no longer entertained each other with anecdotes in connection with the festival of Cardinal Bernis, at which the *entrée* of that fish upon his long silver platter was hailed with shouts and *vivats*—yea, even that Russian princess, who had momentarily shown herself on the horizon of society, all these were quickly forgotten, and people now interested themselves only about the extirpation of the order of the Jesuits, which Pope Clement had now really effected, and of the arrival of the Russian ambassador-extraordinary, the famous Alexis Orloff, whose visit to Rome seemed the more important and significant as they well knew in what near and confidential relations his brother, Count Gregory Orloff, stood with the Empress Catharine, and what participation Alexis Orloff had in the sudden death of the Emperor Peter III.

The order of the Jesuits, then, no longer existed; the pious fathers of the order of Jesus were stricken out of the book of history; a word of power had annihilated them! With loud complaints and lamentations they filled the streets of the holy city, and if the prayer of humility and resignation resounded from their lips, yet there were very

different prayers in their hearts, prayers of anger and rage, of hatred and revenge! They were seen wringing their hands and loudly lamenting, as they hastened to their friends and protectors, and besieged the doors of the foreign embassies. With them wept the poor and suffering people to whom the pious fathers had proved themselves benefactors. For, since they knew that their existence was threatened, they had assiduously devoted themselves to works of charity and mercy, and to strengthening, especially in Rome, their reputation for piety, benevolence, and generosity. Prodigious sums were by them distributed among the poor; more than five hundred respectable impoverished Romans, who had been accused of political offences, were secretly supported by them. In this way the Jesuits, against whom the cry of denunciation had been raised for years in all Europe, had nevertheless succeeded, at least in the holy city, in gaining for themselves a very considerable party, and thus securing protection and support in the time of misfortune and persecution. But while the people wept with them, and many cardinals and princes of the Church secretly pitied them, the ambassadors of the great European powers alone remained insensible to their lamentations. No one of them opened the doors of their palaces to them, no one afforded them protection or consolation; and although it was known that Cardinal Bernis, in spite of the horror which had for years been felt of this order in France, was personally favorable to them, and had long delayed the consent of the court of France to their abolition, yet even Bernis now avoided any manifestation of kindness for them, lest his former friend, the Spanish am-

bassador, might think he so far humiliated himself as to favor the Jesuits for the sake of recovering the friendship and good opinion of the Duke of Grimaldi. But Grimaldi himself now no longer dared to protect the Jesuits, however friendly he might be to them, and however much they were favored by Elizabeth Farnese, the Spanish queen-mother. King Charles, her son, had finally ventured to defy her authority, and in an autograph letter had commanded the Duke of Grimaldi to receive no more Jesuits in his palace. And while, as we have said, the whole diplomacy had declared against the order of the holy fathers of Jesus, it must have been the more striking that this Russian Count Orloff had compassion upon them, that he opened the doors of his palace to them, and lent a willing ear to the complaints of the unfortunate members of the order.

This Russian count gave the good Romans much material for reflection and head-shaking; the women were occupied with his herculean beauty, and the men with his wild, daring, and reckless conduct. They called him a barbarian, a Russian bear, but could not help being interested in him, and eagerly repeating the little anecdotes freely circulated respecting him.

They smilingly told that he had been the first who had had the courage to defy the powerful republic of Venice, which, for recruiting sailors for his fleet in their territories for the war against the Turks, wished to banish him from proud and beautiful Venice. But Alexis Orloff had laughed at the senate of the republic when they sent him the order to leave. He had ordered the two hundred soldiers, who formed his retinue, to arm themselves, and, if necessary, to

repel force with force; but to the senate he had answered that he would leave the city as soon as he pleased, not before! But, as it seemed that he was not pleased to leave the city, he remained there, and now the angry and indignant senate sent him the peremptory command to leave Venice with his soldiers in twenty-four hours. A deputation of the senate came in solemn procession to communicate to the Russian count this command of the Council of Three. Alexis Orloff received them, lying upon his divan, and to their solemn address he laughingly answered: "I receive commands from no one but my empress! It remains as before, that I shall go when I please, and not earlier!"

The senators departed with bitter murmurs and severe threats. Count Alexis Orloff remained, and the cowardly senate, trembling with fear of this young Russian empire, had silently pocketed the humiliation of seeing this overbearing Russian within their walls for several weeks longer.* This evidence of the haughty insolence of Count Orloff was related among the Romans with undisguised pleasure, and they thanked him for having thus humiliated and insulted the proud and imperious republic. But they suspiciously shook their heads when they learned that he seemed disposed to display his pride and arrogance in Rome! They told of a *soirée* of the Marchesa di Paduli which Alexis Orloff had attended. As they there begged of him to give some proof of the very superior strength which had acquired for him the name of "the Russian Hercules," he

* Archenholz, "Italien," vol. iv., p. 53.

had taken one of the hardest apples from a silver plateau that stood upon the table and playfully crushed it with two fingers of his left hand. But a fragment of this hard apple had hit the eye of the Duke of Gloucester, who was standing near, and seriously injured it. The sympathies of the whole company were excited for the English prince, and he was immediately surrounded by a pitying and lamenting crowd. Count Orloff alone had nothing to say to him, and not the slightest excuse to make. He smilingly rocked himself upon his chair, and hummed a Russian popular song in praise of his empress.*

And was it not also an insult for Alexis Orloff now to show himself a friend to the Jesuits, whom the decree of God's vicegerent had outlawed and proscribed? Was it not an insult that he loudly and publicly promised to these persecuted Jesuits a kind reception and efficient protection in Russia, and invited them to found new communities and new cloisters there?

But Alexis Orloff cared little for the dissatisfaction of the Romans. He said to his confidant Stephano: "There is no greater pleasure than to set at defiance all the world, and to oppose all these things which the stupid people would impose upon us as laws. The friend and favorite of the Empress Catharine has no occasion for complying with such miserable laws; wherever I set my foot, there the earth belongs to me, and I will forcibly maintain my pretensions whenever they are disputed! In Russia I am the serf of the empress, in revenge for which I will, at least

* Gorani, vol. ii., p. 23.

abroad, treat all the world as my serfs. This gives me pleasure, and wherefore is the world here but to be enjoyed?"

"A little also for labor," said Stephano, with a sly smile.

"For that I have my slaves, for that I have also you!" responded Orloff, laughing. "There is only one labor for me here in Rome, and that is to create as much disturbance as possible in the city; to set the people at odds with the government, so that they may have their hands full, and find no time for observing our nice game with our little princess, or to interfere with it. We must have freedom of action, that is the most important. Hence we must protect these pious Jesuits, and offer support to the enemies of this too-enterprising pope, by which means we shall ultimately attain our own ends, and that is enough for us!"

"We have not yet advanced a step with our Princess Natalie," said Stephano, shrugging his shoulders; "that, it seems, is an impregnable fortress!"

"It must, however, yield to us," laughingly responded Alexis Orloff, "and she shall yet acknowledge us as conquerors. We are undermining, Stephano, and when the building crushes her in its crashing fall, will she first discover that she has long been in danger. And what said you—that we have not yet advanced a step? And yet Rasczinsky is gone, and we have known how to keep Cardinal Bernis, who would have interested himself for the little one, so very much occupied with the affair of the Jesuits, that he has yet had no time to think of the princess. Ah, these Jesuits are very useful people. We strew them like snuff in the faces of these diplomatists, and, while they are yet rubbing their

weak eyes and crying out with pain, we shall quietly draw our little fish into our net, and take her home without opposition!"

"And if the fish will not go into the net?"

"It must go in!" impatiently cried Orloff. "Bah! have I at the right time succeeded in towing our emperor, God bless him! into eternity, and shall I doubt in the fulness of time of enclosing this beautiful child in my arms? Look at me, Stephano—what is wanting for it in me? Are not all these beautiful women of Rome enraptured with the Russian Hercules? How, then, can it be that a woman of my own country can withstand me? The preliminaries are the main thing, and if we only had some one to prepare her for my appearance, all would then go well. And such a one we will find, thanks to our rubles! But enough of politics for the present, Stephano. Call my valet. It is time for my toilet, and that is a very important affair."

CHAPTER XXXV.

CORILLA.

CORILLA was alone. Uneasy, full of stormy thoughts, she impetuously walked back and forth, occasionally uttering single passionate exclamations, then again thoughtfully staring at vacancy before her. She was a full-blooded, warm Italian woman, that will neither love nor hate with the whole soul, and nourishes both feelings in her bosom with equal strength and with equal warmth. But, in her, hatred

exhaled as quickly as love; it was to her only the champagne-foam of life, which she sipped for the purpose of a slight intoxication—as in her intoxication only did she feel herself a poetess, and in a condition for improvisation.

"I must at any rate be in love," said she, "else I should lose my poetic fame. With cool blood and a tranquil mind there is no improvising and poetizing. With me all must be stirring and flaming, every nerve of my being must glow and tremble, the blood must flash like fire through my veins, and the most glowing wishes and ardent longings, be it love or be it hate, must be stirring within me in order to poetize successfully. And this cannot be comprehended by delicate and discreet people; this low Roman populace even venture to call me a coquette, only because I constantly need a new glow, and because I constantly seek new emotions and new inspirations for my muse."

Love, then, for the improvisatrice Corilla, was nothing more than a strong wine with which she refreshed and strengthened her fatigued poetic powers for renewed exertions; it was in a manner the tow which she threw upon the expiring fire of her fantasy, to make it flash up in clear and bright flames.

It was only in this way that she loved Carlo, and wept for him, except that in this case her love had been of a longer duration, because it was *he* who gave up and left *her*! That was what made her hatred so glowing, that was what made her seek the life of the woman for whom Carlo had deserted her.