

The cardinal again pressed her passionately to his bosom.

"You shall have the laurel crown, and your myrtle crown is mine!" he excitedly exclaimed. "You will soon see whether Francesco is a cold-hearted man! Farewell, Corilla!"

And with a hasty salute he left the room. The astonished Corilla dismissed him with a smile.

"If it is to succeed at all, it can be only through him," said she. "Poor Francesco, he will bring me a full laurel crown! And what can I give him in return? An exfoliated myrtle crown, that is all! No heart with it!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HOLY CHAFFERERS.

CARDINAL FRANCESCO ALBANI, meantime, hastened through the streets with the sprightliness of youth. He noticed neither the respectful salutations and knee-bendings of those he passed, nor their visible shuddering and alarm when under the cardinal's hat they recognized the fierce and inhuman Francesco Albani.

He stopped before the palace of Cardinal Juan Angelo Braschi. The equipage of the new cardinal was drawn up before his door.

"Ah," gleefully remarked Albani, "he is therefore yet at home, and I shall meet with him!"

Hastily entering the palace, and pushing past the serv-

ant who would have preceded him, he entered the cardinal's cabinet unannounced.

"Be not troubled, your eminence," said Albani, with a smile, "I will not detain you long. I know your habits, and know that Signora Malveda usually expects you at this hour, because Cardinal Rezzonico is not then with her! But I have something important to say to you. You know I am a man who, without forms and circumlocutions, always come directly to the point. I do so now. You desire to be the successor of Ganganelli?"

Braschi turned pale, and timidly cast down his eyes.

"Why are you shocked?" cried Albani. "Every cardinal hopes and wishes to become the father of Christendom—that is natural; I should also wish it for myself, but I know that that cannot be. I have permitted these lord cardinals who, in the conclave, invoke the Holy Spirit, to look too much into my cards. I was not so prudent as you, Braschi, and therefore you are much the more likely to become God's vicegerent! Would you not like to be pope, if Ganganelli should happen to die? And how high would you hold my voice—how much would it be worth to you?"

"More than all I possess, infinitely more!" said the shrewd Braschi. "Were I sure of your voice, I might then have a definite hope of becoming a pope; for your voice carries many others with it. How, then, can you expect me to estimate what is inestimable?"

"Would you give me twenty thousand?" asked Albani.*

* Gorani (vol. ii., p. 131) says of this cardinal: "He is excessively vindictive, and keeps in his pay many so-called *bravi*, to whom he de-

"Threefold that sum if I possessed it, but I have nothing! I am a very poor cardinal, as you well know. My whole property consists of six thousand scudi, and that trifling sum I dare not offer you."

"Borrow, then, of Signora Malveda!" said Albani. "Cardinal Rezzonico is rich and liberal. Let us speak directly to the point. You would be pope, and I am willing to forward your views. How much will you pay?"

"If Signora Malveda will lend me four thousand scudi, I should then have ten thousand to offer you!"

"Well, so be it! Ten thousand scudi will do, if you will add to it a trifling favor."

"Name it," said Braschi.

"You know that Ganganelli opposes the crowning of our famous improvisatrice, Corilla, in the capitol. This is an injustice which Ganganelli's successor will have to repair. Will you do it?"

Braschi gave the cardinal a sly glance. "Ah," said he, "Signora Corilla seems to be less liberal than Signora Malveda? She will allow you no discount of her future laurel-crown, is it not so? I know nothing worse than an ambitious woman. Listen, Albani; it seems that we must be mutually useful to each other; I need your voice to become pope, and you need mine to become a favored lover. Very well, give me your voice, and in return I promise you

puts his vengeance. Miscreants find protection with him, and he admits them to his table, that they may always be in readiness to execute his bloody commands. With this cruelty he is also avaricious, and sells his protection; whence his palace serves as a refuge for bankrupts and murderers."

a laurel-crown for Signora Corilla, and eight thousand scudi for yourself!"

"Ah, you would haggle!" contemptuously exclaimed Albani. "You would be a very niggardly vicegerent of God! But as Corilla is well worth two thousand scudi, I am content. Give me eight thousand scudi and the promise to crown Corilla!"

"As soon as I am pope, I will do both. My sacred word for it! Shall I strengthen my promise by swearing upon the Bible?"

Cardinal Albani gave the questioner a glance of astonishment, and then broke out with a loud and scornful laugh.

"You forget that you are speaking to one of your kind! Of what use would such a holy farce be to us who have no faith in its binding power? No, no, we priests know each other. Such buffoonery amounts to nothing. One written word is worth a thousand sworn oaths! Let us have a contract prepared—that is better. We will both sign it!"

"Just as you please!" said Braschi, with a smile, stepping to his writing desk and rapidly throwing some lines upon paper, which he signed after it had been carefully read by Albani.

"At length the business is finished," said Albani. "Now, Cardinal Braschi, go to your signora, and surprise her with the news that she holds in her arms a pope *in spe*. Pope Clement will soon need a successor; he must be very ill, the poor pope!"

So speaking, he took leave of the future pope with a

friendly nod, and departed with as much haste as he had come.

“And now to these pious Jesuit fathers!” said he, stepping out upon the grass. “It was very prudent in me that I went on foot to Corilla to-day. Our cursed equipages betray every thing; they are the greatest of chatterboxes! How astonished these good Romans would be to see a cardinal’s carriage before these houses of the condemned! No, no, strengthen yourselves for another effort, my reverend legs! Only yet this walk, and then you will have rest.”

And the cardinal trudged stoutly on until he reached the Jesuit college. There he stopped and looked cautiously around him.

“This unfortunate saintly dress is also a hindrance,” murmured he. “Like the sign over a shop-door it proclaims to all the world: ‘I am a cardinal. Here indulgences, dispensations, and God’s blessings are to be sold! Who will buy, who will buy?’ I dare not now enter this scouted and repudiated sacred house. I might be remarked, suspected, and betrayed. Corilla, dear, beautiful woman, it costs me much pains and many efforts to conquer you; will your possession repay me?”

The cardinal patiently waited in the shadow of a taxus-bush until the street became for a moment empty and solitary. Then he hastened to a side-door of the building, and, sure of being unobserved, entered.

A deep and quiet silence pervaded these long and deserted cloister-passages. It seemed as if a death-veil lay upon the whole building—as if it were depopulated, desolated. Nowhere the least trace of that busy, stirring life,

usually prevailing in these corridors—no longer those bands of scholars that formerly peopled these passages—the doors of the great school-room open, the benches unoccupied, the lecturer’s chair, from which the pious fathers formerly with such subtle wisdom explained and defended their dangerous doctrines, these also are desolate. The reign of the Jesuits was over; Ganganelli had thrust them from the throne, and they cursed him as their murderer! He had suppressed their sacred order, he had commanded them to lay aside their peculiar costume and adopt that of other monkish orders, or the usual dress of abbés. But from their property he had not been able to expel them in this college *Il Jesu*—within their cloisters his power had not been able to penetrate. There they remained, what they had been, the holy fathers of Jesus, the pious defenders of craft and Christian deception, the cunning advocates of regicide, the proud servants of the only salvation-dispensing Church!—there, with rage in their hearts, they meditated plans of vengeance against this criminal pope who had condemned them to a living death; who, like a wicked magician, had changed their sacred college into an open grave! He had killed them, and he, should he nevertheless live?

With these fatal questions did the holy fathers occupy themselves, reflecting upon them in their gloomy leisure, and in low whisperings consulting with their prior. And in such secret consultation did Cardinal Francesco Albani find the prior with his confidant in the refectory.

“Do not let me disturb you,” he said, laughing; “I see by your faces you are engaged in conversation upon the

subject in which I yesterday took a part. That is very well—we can resume it where we yesterday broke off, and again knot the threads which I yesterday so violently rent. With which knot shall we begin?”

The eyes of the pious Jesuit father flashed with joy. Francesco Albani was inclined to favor their plans and wishes; they saw that in his cunning smile, in his return to them.

“We were speaking of the sacred and important duty you will have to perform to-morrow, your eminence,” said the prior, with a winning smile.

“Ah, yes, I remember,” said the cardinal, with apparent indifference. “We spoke of the to-morrow’s communion of his holiness the pope.”

“And of the fact that you, your eminence, would to-morrow have to discharge the important duty of pouring the sacred wine into the golden chalice of the vicegerent of God,” said the prior.

“Yes, yes, I now remember it all,” said Albani, with a smile. “You spoke to me of a wonderful flask of wine, which, by means of the golden tube, you would gladly help to the honor of being drunk by his holiness from the communion chalice.”

“It is so precious a wine that only the vicegerent of God is worthy of wetting his lips with it. It must touch the lips of no other mortal!”

“I know such a wine,” said Albani; “it thrives best in the region of Naples,* and whoever drinks of it becomes a partaker of eternal blessedness.”

* The celebrated poison, *Acqua Tofana*, is prepared only in Naples.

“Yes, you are right, it is a wonderfully strengthening wine!” said the prior, folding his hands and directing his eyes toward the heavens. “We thank God that He has left us in possession of so precious an essence! The pope, they say, is suffering and needs strengthening. See how closely we follow the teaching of Him whose name we bear, and who has commanded, ‘Love your enemies, bless those who curse you!’ Instead of avenging ourselves, we would be his benefactors, and refresh him with the most precious of what we possess!”

“And you would be so unselfish as to keep from him all knowledge of your benevolence, you would bless him quite secretly! But how if I should betray you, and communicate your precious secret to his holiness the pope? Yes, yes, I shall open my mouth and speak, unless I am prevented by a golden lock put upon my lips.”

“We shall willingly apply such a lock!” said the pleased prior.

“But, that it may entirely close my mouth, the lock will need to be very heavy!” responded Albani, with a laugh.

“It is so—it weighs six thousand scudi!” said the prior.

“That is much too light!” exclaimed Albani, laughing; “it will hardly cover my mouth. It still remains that I am to undertake a very hazardous affair. Reflect, if any one should discover my possession of this strange wine; if Ganganelli should perceive that it is not wine from his own cellar that I have poured into the cup for him! It is dangerous work that you would assign to me, a work for which I might lose my head, and you venture to offer me a poor

six thousand scudi for it! Adieu, then, pious fathers, keep you your golden lock, and I my unclosed lips. I shall know when and where to speak!"

And the cardinal moved toward the door. Hastening after him, the prior handed him a small flask, the contents of which were clear and pure as crystal water, timidly and anxiously whispering, "Ten drops of this in Ganganelli's communion wine, and ten thousand scudi are yours!"

"Give the ten thousand scudi at once!" said Albani, with decision.

"And the drops?"

"The pope's wine is too strong: I will reduce it a little with this pure water.*"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI."

ON the following day there was a solemn high office in St. Peter's. All Rome flocked there, to see this great and touching spectacle. A dense crowd thronged the streets, and all shouted and cried when the pope, surrounded by his Swiss guard, appeared in their midst in his gilded arm-chair, and received the greetings of the people with a bland smile.

* The poison, *Acqua Tofana*, is pure and clear as water, without taste or smell. It is prepared from opium and Spanish flies, combined with some other ingredients, which, however, are only known to the makers of it. That the *Acqua Tofana* is made from the foam sometimes found upon the lips of the dying, is an idle tale. Alessandro Borgia was the first to bring it into use.

Toward St. Peter's waved the human throng, and to St. Peter's the pope was borne. The features of Ganganelli had an expression of sadness, and as he now glanced down upon the thousands of his subjects who, shouting, followed him, he asked in his heart, "Who among you will be my murderers? And how long will you yet allow me to live? Ah, were I yet the poor Franciscan monk I was, then no one would take the pains to assassinate me. Why, then, does the world, precisely now, seem so fair to me, now, when I know that I must leave it so soon?" And the pope shed a secret tear while, surrounded by royal splendor, he imparted his blessing to the thousands who reverently knelt at his feet.

The bells rang, the organ resounded, the wide halls of St. Peter's were penetrated by the marvellous singing of the Sistine chapel. Thousands and thousands of wax tapers lighted the noble space of the church, thousands and thousands of people pressed into the sacred halls. Under his canopy, opposite the high altar, sat the vicegerent of God upon his golden throne, surrounded by the consecrated cardinals and bishops, protected by the Swiss guard! Who could have ventured to attack the holy father—who would have been so foolhardy as to attempt to penetrate that thick wall of Swiss guards and princes of the Church—who could have been successful in such an attempt? No human being! But where the people could not penetrate, where there was no room for the swinging of a dagger, there the malignant poison lurked unseen!

Ganganelli sat upon his golden throne, intoxicated by the clang of the organ and charmed by the singing of the

high choir, and the pope, looking down upon the human crowd, again asked himself: "Who among you are my murderers?"

The singing ceased, the organ was silent, and only the solemn tones of all the bells of St. Peter's resounded through the church. A death-like stillness else; the people lay upon their knees and crossed themselves; before the altar kneeling priests murmured prayers.

It was a solemn, a sublime moment, for the pope must now receive the communion—the vicegerent of God must drink the blood of the Lamb. But still the pope remains sacred; he cannot, like other mortals, make use of his earthly feet; he must not, like them, approach the altar. Sitting upon his throne, he has partaken of the holy wafer, and, as it was unbecoming his dignity to descend to the altar in order to come to Christ, the latter must decide to come to him!

The golden chalice at the high altar contains the blood of the Lamb; the Cardinal Francesco Albani performs the holy office. He has blessed the host, and under his consecrated hand will now be effected the miracle of turning the wine into the blood of Christ!

And Cardinal Albani lays the golden tube in the cup, and another cardinal passes the other end of the tube to the pope.

Through this sacred tube will he sip the consecrated wine, the blood of the Redeemer!

Rushing and thundering recommences the high office, the trumpets renew their blasts, the drums roll, the bells ring, the organ rattles its song of jubilee, the trombones

crash in unison. It is the greatest, most sublime moment of the whole ceremony. The pope, having put the golden tube to his lips, sips the wine changed into blood.

While the pope drinks the two cardinals who to-day are on service approach the sacred throne. They hold a torch in the right hand and a small bundle of tow in the left, and according to the custom, set the tow on fire.

It flashes up in a bright flame, is soon extinguished, and a small, almost imperceptible quantity of ashes floats from it to the feet of the pope.

"*Sic transit gloria mundi!*" (So passes the glory of the world!) exclaimed Francesco Albani, with proud presumptuousness and with maliciously scornful glances, while with an expression of savage triumph he stares in the paling face of the pope. "*Sic transit gloria mundi!*" repeated Albani, in a yet louder and more thundering voice.

The bells ring, the hymn resounds, the trombone and organ clang; the audience are on their knees in prayer. A bustle arises, a suppressed murmur—the holy father of Christendom has fainted upon his throne like any common mortal man.

He has had a vision, the poor pope! It seemed to him that he had seen the face of his murderer, and, as his sentence of death, resounded the scoffing words of Albani: "*Sic transit gloria mundi!*"
