

"Were I Juno, would you consent to be my Vulcan?" roguishly asked Corilla.

"No," said Albani, laughing; "the noble Juno was not exactly true to her Vulcan, and I require a faithful love! Would you be that, Corilla?"

"We shall see," said she, changing the arrangement of the diadem before the glass—"we shall see, my worthy friend. But forget not the conditions—first the laurel-crown!"

"You shall have it!" triumphantly responded the cardinal.

"Are you certain of that?" asked Corilla, with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks.

Cardinal Francesco Albani smiled mysteriously.

"Pope Ganganelli is ill," said he, "and it is thought he will die!"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE DOOMING LETTER.

GROANING, supported by his faithful Lorenzo's arm, Pope Ganganelli slowly moved through the walks of his garden. Some months had passed since the suppression of the order of the Jesuits—how had these few months changed poor Clement! Where was the peace and cheerfulness of his face, where was the sublime expression of his features, the firm and noble carriage of his body—where was it all?

Trembling, shattered, with distorted features, and with

dull, half-closed eyes, crawled he about with groans, his brow wrinkled, his lips compressed by pain and inward sorrow.

No one dared to remain with him; he spoke to no one. But Lorenzo was yet sometimes able to drive away the clouds from his brow, and to recall a faint smile to his thin pale lips.

He had also to-day succeeded in this, and for the first time in several weeks had Ganganelli, yielding to his prayers, consented to a walk in the garden of the Quirinal.

"This air refreshes me," said the pope, breathing more freely; "it seems as if it communicated to my lungs a renewed vital power and caused the blood to flow more rapidly in my veins. Lorenzo, this is a singularly fortunate day for me, and I will make the most of it. Come, we will repair to our Franciscan Place!"

"That is an admirable idea," said Lorenzo, delighted. "If your holiness can reach it, you will recover your health, and all will again be well."

Ganganelli sighed, and glanced toward heaven with a sad smile.

"Health!" said he. "Ah, Lorenzo, that word reminds me of a lost paradise. The avenging angel has driven me from it, and I shall never see it again."

"Say not so!" begged Lorenzo, secretly wiping a tear from his cheek. "No, say not so, you will certainly recover!"

"Yes, recover!" replied the pope. "For death is a recovery, and in the end perhaps the most real."

They silently walked on, and making a path through

the bushes, they at length arrived at the place, with the construction of which Lorenzo had some months before surprised the pope, and which Ganganelli had since named the "Franciscan Place."

"So," joyfully exclaimed Lorenzo, while the exhausted pope glided down upon the grass-bank—"so, brother Clement, now let us be cheerful! You know that here we have nothing more to do with the pope. You have yourself declared that here you would be brother Clement, and nothing more; now brother Clement was always a healthy man, full of juvenile spirits and strength."

"Ah, my friend," responded Ganganelli, "I fear the pope has secretly followed brother Clement even to this place, and even here no longer leaves him free! No, no, it is no longer brother Clement who sits groaning here, it is the vicegerent of God, the father of Christendom, the holy and blessed pope! And if you knew, Lorenzo, what this vicegerent of God has to suffer and bear, how his blood like streams of fire runs through his veins, carbonizing his entrails and parching the roof of his mouth, so that the tongue fast cleaves to it, and he has no longer the power to complain of his misery! And such a crushed earth-worm this miserable, infatuated people call the vicegerent of God, before whom they bow in the dust! Ah, foolish children, are you not yourselves disgusted with your masquerade, and do you not blush for this jest?"

"See you not," said Lorenzo, with forced cheerfulness, "that since you are here you have, against your will, again become brother Clement, and inveigh against God's vicegerent who holds his splendid court in the Vatican and

Quirinal! Yes, yes, that was what brother Clement used to do in the Franciscan convent; he was always scolding about the pope."

"And yet he let men befool him and make a pope of him," said Ganganelli. "Ah, Lorenzo, they were indeed good purposes that decided me, and good and holy resolutions were in me when I bore this crown of St. Peter for the first time. Ah, I was then so young, not in years, but in hopes and illusions. I was so enthusiastic for the good and noble, and I wished to serve it, to honor and glorify it in the name of God!"

"And in the end you have done so!" solemnly responded Lorenzo.

"I have wished to do so!" sighed Ganganelli, "but there it has ended. I have been hemmed in everywhere; wherever I wished to press through, I have always found a wall before me—a wall of prejudices, of ancient customs, once received as indifferent, and at this wall my cardinals and officials held watch, taking care that my will should be broken against it, and not be able to break through, in order to let in a little freedom, a little fresh air, into our walled realm! They have curbed and weakened my will, until nothing more of it subsists, and of my holiest resolutions they have made a scarecrow before which foreign kings and princes cry murder, and prophesy the downfall of their kingdoms if I adhere to my innovations. Ah, the princes, the princes! I tell you, Lorenzo, it is the princes who have undermined the happiness of the world with their ideas of absolute power; they are the robbers of all mankind; for freedom, which is the common property of all

men, that have they, like regular lawless highwaymen, appropriated for themselves alone. They plundered the luck-pennies of all mankind, and coined them into money adorned with their likenesses, and now all mankind run after this money, thinking: 'If I gain that, then shall I have recovered my part of human happiness which once belonged to all in common!' It has come to this, Lorenzo, through the rapacity of princes, and yet they still tremble upon their thrones, and fear that the people may one day awake from their stupid slumber, all rising as one man, and cry in the paling faces of their robbers: 'Give back what you have taken from us—we will have what is ours; we require freedom and human right; we will no longer remain slaves to tremble before a bugbear; we will be free children of God, and have no one to fear but the God above us and the consciences within our own breasts!' Come down, therefore, from your usurped thrones, become once more human—labor, enjoy, complain, and rejoice, as other men do; live not upon the sweat of your subjects, but nourish yourselves by your own efforts, that justice may prevail in the world, and humanity regain its rights!"

And Ganganelli's eyes flashed, his sunken cheeks were feverishly flushed, while he was thus speaking. Lorenzo observed it with anxious eyes; and when the pope made a momentary pause, he said: "You are again altogether the good and brave brother Clement, but even he should think about sparing himself!"

"And to what end should he spare himself?" excitedly exclaimed Ganganelli; "Death sits within me and laughs to scorn all my efforts, burying himself deeper and deeper

in my inward life. You must know, Lorenzo, that my cause of sorrow is precisely this, that I now live in vain, and that I cannot finish what I began! I wished to make my people happy and free; that was what alarmed all these princes, that was an unheard-of innovation, and they have all put their heads together and whispered to each other, 'He will betray to mankind that they have rights of which we have robbed them. He wishes to give back to mankind his inherited portion of the booty! But what will then become of us? Will not our slaves rise up against us, demanding their human rights? We cannot suffer such innovations, for they involve our destruction!' Thus have they cried, and in their anxiety they have decided upon my death! Then they threw me in a crumb exactly suited to my dreams of improving the happiness of the people; they all consented that I should relieve mankind from that dangerous tapeworm, Jesuitism, and with secret laughter thought, 'It will be the death of him!' And they were right, these sly princes, it will be the death of me! I have abolished the order of Jesuits—in consequence of which I shall die—but the Jesuits will live, and live forever!"

The echo of approaching footsteps was now heard, and, sinking with fatigue, he directed Lorenzo to go and meet the intruder, and by no means to let any one penetrate to him.

Returning alone, Lorenzo handed the pope a letter.

"The courier whom you sent out some days since, has returned," said he. "This is his dispatch."

Taking the letter, with a sad smile, the pope weighed it in his hand. "How light is this little sheet," said he, "and

yet how heavy are its contents! Do you know what this letter contains, Lorenzo?"

"How can I? A poor cloister brother is not all-knowing!"

"This letter," said the pope, with solemnity, "brings me life or death. It is the answer of the learned physician, Professor Brunelli, of Bologna!"

"You have written to him?" asked Lorenzo, turning pale.

"I wrote him, particularly describing my condition and sufferings; in God's name I conjured him to tell me the truth, and Brunelli is a man of honor; he will do it! Am I right, therefore, in saying that the contents of this letter are very heavy?"

Lorenzo trembled, and, grasping the pope's hand, he hastily and anxiously said: "No, read it not. Of what use will it be to learn its contents? It is tempting God to endeavor to learn the future in advance! Let me destroy this fatal letter!"

"Of what use is it to know its contents?" asked the pope. "That I may either prepare for death, or resume a cheerful, hopeful life. Leave me, Lorenzo; I must read this letter!"

And, while his faithful servant respectfully stood back, Ganganelli broke the seal.

A pause ensued—a long, excruciating pause! Lorenzo, kneeling, prayed—Pope Ganganelli read the letter of the physician of Bologna. His face had assumed a mortal pallor; while reading, his lips trembled, and tear-drops rolled slowly down over his sunken cheeks.

Falling from his hand, the letter rustled to the earth; with hanging head and folded hands sat the pope. Lorenzo was still upon his knees praying. Ganganelli suddenly raised his head, his eyes were turned heavenward, a cheerful, God-given peace beamed from his eyes, and with a clear, exulting voice, he said: "Lord, Thy will be done! I resign myself to Thy holy keeping."

"The letter, then, brings good news?" asked Lorenzo, misled by the joyfulness of the pope. "There is, then, no ground for the presentiments of death, and the learned doctor says you will live?"

"The life eternal, Lorenzo!" said Ganganelli. "This letter confirms my suppositions! Brunelli is a man of honor, and he has told me the truth. Lorenzo, would you know what signifies this consuming fire, this weariness and relaxation of my limbs? It is the effect of *Acqua Tofana!*"

"Oh, my God!" shrieked Lorenzo, "you are poisoned!"

"Irretrievably," calmly responded the pope; "Brunelli says it, and I feel in my burning entrails that he speaks the truth."

"And are there no remedies?" lamented Lorenzo, wringing his hands. "No means at least of prolonging your life?"

"There is such a means; and Brunelli recommends it. The application of the greatest possible heat, the production of a continual perspiration, which may a little retard the progress of the evil, and perhaps prolong my life for a few weeks!"*

* Archenholz, vol. v., 127.

"Lorenzo, it is my duty to struggle every day with death. I have yet much to complete before I die, yet much labor before I go to my eternal rest, and, as far as I can, I must bring to an end what I have commenced for the welfare of my people! Come, Lorenzo, let us return to the Vatican; set pans of coals in my room, procure me furs and a glowing hot sun! I would yet live some weeks!"

With feverish impetuosity Ganganelli grasped Lorenzo's arm and drew him away. Then, suddenly stopping, he turned toward his favorite place.

"Lorenzo," he said in a low tone, and with deep sadness, "it was yet very pleasant in the Franciscan cloister. Why did we not remain there? Only see, my friend, how beautifully the sun glitters there among the pines, and how delightfully this air fans us! Ah, Lorenzo, this world is so beautiful, so very beautiful! Why must I leave it so soon?"

Lorenzo made no answer; he could not speak for tears.

Ganganelli cast a long and silent glance around him, greeting with his eyes the trees and flowers, the green earth and the blue sky.

"Farewell, farewell, thou beautiful Nature!" he whispered low. "We take our last leave of each other. I shall never again see these trees or this grassy seat. But you, Lorenzo, will I establish as the guardian of this place, and when you sometimes sit here in the still evening hour, then will you think of me! Now come, we must away. Feel you not this cool and gentle air? Oh, how refreshingly it fans and cools, but I dare not enjoy it—not I! This cooling cuts off a day from my life!"

And with the haste of a youth, Ganganelli ran down the alley. Bathed with perspiration, breathless with heat, he arrived at the palace.

"Now give me furs, bring pans of coals, Lorenzo, shut all the doors and windows. Procure me a heat that will shut out death—!"

But death nevertheless came; the furs and coverings, the steaming coal-pans with which the pope surrounded himself, the glowing atmosphere he day and night inhaled, and which quite prostrated his friends and servants, all that could only keep off death for some few weeks, not drive it away. More dreadful yet than this blasting heat with which Ganganelli surrounded himself, yet more horrible, was the fire that consumed his entrails and burned in his blood.

Finally, withered and consumed by these external and internal fires, the pope greeted Death as a deliverer, and sank into his arms with a smile.

But no sooner had he respired his last breath, no sooner had the death-rattle ceased in his throat, and no sooner had death extinguished the light of his eyes, than the cold corpse exhibited a most horrible change.

The thin white hair fell off as if blown away by a breath of air, the loosened teeth fell from their sockets, the formerly quietly smiling visage became horribly distorted, the nose sank in and the eyes fell out, the muscles of all his limbs became relaxed as if by a magic stroke, and the rapidly putrefying members fell from each other.

The pope's two physicians, standing near the bed, looked with terror upon the frightful spectacle.

"He was, then, right," murmured the physician Barbi, folding his hands, "he was poisoned. These are the effects of the *Acqua Tofana!*"

Salicetti, the second physician, shrugged his shoulders with a contemptuous smile. "Think as you will," said he, "for my part I shall prove to the world that Pope Clement XIV. died a natural death."

Thus saying, Salicetti left the chamber of death with a proud step, betaking himself to his own room, to commence his history of Ganganelli's last illness, in which, despite the arsenic found in the stomach of the corpse and despite the fact that all Rome was convinced of the poisoning of the pope, and named his murderer with loud curses, he endeavored to prove that Ganganelli died of a long-concealed scrofula!*

And while Ganganelli breathed out his last sigh, resounded the bells of St. Peter's, thundered the cannon of Castle Angelo, and the curious people thronged around the Vatican, where the conclave was in solemn session for the choice of a new pope. Thousands stared up to the palace, thousands prayed upon their knees, until at length the doors of the balcony, behind which the conclave was in session, were opened, and the papal master of ceremonies made his appearance upon it.

At a given signal the bells became silent, the cannon ceased to thunder, and breathlessly listened the crowd.

The master of ceremonies advanced to the front of the balcony. A pause—a silent, dreadful pause! His voice

* Archenholz, vol. v., p. 125; Gorani, vol. ii., p 45.

then resounded over the great square, and the listeners heard these words: "*Habemus pontificem maximum Pium VI.!*" (We have Pope Pius VI.)

And the bells rang anew, the cannon thundered, drums beat, and trumpets sounded; upon the balcony appeared the new pope, Juan Angelo Braschi, Pius VI., bestowing his blessing upon the kneeling people.

As they now had a new pope, nothing remained to be done for the deceased pope but to bury him; and they buried him.

In solemn procession, followed by all the cardinals and high church officials, surrounded by the Swiss guards, the tolling of the bells and the dull rolling of the muffled drums, the solemn hymns of the priests, moved the funeral *cortège* from the Vatican to St. Peter's church. In the usual open coffin lay the corpse of the deceased pope, that the people might see him for the last time. As they passed the bridge of St. Angelo, when the coffin had reached the middle of the bridge, arose a shriek of terror from thousands of throats! A leg had become severed from the body and hung out of the coffin, swinging in a fold of the winding-sheet. Cardinal Albani, who walked near the coffin, was touched on the shoulder by the loosely swinging limb, and turned pale, but he yet had the courage to push it back into the coffin. The people loudly murmured, and shudderingly whispered to each other: "The dead man has touched his murderer. They have poisoned him, our good pope! His members fall apart. That is the effect of *Acqua Tofana.*"*

* Archenholz relates yet another case where the *Acqua Tofana* had a similar violent and sudden effect. "A respectable Roman

The infernal work had therefore proved successful, the vengeance was complete—Ganganelli was no more, and upon the papal throne sat Braschi, the friend of the Jesuits and of Cardinal Albani, to whom he had promised the crowning of the improvisatrice Corilla.

And as this cost nothing to the miserly Pope Pius, he this time found no inconvenience in keeping his sacred promise, though not so promptly as Corilla and the passionate cardinal desired.

Not until 1776, almost two years after Braschi had mounted the papal throne, took place the crowning of the improvisatrice in the capitol at Rome.

She had therefore attained the object of her wishes. She had finally reached it by bribery and intrigue, by hypocritical tenderness, by the resignation of her maiden modesty and womanly honor, and by all the arts of coquetry.

But this triumph of hers was not to be untroubled. The *nobili* shouted for her, and the cardinals and princes of the Church, but the people accompanied her to the capitol with hissing and howling. Poems came fluttering down on all sides; the first that fell upon Corilla's head, Cardinal Albani eagerly seized and unfolded for the purpose of reading it aloud. But after the first few lines his voice was

lady, who was young and beautiful, and had many admirers, made in the year 1778 a similar experiment, to rid herself of an old husband. As the dose was rather strong, death was followed by the rapid and violent separation of the members. They employed all possible means to retain the body in a human form until the funeral was over. The face was covered with a waxen mask, and by this means was the condition of the corpse concealed. This separation of the members seems to be the usual effect of this poison, and is said to occur as soon as the body is cold."—Archenholz, vol. v., p. 126.

silenced—it was an abusive poem, full of mockery and scorn.

But nevertheless she was crowned. She still stood upon the capitol, with the laurel-crown upon her brow, cheered by her respectable protectors and friends. But the people joined not in those cheers, and, as the exulting shouts ceased, there swelled up to the laurel-crowned poetess, from thousands of voices, a thundering laugh of scorn, and this scornful laugh, this hissing and howling of the people, accompanied her upon her return from the capitol, following her through the streets to her own door. The people had judged her!

Corilla was no poetess by the grace of God, and only by the grace of man had she been crowned as queen of poesy!

Mortified, crushed, and enraged, she fled from Rome to Florence. She knew how to flatter the great and win princes. She was a princess-poetess, and the people rejected her!

But the laurel was hers. She was sought and esteemed, the princes admired her, and Catharine of Russia fulfilled the promise Orloff had made the improvisatrice in the name of the empress. Corilla received a pension from Russia. Russia has always promptly and liberally paid those who have sold themselves and rendered services to her. Russia is very rich, and can always send so many thousands of her best and noblest to work in the mines of Siberia, that she can never lack means for paying her spies and agents.