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DIVERSIONS IN SICILY

BY
HENRY FESTING JONES

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TO ENRICO PAMPALONE

My dear Enrico,

Your father and I, sitting one summer night on the terrace at Castellinaria watching the moon on the water, agreed that this book might be dedicated to you, although you have not yet put it into my power to ask your permission.

"After all," exclaimed your father, "what is existence?" And I was unable to give him a satisfactory reply.

When Orlando and his Paladins were overcome at Roncisvalle through the treachery of Gano di Magonza, were they all slain? When "the Crusaders' streams of shadowy midnight troops sped with the sunrise," did none linger? When the angel carried up to heaven the soul of Guido Santo, did he never fight another battle? The young men of your island hardly think so; their thoughts and actions are still coloured by the magnificent language and the chivalrous exploits of Christian and Turk. As long as there is an imaginative shoeblack in the Quattro Canti working for pennies by day, so long will those pennies be paid for the story to be told by night in the marionette theatre. Often will Angelica recover her ring, and as often be robbed of it again; often will the ghostly voice of Astolfo, imprisoned in a myrtle upon Alcina's magic isle, reveal the secret of his

woe; often will Rinaldo drink of the Fountains of Hatred and of Love, and, forgetful of the properties of those waters, return and drink once more.

And what of those other and less heroic figures—the brigadier and his guards gambling among the ruins of Selinunte, the ingenious French gentleman classifying the procession at Calatafimi, Micio buying his story-books and chocolate at Castellinaria, and many another whom I should like to think you will some day meet, palely wandering up and down these pages?

To pursue the subject might disincline you ever to take leave of the world of the unborn, whereas I am desirous of making your acquaintance as soon as possible. Let me, then, rather assure you that life is not all marionettes and metaphysics, and that I know of no reason why you should not at once enter upon an existence as real as that enjoyed by your dear father or your beautiful mother—it would be unbecoming in a son to expect more. Castellinaria is waiting to welcome you. You could not have a more delightful birthplace than your native town, or more charming compatriots than your fellow-townspeople. Only resemble your parents, and you will never regret having hastened the day when I shall be entitled to sign myself

Your affectionate Godfather,
HENRY FESTING JONES.

NOTE

Chapters VIII–XI have been enlarged and re-written since August, 1903, when they appeared as *A Festa on Mount Eryx* in *The Monthly Review*. I have to thank Mr. John Murray for kindly giving me permission to reprint them here.

A few sentences in Chapter XIII have been taken from a pamphlet I wrote and had printed for private circulation in 1904, entitled: *Diary of a Journey through North Italy to Sicily in the spring of 1903, undertaken for the purpose of leaving the MSS. of three books by Samuel Butler at Varallo-Sesia, Aci-Reale and Trapani*.

It would be impossible to enumerate and thank all the many friends who, with the courtesy and patience that never desert a Sicilian, have given me information, explanation and assistance. Among them are two, however, to whom, and to whose families, I desire to give my special thanks, namely: Cavaliere Uffiziale Giovanni Grasso, of the Teatro Macchiavelli, Catania; and Signor Achille Greco, of the Marionette Theatre, in the Piazza Nuova, Palermo.

Signor Greco wrote to me recently that, for Rosina's riddle in his episode of the masks in *Samson*, he had dipped in the stream of children's games current to-day in Palermo; he did not appear to know that Plato had dipped in his own Athenian stream for the riddle quoted by Glaucon towards the end of the fifth book of the *Republic*. The riddles are similar not because Rosina had read the dialogue, nor because Glaucon had seen the play, but because the two streams flowed as one until Greek colonists took their folk-lore with them into Sicily before Plato was born.

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SELINUNTE

CHAPTER I—THE BRIGADIER AND THE LOTTERY

One wet Saturday evening in May I found myself at Castelvetrano consulting Angelo, the guide, about the weather. His opinion was that it would clear up during the night; I said that if it did we would go to Selinunte, and this confirmed his view; so, on the understanding that there was to be no rain, I appointed him padrone of the expedition and promised to acquiesce in all his arrangements.

He was quite right; Sunday morning was brilliantly fine, and at about 8.30 we started. He began by showing me his purchases; he had been out early, marketing, and his basket contained fresh tunny, the first of the season, veal, salame, dried fish, bread and oranges, but no wine; he said we should find that at the locanda, where they would cook the tunny and the veal for us.

Cicciu, our driver, was one of those queer creatures one sometimes meets in Italy. At first I took him to be of feeble intellect, for when I spoke to him or merely looked at him, he shut up his eyes, showed his teeth and covered his face all over with grinning wrinkles; but on knowing him better, I found he was really extremely intelligent and perfectly good. He was about sixteen, but would have passed for twenty. His general appearance was grey, the actual colour of his face, hands and clothes being powdered out of sight by the dust which held all together like a transparent glaze over a painting. He drove us along between flowery fields of cistus until the temples of Selinunte came in sight, then down to the Marinella, a handful of houses on the shore under the low cliff. We drew up at the locanda which distinguished itself by displaying over the door, in a five-ounce medicine bottle, a sample of a cloudy, canary-coloured fluid to advertise the wine Angelo had spoken of, and the forlorn bunch of five or six faded sprigs of camomile which hung on the same hook constituted the bush. We left our basket with instructions and drove off to inspect the acropolis and the ruins, returning in about an hour and a half.

The locanda was an immense, cavernous room divided into front and back by a partition about seven feet high with an opening in the middle. There was no regular window, but we were only a few feet from the sea which reflected the sunshine through the open door and up into the arched roof and illuminated the front part. In the obscurity behind the partition were dim ladders leading up to trap-doors and, through a few holes in the roof and in the end wall, blinding rays of light glinted on piles of earthenware—saucepans, jugs, cups and saucers, coloured crockery lamps, rough basins glazed green inside, heaped up in stacks and protected from one another by straw. There were hanks of rope, fans of hawks' feathers for blowing the fire, palm-leaf brooms and oil-jars big enough for thieves. There were horns on the walls to keep off the evil eye, prints of the Madonna, some with sprigs of camomile stuck into the frame, a cheapissimo coloured lithograph of S. Giuseppe with the Bambino, and in front of it on a little bracket, in half a tumbler of oil, floated a burning wick. In a corner was the landlord putting his whole soul into the turning about of a sieve full of coffee beans which he had roasted and was now cooling. And everything was covered with a grey dust like the bloom on a plum or like Cicciu.

Our table was spread in a clearing among the pottery in the front part of the room and everything was ready on a clean white cloth, wine and all. Besides the landlord and his wife there were two men in uniform, one a corporal of the coastguards and the other a policeman. There was also a third man in ordinary clothes—I did not find out what he was, but they were all, including the landlord, friends of Angelo who, in his capacity of padrone, invited them to join us at lunch. We

were just about to begin when I missed Cicciu. Angelo said we need not wait for him, he had only gone to the sea to wash his feet. So we sat down without him and presently he returned saying he had washed all over, but he looked just as dusty as before his bath.

There must be something in the air of Selinunte that encourages bathing, for they told me that in a few days an annual festa was to take place there, the pilgrims arriving the evening before and p. 7 spending the whole night bathing in the sea, the men in one part and the women in another; at dawn they would come out of the water, dress and attend to their religious duties. I said I should like very much to see it, whereupon the corporal, who sat next me and clinked glasses with me every time he drank, invited me to stay—there would be plenty of room in the caserma and they could make me comfortable for as long as I would remain. I had, however, made appointments elsewhere, so I told him it was unfortunate, but I could not alter my plans and was sorry I must decline his invitation.

After lunch by general consent we all went strolling up the cliff and through a garden belonging to a large house. I assumed that Angelo had been arranging something in dialect and asked the corporal, who happened to be next me, where we were going. He first picked a geranium most politely and stuck it in my button-hole; then he told me we were going to the big house which was the caserma. It appeared that he had been so overcome by my hospitality that he had invited Angelo to bring me to call upon the brigadier and his companions-in-arms at the guard-house. It p. 8 was really Angelo who had shown the hospitality, nevertheless, though not directly responsible for all details, I was responsible for having shifted the responsibility on Angelo by making him padrone of the expedition, so that the hospitality was in a sense mine. But if left to myself, I should never have had the courage to invite two such influential members of the legal profession as a coastguard and a policeman to lunch with me, not to speak of the third man who might have been anything from a sheriff's officer to the Lord Chancellor himself. But they were all friends of Angelo and so was I and in Sicily the maxim "Gli amici dei nostri amici sono i nostri" is acted upon quite literally.

Passing through the door of the caserma we entered a large oblong room; at each end were three or four beds and on the side opposite the door two open windows. Through the windows across a barley-field, lightly stirred by the breeze from the sea, the Temple of Apollo was lying in the heat, an extinct heap of ruins, as though the naughty boy of some family of Cyclopes had spilt his brother's box of bricks. In the middle of the room ten or twelve men were sitting round a table p. 9 on which were dishes of what at first I took to be some kind of frutta di mare, objects about the size and shape of sea-urchins. The brigadier received me with great courtesy and put me to sit next him, and the corporal sat on the other side of me. A dreamy Sunday afternoon feeling pervaded the air, the brigadier said they were slaughtering time ("bisogna ammazzare un po' di tempo"). Being to a certain extent soldiers, their business was to kill something and they were compassing the destruction of their present enemy by drinking wine and eating not sea-urchins but cold boiled artichokes. He gave me some and begged me to make myself at home. The corporal clinked glasses with me and said that the wine was better than that at the locanda, wherein I agreed with him, but I did not tell him I found the artichokes a little uninteresting. They were so very small and there was so much to do to get what little there was of them that they were more trouble than shrimps or walnuts. Looked at from the brigadier's point of view, as a means of passing the time on Sunday, they reminded me of the Litany; pulling off each leaf was like listening to each short clause and eating the unimportant little bit at the end was like p. 10 intoning the little response; then the larger piece that was left, when all the leaves were off, followed like the coda and finale of the Litany after the more monotonous part has been disposed of. The Litany has, however, the advantage that it comes only one at a time, we do not kneel down to a whole plateful of it; on the other hand, there was wine with the artichokes and they were free from any trace of morbid introspection.

The brigadier and Angelo were in earnest conversation about something, and, as my mind began to wander from the artichokes (here again they resembled the Litany) and was able to attend more to what was going on, I became aware that they were talking about the lottery. Selinunte depends for news upon chance visitors and Angelo had brought the winning numbers which he had got from a cousin of his in one of the lottery offices at Castelvetrano. The brigadier had lost and in giving his instructions for the next week's drawing seemed to experience great difficulty in making up his mind.

Presently there looked in at one of the windows a hunchback riding on a mule and carrying a guitar. Several of the guards went to help him in, greeting him with shouts of— p. 11

"Addio, Filippo!"

He lifted one of his legs over the saddle, and then I saw that not only was he a hunchback but that his legs were withered. He reached up and hung on to the ledge over the window with both hands and swung himself very cleverly and with no assistance into a sitting position on the window-sill; two of the guards then picked him up, carried him into the room, set him on a chair and gave him some wine and artichokes. Being a jolly fellow, as cripples often are, he soon tired of the artichokes, asked for his guitar and began to sing Neapolitan songs. He had not sung more than two before the brigadier told me I should like to wash my hands and had better come into his bedroom. I glanced at Angelo who nodded back and the brigadier took me off with him. He began by showing me his room which was very clean and tidy. His bed was at one end, his table, with his official papers and books, in the middle and against the wall hung his guns which he showed me particularly, declaring that he was passionately devoted to the chase. After he had p. 12

done the honours I washed my hands and so did he; then he led the conversation to what his manner betrayed was the real business of the interview. He asked me my name and age, whether I was married or single and particulars of my family, whether I was an Englishman from London or from New York and how much a metre I had paid for the stuff my clothes were made of. This last was the only question that gave me any real trouble, but I made a hasty calculation, converted the result into francs, deducted five per cent. for cash and hazarded—

“Fourteen lire.”

In return for his polite interest in my affairs I pretended a similar interest in his, and it turned out that we had a friend in common—a maresciallo dei carabinieri whom I had met on Monte San Giuliano and of whom I was able to give the latest information namely, that he had retired, gone home to Cremona and married. Carabinieri are not allowed to marry so long as they are in service, or rather they may marry but only on condition of depositing a sum of money which is fixed at an amount beyond anything they are likely to be able to lay their hands on. p. 13

Having exhausted our questions and answers we returned to the guard-room and the corporal welcomed us by filling our glasses again. The brigadier, before sitting down, took Angelo aside and became again immersed in conversation; this time he appeared to be getting on more satisfactorily with his instructions. The artichokes were beginning to lose their attractions for every one, so I took out a packet of cigarettes and offered them round. In those days there used to be in every packet of Italian cigarettes a loose piece of paper about the size of a postage stamp with a number on it. Boxes of biscuits in England sometimes have a similar paper to identify the person responsible for the packing should anything be found to be wrong. In my packet there happened to be two pieces of paper which fluttered out upon the table as I opened it. The brigadier instantly pounced upon them. There was silence in the room. Every one watched and waited. Each of my pieces of paper bore the number thirty-three. The brigadier did me the honour of cancelling all his previous orders to Angelo and of putting his money for next week’s p. 14 lottery on thirty-three. The corporal and several of the men who had not intended to gamble changed their minds and gave similar instructions.

It was now time to think of returning, so Angelo got out of the window into the sunlight and went off to fetch the carriage and the guards began to chaff poor Cicciu about his watch-chain which was a massive and extensive affair in silver. The corporal said they were playing a game with him and offered to teach it to me. I am not good at games, but this one was so simple that I mastered it in less than a minute and played it thus—

First I asked Cicciu to tell me the time. He shut up his eyes, showed his teeth and covered his face all over with grinning wrinkles. Then I asked him the time again. He replied in the same way. I asked him again and so on till he had overcome his shyness and at last pulled out his watch which was found to consist of a circular piece of tin with a paper watch-face gummed on to one side of it. Then we all laughed at the contrast between this and what his elaborate watch-chain had led us to expect.

p. 15 While we were still laughing, Angelo drove up to the window and said it was time to go, so we began saying “Good-bye.” Some of the men departed before us, but the brigadier, the corporal and one or two others were going our way. The brigadier fetched his gun in order to enjoy the chase and we all got out of the window. Angelo accompanied the hunting party, but the corporal came in the carriage with me and Cicciu drove us round the barley-field to the Temple of Apollo to wait for the others. On the way we heard the brigadier firing off his gun and wondered what sport he was having, and I took a leaf out of his book of politeness and asked the corporal his age and particulars of his family, after which, of course, I had to tell him all about myself and to promise I would take the first opportunity of visiting him in his home to clink glasses and drink wine with him.

We went all over the ruins while waiting for the hunting party which presently joined us. The brigadier was satisfied with his sport and permitted himself the pleasure of offering me the spoils—two birds the size of sparrows—which Angelo was to cook for supper. Then we said “Good-bye,” promising to exchange picture postcards when I should be back in England. The corporal, p. 16 however, was still going our way and we took him in the carriage a little further. We asked if he could not come with us all the way to Castelvetrano and he seemed inclined to do so, but he had to patrol the coast in the direction of Marsala from eleven o’clock that night till eleven the next morning, and it was so annoying because, as he must go to Castelvetrano in a few days, he might almost just as well come with us now. We hoped he would see his way to doing so and he hesitated and appeared to be on the point of yielding, but finally made the Herculean choice of duty before pleasure on the very sensible ground that, if it should be discovered he had deserted his post, he would be put into prison for two months. With the brigadier and all the guards in the secret, it seemed impossible that he should escape detection, so we pressed the invitation no further and took leave of him after exchanging names and addresses and promising to send postcards to one another.

As we drove away I could not but draw a comparison in my mind between the corporal’s refusal of my invitation and mine of his, and I was ashamed of myself for the way I had scamped the p. 17 bathing festa. I had made another engagement and there was an end of it. The corporal, on the other hand, had spared no expense in the manner of his refusal, nothing short of two months’ imprisonment could have prevented him from coming with us. We English ought to be able to do this and some of us, I suppose, can, but there is no Italian who cannot. The French are polite, but not always to be trusted. A Frenchman, speaking of an Englishman to whom I had introduced

him, said to me—

"He speaks French worse than you do."

Any Italian, wishing to express a similar idea, would have said—

"He speaks Italian, it is true, but not so well as you do."

My meditations were interrupted by Angelo who had been taking stock of our possessions and, on looking into the basket, exclaimed with disgust that we had been robbed of our fish. It was the first I had heard about our fish, but he said the brigadier had given us ten and he had put them into the basket. How could they have got out again? All the afternoon we had been surrounded by coastguards and policemen whose profession is, as every one knows, to prevent robbery and to take up thieves. Angelo was furious and wanted to drive back and complain to the brigadier, but, on looking further through the basket, we found there were still two fish and I said they would be quite enough for supper—with the sparrows—and he finally agreed that we had better do nothing, it might look as though we thought the brigadier was not up to his business.

p. 18

"And when the tailor is wearing a coat that does not fit him," said Angelo, "it is rude to tell him of it."

So we drove on among the cistus bushes and I asked him about the lottery. Every Saturday morning ninety cards numbered from one to ninety are put into a wheel of fortune and a blind-folded child from the orphan asylum publicly draws out five. Italy is divided into several districts and a drawing takes place in the chief town of each, the winning numbers are telegraphed to the lottery offices all over the country and afterwards posted up and published in the newspapers. Any one wishing to try his luck chooses one or more numbers and buys a ticket and this choosing of the numbers is a very absorbing business. In the neighbourhood of Castelvetrano at that time the favourite numbers were five and twenty-six and the people were betting on those numbers when they had no special reason for choosing any others. Angelo could not tell why these two numbers were preferred, he could only say that the people found them sympathetic and, as a matter of fact, twenty-six had come out the day before. There are many ways of choosing a number if you find five and twenty-six unsympathetic; you can wait till something remarkable happens to you, look it out in "the useful book that knows" and then bet on its number, for everything really remarkable has a number in the book and, if you do not possess a copy, it can be consulted in a shop as the *Post Office Directory* can be consulted in London. Or, if nothing remarkable happens to you in real life, perhaps you may have dreamt of a lady in a white dress, or of a man whetting a scythe, or of meeting a snake in the road—anything will do, so long as it strikes you at the time. When you see the country people coming into town on market day you may be sure that each one has received instructions from relations and friends at home to put something on a number for them.

p. 19

p. 20

Some make a practice of gambling every week, others only try their luck when they have a few spare soldi, others only when they have witnessed something irresistibly striking. A favourite way of choosing a number is to get into conversation with certain old monks who have a reputation for spotting winners, if I may so speak. You do not ask the monk for a number outright, you engage him in conversation on general topics and as he understands what is expected of him, though he pretends he does not, he will presently make some such irrelevant remark as, "Do you like flowers?" whereupon you rapidly bring the interview to a conclusion and, if you do not know the number for "flower," you look it out in the book and bet on it. It occurred to me that possibly that was what the brigadier had been doing with me when he took me into his room to wash.

"Of course it was," said Angelo; "he did not really want you to wash your hands, he wanted to get a number out of you."

"Did he get one?" said I.

"He told me to put his money on 14."

p. 21

"That must have been because I said I paid 14 francs a metre for this cloth. But he changed that afterwards."

"Yes," replied Angelo. "He thought the number that came out of your packet of cigarettes would be better."

Angelo was not strictly right about the brigadier not wanting me to wash, he said so merely to agree with me, for in Sicily, among those who have not become sophisticated by familiarity with money and its little ways nor cosmopolitanized by travel, and whose civilization remains unmodified by northern and western customs, it is usual for the host to give his guest an opportunity to wash after eating. Sometimes the lady of the house has herself taken me into her bedroom, poured out the water and held the basin while I have washed; she has then handed me the towel and presently escorted me back to the sitting-room.

We soon overtook a man who had caught a rabbit and wanted to sell it for a lira and a half. Angelo bargained with him for ever so long and, being at last satisfied that the rabbit was freshly killed, bought it for a lira and put it into the basket, saying he would cook it for supper, and that no doubt the Madonna had sent it to make up for the loss of the fish.

p. 22

I asked him what I must do to get a ticket in the lottery for the following Saturday. He replied

that his cousin would be happy to sell me one and, if I would settle how much to risk and what number to put it on, he would take me to the office in the morning. I said I would risk a lira, which he thought overdoing it, as he and his friends seldom risked more than four or five soldi, but there was still the troublesome matter of the number. He asked whether anything unusual had happened to me lately, either in real life or in a dream. I told him that I seldom remembered a dream, but that I had had an unusually delightful day in real life at Selinunte. In his capacity of padrone he acknowledged the compliment, but feared there would be no number for that in the book. Then I asked if there was likely to be a number for having breakfast with a coastguard as it was the first time I had done so. He mused and said no doubt there would be a number for breakfast and another for coastguard, but not for the combination. Could not we add the two numbers together and bet on whatever they amounted to, if it were not over 90? Angelo would p. 23 not hear of anything of the kind; we must think of something less complicated. It would never have occurred to him to read for Metaphysics under M and for China under C, and combine the information into the article that appeared in the *Eatanswill Gazette* as a review of a work on Chinese Metaphysics. He asked if I had not lately had "una disgrazia qualunque." I reminded him of the theft of our fish, but that did not satisfy him, he considered it too trivial, though he had made enough fuss about it at the time, and 17, which in Sicily is one of the numbers for an ordinary misfortune, was too general. It seemed a pity I had not been involved in the fall of a balcony because that was a very good thing to bet on and he knew it had a number, although he did not remember it at the moment. Filippo, the hunchback, was no use because, though it is fortunate to meet hunchbacks, and of course they have a number, there was nothing remarkable in seeing Filippo at the caserma—he is always there.

p. 24

By this time we had reached Castelvetrano, and supper overshadowed the lottery. Angelo cooked everything; we began with maccaroni, after which we ate the fish and the sparrows, and wound up with the rabbit. It was all very good, but it seemed hardly right to eat the sparrows, besides, there was scarcely as much on one of them as there had been on one of the artichokes at the caserma.

During supper, something—it may have been the sparrows or, perhaps, the Madonna again—inspired me with an idea for a number that met with Angelo's enthusiastic approval. I remembered that my birthday was near and proposed to put my money upon the number of that day of the month. Nothing could have been better and he recommended me to take also my age, that would give me two numbers and I could have an ambo, I should not win on a single number unless it came out first, whereas, if I did not specify their positions, my two numbers might come out anywhere and if they did I should win about 250 francs. Angelo accepted as a good omen the fact that neither of my numbers exceeded 90, and next morning we called on his cousin and put a franc on 27 and 52.

p. 25

Now, a lottery is an immoral thing, accordingly I expected to feel as though I had committed an immoral action, instead of which I felt just as I usually do. I, therefore, gave my ticket to Angelo in order that, if I should develop a conscience by the time the numbers came out, I might silence it by the consciousness of having disclaimed all hope of gain. This was perhaps a little cowardly, for the effects of a lottery are said to be most pernicious to those who win. But no harm was done in the end, the actual numbers drawn the following Saturday being 39, 42, 89, 83, 28, so Angelo lost and likewise the brigadier and the corporal and the guards who had put their money on 33.

CASTELLINARIA

p. 29

CHAPTER II—PEPPINO

The train passed through the tunnel under the headland on which stands the Albergo Belvedere, and steamed into the station of Castellinaria, a town that is not so marked on any map of Sicily. I had written to Carmelo to meet the train and drive me up, but he was not among the coachmen. I recognized his brother, and said to him—

"Hullo! Rosario, where have you been all these years?"

"Well, you see," he replied, "I have been away. First there was the military service and then I had a disgrazia; but I have come back now."

I avoided inquiring into the disgrazia till I could ascertain from some one else whether he meant what we should call a misfortune or something more serious and merely said I was glad it was all p. 30 over and asked after his brother.

"Carmelo is quite well—he is in private service. He told me to meet you and sent you his salutes and apologies for not coming himself; he will call on you this evening."

"At the Albergo Belvedere?"

"No, excuse me, the Belvedere is closed; he told me to take you to the Albergo della Madonna, unless you wish to go anywhere else."

So Rosario drove me with my luggage up the zigzags for an hour and a half through dust and sunshine, past orchards of lemons and oranges, among prickly pears and agave overgrown with pink and red geranium, by rocky slopes of mesembryanthemum, yellow marguerites, broom and sweet peas, between white walls with roses straggling over them and occasional glimpses of the sea dotted with fishing boats and, now and then, of the land covered with olives, almonds, and vines.

We stopped in the corso at the Albergo della Madonna (con giardino) and were received by a young man who introduced himself as Peppino, the son of the landlord. He also said he remembered me, that he had been a waiter in a restaurant in Holborn where I used to dine; I did p. 31 not recognize him, though, of course, I did not say so. There was something in his manner as though he had recently been assured by my banker that the balance to my credit during the last ten years or so had never fallen below a much larger sum than my passbook had been in the habit of recording. He would not hear of my doing anything about my luggage or dinner, he knew my ways and would show me to my room at once. It was a very fine room with two beds, and he promised that no one should be put into the second bed, not even during the festa which in a few days would fill the town with pilgrims. He then departed to bring up my luggage and I went out on to the balcony.

Before me lay one of those stupendous panoramas which are among the glories of Sicily. First a garden of flowers with orange and lemon trees whose blossoms scented the air, then a thicket of almonds full of glittering goldfinches, then a drop of several hundred feet; beyond, to the right, a great mountain with snow on its rocky summit, its lower slopes and the intervening country highly cultivated; to the left the sea, an illimitable opal gleaming in the sunset. Between the p. 32 mountain and the sea the coastline went in and out, in and out, in a succession of bays and promontories that receded and receded until sea and land and sky were blended into one distant haze. Across the first bay was the port and, as the dusk deepened, constellations of lights gathered and glowed among the shipping. I took possession, thinking that if, like Peppino's parents, I might spend my declining days here, the troubles of life, and especially those attendant upon old age, might be easier to bear. And yet, possibly, a stupendous panorama might turn out as deceitful as proficiency at whist, or great riches, or worldly honours, or any of the other adjuncts of age popularly supposed to be desirable; for I suspect that most of these things fail and become as naught in the balance when weighed against a good digestion, a modest competency and a quiet conscience. These are the abiding securities that smooth our passage through life and bring a man peace at the last, and each of us has his own way of going about to win them.

Peppino brought my luggage and, with no nonsense about what I would have for dinner or when p. 33 or where I should like it, told me that it would be ready at 7.30 in the garden. Accordingly I went down punctually and found a table spread under a trellis of vines from which hung an electric light. Peppino waited on me as, according to his account, he used to do in London, and entertained me with reminiscences of his life there. He had attended divine service at St. Paul's, which he called il Duomo di Londra, and had found it a more reverent function, though less emotional, than Mass at home. He was enthusiastic about the river Thames, the orators in Hyde Park and the shiny soldiers riding in the streets. He remembered the lions in the Zoological Gardens and the "Cock" at Highbury, where he once drank a whisky-soda and disliked it intensely. He had stood on the base of La Torre del Duca di Bronte (by which he meant the Nelson Column) to see the Lord Mayor's Show, and considered it far finer than any Sicilian procession—more poetical in conception, he said, and carried out with greater magnificence. He had been to Brighton from Saturday to Monday and burst into tears when he saw the sea again. It is difficult to travel on the Underground Railway without losing oneself, but Peppino can do it. p. 34 He got lost once, but that was in some street near Covent Garden, soon after his arrival, and before he had ventured alone in the Underground; he asked his way of a policeman who spoke Italian and told him the way: he believes that all London policemen speak Italian, but he himself prefers English if he can get a chance to speak it.

Sicilians always want to speak English, especially those of the lower orders who invariably consider it as a master-key that will open every door leading to wealth. Sometimes what they say is, of course, nothing more than otiose compliment; sometimes they are merely introducing the subject of their want of money in an artistic manner in the hope of anything from a soldo to a promise to take them into service as valet, courier, coachman, or whatever it may be—a sort of shaking of Fortune's bag to see what will come out. Sometimes they really do want to learn English and some of them even make attempts to pick up a few words and actually retain them.

I went once from Siracusa to Malta at the end of December; it was abominably rough, and my p. 35 luggage was thrown about in the cabin with such violence that some of the things slipped out of my bag. I was too sea-sick to be sure I had picked them all up, but afterwards discovered that the only thing left behind was my new diary for the next year. On returning from Valletta to Siracusa about a fortnight later, I asked the steward if he had found my diary and it was produced by the cabin-boy who must have been a youth of considerable energy and enterprise. He had apparently learnt by ear several English words and, finding a book full of blank paper, had written them down, spelling them the best way he could, that is phonetically, according to Italian pronunciation, and writing the Italian equivalents, spelt in his own way, in a parallel column. His writing is so distinct that I am certain I have got every letter right, but I do not recognize his second English word for latrina, it is probably some corrupt form of lavatory. The vocabulary, though restricted, seems a fairly useful one for a cabin-boy to begin with:

Engl.	Italy.
Fork	Forketa
Spoun	Cuchiaio
Neif	Coltelo
Pleit	Piati
Glas	Bichiere
Bootl	Butiglia
Voutsch	Orologio
Tebl	Tavola
Ceaer	Sedia
Taul	Tavaglia
Serviet	Serviette
Dabliusii	Latrina
Lavetrim	„
Vouder	Aqua
Badi	Letto

p. 36

Peppino is not exactly of this class, his parents were able to give him a good education, he took his degree at the University of Palermo and, though he does not practise his profession, is a qualified engineer. When he returned from London his English was probably better than the cabin-boy’s will ever be, but he is a little out of practice.

I had observed a couple of picturesque ruffians hovering about in the gloom of the garden; towards the end of dinner they wandered into the circle of the electric light and resolved themselves into Carmelo and Rosario. We invited them to sit down, gave them wine and cigarettes and talked over the changes that had taken place in the town since I had last been there.

p. 37

When they had gone, I asked Peppino about Rosario’s misfortune and learnt that he had been put into prison for stabbing his father. He had only wounded him, and Peppino thought the father had probably been in the wrong, for he has a bad history in the books of the police, but Rosario had not done himself any good over it, because, of course, the crime and its consequences have now gone down into his own history.

An Englishman may be a mass of prejudices, but I confess I did not like the idea of hob-nobbing with a would-be parricide and determined that Rosario should not drive me any more; if I wanted a carriage, Carmelo should get leave of his padrone and take me.

Next morning, while I was having my coffee, there was a sound of passing music; I recognized it as belonging to a funeral, and asked Peppino if he knew who was dead. Several people were dead and he did not know which this was, unless it was old Baldassare; it must be either a married woman or a grown-up man. I asked how he knew that. He replied that when apprenticed to his father, who had been sagrestano before taking the hotel, he had learnt all about the ceremonies of the Church.

p. 38

“They do this,” he said, “when it is a married lady dead or a grown man. If it shall be the woman dead unmarried or a boy dead, then shall it be a different song, a different ring of bell and the dead shall go very directly in the paradiso; it is like the—please, what is fuochi artificiali? Excuse me, it is the rocket; prestissimo and St. Peter he don’t be asking no question. Did you understand?”

He then diverged to ceremonies connected with last illnesses—

“When the doctor is coming it is telling always that you would be good of the malady, but when the priest is coming it is telling that you are finished. This is not a good thing. It is difficult to hope when the doctor is shaking the head and is telling ‘Please, you; go, catch the priest quickly, quickly.’ And sometimes the notary, the man of law, if the malade is having money; if no money, it is the notary not at all. When the doctor is coming out, the priest is coming in, and generally after would be the death. But you must pay. If to pay less would come only one priest and not well dressed, if to pay more, very well dressed and too many priests. If to pay plenty, plenty, then to ring all the bells and enter by the great door; but if to pay few, then not many bells and to enter by the second door. Did you understand?

p. 39

“When they die the parents always, and also the man that is to die, they fear the—please, what is not the paradiso? Excuse me, it is the inferno: and they tell to the priest ‘Please come.’ Then they pay him to tell all that is good, and sometimes the priest arrive that you will be dead. If you shall suicide, very likely you are dead before. Then shall the parents pay him to tell that the man to die has taken all the functions of religion and the holy oil to put in the foot to prevent him the death. But it is prevent not at all.

“Did you know what is sacramento? All right, I shall tell you. The priest is going with the

sacramento on the hand and the umbrella on the head and you must pay—always must pay, it is the interesting thing. And the old women are going and are praying because the man is dead: and the soldiers are going and are taking the arms before the risorgimento, but now the law it is p. 40 redeemed. Then they arrive into the room of the malade and take the sacramento and up and down and put the holy oil in the foot and pray and went away, and the malade who is not dead would very soonly die.”

CHAPTER III—THE PROFESSOR

p. 41

The day before the festa there came a professor of pedagogy, and Peppino was not best pleased to see him because he knew him as a jettatore. I had supposed this word to mean a person with the evil eye who causes misfortunes to others, but he used it in the sense of one who causes misfortunes to himself or, at least, who is always in trouble—a man who is constitutionally unfortunate, the sort of man with whom Napoleon would have nothing to do. He will miss his train more often than not; if he has to attend a funeral it will be when he has a cold in his head, and all his white pocket-handkerchiefs will be at the wash, so that he must use a coloured one; he will attempt to take his medicine in the dark, thereby swallowing the liniment by mistake. Of course, this kind of man is incidentally disastrous to others as well as to himself and is, therefore, p. 42 also a jettatore in the other sense, so that Napoleon was quite right.

The arrival of the professor led Peppino into giving me a great deal of information about the evil eye in which he swore he did not believe. It was all rather indefinite and contradictory, partly, no doubt, because those who believe in it most firmly are the analfabeti and unaccustomed to express themselves clearly.

The prevailing idea seems to be that an evil influence proceeds from the eye of the jettatore who is not necessarily a bad person, at least he need not be desirous of hurting any one. The misfortunes that follow wherever he goes may be averted by the interposition of some attractive object whereby the glance from his eye is arrested, and either the misfortune does not happen at all, or the force of the evil influence is expended elsewhere. Therefore, it is as well always to carry some charm against the evil eye. All over Italy, but especially in the south, it is rare to meet a man who does not carry a charm, either on his watch-chain or in his pocket, or on a string or a chain round his neck under his clothes, and he usually carries more than one. Women, of p. 43 course, always wear them, which may be because a woman likes to surround herself with pretty things, and, if she can say that they protect her, she has a reason, unconnected with vanity, which she may be apt to profess is her true reason for wearing ornaments. The same applies to men who, though less in the habit of wearing ornaments, are, as has been often remarked, no less vain than women. This may be called the ornamental view and may account for some of the fashions that arise in the wearing of charms. But there is also the utilitarian view, and a new form of charm will sometimes become popular, just as a new sanctuary becomes popular, because it is reported to have been effective in some particular case. Probably no change of fashion will ever banish horns made of coral or mother-of-pearl; being pointed, they are supposed to attract and break up the evil glance as a lightning conductor is supposed to attract and break up a flash of lightning.

Peppino was very contemptuous about all charms and coral horns especially. Even assuming that horns in a general way are prophylactic, it is no use having them made of coral or mother-of-pearl and wearing them on one’s watch-chain, because the Padre Eterno, when he designed the p. 44 human form, was careful to provide man with natural means of making horns so that the evil eye might be averted during the period that would have to elapse before the wearing of ornaments became customary. We can still benefit by this happy forethought if we are threatened with the evil eye when divested of all our charms—when bathing for instance. The pope, Pio Nono, was believed to have the evil eye, and pious pilgrims asking his blessing used, at the same time, to take the precaution of protecting themselves from his malign influence by pointing two fingers at him under their clothes.

Inanimate things, of course, cannot be said literally to have the evil eye, but many of them cause misfortunes. A hearse is a most unlucky thing to meet when it is empty. Peppino says—

“If you shall meet the carriage of the dead man and it is empty, perhaps it shall be coming to take you; this is not a good thing and then must you be holding the horn in the hand. But if the dead man shall be riding in his carriage, then certainly this time it shall not be for you and the horn it p. 45 is necessary not at all. This is what they believe.”

He did not mean that you are bound to die if you see an empty hearse, but that unless you take precautions you will certainly meet with some kind of misfortune. I should say that the professor meets an empty hearse every day of his life. He came up to Castellinaria, not knowing there was to be a festa, found every place full and spent the night wandering about the streets. It was impossible not to be sorry for the poor man when I found him the following afternoon dozing on a chair in the kitchen and, in a fit of expansiveness, I offered him the other bed in my room. He accepted it with gratitude and said he should retire early as he was too much fatigued to care about religious festivities.

Peppino took the earliest opportunity of blowing me up for this, saying that it was most dangerous to sleep with a jettatore in the room. I told him I did not believe in all that nonsense any more than he did and we had a long discussion which he ended by producing a coral horn from his pocket, saying the professor might have the other bed if I would wear the coral all

night. Of course I chaffed him about having the horn in his pocket after his protestations of disbelief, but it was like talking to a kitten that has been caught stealing fish and I had to take his charm and promise to conform on the ground that one cannot be too careful.

The procession, which was the climax of the festa, did not begin till 11.30 P.M. and was not over till 3.30 the next morning. On returning to the albergo I found the professor still dozing on his chair, undisturbed by the constant chatter of all the servants and their friends. He had not gone to bed because the padrone, Peppino's father, with the key of my room in his pocket, had gone out early in the evening and got lost in the crowd, so there were both my beds wasted and nothing to be done but to make the best of it. I settled myself on a chair in a corner and wished for day. Whereupon, almost immediately, Peppino, who, though I did not know it till afterwards, had been keeping near me and watching me all night in case I might meet the evil eye among the people, came in and the discussion rose into a tumult of dialect, as the situation was made clear to him, and then sank into complete silence which was broken by his suddenly saying to me—

p. 47

"You wish to sleep? All right. I show you the bed. Come on."

He preceded me up some back stairs into a room occupied by a lady in one bed, her female attendant in another and, in various shakedowns on the floor, another woman, two men and more children than I could count by the light of one candle. We picked our way among them to the farther end of the room where there was a door. Peppino produced a key and opened it; to my surprise it led into my room.

"Buon riposo," said Peppino, and was about to disappear the way we had come when I reminded him that the professor was to have the other bed. I had some difficulty with him, but when I had hung his coral round my neck he gave way.

After this I saw a great deal of the professor. He said he was forty-five and he was perhaps the most simple-minded, gentle creature I have ever known. Being with him was like listening to a child strumming on a worn-out piano. As we sat down to dinner next day he asked if he could have a little carbonate of soda. Peppino, with a glance at the bill of fare, regretted that there was none in the house. The professor then explained to me the advantages of taking carbonate of soda before meals and said that some chemists gave one an enormous quantity for two soldi. Evidently the professor had not a good digestion. He helped me with his own fork to a piece of meat off his own plate. This is a mark of very great friendliness and makes me think of Joseph entertaining his brethren when they went down to buy corn in Egypt.

p. 48

"And he took and sent messes unto them from before him; but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs."

And I think of Menelaus in the *Odyssey* sending a piece of meat to Telemachus and Pisistratus when they supped with him at Lacedæmon; and of Ulysses, at supper in the palace of Alcinous, sending a piece of meat to Demodocus to thank him for his singing, in spite of the pain his lays had caused him.

I always accept the gift, after deprecating the honour with words and gestures, and a little later, in accordance with what I believe to be the modern practice, return the compliment.

p. 49

The professor was pleased to have an opportunity of improving his knowledge of England and asked me many questions. I am afraid he only pretended to believe some of the things I told him. I said that in England a man who is the proprietor of the house he lives in is not on that account necessarily a rich man; he may or may not be, it all depends. He was surprised to hear that I had travelled from London to Castellinaria in less than three weeks; that the channel passage takes under twelve hours and has been known to be smooth; that London is not actually on the coast but a few miles inland and on a river; that we have other towns even more inland and that after the death of Queen Victoria, England did not become a republic.

I had the professor at a disadvantage because, being a Sicilian, his natural politeness would not permit him to show that in his opinion I was drawing upon my imagination after the manner of travellers. Moreover Peppino declared that all I said was quite true and added that what in Sicily is like this (holding his hand out with the palm upwards) in England is like that (holding it with the palm downwards). Nevertheless I was beginning to feel that I had gone far enough and had better be careful, so when he asserted that England refuses Home Rule to New Zealand, and grinds her colonies down under the iron heel of the oppressor because she cannot afford to lose the amount they pay us in our iniquitous income tax, I did not contradict him. It is possible that I misunderstood him, or he may have guessed I did not agree, or there may have been even more confusion in his mind than I suspected, for he afterwards said that the income tax paid by the colonies went into the private pocket of Mr. Chamberlain, and that explained why the Secretary for the Colonies was so rich.

p. 50

"My dear professor," I said, "permit me to tell you something; my poor mother had a cousin whose name was James. He was perhaps the most simple-minded, gentle creature I have ever known. Being with him was like listening to—well, it was like listening to certain kinds of music. He lived by himself in the country, with an old woman to do for him, and was over sixty before we came to know him; then we were all very fond of him and often wondered what the dear, good old gentleman could have been like in his early days. It has just occurred to me that you, sir, are like what cousin James must have been at your age."

p. 51

He was overwhelmed; his eyes filled with tears; he said he should remember for all his life the

flattering words he had just heard; they constituted the most pleasing and genteel compliment he had ever received; he shook hands with me and remained silent as a sign that his emotion was too deep for more words.

CHAPTER IV—THE WINE-SHIP

p. 52

Peppino usually took half an hour off and came about noon to wherever I was sketching to fetch me to lunch. One morning as we walked along nearly every man we met smiled and said to him—

“Buona festa, Peppino,” and he smiled and returned their salutes with the same words. He accounted for it by saying it was his onomastico—the day of the saint whose name he bears.

“What?” said I, “is it S. Peppino and you never told me? I wish you many happy returns of the day. But it cannot be everybody’s onomastico as well, and you say ‘Buona festa, Peppino’ to all who speak to you.”

He replied that it was the 19th of March, the festa of S. Giuseppe, and assured me that he had said “Buona festa, Peppino” to no one who was not a namesake; so that about two-thirds of the men at Castellinaria must have been baptized Giuseppe.

p. 53

“Then that explains it,” said I. “I was beginning to think that you might have become engaged to be married and they were congratulating you.”

That did not do at all.

“I got no time to be married,” said he, “too much busy. Besides, marriage very bad thing. Look here, I shall tell you, listen to me. Marriage is good for the woman, is bad for the man: every marriage makes to be one woman more in the world, one man less. Did you understand? And they are not happy together. We have a bad example in this town.”

“Surely you don’t mean to tell me that here in Castellinaria, where everything moves so smoothly and so peacefully, you have an unhappy married couple?”

He replied solemnly, slowly and decidedly, “Not one—all.”

He continued in his usual manner, “Did you read the ten commandments for the people who shall be married? If to find, shall be showing you. It says, ‘Non quarelate la prima volta.’ Did you understand? ‘Don’t begin to quarrel,’ because you will never stop. After the quarrel you make the peace, but it is too late: the man shall forget, perhaps, but the woman shall forget never, never, never, and you have lost.

p. 54

“I was telling to my friend,” he continued, “‘Please do not be married, because when you would be married you would not love any more that lady.’ And he was telling to me that he would marry, because it would be a good thing for him, good wife, good food, good care and many things like this. And I was telling to him, ‘I would be seeing if you shall be repeating these words when you shall be married one year.’ The year was passed but my friend he don’t be saying nothing to me. Excuse me, I am not so bad man to ask him. I found him many times in the street, but he would not meet me, would not speak. Oh, no! And he is not laughing any more. Not one friend; fifteen friends, all married. Never they are telling they are happy.”

Having disposed of the question of marriage he told me that Carmelo had been to see me and would call again. He had already been several times, and I was puzzled to know what he wanted. He could hardly be wanting to propose an excursion, for I had already made him get leave and take me for several. But as, sooner or later, an opportunity must occur for clearing up the mystery, I left it alone for the present and asked Peppino, who always knew everything that was going on in the neighbourhood, what ship it was I had seen coming into the bay and making for the port.

p. 55

He said she was the *Sorella di Ninu*, returning from Naples, where she had been with a cargo of wine. He knew because she belonged to his cousin Vanni, who was a wine merchant and, if I would give up a morning’s sketching, he would give up a morning’s work, take me down to the port, introduce me to his cousin and show me over the ship.

Accordingly next morning Carmelo got leave from his padrone and drove us down the zig-zags among the flowers while Peppino told me about his cousin. His father had two brothers, one was the father of Vanni and used to keep a small wine shop down in the port and Vanni, who had a voice, studied singing and went on the opera stage. The other brother emigrated to America and never married. Very little was heard of him, except that he was engaged in some speculative business, until at last news came of his death. Had he died six months before, he would have left nothing, but it happened that the markets were favourable and he died rich. After the usual delays, his money came and was divided between his surviving brothers. Vanni’s father enlarged the wine shop, bought vineyards and a ship, took his son away from the stage and sent him to the University. In course of time he enlarged his business and took Vanni into partnership. Peppino’s father gave up being sagrestano, bought vineyards and the Albergo della Madonna (con giardino) and educated his son. The part of Peppino’s education that was most useful to him was his two years in England, and that did not cost his father anything, for he would only take money enough for the journey and all the time he was away he kept himself and saved, so that he not only repaid his father and paid for his journey home but had money in the bank.

p. 56

By this time we had arrived at the quay and Peppino went off to his uncle’s shop for information

p. 57

as to approaching the *Sorella di Ninu*, leaving me alone with Carmelo. He seized the opportunity.

"I have been to see you several times because I wanted to tell you that I also have been in prison."

"Hullo! Carmelo," I said, "have you been trying to murder your father?"

"No," he said, "it was not my father. It was a friend. We quarrelled. I drew my knife and stabbed him in the arm. It happened last year."

I sympathized as well as I could and assured him that it should make no difference in the relations between us.

Why did I say this? Why was I so indulgent towards Carmelo and so implacable to Rosario? It seems as though an Englishman may also be a mass of contradictions. It is true that parricide is perhaps the most repulsive form that murder can take, but I do not think this had anything to do with it, for ordinary murder is sufficiently repulsive. I believe I was influenced by a conversation we had had during our last expedition; Carmelo had told me that he intended soon to leave private service, to marry and go into partnership with Rosario.

"But, Carmelo," I had objected, "would not that be rather risky? Don't you remember that p. 58 Rosario has been to prison for trying to kill your father?"

"Oh, that all happened a long time ago and Rosario has married and settled down since then."

Evidently Carmelo had thought this over and had felt uncomfortable that I should shun Rosario for being a jail-bird and not shun him who was one also. It seemed to indicate considerable delicacy of feeling on his part and I was pleased with him for taking so much trouble to get the confession off his chest. Whereas Rosario had treated his disgrazia as merely an annoying little accident that might happen to any gentleman.

Peppino returned, stood on the quay and shouted to the ships; presently a small boat containing Vanni and a sailor detached herself from the confusion and rowed to our feet. I was introduced and, amid the usual compliments, we took our seats and glided past the *Sacro Cuore*, the *Due Sorelle*, the *Divina Provvidenza*, the *Maria Concetta*, the *Stella Maris*, the *La Pace*, the *Indipendente*, the *Nuova Bambina* and many more. Peppino called my attention to the names of the ships and said how commonplace and dull they were after the romantic names he had seen on p. 59 the beach at Brighton. He gave, as an instance, *Pride of the Ocean*, which I remembered having often seen there; it was all very well, but somehow it had never impressed me as hitting the bull's-eye of romance. During their voyage through time the words of one's own language become barnacled over with associations so that we cannot see them in their naked purity as we see the words of a foreign tongue. I translated *Pride of the Ocean* into *Vanto del Mare* and offered it to Peppino; it seemed to me to gain, but he said I had knocked all the poetry out of it. One of the ships was the *Riunione dei due Fratelli*. I inquired whether the brothers had quarrelled and made it up.

"Yes," said he, "that is the worst of family quarrels; they do not last."

"What do you mean, Peppino? Surely it is better for brothers to be friends than to quarrel?"

"If to be friends inside also, then is it a good thing and much better; but look here, excuse me; the brothers are quarrelling and fighting and are failing to kill each others and the parents are p. 60 telling to don't be quarrelling and the brothers are telling that they would be quarrelling and the parents are telling to don't be stupid and to embrace and became friends and the brothers are telling, Go away, parents, and to leave alone to be quarrelling in peace. But it is too difficult and many months are passing and the brothers are—please, what is stanchi? Excuse me, it is fatigued, and are embracing to make pleasure to the parents and to make riunione outside and to baptize the ship, but inside it is riunione not at all. It is to kiss with the lips and the heart is hating each others. This is not a good thing."

The boat with the name that pleased me best was not there. Peppino told me about it: it belonged to him before the money came from America and he used it to ferry tourists across the bay and into the bowels of the promontory through the mouth of a grotto where the reflected lights are lovely on a sunny day; he called it the *Anime del Purgatorio*.

This would have been just the morning to visit the caves, for there were no clouds. We stood on the deck of the *Sorella di Ninu*, looking up through the brown masts and the rigging into the blue p. 61 sky, and watching the gulls as they glided and circled above us and turned their white wings to the sun. Vanni did the honours of his ship, showed us his barrels and casks, nearly all empty now, and made us look down into the hold where there was a cask capable of holding, I forget how much, but it was so big that it could never have been got into the ship after it was made, so it had to be built inside. Then we must taste his wine, of which he still had some in one of the casks, and the captain brought tumblers and another queer-shaped glass with a string round its rim in which to fetch the wine up; it was about the size and shape of a fir-cone, the broad upper part being hollow to hold the wine, and the pointed lower part solid. The captain held it by the string and dropped it neatly down through the bung-hole, as one drops a bucket into a well; its heavy point sank through the wine without any of that swishing and swashing which happens with a flat-bottomed, buoyant, wooden bucket, and he drew it up full and gleaming like a jewel. The first lot was used to rinse the tumblers inside and out and then thrown overboard, sparkling p. 62

and flashing in the sunlight as it fell into the sea. The taster was lowered again and the tumblers filled.

Vanni, seeing I admired the taster, wanted to give it to me, but it was the only one he had and was in constant use when customers came to the ship, so I declined it and he promised to bring one for me next time his ship made a voyage; in the meantime I took one of the tumblers as a ricordo. Then we went into the captain’s cabin and sat round his table listening to his stories and smoking cigarettes. Every now and then a silence came over us, broken occasionally by one of us saying suddenly—

“Ebbene, siamo quà!” (“Well, here we are!”)

This sort of thing formerly used to make me feel nervous; it was as though I had failed to entertain my friends or as though they had given up the hope of entertaining me. After experiencing it several times, however, I came to take a different and more accurate view. There was no occasion to do or say anything. We were enjoying one another’s society.

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Vanni told us he was thinking of taking a cargo of Marsala to England and what would the English people say to it? Now the Marsala was very good and, according to Vanni, could be put upon the market at a very low price, but I foresaw difficulties. Knowing that he had sung in opera in Naples, Palermo, Malta and many other places, I asked if he liked music. He said he adored it. Music, he declared, was the most precious gift of God to man—more precious even than poetry. He had his box at the opera and always occupied it during the season. And he enjoyed music of all kinds, not only the modern operas of Mascagni, Puccini and so on, but also the old music of Verdi, Donizetti and Bellini. I asked if he did not like *Le Nozze di Figaro*. He had never heard of it, nor of *Don Giovanni*, nor of *Fidelio*. He had heard the names of Beethoven and Mozart, but not of Handel, Schubert or Brahms. He had heard also of Wagner, but had never heard any of his music.

I was not surprised he should not have heard of those composers who are not famous for operas, nor by his odd list of so-called old musicians, but I was surprised that he should place music so decidedly above poetry. p. 64 I said it appeared to me he had practically expressed the opinion that Donizetti was a more precious gift of God to man than Dante. Put like that, he did not hold to what he had said and confessed he had been speaking without due consideration. But Peppino said that in some respects Donizetti was a better man than Dante; he was smoother and better tempered, “and many things like this.” Peppino had been brought up, like every Italian, to worship Dante, but when he went to London and mastered the English language, when he began to read our literature and to think for himself, then he saw that Dante was “un falso idolo.” Every nation gets the poet she deserves and Italy has her faults; but what, asked Peppino, what has Italy done to deserve her dreary Dante? On the other hand, with all his admiration for England, he could hardly believe that we really do deserve our Shakespeare.

I was beginning to feel giddy, as though the *Sorella di Ninu*, instead of being quietly in port, was out on the tumbling ocean in a sudden gale, so very unusual is it to hear such opinions in Italy. But Peppino is full of surprises. To recover my balance I turned the conversation back to the wine, p. 65 taking my way through the music and telling them that in England we thought very highly of the Austrian and German composers, and asking Vanni if he would recommend any one to introduce their compositions into Sicily. He replied that if it was pleasing music it might be successful, but that if it was very different from Italian music it would hardly pay to bring it over until the people had been educated. I feared it would be the same with the wine. He must first educate us to forsake our old friends, beer, whisky and tea, before he could create a market on which he could put his Marsala.

Driving back, I told Peppino about the lottery at Castelvetrano and how my numbers had lost. He inquired whether my birthday fell during the week I bought the ticket. It did not.

“Then,” said he, “of course you could not be winning and Angelo very stupid to let you play those numbers.”

It seems that numbers are no good unless they are connected with something that happens to you during the week. This explained why at Selinunte the brigadier had discarded the price of my clothes, which was not his concern but mine and belonged to the week in which I had bought p. 66 them, and preferred to play the number that fell from the cigarettes, of which he was at the moment actually smoking one.

“If there shall be a railway accident,” continued Peppino, “on Thursday night, then shall there be going plenty much people and shall sleep in the ground to be first on Friday morning, because the office shall shut early to take the papers to Palermo to turn the wheel the Saturday. And if to come out the number, the people shall be gaining many money, but if to don’t come out, shall be gaining no money. This is not a good thing.

“They think it is fortunate the—please, what is sogno? Excuse me, it is the dream. But it must be the dream in the week you play. When the man in the dream shall be coming from the other world and shall be saying, ‘Please you, play this number,’ then they believe you shall certainly win. But if to play the number, very uncertain to win.”

They live in a state of wild hope after buying their tickets until the numbers are declared and, the odds being enormously in favour of the government, the gamblers usually lose. p. 67 Then they live in a state of miserable despair until the possession of a few soldi, the happening of something

remarkable, or merely the recollection of the departed joys of hope compared with present actual depression, urges them to try their luck again. So that the gambler’s life consists of alternations of feverish expectation and maddening dejection. “This is not a good thing”; but it is a worse thing for the gambler who wins. He sees how easy it is and is encouraged to believe he can do it every time; in his exaltation he stakes again and loses all his winnings, instead of only a few soldi. If he does not do this he spends the money in treating his friends and getting into debt over it and has to pawn his watch. So that the Genovese, by way of wishing his enemy ill-luck, while appearing to observe the proprieties, says to him—

“Ti auguro un’ ambo.” (“I hope you may win an ambo.”)

Peppino does not approve of the lottery, yet he has not made up his mind that it ought to be abolished. It certainly does harm, but so deep is the natural instinct for gambling that innumerable private lotteries would spring up to replace it, and they would do far more mischief, p. 68 because they would be in the hands of rogues, whereas the government manages the affair quite honestly. The government pays no attention to dreams or ladies in white dresses or anything that happens during the week; it bases its calculations on the mathematical theory of chances, and gathers in the soldi week after week, so that it makes an annual profit of about three million sterling. Besides, if people are willing to pay for the pleasure of a week of hope, why should they not be allowed to do so? The uneducated as a class ought to contribute to the expenses of governing their country, and the lottery is a sure and convenient way of collecting their contributions. It is literally what it is often called—La tassa sull’ ignoranza. (The tax upon ignorance.)

Peppino even uses the lottery himself, but in a way of his own. He chooses two numbers every week, according to what occurs to him as though he were going in for an ambo and, instead of buying a ticket, puts four soldi into an earthenware money-box. The numbers he has chosen do not come out and he considers that he has won his four soldi and has put them by. In this way he has accumulated several money-boxes full, and if ever his numbers come out he intends to break p. 69 his boxes and distribute the contents among the deserving poor.

As a way of making money Peppino prefers the course of always doing whatever there is to be done in the house and in the vineyard. A few years ago his father’s vines were suffering from disease; he made inquiries, studied the subject, ascertained the best course to pursue and, with his own hands and some little assistance, rooted up all the plants and laid down American vines, with the result that the yield is now more than double what it ever was before. And this he thinks was a great deal better than losing money week after week in the lottery, not only because of the result, but because of the interest he took in the work. In fact, he attends to his own business and finds every moment of the day occupied. He says—

“Always to begin one thing before to finish some other thing, this is the good life.”

Certainly it seems to agree with him. There is not much the matter with Peppino’s health nor with his banking account nor with his conscience, so far as I can judge. Every one in the town is fond of him and he is always happy and ready to do any one a good turn. Indeed, his popularity is p. 70 the only thing that causes me any uneasiness about him. There is generally something wrong about a man who has no enemies—but there are exceptions to every rule.

The poor professor, on the other hand, has at least one enemy and that the worst a man can have, namely himself. The evening before he went away he took me into his confidence and consulted me about his future and his prospects. He is married, but his wife is out of her mind, and he has three sons, all doing badly, one of them very badly. He told me he was not at the moment employed as professor, he was living on his patrimony which consisted of a few acres of vines; he was gradually selling his land and spending the proceeds, and he thought this the best plan because the vines were all diseased and did not bring him in enough money to keep himself and his family. Should I recommend him to come to England, learn English and try to keep himself by the exercise of his profession? It was like Vanni’s idea of bringing his wine to England. I could only say I was afraid we already had enough professors. Then he thought he might write and earn a little money that way; he had read all Sir Walter Scott’s novels in a translation—thirty-two p. 71 volumes I think he said; he admired them immensely and was thinking of writing a romance; he had in fact an idea for one, and would I be so good as to give him my opinion about it? A young lady is desired by her father to marry a man she does not love, a rich man, much older than herself. She refuses, but, later on, consents to make the sacrifice. After a year of unhappy married life she meets a man of her own age, falls in love with him, and one day her husband surprises them together, in his rage kills them both and commits suicide.

“Now,” said the professor, “what do you think of my theme?”

I said that, so far as I could remember Sir Walter Scott’s novels at the moment, they contained nothing from which any one could say he had taken his plot which, of course, was greatly to his credit on the score of originality, but I begged to be allowed to defer giving any further opinion until he had finished the work; so much depends upon the way in which these things are carried out.

He had also written a poem entitled *Completo*, of which he gave me a copy. It was, he said, “un grido dell’ anima.” He had not found a publisher for it yet, but if I would translate it into English p. 72 and get it published in London, I could send him any profits that might accrue. I showed it to Peppino who swore he remembered something very like it in an Italian magazine and that the

professor had had nothing to do with it beyond copying it. I translated it without rhymes, the professor not having gone to that expense. I have not offered the result to any English publisher, none of them would receive it as Peppino did when I showed it to him. He said I had performed a miracle, that I had converted a few lines of drivelling nonsense—just the sort of stuff that would attract the professor—into a masterpiece. But I am afraid the prestige of the English language may have blinded Peppino to any little defects, as it made him see more romance than I could find in the names of the English boats. This was my "masterpiece":

FULL INSIDE.

The train is full; Ah me! the load of travellers!
The engine whistles; Ah me! the piercing shriek!
My heart is burdened; Ah me! the weight of sorrows!
My soul exclaims; Ah me! the despairing cry!

p. 73

O Train! have pity upon me
For you are strong and I am weak,
Transfer to my heart the load of your passengers
And take in exchange the weight of my sorrows.

Next time I saw the professor he was in charge of a newspaper kiosk in Palermo, looking older and more dilapidated and still waiting for the manna to fall from heaven. He complained of the slackness of trade. He also complained that the work was too hard and was killing him; so that, one way or the other, he intended to shut up the kiosk and look out for something else.

CATANIA

p. 77

CHAPTER V—MICHELE AND THE PRINCESS OF BIZERTA

Educated Sicilians have not a high opinion of the marionettes; it is sometimes difficult to induce them to talk on the subject. They say the marionettes are for the lower orders and accuse them of being responsible for many of the quarrels we read about in the newspapers. The people become so fascinated by the glamour of the romance in which they live night after night that they imitate in private life the chivalrous behaviour of the warriors they see fighting in the little theatres, and thus what may begin as a playful reminiscence of something in last night's performance occasionally leads to a too accurate imitation of one of last night's combats and perhaps ends in a fatal wound. This being like the accounts in English papers about boys becoming hooligans or running off to sea as stowaways in consequence of reading trashy literature, my desire to attend a performance of marionettes was increased, but I did not want to go alone for, in the event of a row, with knives, among the audience it would be better to be accompanied by a native.

p. 78

I was in Palermo where I knew a few students, whose education was of course still incomplete, but they were cold on the subject and said that if they came with me we should probably be turned out for laughing. That was not what I wanted. It ought to have been possible to do something with the waiter or the porter, or even with the barber whom I met on the stairs and in the passages of the hotel when he came in the morning to shave the commercial travellers; but they all made difficulties—either they did not get away from their work till too late, or it was not a place for an Englishman or it was not safe. At home, of course, one does not go to the theatre with the waiter, but when in Sicily, though one does not perhaps do altogether as the Sicilians, one does not do as one does in England. I know a Palermitan barber with whom I should be proud to be seen walking in the Via Macqueda any day—that is, any day when his Sunday clothes were not in pawn—and there used to be a conduttore at my hotel who took me round to many of the sights in the town and who was a person of such distinguished manners that when with him I felt as though walking with a Knight-Templar in disguise—a disguise that had to be completed by my buying him a straw hat, otherwise he would have given us away by wearing his cap with "Albergo So-and-so" written all round it. These are the people who really know about the marionettes, for whenever they get an evening off they go. It seemed, however, that I had met with a conspiracy of obstruction. Palermo was treating me as a good woman treats her husband when he wants to do something of which she disapproves—there was no explanation or arguing; what I wanted was quietly made impossible. So I replied by treating Palermo as a good man treats his wife under such circumstances—I pretended to like it and waited till I could woo some less difficult city.

p. 79

Catania provided what I wanted. There I knew a professor interested in folk-lore and kindred subjects to whom I confided my troubles. He laughed at me for my failures, assured me there was no danger and offered to take me. It was a Sunday evening. On arriving at the teatrino, he spoke to an attendant who showed us in by a side entrance and gave us the best places in the house, that is, we were near the only open window. The seating arrangements would have been condemned by the County Council; there were rows of benches across the floor and no passages, so that the people had to walk on the seats to get to their places; two galleries ran round the house very close together, an ordinary man could not have stood upright in the lower one, and it was difficult to move in the upper one in which we were, because the arches supporting the roof

p. 80

nearly blocked it in three places on each side. Presently a man came round and collected our money, twenty centimes each, the seats on the ground being fifteen.

There were four boys sitting on the stage, two at each side of the curtain, as they used to sit in Shakespeare’s theatre. Like the rest of the audience, these boys were of the class they call Facchini, that is, porters, coachmen, shop assistants, shoeblacks, water-sellers, and so on. It sometimes happens when travelling in Sicily that one has to spend half an hour, half a day, or it p. 81 may be more, in company with one of these men. He is usually a delightful person, dignified, kind, courteous, full of fun and extremely friendly without being obtrusive. During conversation one may perhaps ask him whether he can read and write; he will probably reply that at school he was taught both. Presently one may ask him to read an advertisement, or to write down an address; he will probably reply that the light is bad, or that he is occupied with the luggage or the horses. The fact is that reading and writing are to him very much what the classics and the higher mathematics are to many an English gentleman—the subjects were included in his youthful studies, but as they have never been of the slightest use to him in earning his bread, he has forgotten all he ever learnt of them, and does not care to say so. The Sicilian, however, no matter how uneducated he may be, has an appetite for romance which must be gratified and, as it would give him some trouble to brush up his early accomplishments and stay at home reading Pulci and Boiardo, Tasso and Ariosto, he prefers to follow the story of Carlo Magno and his p. 82 paladins and the wars against the Saracens in the teatrino. Besides, no Sicilian man ever stays at home to do anything except to eat and sleep, and those are things he does out of doors as often as not; the houses are for the women, the men live in the street. It is as though in England the cab-drivers, railway porters and shop-boys were to spend evening after evening, month after month, looking on at a dramatized version of the *Arcadia* or *The Faerie Queene*.

Presently the curtain went up and disclosed two flaring gas-jets, each with a small screen in front of it about halfway down the stage; these were the footlights, and behind them was a back cloth representing a hall with a vista of columns. In the rather confined space between the footlights and the back cloth there came on a knight in armour. He stood motionless, supporting his forehead with his right fist, the back of his hand being outward.

“Is he crying?” I inquired.

“No,” replied the professor, “he is meditating; if he were crying the back of his hand would be against his face.”

He then dropped his fist and delivered a soliloquy, no doubt embodying the result of his p. 83 meditation, after which he was joined by his twin brother. They conversed at length of battles and the King of Athens, of Adrianopoli and the Grand Turk, of princesses and of journeys by sea and land. The act of speaking induced a curious nervous complaint, useful because it showed which was the speaker; not only did he move his head and his right arm in a very natural and Sicilian manner, but he was constantly on the point of losing his balance, and only saved himself from falling by swinging one leg from the hip forwards or backwards as the case required. The listening knight stood firm till he had to speak, and then he was attacked by the complaint and the other became still.

At first I was puzzled as to the actual size of the figures and, starting with the idea that marionettes are always small, assumed that these were about three feet high; but, as the novelty wore off, I compared them with the audience and especially with the boys sitting in the corners and with various assistants of whom occasional glimpses could be caught at the wings; sometimes the hand of an operator appeared below the scenery and gave a hint, and gradually I came to the conclusion that the puppets could not be much smaller than life, if at all. p. 84

The operators must have been standing on a platform behind the back scene; the figures were able to pass one another, but never came forward more than a step or two, the footlights being in the way, and no doubt the operators could not reach further forward than they did. Each figure was worked by two iron rods, one to his head and one to his right hand, and several strings to which after a few minutes I paid no attention; perhaps their very obviousness saved them from notice. Any attempt to conceal them would have been a mistake, for what is the use of announcing a performance by marionettes and then pretending there is no mechanism? Besides, if one cannot accept a few conventions one had better stay away from the theatre altogether.

At the conclusion of the interview the knights followed one another off; and the buoyancy of their walk must be seen to be believed. The students have seen it and believe it so thoroughly that, when they meet one another in the Quattro Canti, they not unfrequently adopt it to the amusement of the bystanders. But the students make the mistake of slightly overdoing it. The p. 85 marionettes often take a step or two quite naturally, and this, while adding to the absurdity (which cannot be the intention of the operator), also shows what is possible and makes one think that with a little extra trouble they might be made to walk always as smoothly as they move their heads and arms. It might, however, be necessary for them to have more strings, and this would make them more difficult to manipulate. In Sicily the marionettes who tell the story of the Paladins do not lay themselves out to be of a mechanism so ingenious that they shall appear to be alive; such illusion as they do produce, like the incompetent illustration to Shakespeare which Lamb preferred, is insufficient to cripple the imagination of the audience who are the more intimately touched by the romance of the story and by the voice of the speaker.

The back cloth was raised and we had before us a tranquil sea with two little islands sleeping under a sunset sky. Michele entered; he was a very splendid fellow in golden armour with

draperies of purple and scarlet and white, and in his helmet a plume that nearly trailed on the ground. No playbill was provided, but none was wanted for Michele, he could not have been p. 86 taken for anything but an operatic tenor of noble birth about to proceed against the Saracens. He first meditated and then soliloquized as he paced the sandy shore. The Princess of Bizerta in a flowing robe, covered with spangles, though not actually in sight, was not far off, imparting her griefs to the unsympathetic ocean. Spying the paladin, she strolled in his direction and spoke to him, but it was not an assignation; Michele, indeed, was obviously distressed at having his soliloquy interrupted; nevertheless, being a knight and a gentleman, he could but reply politely, and so they got into conversation. She told him who she was, which would not have been necessary if they had ever met before, then she told him of her unhappy plight, namely, that she was in the custody of an Arabian giant, and then she implored his assistance.

Michele was as unsympathetic as the ocean, his mind being full of Saracens; but before he had time to invent a plausible lie, the giant entered very suddenly. Physically he was not a particularly gigantic giant, being but three or four inches taller than Michele. If he had been p. 87 much more, his head, which like that of all stage giants was undeveloped at the back, would have been hidden by the clouds that hung from the sky. His inches, however, were enough, for, in romance, height is given to a giant to symbolize power, and provided he is perceptibly taller than the hero, the audience accept him as a giant and a bully and one, moreover, who is, as a rule, nearing the end of his wicked career. Accordingly, when, in a voice of thunder, he demanded of Michele an immediate explanation—wanted to know how he dared address the princess—we all felt that he was putting himself in the wrong and that a catastrophe was imminent. Giants, that is, unscrupulous people in power, are too fond of assuming this attitude of unprovoked hostility and overbearing insolence, but they assume it once too often. Had he remembered Adam and Eve and the apple it might have occurred to him to inquire whether in the present case also the lady had not begun it. Giants, however, are for the most part unintelligent, not to say downright stupid people, and seldom have the sense to know how to use their power wisely—think of the giant in *Jack and the Beanstalk*, think of Polyphemus and Ulysses, think of the Inquisition and p. 88 Galileo.

And then this giant made the mistake of losing his temper, and the further mistake of showing that he had lost it, and when giants do this, it means that they know they are in the wrong and don't care. He insulted Michele most grossly, and the knight very properly drew his sword and went for him, and a terrible battle ensued throughout which realism was thrown to the waves. The combatants rose off the ground so high that Michele's head and the giant's head and shoulders were frequently lost in the clouds; and they clanked down again upon the sandy shore two or three feet in front of where they had stood—or behind, just as it happened; and their swords banged against their breast-plates and shields, proving that they were real metal and not merely tinsel; and they twirled round and round like beef on a roasting-jack, until at last Michele dealt the inevitable blow and the giant fell dead on the sand with a thud that jolted the coast, shook the islands, rippled across the sunset sky and restored animation to the lifeless form of the princess.

p. 89 While the battle raged she had been standing by, unmoved, blankly glaring at the audience; and yet she must have known as well as we did that it was all about her. The probability is that her operator had temporarily moored her to a convenient peg in the back of the clouds while he worked the giant, and that at the conclusion of the duel he was free to return to her. She first looked round and then swooped hurriedly across the stage, three inches from the ground; before quite touching her protector, however, she swung halfway back again, then a little forwards, and finally, coming to anchor at a suitable distance, raised her two hands and, as though offering him a tray of refreshments, said—

"Grazie."

He, pursuing his policy of frigid politeness, bowed in acknowledgment and followed her off the stage, leaving the corpse of the giant lying near the sea.

The back cloth was intentionally too long, so that the bottom was crumpled into folds which did well enough for little waves breaking on the shore. These waves now began to be agitated, and gradually rose gustily and advanced until they had covered the dead giant. It was a very good effect and avoided the banality of removing the body in sight of the audience; it looked as though p. 90 the wind had risen and the depths had swallowed him. And this, as I afterwards was told, is what happens to the giant's body in the story.

When the back cloth went up for the next scene the corpse was gone, and we were in The House of the Poor Man where Michele came to take refuge—from what I did not clearly understand, but if from the Princess of Bizerta he would have been better advised had he sought some other sanctuary; for no sooner had he performed his usual meditation and soliloquy and got himself to sit down on The Poor Man's chair, where he instantly fell asleep with his head resting on his hand, than Her Highness entered and, addressing the audience confidentially, said that she loved him and intended to take this opportunity of giving him a kiss. She was, however, on the other side of the stage and had first to get to him, which she did so like a bird with a broken wing that he woke up before she reached him. She evidently did not consider that this added to her difficulties, but something else did.

p. 91 A dispute had been simmering in the gallery just opposite where we sat, and now began to boil over, and threatened to swamp the play as the waves had submerged the Arabian giant. I thought perhaps we ought to leave, though it would have been impossible to pass out quickly, but

the professor again assured me there was no danger; the management are accustomed to disturbances and know how to deal with them. So I sat still, and the proprietor came on the stage and stood in front of the gas-jets. He joined his hands as though in prayer and begged us to be quiet, saying that it was a complicated story and would require all our attention, that Michele would die on Wednesday, and he hoped we should not cause the speaker to die of starvation before that day by preventing him from earning his bread. The appearance of the proprietor among his puppets confirmed me in the conclusion I had arrived at as to their size; he may have been a small man, but he was about the size of the giant. He must have been a strong man, for, with all their armour, the figures must be very heavy.

The proprietor's appeal went to all our hearts; silence was restored and the princess repeated to the warrior what we already knew—that she loved him and desired to kiss him. Something of the kind was exactly what poor Michele had been dreading. He turned to her and, almost choking with despair, said, "Misericordia," not meaning to be hostile, but that the killing of her giant had already delayed him, and if he were to allow himself to yield to her blandishments he would be too late for the Saracens. No doubt he also had a vow. But when a lady has made up her mind on a matter of this kind, to thwart her is to invite disaster—think of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Not that Michele thought of them, nor would it have influenced him if he had, for he was a paladin and incapable of fear; but he had the instincts of a gentleman, so, in spite of his anxiety to be off to the wars, he rose as well as he could, which was unsteadily, and staggered towards the princess who made every effort to meet him. In time they drew close enough to fall into one another's arms, and the curtain descended as they were accomplishing not a passionate but a quite creditable embrace.

Then there was a scene between three kings with golden crowns who conversed at length of battles and the King of Athens, of Adrianopoli and the Grand Turk, of princesses and of journeys by sea and land. These were the things they spoke about as they stood together in the hall that had served for the first scene with a vista of columns behind, and when they had done they followed one another off. Then we also followed one another out of the theatre, not because of the Saracens, nor because we had any vow, nor because we feared a repetition of the uproar, nor even because of the coming-on disposition of the Princess of Bizerta, but because one open window was not enough.

TRAPANI

CHAPTER VI—FERRAÙ AND ANGELICA

My next experience in a marionette theatre was at Trapani. I approached the subject with Mario, a coachman whom I have known since he was a boy. He was quite ready to help me, and told me there were two companies in the town, one of large puppets, about as high as my umbrella, the others, to which he went every evening, being rather smaller. Accordingly, at about a quarter to eight, he called for me, wrapped in his melodramatic cloak, and hurried me through the wet and windy streets to the teatrino. He kept me on his right hand because he was the host and I the guest, and if, owing to obstructions, he found me accidentally on his left he was round in a moment and I was in the place of honour again. He insisted on paying for our seats, fifteen centimes each, and we went in.

This teatrino was in every way a much smaller place than that in Catania; it belonged to a private gentleman who had bought the puppets for his own amusement and spent much of his time among them, sometimes working them himself. He has since married and parted with them and the theatre is now (1908) closed. No complaint could be made about the seating arrangements or the ventilation. There were benches on the floor with a passage down the middle, a few rows in front were reserved for boys at ten centimes each and at the other end of the hall was a small gallery for ladies, twenty centimes each. I asked Mario so many questions that he proposed we should go behind the scenes, which was exactly what I wanted. He spoke to one of the authorities, who was politeness itself and, showing us through a door and up three steps, introduced us behind the curtain. Our heads were high above the opening of the proscenium, which was about the size and shape of the opening of the fireplace in a fairly large room. We were in a grove of puppets hanging up against the walls like turkeys in a poulterer's shop at Christmas—scores and scores of them. There were six or eight men preparing for the performance and a youth, Pasquale, took charge of us and pointed out the principal figures.

"This warrior," he said, "is Ferraù di Spagna."

He was in tin armour, carefully made and enriched with brass and copper ornamentation, all as bright as a biscuit-box. I said—

"He looks a very terrible fellow. Why is he so red about the eyes?" for the whites of his eyes were redder than his cheeks.

"Because he is always in a rage. And this lady is Angelica, Empress of Cathay; she wears a crown and will die this evening. This is her husband, Medoro; he is a black man and wears a crown; he will perish to-night by the sword of Ferraù."

I rapidly constructed by anticipation the familiar plot. The jealous husband would kill his erring wife and would then be killed by her lover; but, being unversed in the habits of Cathaian emperors and their entourage, I had run off the track. Pasquale put me straight.

"Prima Ferraù uccide Medoro." (Ferraù first kills Medoro.) p. 100

"And then kills Angelica?" I inquired.

"No. Angelica si uccide personalmente, so as not to marry Ferraù."

I was next introduced to Galafrone, the father of Angelica, who also wore a crown, and to two valorous knights, Sacripante, King of the Circassians, and the Duca d'Avilla.

There were more than two hundred marionettes altogether, including Turkish and Spanish soldiers. The knights and ladies were kept in green holland bags to preserve them from the dust, and taken out as they were wanted. They varied in height from twenty-four to thirty-two inches. Ferraù was thirty-one and a half inches from the soles of his feet to the top of his helmet; Angelica was twenty-six and a half inches; ordinary Turks and Spanish soldiers were only twenty-four inches each.

Pasquale was very proud of Ferraù who really was magnificent. He was made of wood with loose joints. An iron rod went through his head, and was hooked into a ring between his collar-bones. Another rod was fastened to his right wrist. There were three strings—one for his left hand, which held his shield, one to raise his vizor and one which passed through his right fist and p. 101 across his body to his sword-hilt so that he could draw his sword. I should have liked to buy him and bring him to London with me; he would be an ornament to any house. But he was not for sale; and, besides, it would not have been right to break up the company. When Don Quixote, carried away by his feelings like a Sicilian facchino, came to the assistance of Don Gayferos by drawing his sword and attacking the Moorish puppets, he broke up Master Peter's company in a very literal sense, and had to pay four and a half reals for King Marsilio of Saragossa and five and a quarter for the Emperor Carlo Magno; but it is not clear how large or how splendid they were.

Each figure requires one operator who stands between the wings, which are about up to his waist and so solid that he can lean his elbows on them and reach comfortably more than halfway across the stage. There are four openings between the wings, and thus there can be eight puppets on the stage at once, operated by eight manipulators, four on each side. This could not be done with the life-sized marionettes in Catania, which were all operated from behind, and never came p. 102 forward. At Trapani the stage was much deeper in proportion, and the flies from which the scenery descended were high above the heads of the operators, so that the figures could walk about backwards and forwards all over the stage. The footlights were in the usual place in front of the curtain, and during the performance boys got up from their seats in the front row and lighted their cigarettes at them.

I had not nearly completed my investigations; but, fearing we might be in the way, we returned to the front and inquired about play-bills. There was only one in the house, posted up near the box-office; we went and inspected it—

TEATRO DI MARIONETTE.

Per questa sera darà 2 recite
la prima alle 5½ la seconda alle 8
Pugna fra Sacripante e il Duca d'Avilla—
Ferraù uccide Medoro e acquista Angelica—
Morte di Sacripante per mani di Ferraù—
Morte di Angelica.

MARIONETTE THEATRE.

This evening two performances will be given
The first at 5.30, the second at 8
Fight between Sacripante and the Duke of Avilla—
Ferraù kills Medoro and gains possession of Angelica— p. 103
Death of Sacripante at the hands of Ferraù—
Death of Angelica.

There was a pleasant-looking, retiring young man in the box-office, who was pointed out to me as "Lui che parla"—the one who speaks. They said he was a native of Mount Eryx and a shoemaker by trade.

We returned to our places and sat talking, smoking, eating American pea-nuts and waiting. The audience, which consisted of men of the class of life to which Mario belonged, all knew one another; most of them met there every evening. A subscription for one month costs three lire and entitles the holder to one performance a day, the performance at 8 being a repetition of that at 5.30.

The play now being performed is *The Paladins of France*; it was written by Manzanares in Italian prose and is in three volumes. It does not always agree with the other versions of the same story; but that is only as it should be, for romances have always been re-written to suit the audience they are intended for. It has been going on about four months, that is, since last October, when it began with Pipino, Re di Francia ed Imperatore di Roma, the father of Carlo Magno, and it will p. 104

continue day after day till May, like the feuilleton in a journal. During the hot weather there is no performance in this theatre; but the same story will be taken up again next October and is long enough to last through two winters. It could last longer, but they bring it within reasonable limits by removing some of the boredom. It concludes with the defeat and death of Orlando and the paladins at Roncisvalle.

The portion of the story appointed for the evening's performance was in five acts, divided into a large number of very short scenes, and if I did not always know quite clearly what was going on, that was partly due to the distracting uproar, for nearly every scene contained a fight, and some contained several, the shortest lasting well over a minute. Whoever had been employed to shorten the story would have earned the thanks of one member of the audience if he had acted upon Pococurante's remarks to Candide about the works of Homer. He ought not to have left in so many combats; they were as like one another and as tedious as those in the *Iliad*, besides being much noisier, at least we are not told that the Homeric heroes were accompanied by a p. 105 muscular pianist, fully armed, and by the incessant stamping of clogged boots. Nevertheless the majority of the audience enjoyed the fights, for no Sicilian objects to noise.

This is what I gathered: Angelica had come from far Cathay with the express intention of sowing discord among the paladins by inducing them to fall in love with her, and at the present moment Sacripante and the Duca d'Avilla were her victims. These two knights met in a wood, raised their vizors and talked matters over; there was to be a fight about it, of course, but the preliminaries were to be conducted in a friendly spirit—like a test case in Chancery. They separated, no doubt to give them an opportunity of going home to make their wills and take leave of their wives and families, if any. In the second scene they met again, lowered their vizors, drew their swords and fought till Angelica supervened. In the next scene the two knights and Angelica were joined by Medoro with whom one of the knights fought. I recognized Medoro when his vizor was up p. 106 because he was a black man, but Sacripante and the Duca d'Avilla were so much alike that I did not know which was fighting and which was standing with Angelica looking on; say it was Sacripante that was fighting, being king of the Circassians he was probably entitled to precedence over a mere duke. Angelica, after some time, began to feel qualms of conscience, so she interrupted and mentioned who Medoro really was. Sacripante, in the most chivalrous manner, immediately desisted and apologized—he had failed to recognize his opponent and had no idea he had been fighting with the lady's husband. The apology was accepted in the spirit in which it was offered, all accusations, expressed or implied, were withdrawn, and friendly relations established. The four then set out together to pass the night in an albergo. Angelica, however, with her quick, womanly instinct, mistrusted the knights and, taking her husband aside, proposed that they two should depart by stealth and escape to Cathay, leaving Sacripante and the Duca d'Avilla asleep. Medoro demurred, saying it was a very good inn and he was quite comfortable where he was. So she told him a few facts which alarmed him to such a degree that p. 107 he consented and they decamped.

On their way they encountered Ferraù who entered with a stamp of the foot, sforzando, attacked Medoro and killed him dead, thus obtaining possession of Angelica according to the play-bill. But she managed to get free and appeared upon the coast where she met a sea-captain and, telling him she was very rich, made terms with him, bought his vessel and embarked for the Court of her father, Galafrone. She might have made better terms had she not opened negotiations by telling him she was very rich, but it was a matter of life or death and she was reckless, knowing that Ferraù was after her. Sacripante and the Duca d'Avilla were after Ferraù and presently caught him up and attacked him. He fought with them both at once and killed one of them in a minute and a half. With the exception of myself, every one in the theatre knew which he killed, for they knew all the knights as they came on. Let us again give Sacripante the precedence and suppose that he was killed first. Ferraù went on fighting with the Duca d'Avilla and both were hard at work when the curtain fell.

p. 108 It rose again, very effectively, on the continuation of the fight, and almost at once Ferraù cut off the Duca d'Avilla's head which rolled about on the stage. Immediately there came three Turks; Ferraù stabbed each as he entered—one, two, three—and their bodies encumbered the ground as the curtain fell.

It rose as soon as the bodies had been removed and disclosed Ferraù stamping about alone. There came three more Turks; he stabbed them each as they entered—one, two, three—and their bodies encumbered the ground. Then there came three knights in armour; Ferraù fought them all three together for a very considerable time and it was deafening. He killed them all and their bodies encumbered the ground with those of the last three Turks. It was a bloody sight that met the eyes of Galafrone who now entered.

The curtain fell, while Galafrone had the corpses cleared away, and rose again on the same scene which was the ante-chamber of Angelica's bedroom—for somehow we were now in her father's dominions, and it was she who had sent the knights and the Turks to kill Ferraù before he could approach her. Then there was an interview between Ferraù and Galafrone on the subject of p. 109 Angelica. The knight, having made her a widow, now wished to make her his wife, the king saw no objection and promised to use his influence with his daughter.

The scene changed to Angelica's bedroom; her bed was at the far end of the stage with a patchwork quilt over it, but there was no other furniture in the room except a sofa near the front. Her father brought her in and I, knowing that she was to kill herself personally and that this must be her last entry, examined her closely and detected a string passing through her right

hand and ending in the hilt of a dagger ostentatiously concealed in her bosom. Of course I knew what that meant. Her father, true to his promise, began to urge Ferraù's suit, saying that he had forgiven him for having killed Medoro. But Angelica had not forgiven him, and moreover she hated Ferraù with his bloodshot eyes and his explosive manners. She made a long speech, admirably delivered by the cobbler and as full of noble sentiments as a poem by Mrs. Browning, then, suddenly drawing her dagger with the string, she stabbed herself and fell dead on the couch, exclaiming—

"A rivederci."

It was an extremely neat suicide and her father concluded the entertainment by weeping over her body.

These marionettes were not nearly so comic in their movements as the life-sized ones in Catania, not because they were better managed, but because they attempted less and because, being so small, their defects were less obvious. A small one may, and generally does, enter like a bird alighting on a molehill, but he has such a short distance to go that he is at rest before one realizes that he has not attempted to walk. Besides it is a mode of progression we are all familiar with, having practised it in dreams since childhood. A life-sized marionette, on a larger stage, has, perhaps, two or three yards to traverse; he tries to take steps and is easily caught tripping, for without strings to his feet his steps can only be done in a haphazard way. There are marionettes with strings to their feet, and though they may do *The Story of the Paladins*, this is not their usual business, they are more elaborately articulated, and are intended for operas, ballets and other complicated things.

And then, again, in Catania a glimpse of the hand of an operator or of some one standing in the wings offended at once as a blot on the performance. But looking at the small figures at Trapani one accepted them almost immediately as men and women, and forgot all about absolute size, so that when the hand of an operator appeared and it was larger than the head of a marionette, it seemed to belong to another world, while a real man standing in the wings could not be seen above his knees, and it required a mental effort to connect his boots and trousers in any way with the performance.

The speaker at Catania did well with a good voice; nevertheless one felt that disaster was in the neighbourhood and was being consciously avoided. The idea of failure never crossed the mind of the cobbler from Mount Eryx. His voice was rich and flexible, full of variety and quick to express a thousand emotions. Listening to it was like looking long and long into a piece of Sicilian amber in whose infinite depth, as you turn it about in the sunlight, you see all the colours of the rainbow, from red, through orange, yellow, green and blue, even to a glowing purple. There was nothing he could not do with it, and he managed it with the quiet dignity and easy grace of a young lion at play.

CHAPTER VII—THE DEATH OF BRADAMANTE

Before the last act, which concluded with the death of Angelica, a dwarf had appeared in front of the curtain (not a human dwarf, but a marionette dwarf) and recited the programme for the following day, stating that the performance would terminate with the death of Ferraù. Unfortunately I was not able to witness his end, but I went to the teatrino the evening after. We arrived early and began by inspecting the programme—

> Carlo ottiene piena vittoria contro Marsilio—
> Fuga di costui e presa di Barcelona—
> Marfisa trova Bradamante che more fra le sue braccia.
>
> Charles obtains complete victory over Marsilio—
> Flight of the latter and taking of Barcelona—
> Marfisa finds Bradamante who dies in her arms.

We then went behind the scenes to spend some time among the puppets before the play began. First I inquired whether Ferraù had perished and ascertained that Orlando had duly killed him the night before with la Durlindana. This famous sword was won by Carlo Magno in his youth when he overcame Polinoro, the captain-general of Bramante, King of Africa. Carlo Magno, having another sword of his own and wishing to keep la Durlindana in the family, passed it on to his nephew Orlando. That is Pasquale's version. Others say that it was given to Orlando by Malagigi the magician. The most usual account is that la Durlindana belonged to Hector. After the fall of Troy it came to Æneas; and from him, through various owners, to Almonte, a giant of a dreadful stature, who slew Orlando's father. An angel in a dream directed Orlando, when he was about eighteen, to proceed to a river on the bank of which he found Carlo Magno and Almonte fighting. He took his uncle's part, avenged his father's death by killing Almonte, threw his gigantic body into the stream and appropriated his enchanted possessions, namely, his horse, Brigliadoro, his horn, his sword and his armour. He had the sword with him when he was defeated at Roncisvalle and threw it from him, about two hundred miles, to Rocamadour in France where it stuck in a rock and any one can see it to this day.

I do not remember that Homer speaks of Hector's sword as la Durlindana; perhaps he did not know. But every one knows that horses have had names, both in romance and real life, from the days of Pegasus to our own. Mario calls his horses Gaspare, after one of the Three Kings, and

Totò, which is a form of Salvatore. They were so called before he bought them, or he would have named them Baiardo and Brigliadoro. Having no sword, he calls his whip la Durlindana. He assured me that the barber whom he employs calls all his razors by the names of the swords of the paladins, and that the shoe-blacks give similar names to their brushes.

If Pasquale’s statements were at variance with other poetical versions of the story, they were, as might be expected, still more so with the prose authorities. In the books, Carlo Magno was born sometimes in the castle of Saltzburg, in Bavaria, and sometimes at Aix-la-Chapelle; which may be good history, but could not well be represented by the marionettes without a double stage, and even then might fail to convince. The Carlo Magno of romance, son of Pipino, King of France, and Berta, his wife, was not born until many years after the wedding; for Berta had enemies at the French Court who spirited her away immediately after the ceremony, substituting her waiting-maid, Elisetta, who was so like her that Pipino did not notice the difference. Elisetta became the mother of the wicked bastards Lanfroi and Olderigi, while Berta lived in retirement in the cottage of a hunter on the banks of the Magno, a river about five leagues from Paris. Pipino lost himself while out hunting one day, took refuge in the cottage, saw Berta, did not recognize his lawful, wedded wife and fell in love with her over again. Carlo Magno was born in due course in the cottage, and his second name was given to him, not for the prosaic reason that it means the Great, but because it is the name of the river. The bastards afterwards murder their father, which is a warning to any bridegroom among the audience to be careful not to mistake another lady for his bride upon the wedding night. And thus Romance becomes the handmaid of Morality.

Carlo Magno is now on the throne. I was presented to him, and found him in mourning for a nephew who had been killed a few evenings before and whose corpse was still hanging on a neighbouring peg, waiting for the slight alteration necessary to turn him into some one else. All the paladins who had recently lost relations were in mourning and wore long pieces of crape trailing from their helmets. Pasquale took me round, told me who they all were and explained their genealogies.

I was in a hades peopled with the ghosts of Handel’s operas. I saw Orlando himself and his cousins “Les quatre fils Aymon,” namely Rinaldo da Montalbano, Guicciardo, Alardo, and Ricciardetto. I saw their father, whose name in Italian is Amone, and their sister Bradamante, the widow of Ruggiero da Risa, and her sister-in-law, the Empress Marfisa, Ruggiero’s sister. These two ladies were in armour, showing their legs, and in all respects like the men warriors, except that they wore their hair long.

“Bradamante will die this evening,” said Pasquale.

I expressed regret, and asked for particulars.

“She will die of grief for the loss of her husband, Ruggiero da Risa, who has been killed by the treachery of Conte Gano.”

Then I saw my fellow-countryman, Astolfo d’Inghilterra; he it was that brought back from the moon the lost wits of Orlando when he became furioso because Angelica would have nothing to say to him and married Medoro. And I saw Astolfo’s father, Ottone d’Inghilterra, and Il Re Desiderio and Gandellino, who seemed undersized; but when I said so, Pasquale replied—

“Si, è piccolo, ma è bello—stupendo,” and so he was.

I took down one of the knights, stood him on the floor and tried to work him. The number of things I had to hold at once puzzled me a good deal, especially the strings. Pasquale took another knight and gave me a lesson, showing me how to make him weep and meditate, how to raise and lower his vizor, how to draw his sword and fight. It was very difficult to get him to put his sword back into the scabbard. I could not do it at all, though I managed the other things after a fashion.

Then I saw the Marchese Oliviero di Allemagna and Uggiero Danese and Turpino, a priest, but a warrior nevertheless.

“This,” said Pasquale, “is Guidon Selvaggio, and this is his sister Carmida. They are the children of Rinaldo.”

“But spurious,” interrupted another youth.

“Yes,” agreed Pasquale; “they are bastards. Shall I tell you how?”

But I declined to rake up the family scandal and we passed on to Carmida’s husband, Cladinoro, Re di Bizerta, a spurious son of the old Ruggiero da Risa, and so valorous that they speak of La Forza di Cladinoro.

All these knights and ladies were hanging on one side of the stage in two rows, one row against the wall and the other in front. I asked Pasquale how he knew which was which. He concealed his astonishment at such a simple question and replied—

“By the crests on their helmets.”

I then observed that they all wore their proper crests, a lion or an eagle, or a castle, or whatever it might be; Ferraù had no crest, but he had a special kind of helmet, and these boys knew them all in the legitimate way by their armorial bearings, and that was how, on the evening of

Angelica's death, the audience knew all the knights and said their names as they entered.

p. 120 On the other side of the stage were two rows of pagans who in this hades, where the odium theologicum persists, are not admitted among Christians. Here hung Il Re Marsilio di Spagna, who was to be defeated this evening, and his two brothers, Bulugante and Falserone, his son the Infanta di Spagna, his nephew Ferraù, now dead, and Grandonio. Then I came upon a miscellaneous collection and could look at no more knights or ladies after I had found the devil.

He was not The Devil, he was only "un diavolo qualunque," but he was fascinating, and he had horns and a tail—Pasquale and the other youths showed me his tail very particularly and laughed at him cruelly for having one. But it was not his fault, poor devil, that he had a tail: except for the wear and tear of his tempestuous youth he was as he had left the hands of his maker.

There was also a skeleton; they made him dance for me and said that he is used to appear to any one about to die; but this cannot apply to the warriors, for they fight and die freely, and put whole families into mourning nightly, and if the skeleton appeared to them every time, a new one would be wanted once a month.

p. 121 And there was "un gigante qualunque"—the raw material for a giant, something that could be faked up into this or that special giant when wanted. Similarly there was a lady having her dress and wig altered, they told me she was "una donna qualunque"—the very words I had seen a few weeks previously written up in Rome to advertise a performance in Italian of *A Woman of no Importance*. I suspect there must have been somewhere "un guerriero qualunque" so constructed that his head could be cut off, and that he had been disguised as and substituted for the Duca d'Avilla when Ferraù appeared to kill that warrior, for, without trickery, no sword in the teatrino, not even la Durlindana, could have cut off a head which had an iron rod running through it.

There was a confused heap of Turks and Spanish soldiers lying in a corner, and at the back of the stage, between the farthest scene and the wall of the theatre, was the stable containing seven war horses and one centaur. Pasquale told me that the centaur was "un animale selvaggio" which I knew, but he did not tell me what part he took in the play. One of the horses, of course, was Baiardo, the special horse of Rinaldo. p. 122 Baiardo is still living in the forest of Ardennes, he formerly belonged to Amadis de Gaul and was found in a grotto by Malagigi when he found Rinaldo's sword, Fusberta, which used to belong to the King of Cyprus.

It appeared to me time to go to the front, but Pasquale said that this evening I might stay behind during the performance if I liked and I accepted his invitation, for I had a toy theatre of my own once and used to do *The Miller and His Men* with an explosion at the end; it had to be at the end, not only as a bonne-bouche, but also because my audience, not being composed of Sicilian facchini, were driven out of the room by its effects. Smokeless explosions may be possible now, but we did not then know how to do any better. I would have given much—even the explosion—if I could have had a teatrino and real marionettes of my own, as one of my Sicilian friends had when he was a boy; he dressed his own dolls and made his own scenery, and used to do the *Odyssey*—a first-rate subject that could easily be made to last two winters.

p. 123 I was so much interested that I may have paid less attention this evening to the story than to the working of the puppets. The rods that pass through their heads have wooden handles and end in hooks; across the stage, pretty high up, were laid two horizontal laths with six or seven chains hanging from them; when the paladins appeared, marching in one after another and taking up their positions in two rows, as they frequently did, what really happened was that an operator on one side reached across and handed them over one by one to an operator on the other side, who hooked them up into the chains, choosing the link according to the height of the particular puppet in such a way that, if possible, its feet just rested upon the stage. After three or four had been hooked up, the first operator could hang up the rest, and as soon as the two rows were in their places Carlo Magno entered in front and addressed them in a majestic voice. During the pauses of his speech and at its conclusion the paladins all murmured in agreement or shouted "Evviva" which was done by us who were behind and, as there were thirteen of us, it ought to have sounded fairly imposing. Three of the thirteen were regular operators, pretty constantly employed, p. 124 who took off their coats, waistcoats and shirts, and found it very hot work; of the remainder some were authorized assistants, some were friends and one was the reader—"Lui che parla."

The siege of Marsilio's city was managed in this way. First a scene was let down as far back as possible on the stage. This, Pasquale said, represented "una città qualunque." The collection of little wooden houses on Captain Shandy's bowling-green was not a more perfect Proteus of a town than Pasquale's back cloth. This evening it was Barcelona. In front of it, about halfway to the footlights, was a low wall of fortifications. Just behind the fortifications the Spaniards were hooked up into rather high links of the chains, so that, from the front, they appeared to be looking over the wall and defending the city. Carlo Magno and his paladins brought ladders, scaled the wall, fought the Spaniards and effected an entrance. The fights were mostly duels. At one time there were three duels; that is, six knights were all fighting at once, three on each side. The places on the stage occupied by the front pair were worn into hollows by their feet. The damage sustained by the figures in the fury of the combats is very great; p. 125 their armour gets broken, their draperies torn, their joints and the hinges of their vizors are put out of order and there is much to be done to them before they can appear again.

For the conclusion we came to the front and took our places as the curtain drew up on a wood.

The Empress Marfisa entered in all her bravery, riding cross-legged on her charger and looking round, first this way, then that. She was searching the wood for Bradamante who had retired from the world to “una grotta oscura” to die of grief. The empress looked about and rode here and there but could see Bradamante nowhere, so she rode away to search another part of the wood and the scene changed. We were now in the obscure grotto and here came Marfisa, riding on her charger and looking about; she could see her sister-in-law nowhere and was overcome with anxiety. Presently, in the dim light, she spied something on the ground; she dismounted, went far into the cave, and—could it be?—yes, it was the unconscious form of Bradamante. She knelt down by her, embraced her and called her by her name, but there was no reply. p. 126 She kissed her and called “Bradamante,” still there was no reply. She fondled her, and called her her “dolce cognata,”—her sweet sister-in-law—and at length Bradamante raised herself with an effort, recognized Marfisa and saying, “Farewell, sister, I am dying,” fell back and expired. An angel fluttered down, received her soul from her lips and carried it up to heaven, while Marfisa wept over her body.

Then the dwarf came on and recited the programme for the next evening. This was, as usual, followed by the last scene. The paladins all marched in—that is to say, they were handed over and hooked up in two rows, the audience recognizing each, and saying his name as he took his place, and Carlo Magna came and addressed them in a magnificent speech beginning—

“Paladini! noi siamo stanchi.”

Their fatigue was caused by their exertions at the siege of Barcelona and their Emperor went on to promise them some repose before proceeding against Madrid.

This epilogue struck me as out of place; nothing ought to have followed the death of Bradamante, which was as affecting a scene as I have ever witnessed. p. 127 The only hitch occurred when Marfisa dismounted; her left foot came to the ground capitally, but her right would not come over her saddle for some time; she got it free at last, however, and stood upright on both feet. I thought again of Master Peter’s puppet-show and of how the petticoat of the peerless Lady Melisendra caught in one of the iron rails as she was letting herself down from the balcony, so that she hung dangling in midair, and Don Gayferos had to bring her to the ground by main force.

The rest of the scene in the grotto could not have gone better and the audience were enthralled by it. Yet what was it after all? Nothing but a couple of loosely jointed wooden dolls, fantastically dressed up in tin armour, being pulled about on a toy stage. Yet there was something more; there was the voice of the reader—the voice of “Lui che parla.” In the earlier part of the evening he had been giving us fine declamation, which was all that had been required. The meeting between the two princesses brought him his opportunity and he attacked the scene and carried it through in a spirit of simple conviction, his voice throbbing with emotion as he made for himself a triumph.

p. 128 Art abounds in miracles, and not the least is this, that a man can take a few watery commonplaces and by the magic of his voice transmute them into the golden wine of romance. The audience drank in the glowing drops that poured from his lips, and were stilled to a silence that broke in a great sob as the curtain fell. What did they know of loosely jointed wooden dolls or of toy stages? They were no longer in the theatre. They had wandered the woods with Marfisa, they had sought Bradamante in the leafy glades, they had found her dying in the grotto, they had received her last breath and the world would never be the same to them again. A voice that can do this is rare and, like the power of a giant, rarely found in the possession of one who knows how to use it worthily.

MOUNT ERYX

p. 131

CHAPTER VIII—MONTE SAN GIULIANO

Three or four miles inland from Trapani, at the north-west corner of Sicily, rises a precipitous solitary mountain, nearly 2500 feet high, with a town on the top. A motor bus makes a circuit of the mountain, taking one up to the town in about an hour. It proceeds inland, past the church of the Annunziata, the famous shrine of the Madonna di Trapani, and the ascent soon begins. As one looks back towards the sea, Trapani gradually assumes the form that gave it its Greek name of Drepanum, for it juts out towards the island of Levanzo like a sickle “with the sea roaring all round it.” Marsala is usually visible beyond the innumerable salt pans and windmills. One of these windmills is especially pleasing; it consists of five or six dummy ships with real sails on a pond; p. 132 these ships form, as it were, the rim of a wheel lying on its side, the spokes being poles which attach the ships to the axle, an island in the middle of the pond. The wind blows and the ships race after one another round and round the pond, causing the poles to work the mechanism which is inside the island.

The manufacture of salt is one of the chief industries of Trapani and one of the chief causes of its wealth. In Sicily it practically never rains during the summer; the sea water is collected in large, open pans, being raised by means of the screw which has been in use all over the island for nearly twenty-two centuries, ever since Archimedes invented it to remove the water from the

hold of one of Hiero's ships at Siracusa. All through the summer the heat of the sun evaporates the moisture, leaving the salt which is afterwards exported to Newfoundland, Norway, the North of France and many other countries and used for salting fish and other purposes.

The road continues to ascend and the horizon appears to ascend also, so that the sea takes up with it the Ægadean islands till, presently, Marettimo looks over the top of Levanzo, while Favognana lies away to the left. The Isola Grande (S. Pantaleo), the fourth island, is not a p. 133 prominent object, being low and near the land, a good deal to the south towards Marsala; but in former times, when it was Motya, it was the most important of them all. The sea extends right and left till it is lost in the haze which so commonly obscures a Sicilian horizon.

The road goes more and more inland and, still rising, diverges from the shorter road taken by the old horse bus and passes through Paparella. Presently the mountain shuts out Trapani and the sea, and then the country lying inland about the base of the mountain comes into view bounded by a distant amphitheatre and, as the road completes the circuit of the mountain, and still rising joins the other shorter road at the Trapani gate of the town, the sea comes into sight again, with the horizon high above Trapani and the promontory of Capo S. Vito bounding it on the right.

This mountain, formerly world-renowned as Mount Eryx, and still often called Monte Erice, is now Monte S. Giuliano and gives its name both to the town on the top and to the comune of which that town is the chief place. The highest point of the town is towards the east of the p. 134 mountain-top, and here are several towers, some belonging to the Castello, a Norman fortress, and others to Le Torri, the summer residence of Count Pepoli. On the north, east and south sides of the summit the mountain is precipitous, but towards the west it slopes from the towers through a public garden called the Balio, and then through a maze of narrow, winding streets, down to the Trapani gate. The normal population of the town is about 4000, but in the summer and autumn this is largely increased, inasmuch as the great heat of Trapani and the low country drives as many as can afford it to live on the summit where it is seldom too hot.

The rest of the comune lies dotted about on the plain at the foot of the mountain and consists of a dozen small villages, all visible from the summit. These have mostly grown up within the last hundred years or so as colonies from the chief town, for when the country was less secure the women and children were left within the town walls while the men went down to work in the fields and to fish in the sea, returning for Sundays and festas, and gradually, as it became possible, settlements were formed below to which the women and children could safely be p. 135 moved. Custonaci, however, one of the villages of the comune, did not spring up in this way and is of older date than the others.

The peculiar charm of the mountain cannot be fully realized unless one visits it at all seasons and in all weathers. I have been there in the winter; the summit was hidden in a cloud which, as we drove up into it, obscured the view and chilled the marrow. It was before the days of the motor, when a horse bus did the journey by a shorter route in about three hours. I was on the box with the coachman who gave me a spare cloak with a hood to keep me dry and warm. Two of my friends, natives of the mountain, one a doctor and the other the accountant to the Municipio, were at the Trapani gate to meet me, both in hooded cloaks, so that I did not recognize them till they spoke. The wind was tremendous. The narrow sloping streets were running with water as we walked up through the town to the albergo, where Donna Anna received us. There was no blazing fire or warm room as there would have been in an English inn, only semidarkness and dampness. The damp had patched the painting on the ceiling and disfigured the whitewashed p. 136 walls, on which were hung a few pictures—a lithograph of the Madonna di Custonaci, a cheap Crucifixion, a reproduction of the design for the monument to Vittorio Emmanuele in Rome, three shiny chromolithographs of English country scenes, representing the four seasons minus one, an absurd French engraving, *Education Maternelle* and S. Francesco da Paola, with a shell for holy water. S. Francesco belongs to South Italy, but he is a favourite in Sicily because he walked across the Straits of Messina to carry the Last Sacraments to a dying man. On the undulating tiled floor were a few of the rugs peculiar to the neighbourhood. They are made by the natives on looms, the length being thin, strong string and the width white, black and coloured cotton rags—old petticoats, shirts, aprons and so on, washed clean and torn into narrow strips. With a little ingenuity they make the colours go in simple patterns, chiefly diamonds and zigzags; but sometimes they are more daring and attempt drinking-cups, etc.: the most effective are made by running the strips in rows without any regard to pattern.

p. 137 Some winds blow some clouds away, but the roots of this cloud were so firmly wedged in among the narrow streets and through the cracks of the doors and windows, which would not shut close, that this wind could do nothing with it but blow it more deeply in and the house was full of mist like the Albert Hall in a winter fog. The natives consider it more healthy to keep the same temperature indoors and out, so there is not a house on the mountain with a fireplace, and only a few with stoves. The absence of chimneys is a feature of the town, as it is of other Sicilian towns that can bear their absence better. And these are the people who commiserate an Englishman on being compelled to live in our cold, damp, foggy island! In support of my statement that we do occasionally see the sun, I showed them a picture-postcard of a house in London standing in a garden. It was midday, but we had to have a lamp to see the picture; nevertheless they supposed that the flowers were artificial and were renewed when we had a festa because, of course, real flowers will not grow in our perpetual fog. I told them that our fogs prevent flowers from growing in England just as much as their brigands prevent foreigners from travelling in Sicily, p. 138 and that both are more spoken of than seen.

It must, however, be admitted that the natives do not appear to suffer from the effects of their climate. They boast that statistics show them to be particularly free from pulmonary complaints, and to have an unusually low death rate. As the doctor said, in a tone of professional discontent, they enjoy an epidemic of good health.

Supper consisted of maccaroni, bread and wine, and the table-cloth and napkins were as damp as one’s towels after a bath. My two friends sat with me and introduced me to a student with a slight cast in one of his melancholy eyes, a misty tenor voice and the facile Italian smile, who had come up from Castelvetrano to study a little philosophy, and supped with me.

When it was bedtime, they all three came with Donna Anna into my bedroom to make sure that I was comfortable and the old landlady took the opportunity of consulting the accountant about the prisoners. Although the inhabitants of the province of Trapani are all good people, nevertheless now and then some slight crime is committed, an occasional wounding, a simple stabbing or so, and consequently it is convenient to have a prison handy. Part of the castle on the mountain is used for the purpose and Donna Anna provides the prisoners with their food and also sees to their sheets, bedding etc. They could not have a better matron and if she keeps everything in the prison as clean and good as it is in her house, I am afraid she may perhaps make the prisoners more comfortable than they deserve.

When she had disposed of her business she asked whether I should like some fire in my bed. I was going to decline, not being in the habit of using a warming-pan, but then I thought of the table-cloth and the napkins at supper—and my friends said that every one on the mountain always has fire in the bed in cold, damp weather—so I agreed, and Donna Anna fetched what looked like a flower-pot containing hot charcoal. She put this between my sheets with a wicker cage over it, and presently shifted its position. I wanted her to leave it all night in a corner of the room to take the chill off, but this met with opposition from all because they did not wish me to be found in the morning asphyxiated in my sleep like a Parisian milliner in a novel. I would have chanced it, had I been allowed, for the milliners always have the greatest difficulty in stopping up all the chinks, and even then occasionally survive; whereas, although Donna Anna pinned up a blanket across my window, it did not keep out the gale that was raging all about the room. The general opinion being against the charcoal, I acquiesced and it was taken back to its home in the kitchen. It was the only fire in the house and was what Dickens would have called an honest and stout little fire. It had cooked the maccaroni for supper and, after warming all the beds, went back to rest from its labour until the morning when it would be called to make the coffee for breakfast. It deserved its rest, not that it dried my sheets, but it warmed them; and the doctor assured me that it is the coldness and not the dampness of wet sheets that gives one a chill, so he considered me practically safe. If only I had had a cold at the time, he said, I should have been completely safe on the principle that one must be off with the old cold before one can be on with the new. Owing, doubtless, to the kindly influence of the good little fire, I passed a comfortable night and took no harm.

When I came down in the morning there was the student immersed in his philosophy; the industrious little fire had obligingly allowed itself to be coaxed into two, and he had secured part of it in a flower-pot on the floor between his feet and had a rug over his knees. The cloud was as thick and the wind as boisterous as it had been the day before, so I followed his example, got another flowerpot, split off a bit of fire for myself and sat down with a rug.

The next morning the cloud had gone and I returned to Trapani. The bus started very early and I had to rise before the sun, but the view would have repaid sitting up all night. We saw Marettimo hovering over Levanzo “on the horizon all highest up in the sea to the West,” as Ithaca is described in the *Odyssey*. We saw Ustica floating over Cofano and Capo S. Vito. We looked down on Custonaci, the Sanctuary of the Madonna and the great curve of the bay from Cofano to the foot of the mountain. We gazed over the low, undulating country covered with villages, roads, fields and villas that lay all around us on the inland sides—the country through which in 1860 Garibaldi marched to Calatafimi with his thousand volunteers after landing at Marsala. We saw Monte Inice and the heights above Segesta. We saw Pantellaria, halfway to Africa, but we could not see Africa itself for Cape Bon is only visible under very exceptional atmospheric conditions.

I have been on the mountain in the spring and eaten quails for supper. It was the time of their migration, and they had been caught as they rested on the islands. I have never been able to ascertain exactly what it is that the quails do. First I read in a book that when going north in the spring they rest on Levanzo and when returning south in the autumn, on Favognana. Levanzo being north of Favognana this meant that, in both cases, they choose for their resting-place the second island they come to. There is no mistake about this being what I read, for I made a memoria technica about it at the time out of what Rockstro, my old counterpoint master, used to say musicians do in performing the diatonic major scale unaccompanied. In ascending they pass over the grave supertonic and take the acute supertonic, and in descending they pass over the acute supertonic and take the grave supertonic; the two supertonics being only a comma apart, as the two islands are only a very little way from one another.

Then I was told by a native of Trapani that this is just what the quails do not do, and that, in fact, they rest on the first island they come to, namely, on Favognana when going north, and on Levanzo when going south, being too tired to fly across the geographical comma that divides the two islands. I was next told by another native of Trapani that the quails rest on all the three islands indiscriminately and not merely on Levanzo and Favognana, thus destroying any attempt

at purity of intonation and introducing equal temperament along with Marettimo, which had not hitherto been touched upon. He also said that if in any year it was found that the quails avoided any one of the islands, the reason would be that there were too many people on it. Finally, I was told by another native that when the quails were going north in the spring of 1906 the wind suddenly changed and blew most of them into Trapani itself, and people picked them up by hundreds in the streets. It does not matter, of course, so long as one gets the quails for supper, but if one really did want to know, one would have as much difficulty as in finding out how Orlando got hold of la Durlindana and where it originally came from.

p. 144

The student from Castelvetrano was still there with his melancholy eyes, studying philosophy. He said he found the mountain more suitable for his purpose than his native town because it was more tranquil. I had been at Castelvetrano, but had not noticed that it was a particularly noisy place, indeed, I could no more have distinguished between the tranquillity of Castelvetrano and that of the mountain than between the acute and the grave supertonic.

The next time I met this student he had completed his studies and was employed as a clerk in the Italian railway station at Chiasso, the frontier town on the S. Gottardo, at an annual salary of 1,080 lire, which is about £43 4s. He could hardly have been sent to a station more remote from his native town. He had had a holiday of twelve days, and had gone home to embrace his adorata mamma. The government gave him a free pass, so he travelled by rail, crossing from Reggio to Messina, and it took him forty-six hours. When he arrived at Castelvetrano he was so knocked up by the journey and the change of air that he was obliged to go to bed, where he remained till it was time for him to get up and return to Chiasso, and this means that he was in bed for more than a fortnight, because his holiday was extended to twenty days in consideration of his illness. He was quite contented about his position and prospects and told me these facts without any complaint. On the whole, Mount Eryx would appear to be not such a bad school for philosophers: nevertheless, when one considers the large part played in evolution by the inherited desire of the organism to live beyond its income, one may doubt whether it is good for a country’s progress that many of its men should be so philosophically contented with so little. They do not, however, include the whole of the population, for Italy cannot be said to be without examples of aggressive discontent. It is somewhere between the two extremes that practical commonsense should be looked for. In the meantime, if it is a question of sharing a supper of spring quails on Mount Eryx, a peaceful, gentle philosopher is probably a more agreeable companion than a socialistic nihilist.

p. 145

If one had the power of choosing one’s company, this philosopher would counsel one not to exercise it; for he looks upon choosing as a presumptuous kind of trying to control nature. I pointed out that one cannot altogether detach oneself from nature and that doing nothing is still choosing not to choose, but he replied that it is the lesser evil, as in choosing not to write a tragedy in five acts, which I had to admit can seldom be wrong. Further he asked, inasmuch as we had neither arranged our meeting nor ordered the quails, were we not at the moment both enjoying the advantage of having acted on his philosophy? I bowed and said I had been particularly fortunate this evening; but in Sicily one is always safe because the people are so charming that the art of travelling among them consists in allowing things to happen and in being ready to welcome whatever may come.

p. 146

Perhaps the best season for going on the mountain is the late summer and early autumn, when the Trapanese come up for the villegiatura. It is not too hot during the day, as it is by the sea, and it can be almost chilly by night, which it never is below. Every one is in a holiday frame of mind; even the ladies of Eryx go out, whereas during the winter they seldom leave the house, unless, perhaps, after a storm for a turn in the balio to see how the trees look when laden with snow. There are picnics and excursions to other places on the slopes of the mountain where friends are passing the summer who presently return the visits by coming up to breakfast with us. There is a touring company performing in the theatre, there is music, there are drives and all manner of quiet amusements.

p. 147

On the mainland of Italy, tobacconists’ shops display the Royal Arms with a notice that they are licensed to sell tobacco and salt. Here a license is necessary only for tobacco, salt being free in Sicily. This combines with the absence of rain to make the manufacture of salt profitable; but should a thunderstorm dilute the pans, the fresh water must be evaporated out again and time and money are lost. Storms come so rarely in the summer, however, that the caprices of the weather interfere but little either with the salt works or the excursions.

If there is no excursion or no special occupation, we go to the caffé or the club, or call on the chemist who is sure to be surrounded by friends, or sit in the balio smoking and talking nonsense by the hour. And there is always the inexhaustible wonder of the great view. The spacious dome of the sky, which curves above and around, unites at the horizon with the inverted dome of the earth and sea, which curves around and below, the two together forming an enormous hollow globe in the midst of which the top of the mountain seems to be suspended like the floating island of Laputa. Conte Pepoli can sit in his castle and watch the half-tame ravens, with little silver bells on their necks, as they flit around the window and perch on the crazy wooden balcony where an old priest is asleep in a chair, over the edge of a precipice of many hundred feet, backed by leagues upon leagues of Sicily.

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CHAPTER IX—THE MADONNA AND THE PERSONAGGI

p. 149

In August, 1901, I was on the mountain and saw a procession representing Noah’s Ark and the

Universal Deluge—one of those strange and picturesque cavalcades that were formerly more common than they are now.

Usually, in other parts of Italy, the same story is repeated at the same season: in one place, always the Passion at Easter; in another, always the Nativity at Christmas, and so forth. On the mountain they have the procession at irregular intervals, after perhaps three or four years, and the story, though now, as a rule, scriptural, is never the same again. When it does occur, it is as an extra embellishment of the annual harvest thanksgiving; it takes place by night and always introduces the Madonna di Custonaci. And now it is time to say a few words about this famous p. 150 Madonna, whose influence is felt throughout the whole comune at all times, but nowhere more than on the Mountain, and at no time more than during the harvest thanksgiving.

Mount Eryx, as every one knows, was in classical times famous for the worship of Venus: here stood perhaps the most celebrated of all her temples—the one with which her name is most familiarly associated—and here, long before Horace wrote of “Erycina ridens,” she was worshipped as Aphrodite by the Greeks, and as Astarte or Ashtaroth by the Phœnicians. Hardly any vestige of a temple can now be made out, but the remains of the Pelasgic walls that protected the city in prehistoric ages are still to be seen near the Trapani gate. The late Samuel Butler (author of *Erewhon*) wrote *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (Longmans, 1897) in support of his view that the *Odyssey* was written by a woman who lived at Trapani and upon the mountain, and who in the poem described her own country. In Chapter XII. he quotes Thucydides (vi. 2), to show that the Sicans had inhabited this corner of the island from a very remote period, having come probably from Spain. After the fall of Troy, some of the Trojans, who had escaped the Greeks, p. 151 migrated to Sicily, settled in the neighbourhood of the Sicans and were all together called Elymi, their cities being Eryx and Segesta. The city walls were originally built by the Sicans, and restored by the Phœnicians when they came to the mountain; on many of the stones the quarrymen’s marks in Phœnician characters are still visible.

It was believed that at certain seasons of the year the goddess left her shrine on the mountain and went over into Africa accompanied by all the pigeons of the neighbourhood, and this was the occasion for a festival of Anagogia. [151] A little later, when the pigeons returned, the goddess was believed to come back with them, and then there was another festival of Catagogia.   Seeing that she would have had to go little more than 120 miles in order to reach what is now Cape Bon, and then only to cross the gulf of Tunis to arrive at the Phœnician colony of Carthage, one may suppose it probable that these flittings began when Astarte was in power. p. 152

In our own time the Madonna di Custonaci reigns upon the Mountain, and is Protectress of the whole comune. Her sacred picture is normally in her sanctuary down at Custonaci, about 15 kilometres distant, but when any general calamity afflicts the district, it is brought up to the Matrice or Mother Church of the comune on Mount Eryx. On these occasions three days of humiliation are proclaimed, priests and men, their heads crowned with thorns, their necks encircled with cords, go about the town flagellating themselves; in the evening fires are lighted in the balio, and all the villages below answer by lighting fires too, to show that they are taking part in the general tribulation. A document is signed by the sindaco, and then the picture is brought from Custonaci and set over the great altar in the church of the Matrice. When it has become quite clear that the anger of Heaven has been appeased, the picture is taken back to Custonaci.

The calamity that most commonly befalls the comune is a drought, or the fear of a drought. Rain is not wanted while the salt is being made, but as soon as that is all under cover in the autumn it p. 153 is time for the rain to begin, otherwise the crops will fail. In 1893 the rain was delayed until matters began to look so serious that it was determined to bring the picture up to the mountain. The proper formalities having been observed, the people all went out in crowds to welcome it and, as it was borne along, cried—

“Acqua, Maria, acqua!” (“Rain, Maria, rain!”)

Meanwhile the clouds were gathering and presently a tremendous thunderstorm came on which drenched them all, and they returned to the mountain, shouting—

“Basta, Maria, basta!” (“Leave off, Maria, leave off!”)

The lightning struck the church and injured four persons who were standing near the altar, but the Madonna was already in her place, and owing to her presence they recovered.

The picture, like many of the thaumaturgic representations of the Madonna, is the work of St. Luke the Evangelist—all except the head which was done by an angel who descended from heaven expressly for the purpose. This being so, one would expect to find its home on the top of p. 154 the very Mountain itself, in the chief place of the comune, and not down at an insignificant little village like Custonaci. Some have thought that to allow the Sanctuary of a Madonna Ericina to take the place of the Temple of Venus Erycina would have been to insist on a parallelism about which it was desirable to say as little as possible. Others believe the real reason why we have a Madonna di Custonaci to be preserved in the following legend. [154]

A French vessel, laden with precious merchandise and also with this still more precious picture, was returning to Marseilles from Alexandria in Egypt, and, while sailing the Sicilian seas, encountered a furious tempest. The more the unhappy mariners laboured to govern their craft, the less they succeeded, and at last, despairing of earthly help, they turned their thoughts to the

Madonna. With streaming eyes they knelt before the painting and prayed without ceasing to the Queen of Heaven that she would be graciously pleased to conduct them safely home. p. 155 For a long time they met with no response, but when they were nearing Cofano, every sailor heard a voice, as though coming from the picture and declaring that the Madonna desired to be landed on the neighbouring coast. Whereupon they bound themselves by a vow that if they reached land in safety they would build a sanctuary then and there in memory of their miraculous preservation. No sooner was the vow uttered than the wind fell, the storm ceased and the surface of the waters became as smooth as polished glass, over which the fortunate bark glided without guidance into harbour—and this to the great astonishment of the crew who observed that her course lay among dangerous shoals and sunken rocks.

The joyful mariners returned thanks to their Blessed Protectress and immediately began to perform their vow; but while disembarking, they found themselves surrounded by a crowd of armed peasants who, taking them for Turkish pirates, ran to the spot with the intention of frustrating their supposed nefarious designs. Mutual explanations averted bloodshed, and the peasants then began to dissuade the sailors from performing their vow in so literal a manner, p. 156 pointing out that they would be abandoning their precious charge to the risk, if not the certainty, of sacrilegious theft at the hands of the corsairs who frequented that harbour. In the end the simple mariners yielded to the arguments of the peasants, and with many tears consigned the picture to their care. The peasants put it into a cart harnessed with two oxen who started to draw it inland, but would only go in a direction chosen by themselves and, after proceeding two or three kilometres, lay down and by no means could be persuaded to go a step further. This was accepted as an indication of the Madonna's approval of what had been done and of her desire that her church should be erected there, and on that spot now stands the Sanctuary of Custonaci. The poor sailors, grieving bitterly for the loss of their treasure, returned to the ship and continued their interrupted voyage till they reached Marseilles in safety.

Owing to the culpable negligence of those who ought to have considered it a privilege to be permitted to chronicle the many important miracles which the Madonna performed in honour of p. 157 the arrival of her picture, we have particulars of only two cures wrought in those times, one on a cripple and the other on a mute. Any one, however, who is disposed to doubt that there were many more has only to visit the sanctuary and take note of the large number of votive pictures there exhibited. Besides, how else could the fame of this wonder-working image have travelled abroad so extensively unless the wonders had been not less numerous than undoubted?

There is uncertainty as to the exact date of the arrival of the picture at the Sanctuary: some give the year 1570; others consider this too late, if only because wills exist dated as far back as 1422 bequeathing gifts to Santa Maria di Custonaci; others say that this need not have anything to do with our Madonna, because there has been a church or chapel at Custonaci dedicated to the Virgin from very early times, and there is nothing to show that these wills do not refer to the earlier Madonna; others believe 1370, not 1570, to be the true date. We should have something to guide us if we could ascertain how often the picture has been transported to the mountain in times of calamity, but here again the culpable negligence of the chroniclers has left us with p. 158 records of only fifty-one such occasions from the beginning of the 16th century to 1794, viz. five when the pestilence walked by midday, four when the mountains trembled and the earth opened, two when the locusts came without number and devoured the fruits of the ground, four when war clouds gathered in the sky and thirty-six when the autumn rains were delayed.

The disputes extend also to the date of the painting, some even denying that it was painted by St. Luke. But to do this they are obliged to ignore all the considerations which support the orthodox view, viz. the place from which the sailors brought it, the many wonders performed by it, the miraculous preservation of the colouring during all the years that have elapsed since St. Luke's time, the widespread belief in the efficacy of its powers and lastly the fact that, though many have made the attempt, no artist has yet succeeded in producing a perfect copy of the original.

I asked several people what St. Luke had to do with Alexandria, and was always told that St. Mark's body was brought from there to Venice in 828, why then should not another of the p. 159 Evangelists have been there also? Why not indeed? But this reply was as little satisfying as those with which pre-occupied age endeavours to silence inquisitive childhood, and produced much the same sort of result, spurring me on to further investigations.

A musician who desires to compose a tune that shall become popular must contrive something apparently original and yet not so original as to demand study; it must also contain echoes of other tunes previously popular, and yet they must be so indefinite that no one can tell for certain where they come from, which is what we mean when we say it is a wise tune that knows its own father. Similarly, the framers of the foregoing legend had to compose an entirely Christian story, as original as was compatible with the use of the forms of Christian legend, and yet they could not neglect all the pagan traditions with which their public had been impregnated for generations. In the first place the picture must come over the sea—everything that arrives in an island does so; one of the most effective of the common forms in legend is the arrival of a boat with a precious cargo from a distant land, often bringing corn to stay a famine, and every one is p. 160 now familiar with the opening of Lohengrin. Tunis would not do for the point of departure, not only because it is where pagan Astarte came from when she arrived in Sicily, but also because it had been Moslem since the seventh century and could not have been accepted by the people as a Christian seaport. It is quite likely that the popularity of the St. Mark legend determined the selection of Alexandria, which had the advantage also of being on the coast of the same continent as Tunis. The storm, the vow and the oxen are as much common form in legend as the ship; and

the next thing that strikes one is the curious similarity between the alternate domiciles of the Madonna on the mountain and at Custonaci, and the flittings of Venus Erycina to and fro between the mountain and Carthage. If we look upon the arrival of the picture at Custonaci as involving the transplanting of a piece of Africa into Sicily, much as an ambassador's house is regarded as being part of his own country transplanted into a foreign land, we may then consider that the Madonna, to all intents and purposes, still travels between the Mountain and Africa, only she now has an easier journey and avoids actually dwelling among heretics. In this view the transporting of her picture backwards and forwards should be looked upon as the modern version of the feasts of Anagogia and Catagogia. p. 161

It is admitted that the picture has, more than once, been placed in the hands of skilful modern painters whose services have been called in merely to repair any damage it may have sustained in its journeyings—they have had nothing to do therefore with the miraculous preservation of the colouring. What these experts thought about the date of the original painting is known only to themselves. We need not suppose that they agreed—that would have been indeed a miracle and quite a fresh departure for a picture with a reputation earned in a different branch of thaumaturgy. It does not much matter, however, what they thought, for experts in matters of art are the victims of such cast-iron prejudices that if once they fancy they see the influence of Leonardo da Vinci in a picture and take it into their heads that it comes from Piedmont, it will be found the most difficult thing in the world to persuade them that it really was painted in Egypt more than 1000 years before Giotto.

p. 162 We shall probably not be far wrong if we assume that something like the processions of the Personaggi, involving the display of the most beautiful men and women that could be found, took place on the mountain in heathen times as part of the cult of the goddess and that, as a compromise, they were not abolished but accommodated to Christian usages.

Giuseppe Pitrè, in his *Feste Patronali in Sicilia*, gives an account of the procession on the mountain held in 1752. We are to suppose that the wickedness of the good people of Eryx had attained to such monstrous proportions that the whole universe, incited thereto by observing the anger of God against them, took up arms in the cause of justice. The Madonna di Custonaci, however, intervened and saved her chosen people. It began with the Wrath of God, personified by a warrior armed with thunderbolts and lightning and setting forth to destroy the mountain. Then came the Angry Heavens, the Benignant Moon, Mars and Mercury ready to avenge the outrages done to God; Jove grasping a thunderbolt and about to hurl it against the comune, Venus anxious to overthrow the city, and Saturn whetting his golden scythe. p. 163 The Sun is obscured, the Four Winds blow terribly, the Four Elements assist in the work of desolation, the Four Seasons threaten misery and affliction. Mount Eryx being convinced by this display that it is in a great danger, the Genius of the city appears next, bearing in his hand a figure of the Madonna di Custonaci. He calls to his assistance Divine Counsel, Devotion, Beneficence and Piety, and the procession closes with the Guardian Angel.

It must have been a magnificent spectacle. Many clouds have rested on Mount Eryx since 1752 and we do not now expose our bedrock of paganism quite so openly. This, indeed, but for the slight veneer of Christianity, might have passed for a downright pagan procession.

In 1894, *L'Aurora Consurgens della Cantica* was the subject. There were twelve figures showing the growth of idolatry and culminating with the Emperor Julius Cæsar who, it will be remembered, accepted worship as a god; moreover, his death having occurred not half a century before the birth of Christ, he was naturally followed by the Aurora, symbolizing the Madonna di Custonaci, and the explanatory pamphlet contained a reference to the *Song of Solomon* vi. 10: p. 164 "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" After the Aurora came the Rising Sun, Faith, Christian Civilization, Mount Eryx, Charity and Youth—meaning, probably, that Christianity will never grow old. In conclusion came a car with a copy of the sacred picture and a chorus of youths.

It would seem that the personages formerly appeared on foot, for the earliest record states that in 1750 they appeared for the first time on horseback. In 1897 the subject was *Jael*, and the cavalcade consisted of eight figures, of whom Deborah, seated in the shade of a palm tree surrounded with a chorus of damsels, Jael in the tent with Sisera nailed to the ground, and Triumph, appeared on cars, each of the others being on horseback and the horses being led by grooms suitably attired. A nocturnal procession, whether the figures go on foot, on horseback, or on cars, does not strike one as being a particularly favourable medium for the telling of a story. p. 165 Nevertheless, by choosing a subject with which the people are more or less familiar, by emphasizing the climax and by providing an explanatory pamphlet for 2d., a more satisfactory result is produced than one would have supposed probable, as I realized when I saw the procession in August, 1901. The sacred picture had been on the mountain since 1893, an unusually long time, and was now to be taken back to the sanctuary at Custonaci, which, during its absence, had been beautified "in the Gothic style." The two events of the Procession and the Return synchronizing, there was a double festa, lasting four days on the mountain and four days more at Custonaci.

CHAPTER X—THE UNIVERSAL DELUGE

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On the morning of Sunday, 25th August, 1901, every one on Monte San Giuliano was up early and at 7.30 a brass band began to perambulate the town to announce that the festa had begun. At 8.30 the band entered the Matrice, and before Mass the sacred picture was unveiled, the band

saluting it with a burst of music. Much may be done in music by allusion and suggestion. The service concluded with an extremely graceful movement in six-eight time, that drove the Madonna out of the mind of at least one listener and substituted a vision of laughing girls swaying lightly to the rhythm and singing of the dancing waves whose foam gave birth to Venus.

When the church emptied we got a better view of the picture. It is about 6 ft. high by 3 broad, p. 167 painted in oils on wood prepared with gesso, and represents a smiling Madonna with the Child at her breast. She is seated on a throne in a landscape; two angels hold over her head a massive golden crown; the Child is crowned also and in His hand are three ears of corn, to signify fruitfulness; He also holds the keys. The crowns are really only half-crowns, but they are gold or silver-gilt, and are fastened into the wood of the picture. All round the Madonna's nimbus is a raised band of gold set with twelve diamond stars, valued at 14,000 lire. A large diamond earring hangs in her right ear, the only one that is visible; three large diamond rings are on the fingers of her right hand and one on the finger of her left which supports the Child, and suspended all over her skirts is an immense quantity of jewellery. The frame is of wood entirely coated with silver, in the form of a Renaissance doorway with a fluted column on each side and a broken pediment over the top. It is almost concealed by the jewellery hung about it, earrings, chains, necklaces, rings, watches etc. These are offerings from the faithful, but what is shown is nothing like all. There is a large chest containing much more and what has been given this year is exposed in a p. 168 separate case. These valuables constitute the Madonna's dowry and she carries it with her on her journeys; but some of the more important articles never leave the mountain; her diamond stars, for instance, are removed from the picture when it goes down, and their place is taken by less valuable stars of gold.

In the afternoon there were horse-races outside the Trapani gate on a fairly level piece of road, and a concert and illumination in the balio in the evening.

In the course of the day I bought a copy of the explanatory pamphlet. Its title was *L'Arca Noetica*. *Simbolo Mariano*. *Processione notturna figurativa* (*I Personaggi*) *in omaggio alla Diva di Custonaci Celeste Patrone degli Erecini*. *Ultimo Lunedì d'Agosto*, 1901. It was to be a procession of cars, there were to be no figures on horseback. Having introduced cars, as in *Jael*, to give special importance to the three points of the story, viz. the opening, the climax, and the conclusion (or, as the pamphlet expressed it, Causa, Consequenza e Termine), it was, no doubt, felt that more could be done with them than with single figures on horseback in presenting the p. 169 somewhat intractable subject of *Noah's Ark and the Universal Deluge*.

The preparations had taken a month or six weeks. The course is for the arciprete of the Matrice, who is the head of the clergy of the district, to determine what the story shall be and how it is to be told. The designing of each personaggio, or of each group of personaggi, is then confided to one of the inhabitants, who, provided he bears in mind the general scheme, is free to follow his natural artistic instincts. The dresses are hired from Palermo, and an astonishing quantity of jewellery is lent by the families of the comune; in 1897 the personaggi carried 85 lbs. weight of it, and far more is always lent than can possibly be used. It is all gold and precious stones, no silver is to be seen, and nothing is ever lost, stolen, or mislaid; even the thieves become honest on these occasions. It is sewn on to the dresses in various designs and makes them look very rich, so that what is hired from Palermo is only the costumes in the rough, so to speak.

p. 170 In wandering about the town next day, I came upon four or five of the cars lurking in obscure churches where they had been prepared. It was not easy to make much of them; there were a few rocks, banks and clouds, also the waters of the deluge, all made of papier maché painted to appear real, and in among the rocks and banks were real plants, mostly the dwarf palm which grows plentifully on the mountain. There were wooden supports for the figures, to help them to stand in their places. Each car carried under it an apparatus to supply it with acetylene gas, used in 1901 for the first time.

All day long people kept on coming up the mountain and pouring into the town. Those who did not come on foot left their carts and horses outside, and they all swarmed up through the narrow, irregular, roughly paved streets from the Trapani gate to the balio, till by nightfall the Piazza was as crowded as Piccadilly on Mafeking night. Every one who has been present at an Italian festa knows what it is like—men shouting and elbowing their way through the people with flaming lamps fitted to their baskets, selling water and syrups, cakes and confectionery, melon seeds and peanuts—others going about with halfpenny buttonholes of gelsomina, each neatly folded up in a p. 171 vine-leaf to keep the scent in—three independent piano-organs and a brass band in the middle distance—an enthusiastic blind singer, a survival of Demodocus in the *Odyssey*, with a falsetto voice and no bridge to his nose keeping a group of listeners spellbound in the foreground with their favourite ballad, illustrated by a large sheet of oil paintings in eight tableaux, about the man who murdered his wife and mother with one bloody knife—there it is lying on the supper-table—and was ultimately taken by the carabinieri and executed.

This blind singer with no bridge to his nose is a humorist; on one occasion when he was fibbing in a particularly flagrant manner, he enforced his remarks by calling upon heaven to strike him blind and smash his nose if he was not speaking the truth.

While you are thinking that the tumult must be at its height, peaceful nuns are creeping up the convent stair, silently, one by one, they reach the roof, every one can see them collecting together in the moonlight and taking hold of the dangling bell-ropes. All of a sudden you realize what a mistake you had been making about the tumult as the riotous bells fling their additional p. 172 accompaniments out into the night, all over the town, over the whole comune, down to Trapani,

to Cofano and out to the islands.

In the meantime those in charge of the cars had been giving their final directions and seeing that everything was in order, and the personaggi, who had been being dressed ever since early in the afternoon, were ready to receive visitors. About 10 p.m. each of them began to hold an At Home. They sat there silent and motionless in their houses among trays full of superfluous jewellery and surrounded by lighted candles, gazing imperturbably in front of them while people streamed through the room admiring them, fingering their dresses and jewels, and asking questions of their relations and friends. About 11.30 I was conducted along the illuminated streets through the crowd to a house where I stood on a balcony looking up a street down which the procession was to come.

We had to wait till long after midnight, but at last the moving lights began to shine on the high houses in the distance, the band was heard approaching, and at 1.45 the first car staggered into p. 173 sight. It represented *The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men*; there were three of each, reclining in the front part of the car and offering flowers to one another, instigated so to do by the Monster of Iniquity, a loathsome dragon, who was insinuating himself among them from rocks behind, while the Angel of the Lord, a singularly beautiful child, stood on a high cloud in the background, in an attitude of horror, about to take wing from such a world of wickedness. Cupid was there also, sitting at the feet of the daughters of men and taking aim generally.

The second car brought *Sin*, a bearded man in an imperial attitude with a golden sceptre resting on his hip. He dominated a globe round which the old Serpent had coiled himself. He was dressed in dark-blue velvet, and wore a voluminous red cloak. On his breast was a bunch of grapes, made entirely of diamond rings; each grape was a separate ring isolated from the others and so sewn on that the hoop, being passed through a hole in the material, was not visible, and only the rose of diamonds was displayed. There were fifty-five grapes, and they sparkled and glittered in the flickering lights as the car lurched down the street and passed the balcony. p. 174

The third car represented *The Voice of God*, a beautiful figure of an Angel blowing a trumpet, and the words written on the cloud behind were “Delebo hominem.” In the front of the car sat a youth and a girl holding hands to represent the wicked population destined to destruction.

Then *The Universal Deluge* came pitching and tossing round the corner—rather an ambitious car. The foreground was occupied by the water, with the head of a drowning man throwing up his arms, and the indication of another entirely submerged. The waves were beating against a steep bank up which a tigress was climbing, carrying her cub in her mouth. On the top of the bank stood a lovely woman endeavouring to save her terrified child. She was the only living figure on the car, everything else, even the terrified child, being of papier maché.

The Ark came on the fifth car and had no living figure at all, being merely Noah’s Ark resting on Mount Ararat with a dove in front. This may sound rather uninteresting and as though designed p. 175 to support home industries, but, to the initiated, it palpitated with significance, for it symbolized the Madonna herself, the only means of salvation from the waters of punishment; and as the Ark rested on Mount Ararat while the flood subsided, so does the Madonna di Custonaci rest upon Mount Eryx while the calamity is stayed.

No. 6 was *The Sacrifice* and represented Noah, an imposing old man with long white hair and beard, standing at an altar where a real sheep lay dead under a net and his three sons were in front praying.

No. 7 was *The Rainbow*, another lovely girl as an angel standing between a bank of clouds and a rainbow. On the breast of this figure was worked in jewels Noah’s dove with an olive-branch; this was particularly appropriate, as it happens also to be the badge of the town.

The procession was closed by a long car carrying first a band of musicians, then a chorus of youths attired as angels and crowned with roses, the whole backed by a sort of temple front framing a copy of the sacred picture. This car had to stand still from time to time while its occupants performed music composed specially for the occasion, and the continual stopping p. 176 dictated the movements of the other cars and was signalled to them by bells, so that there might always be about the same space between them.

The cars were drawn by men and the figures made no attempt to stand rigidly still—anything of the kind would have been out of the question, for they must have been on the move between five and six hours. The last car passed my balcony at 3.30, an hour and three-quarters after the first had come into sight, and one could tell the next day that they had been through nearly the whole town, for hardly a street was safe to walk in—they were all so slippery with the wax that had dropped from the candles. The constant moving of their limbs by the figures, though they never lost the general idea of the attitude, together with the tottering motion caused by the roughness of the paving, prevented any sense of the pose plastique or living picture.

Every one of the female figures, except *The Voice of God*, had her breast encrusted with jewels, usually in a floral design, and the borders of their dresses were heavy with jewellery; the male p. 177 figures also wore as much as could be suitably sewn on their costumes.

Omitting consideration of the final car, which was there to close the procession and bring on the music and the Madonna, and also of the Ark, which could hardly have been otherwise, there were six cars, three carrying groups and three practically single figures, for the boy and girl at the feet of *The Voice of God*, though they were the children of Donna Anna, my landlady, were not really

necessary. Of the groups, the one representing *The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men* was certainly the finest. It told its story in the right way and was full of the right kind of imagination. *The Sacrifice* was next best, and owed much to the extreme dignity of the principal figure. I should have liked *The Flood* better if it had had more living figures and less papier maché, though I am not ashamed to admit that I have no idea how this could have been done. Shakespeare himself, who apologizes for trying to make a cockpit hold the vasty fields of France, might have been excused for not attempting to decant The Universal Deluge into a receptacle scarcely bigger than a costermonger's barrow. Of the three remaining cars, *Sin* was beyond p. 178 comparison the finest both in conception and execution. Perhaps he would have looked the part more obviously if he had had more of a once-aboard-the-lugger expression on his kind and gentle face; on the other hand, the designer of this car may have intended that Sin is most successful in seducing the righteous when he appears with nothing repulsive in his aspect. The other two were merely just what they should have been—ordinary business cars, so to speak. Had these three single figures appeared on horseback with grooms to lead them, as in former times, the procession would have gained in variety and the importance of the groups on the cars would have been emphasized.

But this is a small matter. The procession as it was, with its car after car jolting along under an August full moon, the sparkling of the jewels, the flashing of the torches, the blazing of the gas, the beauty of the figures and the immense multitude of reverent worshippers made up a scene never to be forgotten. The impressiveness was deepened by the knowledge that this Mountain, where Astarte, Aphrodite and Venus have all reigned in turn, is also a place where much that has p. 179 helped to mould the poetry and history of the world has happened since the Sicans first girded it with its megalithic cincture. Added to this was the conviction that for many and many an age some such procession has been winding through these narrow, irregular streets, the form changing, but the intention remaining ever the same—Praise to the Giver of the Increase.

The programme for the next day contained nothing till 5 p.m., when there were more horse-races, then Vespers in the Matrice, brilliantly illuminated; after dusk fireworks outside the Trapani Gate, and at night a concert in the illuminated balio.

In the afternoon of Wednesday, the 28th, a procession of fifty-nine mules and horses passed through the town. Each animal was accompanied by its owner, a peasant of the comune, and was loaded with bags of grain, an offering for the Madonna. This grain was to be sold and, in the mean time, was estimated to be worth 2500 lire. About 1500 lire was collected during the festa, partly at the church doors and partly in the value of unused wax candles, and the municipio gave 1000, so that altogether the receipts were about 5000 lire. Against this the expenses of the festa p. 180 were expected to amount to about 4000 lire, and the balance will go towards the expenses of the next.

CHAPTER XI—THE RETURN p. 181

The procession of the grain closed the harvest home and in the evening of the same day began the proceedings relating to the Return of the Madonna to Custonaci. At 8 p.m. another procession started. First came the band to clear the way, then a man beating a drum; this is a feature of Sicilian processions and is said to date from the time when the Saracens had possession of the island; it continues as long as the procession lasts, which may be for hours, and produces an unexpected effect. There is so much else going on that after a time you forget to notice it. But you have not really got away from it; you are being unconsciously saturated, and after the festa is over you become aware that you are suffering from a surfeit of drum; the rhythm runs in your head and keeps you awake at night; when you go out of doors you expect to p. 182 hear it in the distance; when you turn a corner you listen for it, and as it is not there you find yourself listening for it all the more anxiously. But this wears off after two or three days.

Behind the drum came peasants walking two and two, carrying candles and an occasional banner; then the Society of the Misericordia, wearing those mysterious dresses that cover them entirely from head to foot, with holes for the eyes; then priests and men with lamps, and, lastly, the sacred picture out of the Matrice, carried by men, the whole frame quivering with its fringes of jewellery. Every few yards the procession stopped, partly to rest the bearers and partly to give the crowd an opportunity of seeing the picture.

Every church that lay on the route was lighted up and not till long past midnight, when the picture had been taken into each one of them to pay a farewell visit, was it carried back to the Matrice.

On Thursday, 29th, the day appointed for transporting the picture back to Custonaci, there was early Mass in the Matrice, where there was not nearly room for all the people, and after Mass a p. 183 short sermon. The preacher contrasted the sadness of the present occasion with the joy of that happy day in 1893 when the Madonna had come to dwell among them, bringing the rain with her. He told them of her love for her people, of all she had done for them, of all they owed her and of how deeply she entered into the life of each one of them. He reminded them that the first name they had been taught to lisp at their mother's knee was Maria; that she to whom they raised their prayers in time of tribulation was Maria; that the one they blessed for benefits received was always Maria. And now her gracious presence was to depart from her beloved Mountain; the time had come to utter the last farewell. Here the preacher spoke a few words so touching in their eloquence that all the women and most of the men burst into tears and made no attempt to conceal their emotion.

It would not occur to an Englishman to weep because a picture is taken from one place to another. Not so long ago quite a number of pictures were taken and put away in the Tate Gallery, and yet London looked stolidly on and not a tear was shed. Had one been shed, it would p. 184 have been laughed at; and had only one or two of the congregation in the Matrice been so powerfully affected, it might have passed unnoticed, but the simultaneousness and spontaneity of their almost hysterical grief was very impressive, and no one could have had any idea of laughing who saw the weeping crowd that accompanied the Madonna out of the church while the band played a funeral march. She was carried on men's shoulders, her face constantly turned towards the town, through the Trapani gate and down the road to the little church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, while the drum went in front, filling the air with the mournfulness of its perpetual rhythm. As the picture passed among the people one of the women cried out—

"See how pale the face of the Madonna has become; it is with sorrow to leave the Mountain."

Another lifted up her voice and prayed that it might not be long before a calamity befell the comune—as that it might not rain till December, for example—in order that she might soon return. The bearers stopped at the little church, where a large chest had been prepared in which she was to repose during the rest of the journey, and the people's grief culminated as the chest p. 185 received her out of their sight.

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake tells us that, when the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with him, he asked, "Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so make it so?" and Isaiah replied, "All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything." Certainly most of the Ericini are capable of a firm persuasion of something and probably, if Blake could have visited them at a time when the Madonna was going away from the mountain or coming back to it, he would have agreed that the age of imagination still lingers in this classic spot.

Those who did not accompany the picture beyond Santa Maria delle Grazie now proceeded to the balio, and the beating of the drum floated up continuously as the chest, followed by an immense crowd on foot, in carts, and on horseback, was carried down the zigzags and along the winding road to Custonaci. In many places booths had been erected, where wine and bread were given freely to all while the bearers rested. At other points were pulpits, and here they stopped to p. 186 listen to a short sermon. A crowd had come out from Paparella to meet and join the throng, other crowds from Fico, Ragosia, Crocevia, Palazzolo and the other villages forming the comune, were waiting at various points along the road. From the balio the whole journey was visible, except when the windings of the road hid part of the crowd, and, with the help of glasses, the arrival at the sanctuary could be seen distinctly at about 5 p.m., nearly nine hours after the morning start. On ordinary occasions the journey takes about three hours. In the evening there were fireworks and illuminations at Custonaci and bonfires in many of the other villages.

When the picture is on the mountain it is the custom for the women of the town to go to the Matrice in the evening to pray. When it is at Custonaci they go to the balio, where a stone prie-Dieu has been built for them from which they can see the sanctuary. Here they will go and pray every evening until such time as the next calamity brings the picture up among them again.

CUSTONACI

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CHAPTER XII—FAITH AND SUPERSTITION

The brigadier and the corporal both sent illustrated postcards to me from Selinunte and I sent them postcards in return, but the corporal unaccountably desisted after being transferred to another station; for instead of returning home in about a month, as he had intended, he signed on for a further term of service. Perhaps on his change of address one of my cards may have gone wrong in the post, and he may have considered that I was neglecting him. I have never seen him again. The next time I went to Trapani the brigadier, who had been transferred to Custonaci, was guarding the coast between Monte San Giuliano and Cofano; I put off going to see him, however, because it was cold and wet and windy, not weather for excursions into places beyond the reach of civilization. I talked to Mario, the coachman, about it, and he said he would be ready p. 190 to take me if a fine day occurred. I had another reason for wishing to go to Custonaci: I thought it due to the Madonna di Custonaci that I should pay my respects to her in her sanctuary after having been present at her festa on the mountain.

Suddenly there came a fine Saturday. I went out immediately after breakfast, found Mario, told him to be ready in half an hour, ordered a basket of provisions from the hotel, put a few things together in case they might be wanted, and we started.

The road took us inland and round the foot of Mount Eryx, through Paparella and the other villages where some of the wealthy Trapanese have their summer villas, and after a most lovely drive of three hours, we arrived at Custonaci. The village is on a low rocky cliff which rises not from the sea but from an extensive plain. Standing on the cliff one looks over the plain with Monte San Giuliano closing the view on the left and on the right the mountain promontory of Cofano, a great, isolated, solemn, grey rock, full of caves, sprinkled with green and splashed with

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raw sienna; between them, two or three kilometres away, is the sea which, I suppose, formerly covered the plain and washed the foot of the cliff. Prominent on the shore, rather nearer to Cofano than to Monte Erice, is the caserma, an oblong white bungalow, and scattered upon the plain are a few fishermen’s cottages, but no other dwellings. We first sent a boy off to the caserma to tell the brigadier I had come, and then Mario, after attending to his horses, joined me in the only trattoria in the place and we ate our provisions.

After lunch we went to the sanctuary, the home of the famous wonder-working picture of the Madonna which hangs over the altar. The sagrestano pulled aside the curtains while another man pulled a cord which operated a wheel hung with bells of different sizes, thereby making a tremendous and discordant noise and signifying to all within earshot that the Madonna was being unveiled, in case any one might care to offer up a petition.

The light is better in the sanctuary than in the Matrice upon the Mountain, but this picture of the happy Mother with the Child at her breast holding three golden ears of corn did not thereby seem to gain as a work of art. The people, however, look upon it less as a work of art than as the p. 192 representation of a divinity who lives for them as surely as Venus lived for the Romans, Aphrodite for the Greeks and Astarte for the Phœnicians, and as surely as other goddesses have lived here for other peoples. Cofano, looking across to Mount Eryx, saw the earliest appear on some prehistoric morning when man, born of a woman and living by the fruits of the earth, fashioned his first image of the Giver of Life and Increase, vivified it with the spirit of his faith and offered before it the homage of his praise and gratitude. His faith gradually lost its freshness and suffered corruption like the manna which the disobedient children of Israel left until the morning, so that the image of the goddess became a sepulchre and a breeding-place of unclean imaginings. Then man, seeing that virtue had gone out of the work of his hands, fashioned a new one, scarcely different in form, and breathed into it the breath of a new faith, scarcely different from the old. Again his faith carried with it into its stagnant prison the germs of its own decay. Thus was established the recurrent rhythm of the death and resurrection of the deity. Cofano p. 193 has watched them come and go and will one day see the Madonna dethroned to make way for her successor. But that day will not dawn until, in the Sanctuary or upon the Mountain, the peasants shall stand unmoved before this touching symbol of the universal worship of Motherhood.

The brigadier was in sight when we came out of the church and before we had met in the piazza I became aware that I had caught cold—not a very remarkable thing in a wet January with a Sicilian wind. He was as courteous as ever, though a little inclined to grumble because I had not let him know when to expect me so that he could have met me on my arrival. I pleaded uncertainty caused by the bad weather, and he promised to forgive me if I would spend the night at the caserma instead of returning to Trapani. He would give me his own room all to myself, for he had to be out on duty guarding the coast between Monte San Giuliano and Cofano from 9 p.m. till 6 a.m. and, if he should find the coast quiet and wish to lie down in the early morning, there would be no difficulty, because one of his men had left him, so that he had four beds and only three guards to put into them.

It was getting late; we had taken longer to come than I had anticipated, the horses were tired. p. 194 There is no inn at Custonaci, but I knew that Mario could manage somehow; so I accepted, and we went through the village, down the cliff by a steep and difficult path, and across the plain. On the way we talked of our day at Selinunte and I asked after his companions there, but he had heard nothing further of any of them. Soon we met one of the guards who had come from the caserma to look for us. He crossed himself as he told us that, coming along, he had heard the bells ring and knew that the picture of the Madonna was being unveiled. He was a man of few words, or found our conversation uninteresting, for he said nothing else all the rest of the way.

The caserma is quite close to and facing the sea. All round the door is a skeleton porch of wood, which in the summer is fitted with wire gauze to keep out the mosquitoes. Going through this, we were in the general room where I was introduced to the other two guards. Behind this room, with windows looking inland over the plain towards Custonaci, is the kitchen, and these two rooms make up the middle of the bungalow. The right wing consists of the brigadier’s sitting- p. 195 room, out of which a door leads to his bedroom, and the left wing is all one large room, occupied by the men as their bedroom.

The brigadier took me into his sitting-room to rest. There were only a few things in it, merely his table with his books and official papers and three or four chairs; but everything, as at Selinunte, was clean and tidy. On the wall was an extensive eruption of postcards and among them those that had come from me. As I looked on the tranquil whitewash of this secluded caserma, dotted with views of our complicated and populous London, with its theatres and motor buses and the feverish rush of its tumult, I found myself wondering what it would be like to listen to the *Pastoral Symphony* in the *Messiah*, performed with occasional interpolations from *Till Eulenspiegel*.

The brigadier proposed a stroll while the guards prepared supper—they take it by turns to be cook, one each day, but this being an occasion, all three would be cooks to-night. We called at a cottage in the hope of buying some fish, but the weather had been too bad and there was none. We met a young man, however, who had a kid for sale and wanted 95 centesimi per kilo; the p. 196 brigadier would only give 80. The young man could not deal; the kid belonged to his father, and he had no power to exceed his instructions; he would go home and call at the caserma in the morning with the ultimissimo prezzo. We passed a great hole in the ground like a dry well. The brigadier said that if it were not so very near the caserma, it might do as a hiding-place for any

one flying from justice, or for brigands to conceal a prisoner.

“Or for smugglers to keep their spoils in,” I said; and the brigadier chuckled.

He showed me the stone that had been put up to mark the spot at which the Madonna was landed by the French sailors as they returned from Alexandria. We strolled back and tied up the pig which had broken loose and, the brigadier said, was not yet old enough, meaning that there would be no pork for supper yet awhile. With all this difficulty about pork and fish and kid, the simple life, as lived at the caserma, appeared to be less simple than it might have been if the shops had been a little nearer.

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Supper consisted of chicory served with the water it had been boiled in, to which was added some oil; there was also bread and wine, then chicken and afterwards poached eggs which they call eggs in their shirtsleeves. Before we had finished I told them that we have a proverb in England that too many cooks spoil the broth, and added that I had never known precisely how many were supposed to be too many, but that, judging by the excellence of the repast, certainly more than three would be required in the caserma of Custonaci. I said this because I was beginning to feel it was time that something of the kind should come from me. Sicilians are not only polite in themselves, but the cause that politeness or an attempt at it, is in other men; and this was the best I could do at the moment in their manner. Knowing I was among experts, I had not much fear as to their reception of my little compliment, just as a student of the violin is less nervous when performing before a master of the instrument than before the general public. The brigadier and his guards accepted it as though it were of the finest quality, and even complimented me upon it.

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After supper there came a large moth which fluttered about the lamp; one of the guards called it a “farfalla notturna,” a nocturnal butterfly, and said it had come to bring us good fortune. Another of the men, who was of a sceptical temperament, said it might be so, but that in matters of this kind one never can be sure what one’s fortune would have been if the moth had not come. I said that if there was to be any good fortune for me I should like it to take the form of curing the cold which, for my sins, I had caught that morning as I came out of the sanctuary. The guard who believed in the moth—after returning my compliment about the cooking by saying I must be wrong to talk about my sins, for he was sure I had never committed any—said that as to the kind of luck the moth would bring, Fortune would not submit to dictation, the most I could do to control her would be to look out farfalla notturna in the book and put a few soldi on the number in the next lottery. I told him I had had enough of the lottery at Castelvetrano. The brigadier was interested, so I told him about it and said I was afraid the reason I had lost was that my numbers had nothing to do with anything that had happened to me during the week. p. 199 He confirmed what Peppino had said and added that he was always very careful about the choosing of his numbers.

“But surely,” I said, “you do not always win when you follow that rule?”

“I have played every week for twenty years,” said the brigadier, “and have only won four times; but I always hope.”

“One can hope,” I said, “without spending any soldi.”

Here the guard who believed in the moth interposed, seeing that I did not know much about it—

“It is no use hoping unless you do something. It would be absurd to hope for two hundred and fifty francs next week unless you encouraged Fortune to send you the money. Buy a ticket with a likely number and you will have the right to hope.”

“It is like praying for rain,” added the brigadier; “the Madonna may not answer the prayer, but those who pray have done their best and are entitled to hope that rain will follow.”

“This,” I said, “reminds me of an old lady who always insisted on her daughter taking a dose of the medicine her doctor prescribed for her own imaginary complaints. p. 200 ’How can you hope to be well,’ she used to say, ‘if you never take any medicine?’“

“Exactly,” said the guard who believed in the moth, “we do not know how the medicine works any more than we know how the Madonna works, or how a dream affects the lottery, but if you do nothing it is no use hoping.”

With regard to my cold, the sceptical guard, with a twinkle in his eye, recommended me to repent of the sins for which I had said it was a punishment. I was ready to do so if I could be sure as to which sins it was more particularly aimed at. The sceptical guard thought he knew.

“Did you not tell us you had been on the Mountain at the festa? When the sagrestano unveiled the picture in the sanctuary this morning, the Madonna heard the bells ring and looked round the church; no doubt she recognized you as the heretical Englishman she had seen prying into her mysteries. She probably regretted she had not paid you out at the time and, as you came her way this morning, took the opportunity of doing it now.”

p. 201

I agreed that it would have been more of a miracle had she done it in a balmy August, in the midst of other occupations, instead of in a tempestuous January when business was slack; but, on the whole, I did not believe that either the Madonna or my sins had had anything to do with my cold which I considered to be a natural, or non-miraculous, consequence of the rain and the wind. But the sceptical guard objected that even so the Madonna could not get quite clear, for, if

she is credited with the rain, as she certainly is, she must be debited with its unpleasant consequences, if any.

The guard who had heard the bells ring, when he came to meet us, gravely nodded his approval, not seeing that the sceptical guard was speaking ironically, but he began to suspect presently. The guard who believed in the moth told us that he had been stationed once on the coast a little east of Girgenti, near a town where the peasants pray for rain to their patron, S. Calogero, whose painted image, carved in wood, stands in their church. If it rains at once, well and good, they return thanks, and there is an end of the matter. But if their prayers are unanswered after what they consider a reasonable time, they hold a service and punctuate their prayers with threatening cries—

“Corda, o pioggia!” p. 202

The saint sometimes chooses the second alternative and sends the rain—the peasants return thanks, and all goes well. But if he is still obdurate, they assume he has chosen the first, put the threat into execution, take down S. Calogero, tie a cord about his neck and reverently cast him into the sea where they leave him till it does rain. If one waits long enough the rain always comes at last, even on the south coast of Sicily. Then they pull the poor saint out of the water, dry him, give him a fresh coat of paint and carry him back to his place in the church, with a brass band and thanksgiving—another form of the recurrent death and resurrection of the god, imitating sunset and sunrise.

“We call this treatment of S. Calogero an act of faith,” said the sceptical guard, “and yet when a gambler puts a few soldi on any number he may have dreamt of, we call it superstition. The peasant and the gambler are both playing for material gain, and S. Calogero in the sea has as much connection with the meteorological conditions as the dream has with the lottery numbers; yet the treatment of the saint has the sanction of the Church and the act of the gambler is p. 203 branded as superstitious. But to abuse a thing is not to alter its nature.”

The guard who had heard the bells ring now began to remonstrate gently and begged there might be no confusing of faith with superstition.

The sceptical guard replied that it was difficult to keep them apart, or, indeed, to look upon them as two different things. The only confusion there was arose because of the imperfections of language—a clumsy instrument, though the best we have for its purpose. We call a kiss a kiss whether it be given by an old woman to her grandchild or by a young man to his bride; but the having one word for two things does not make them the same in intention, and so the having two words for faith and superstition does not make them fundamentally different. The guard who had heard the bells was beginning to look uncomfortable, if not actually offended, the tendency of all this being to depreciate his faith in the Madonna and treat it as superstition. The brigadier and the guard who believed in the moth, on the other hand, were rather pleased, their superstition about the lottery numbers was being elevated into faith. The brigadier was an unselfish man and p. 204 anxious to spare from further annoyance the guard who had heard the bells. He was also a sensible man and knew that discussions of this kind, endless if left to develop, will generally yield to surgical treatment. He rose, saying it was time for him to begin protecting the coast. I took the hint, thanked them all for a very pleasant evening and wished them “Buon riposo.” The brigadier shut me in for the night, promising to call me in the morning, and the legend above my bedroom door was—

“Comandante della Brigata.”

In the morning he knocked while it was still dark. I got up, dressed, and as the sun began to stir behind Custonaci, came through the general room and the porch of the bungalow into the translucent freshness where the sceptical guard was already smoking an early cigarette. To the right of us rose Cofano and to our left, on the top of Mount Eryx, where formerly stood the temple of Venus, were the towers of Conte Pepoli’s castle, touched by the rising sun and so distinct that we could almost count the stones. In front of us, between these two enormous p. 205 headlands, lay the sea as calm as when the Madonna stayed the tempest, and all along the great curve of the shore little waves were lazily playing in the morning stillness. I asked the sceptical guard what part of Sicily he came from.

“I am not a Sicilian,” he replied, “I come from another mountain near Rome where there was once another temple dedicated to Fortune.”

“Are you from Palestrina?”

“Yes,” he replied. “You cannot see much here of what the temple of Venus was, but on my mountain you can see what the temple of Fortune must have been. In the days when she flourished, kings and princes travelled from distant lands to consult her oracle; now no one ever comes near the place except a tourist or two, passing to some more prosperous town, who may stay an hour to gaze upon the remains of her fallen greatness.”

“Perhaps her temple was too prosperous and too near the shrine of St. Peter.”

“St. Peter should have seized her temple and preserved her popularity for his own profit instead of condemning the faith in her as superstition and allowing the control of it to pass into the hands p. 206 of the state. For if Fortune ever died she rose again and is worshipped as much as ever she was, only she is now called the Lottery.”

"It was a neglected opportunity."

"And it would have been so easy to invent a legend of the arrival of a picture or a statue of la Madonna di Palestrina to inherit the prestige of Fortune. Then I should never have left home to join the guardia di finanza."

I said that possibly something of the kind had been attempted, and that there may have been insuperable obstacles of which we knew nothing; and in any case, whatever the desolation of Palestrina, Custonaci was not in a particularly thriving condition, while the prosperity of Monte San Giuliano is due more to the salt than to the Madonna. But he would not be comforted; so I asked him what he would have done if he had not left home, and he told me that he had been educated to be a chemist and had taken his diploma at Rome with the intention of succeeding to his uncle's shop, but he could not stand the dulness of the life.

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The brigadier called to us that coffee was ready and we turned to go in. The young man came about the kid, which meant that his father had agreed to take 80 centesimi per kilo. So the kid had to be weighed and it was some time before we could persuade the vendor that it was just under and not just over 5½ kilos. To tell the truth, it was a delicate job, for the steelyard was a clumsy instrument, though, like the sceptical guard's language, the best we had. The brigadier paid the young man entirely in coppers, so he had a good deal of weight to carry home with him.

After coffee we started to walk across the plain back to Custonaci, calling again at the settlement of cottages and waiting for the boats to come in, thinking it possible that the luck brought by the farfalla notturna might take the form of fish. But the boats brought nothing. We agreed therefore to consider that the beauty of the morning had exhausted the good fortune and, if so, the farfalla had done the thing handsomely. It was a day of blue sky and brown earth, with flocks of sheep and goats tinkling their bells in the distance; a day of dwarf palm and almond-blossom, and the bark of a dog now and then; of aloes and flitting birds, of canes with feathery tops, of prickly pears and blooming red geranium. p. 208 The bastone di S. Giuseppe had begun to come up and the tufts of grass were full of lily-leaves preparing for the spring.

We climbed the cliff and scrambled into the village. It was Sunday morning; the first Mass was over and half the population was coming out of the sanctuary, the other half waiting to go in for the second Mass. Among them, talking to a shoemaker, who seemed to be the principal man of the place, we found Mario. I inquired what he had done with his horses and how he had passed the night. He said he had found a stable for Gaspare and Totò and had himself slept in the carriage. I trusted he had not been very uncomfortable and he replied that he always slept in his carriage. So I had travelled to Custonaci and was about to return to Trapani in Mario's bed. He introduced me to the shoemaker.

"You see all these young men?" said the shoemaker. "In another couple of months they will be in America."

I spoke to some of those who had returned from the States and from South America. Those who have been to the States like an opportunity to speak English, p. 209 but they are not very strong at it, and it is more than tinged with Yankeeisms. One of them told me that in New York he was treated very well by his Capo-Boss. They earn more over there than they can at home; every week brings American money-orders to Custonaci and on mail days the post-office is crowded with wives, mothers and sweethearts. When they have saved anything up to 5000 lire (£200) they return and buy a bit of land on which a family of contadini can live, or they embellish the family shop or open a new one and hope for the best. If business is bad and they lose their money before they are too old, they can go back and make some more. It is the same on the Mountain; the young men emigrate and bring back money and new ideas. The time will come when Cofano will see what influence this wooing of Fortune in a foreign land by the sons of Mount Eryx and Custonaci may have on the next incarnation of the goddess who reigns in this corner of the island.

CALATAFIMI

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CHAPTER XIII—THE PRODIGAL SON AND THE ARTS

Calatafimi is a town of 10,000 inhabitants about twenty miles inland from Trapani. A slight eminence to the west of the town, 1115 feet above the sea, crowned by the ruins of a castle of the Saracens (hence the name of the place, Cal' at Eufimi), commands an extensive and beautiful view which includes three monuments—first, the famous Greek temple of Segesta; secondly, the theatre and the remains of the city above it; thirdly, the obelisk commemorating Garibaldi's first victory over the Neapolitans in May, 1860. These three monuments are considered to be the chief attractions of Calatafimi; but one should not suppose that, after one has seen its principal monuments, there is nothing more to be got out of a Sicilian town. p. 214 I had picnicked in the temple of Segesta, climbed up through the site of the ancient city to the theatre and seen Garibaldi's monument over and over again and in all kinds of weather, before I knew anything of the processions which occur at Calatafimi early in May.

I was there one year when the annual festa was conducted with more than the usual ceremony. I

went to the Albergo Samuel Butler, named after the author of *Erewhon*, who often stayed there when writing *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, and was well known in the town. Owing to the death of Don Paolo who, with his wife, Donna Maria, used to manage the hotel, it is now (1908), I regret to say, closed, and the traveller must do the best he can at one of the other inns. Butler's memory is, however, still preserved in the name of one of the streets.

The day after my arrival was the great day of the festa, and opened with rain. The people, who had come from all the country round, hung about listlessly during the morning, hoping that the weather might clear up and by noon the authorities decided that the ceremonies should proceed, so that, as they all had to be crowded into the afternoon, the town for the rest of the day was p. 215 choked with processions.

There was first the Procession of the Maestranza, of unascertainable antiquity. Those who took part in it came riding on horses and mules covered with gaudy trappings and carrying something to indicate their trades. The Oil-pressers, suitably dressed, carried a model of an oil-press; the Millers carried a little mill; and these two companies carried their money on trays. The Vetturini, who came next, carried their money stuck into little wooden horses, like almonds in a hedgehog pudding. The Tillers of the Ground carried a model of a plough. There were men carrying long lighted candles with circular loaves of bread threaded on them; others carried bags full of nuts and sugar-plums which they continually scattered among the crowd and threw in at the open windows.

There was the procession with the traditional Car of the Massari, made by fixing a square wooden framework on a cart and covering the outside of it with green leaves which were again nearly hidden by loaves in the shape of rings about eight inches across. It looked like a square Jack-in-the-Green on wheels and the men inside it, standing on chairs and looking over the top of p. 216 the framework, cut off the loaves and threw them to the crowd. They hit me full on the chest with one and I clutched it before it fell, to the great delight of some children who were standing near and who said I must take it home and keep it and it would never go bad, but would bring me good luck.

Then there was the Procession of the Holy Crucifix, the Padrone of Calatafimi. For many years no one knew of its existence; it stood, like the Discobolus in Butler's poem, *A Psalm of Montreal*, stowed away, in a lumber room, turning its face to the wall, and when brought out was found to be so black that it might have come from Egypt and so intensely thaumaturgic that the church of Il Crocefisso had to be built to hold it. That particular crucifix, however, like the letter of the Madonna at Messina, no longer exists; it was burnt and the one in use is a copy, made, one must suppose, from memory. They had the good sense, however, to make it, if anything, blacker than the original, and happily it has turned out to be at least equally thaumaturgic. One cannot see how black it really is, for it is covered with silver, like the frame of the picture of the Madonna di p. 217 Custonaci, and festooned with votive offerings, earrings, necklaces, watches and chains which glitter and glisten as the procession passes along the streets.

Finally, rather late in the day, came the Procession of the Personaggi, telling the story of *The Prodigal Son*. It consisted of twenty-nine principal and many accessory figures, the more important ones carrying scrolls stating who they were. The dresses were not equal to those one expects to see at a leading London theatre, but the peasants of the neighbourhood are unaccustomed to contemplate the triumphs of the modern theatrical costumier. There may have been much else in the procession that would have failed to win praise from a metropolitan crowd of spectators, and such justice as was done to it by the author of the little book, which was on sale for a few centesimi, might have struck an exacting critic as being tempered with more mercy than it fairly deserved. But the author was not thinking of the exacting critic, his attitude of mind was rather that of Theseus when he determined that *Pyramus and Thisbe* should be performed—

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> For never anything can be amiss
> When simpleness and duty tender it.

Moreover, the little book was not intended to be the exact description of something the writer had seen; it was written to ensure that the people should miss nothing they had come to see, and I believe I can best convey an idea of what this procession appeared to them by translating from the book. In the group No. 6—the Prodigal departing with his friends—the figures were on horseback; but all the other personages went on foot, following each other at distances of about ten yards, and walking slowly through the middle of the streets between wondering rows of solemn and delighted people.

THE PRODIGAL SON
PART I
Introduction

I. *Divine Mercy*.—A majestic matron robed as a sovereign, resplendent with jewels and sheltering sinners under the voluminous folds of her mantle.

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2. *The Blind Design of the Prodigal*.—His departure from his father's house. A resolute youth in the garb of nudity, with a bandage over his eyes; his right hand is tied behind him and in his left is a bunch of flowers; he turns and gives ear to the Evil Spirit.

3. *The Evil Spirit*.—Clothed in skins like a faun, he is lying in wait for the preceding figure.

PART II
The Story of the Prodigal

4. *The Young Son*.—His sword by his side, with haughty mien he demands his portion.

5. *The Father of the Prodigal*.—A grave personage, sad and tearful, in the act of handing over his keys and caskets which are carried by a servant.

6. *The Departure of the Prodigal*.—A gay young man mounted on a courser and attended by friends also on horseback. One of his companions carries a scroll: "Invenies multos, si res tibi floret, amicos;" another carries another scroll: "Si fortuna perit, nullus amicus erit."

7. *The Prodigal far from Home*.—He flaunts his rich raiment and carries a lute; one would say he is enjoying life. p. 220

8. *The Allegory of the False Friends*.—They have consumed his wealth and now conspire to abandon him. A man of double aspect, with two faces, carries swallows taking wing: "Ita falsi amici."

9. *The Prodigal reduced to poverty*—despised and spurned by his friends. A youth in mean attire, compelled by hunger to beg, he shades his eyes with his left hand and in his right carries a scroll: "Confusion hath covered my face. To beg I am ashamed."

10. *The Citizen Patron*—to whom the unhappy youth offers his services. An austere man, gazing on him with a harsh countenance, gives him a crust of bread and a rod and sends him forth into the country to tend the swine.

11. *The Son's Resolution*.—In tattered rags, unshod and leaning on a stick, the wretch is saying, "I will arise and go to my father."

12. *The Father's Welcome*.—Descrying him from afar, he goes with open arms to meet his boy, embraces him, folds him tenderly to his bosom and, exulting with joy, exclaims, "My son was dead and is alive again—was lost and is found." The son is saying, "Father, I have sinned." p. 221

13. *The Rejoicings at Home*.—A group of youths and maidens crowned with flowers and playing upon instruments of music.

14. *A Servant* presenting the prodigal with sumptuous apparel and a golden ring.

15. *The Elder Son*.—He has returned from the country, angry and resentful, and is astonished to see the prodigal.

16. *The Good Father* goes to meet him and, calming his anger with soft words, exhorts him to become reconciled to his brother. He blesses them both and foretells peace, brotherly love and happiness.

PART III
The Allegorical Sense of the Parable

17. *The Wicked Man in Prosperity* contented with his state and persisting in evil, a fit subject for reproof. A voluptuary and a miser, magnificently attired, is clasping to his heart a purse full of money and a bunch of flowers and corn.

18. *The Divine Warning*.—A prophet who contemplates the preceding figure threateningly while he records the fatal sentence: "Thou fool; this night thy soul shall be required of thee." p. 222

19. *The Punishment of Tribulation*.—Divine Love that desireth not the death of a sinner. A celestial winged messenger carrying a scourge: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

20. *The Remorse of Conscience*.—The awakening of Repentance. A man in sorrowful garments expressing the emotions of his heart, now weeping, now confused, now raising his eyes to Heaven, now looking on the serpent that gnaws his heart.

21. *The Contrite Sinner* hearkening to the whisperings of grace. A penitent, his heart pierced by an arrow, weeping and carrying a scourge: "Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight."

22. *A Holy Minister* supplicating the Crucifix with these words: "A broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise."

23. *Divine Grace*.—A beautiful girl in white with a transparent veil, radiant and joyful, carries a branch of palm.

24. *Peace of Mind*.—The soul reconciled with Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth comforting the soul and opening His arms to receive her: "Come my Beloved, my Bride." p. 223

25. *The Soul*.—A lovely maiden, modestly clad, with precious gems on her bosom and a garland of white roses on her brow: "My Beloved is mine and I am His."

26. *The Joy of the Angels*.—They appear as nymphs and sing a hymn of glory to God and of welcome to the repentant sinner.

27. *The Holy Cross*, decorated with flowers and rays of glory, carried on high by a seraph.

28. *The Holy Virgin with the Cross*.—It is partly wrapped in a precious cloth and the Madonna, full of joy and lovingkindness, invites the people to kiss the holes from which the nails have been drawn.

29. *Calatafimi*.—A handsome, smiling youth in Trojan attire devoutly offering his heart to the crucified Saviour with these words: “Thy blessing be upon us evermore.”

* * * * *

A stranger had arrived at the albergo and Donna Maria did not know how to manage unless he supped with me; I was delighted to make his acquaintance and to have his company, especially as he turned out to be an ingenious French gentleman with a passion for classification. He had come from Palermo and spent the morning at the Temple of Segesta which had pleased him very much and given him no difficulty. It was architecture—a branch of painting. His plans were upset by the rain and, instead of returning to Palermo, he had come on for the night to Calatafimi, where he arrived in time for the procession of *The Prodigal Son* which had interested him very much but puzzled him dreadfully. He could not classify it.

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“Why not procession—a branch of drama?” I inquired.

He said it was perhaps not so simple as I thought, and that he had been trying unsuccessfully to work it in with his scheme. I begged him to expound his scheme, which he was so ready to do that I suspected he had intended me to ask this.

“There are,” he said, “three simple creative arts. In the first, ideas are expressed in words; this is literature. In the second, ideas are expressed in the sounds of the scale; this is music. In the third, ideas are expressed in rigid forms either round, as in sculpture, or flat, as in painting. We may call this third art painting, that being its most popular phase.”

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“I see your difficulty,” said I. “If drama is not one of the arts, the procession cannot be a branch of drama. But I think the drama is one of the arts all the same.”

“Please do not be in a hurry,” said the French gentleman. “Any two of these arts cover some ground in common where they can meet, unite and give birth to another distinct art related to both as a child is related to its parents, and inheriting qualities from both. It is to these happy marriages that we owe drama—the offspring of literature and painting; song—the offspring of literature and music; and dance—the offspring of music and painting. This gives us altogether six creative arts.

“And now observe what follows. In the first place, these six arts exist for the purpose of expressing ideas. In the next place, painting is without movement, its descendants, drama and dance, inherit movement, the one from literature, and the other from music. Again, inasmuch as a painter must paint his own pictures, painting does not tolerate the intervention of a third person to interpret between the creator and the public. The painter is his own executive artist; when his creative work is done, nothing more is wanted than a frame and a good light. Literature permits such intervention, for a book can be read aloud. Music and song demand performance, and will continue to do so until the public can read musical notation, and probably afterwards, for even Mozart said that it does make a difference when you hear the music performed; while in the case of the drama and the dance the performers are so much part of the material of the work of art that it can hardly be said to exist without them. Is not this a striking way of pointing the essential difference between the creative artist and the executive?”

p. 226

“Very,” I replied. “I am afraid, however, that you have not a high opinion of the executive artist.”

“I will confess that he sometimes reminds me of the proverb, ‘God sends the tune and the devil sends the singer.’“

I laughed and said, “We have not exactly that proverb in English, though I have heard something like it. It can, however, only apply to the performer at his worst, whereas you are inclined to look upon him, even at his best, as nothing more than a picture frame.”

p. 227

“And a good light,” he added. “Don’t forget the good light. Frame or no frame, a picture presented in a bad light or in the dark is no more than a sonata performed badly or not at all.”

“Well, let us leave the performer for the present and return to your second trio of arts. Are you now going to combine them, as you did the first, and raise a third family in which a place may be found for such things as processions?”

“That,” he replied, “may hardly be, for there is no couple of them that has not a parent in common. But there is no reason why any two or more of the six arts should not appear simultaneously, assisting one another to express an idea. Thus an illustrated book is not drama—it is literature assisted by painting. And so a symphony illustrating a poem is not song—it is music assisted by literature, or vice versa, and is sometimes called Programme Music. When we look at dissolving views accompanied by a piano, we are not contemplating a dance—we are looking at painting illustrated by music; and, if there is some one to explain the views in words, literature is also present. When you come to think of it, it is rare to find music and painting either alone or together without literature. Except in the case of fugues or sonatas and symphonies, which are headed ‘Op. ---’ so-and-so, or ‘No. ---’ whatever it may be, music usually has a title. And except in the case of such things as decorative arabesques and sometimes landscapes, painting usually has a title. The opportunity of supplying a title is peculiarly

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tempting to literature who produces so many of her effects by putting the right word in the right place."

I said that this was all very interesting, but what had become of the procession? He replied that he was giving me, as I had requested, a preliminary exposition of his scheme.

"Comic opera," he continued, "is drama interrupted by song and dance. Grand opera is the simultaneous presentation of most, perhaps all, of the six arts. There is no reason in nature against any conceivable combination; it is for the creative artist to direct and for the performing artists to execute the combination so that it shall please and convince the public. And now, *revenons à nos processions*, where can we find a place for them?" p. 229

"Surely," said I, "some such combination will include them—unless they have nothing to do with art."

"I have thought that perhaps they have nothing to do with art, for art should not be tainted with utility; but religious pictures are tainted with utility just as much. Besides, I do not like to confess myself beaten."

It was plain the procession was not going to be allowed to escape. I considered for a moment and said—

"I suppose we may not classify the procession as literature assisted by dance, because literature ought to have words and dance ought to have music."

"The words are not omitted," he replied; "they are in the little book. Besides, we have the story in our minds as with programme music. The omission of the music from the dance is more serious. It may be that we shall have to call it a variety of drama, as you originally suggested."

"Oh, but that," I replied modestly, "was only thrown out before I had the advantage of hearing your scheme of classification. May it not be that—" p. 230

"I have it," he interrupted. "Of course, how stupid I have been! The procession does not move."

"Does not move!" I echoed. "Why, it moved all through the town."

"Yes, I know; but things like that often happen in classification," he replied calmly. "Properly considered, each figure and each group illustrated a separate point in the story, and was rigid. They went past us, of course; and if they had gone on cars it would have been less puzzling; but these good people cannot afford cars and so the figures had to walk. It would have done as well if the public had walked past the figures, but that would have been difficult to manage. The only movement in the procession was in the story which we held in our minds, and of which we were reminded both by the title and by the little book which we held in our hands. The procession must be classified as literature illustrated by living statuary, or sculpture, which, of course, is a branch of painting."

I regret that the French gentleman left Calatafimi so early next morning that I had no opportunity of ascertaining whether he slept well after determining that processions do not proceed. p. 231

PALERMO

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CHAPTER XIV—SAMSON

The next time I was in Palermo, Turiddu, the conduttore, who used to take me about the town, had returned after being for a year in Naples. He was employed at another hotel, but that did not prevent his making an appointment to take me to the marionettes. My experiences at Trapani had removed all sense of danger, and I now felt as safe in the theatre as in the streets of London. Statistics may or may not support the view, but I am inclined to attribute the general impression that Sicily is more dangerous than other countries, less to the frequency of crime there than to the operatic manner in which it is committed. So that I no longer wanted Turiddu to protect me. As the figures on the stage were to interpret the drama to the public, so he was to interpret to me their interpretation. The ingenious French gentleman at Calatafimi would, perhaps, have classified him as an incarnation of the book of the words. p. 236

The theatre was already full when we arrived. We had had to buy another straw hat on the way, to preserve our dignity and incognito; this had delayed us, and the play had begun, but the audience politely made room for us in the gallery at the side.

We were in a wood and there was a picturesque, half-naked, wild man on the stage with loose, brown hair hanging down to his waist; he wore a short, green skirt trimmed with silver braid, a wreath of pink and white roses, yellow leather boots and gaiters; a mantle fell from his shoulders to the ground and made a background of green to his figure. He was actually, as I afterwards discovered, about thirty inches high and his roses were as large as real roses, so that his wreath was enormous and looked very well. Turiddu whispered to me that he was Samson, which made me inquire whether they were going through the whole Bible this winter, but he said this was an

exceptional evening, after which they would return to the usual story.

p. 237
Samson had already killed the lion with a blow of his sinewy right arm; its body lay in the middle of the stage, and the busy bees were at work filling its carcase with honey. He observed them, commented upon their industry, tasted the honey and composed his riddle.

The next scene was the hall of audience in the king's palace. Guards came in and placed themselves at corners. They were followed by a paladin in golden armour with short trousers of Scotch plaid made very full, so that when he stood with his legs together he appeared to be wearing a kilt. Turiddu and I both took him for a Scotchman and, as I had seen Ottone and Astolfo d'Inghilterra in the teatrino at Trapani, there seemed to be no reason why he should not be one. Highlanders, of course, do not wear trousers, but we supposed that his Sicilian tailor had had little experience in the cutting of kilts. Whatever he was, he had an unusually animated appearance, for, by a simple mechanism, he could open and shut his eyes. Then came a lady, and the knight kissed her. She was followed by a king and his prime minister, neither of them very splendid, their robes being apparently dressing-gowns, such as one might pick up cheap at any p. 238 second-hand clothes shop in the Essex Road, Islington. As each of these personages entered, the courtiers, who were not in view, shouted "Evviva." Last of all came Samson.

There was a dispute and it was to be submitted to the king, whom they addressed as Pharaoh. I said to Turiddu—

"But Pharaoh was king of Egypt and all this happened in Palestine—if, indeed, it happened anywhere."

"Pharaoh also governed Palestine," replied Turiddu.

The dispute arose out of the killing of the lion which had been about to attack the lady, and Samson, having delivered her, was by every precedent of romance bound to marry her and wished to do so. But she was already engaged to the golden Scotchman, and that was why he had kissed her. After much discussion it was agreed that if the paladin should guess the riddle to be put forth by Samson he might marry the lady, otherwise Samson should have her. All was done regularly and in the presence of King Pharaoh.

p. 239
Samson then propounded his riddle: "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness."

The golden Highlander winked his eyes, put his fist up to his forehead and meditated anxiously for some time. Then he said—

"Sono confuso."

He wanted to give it up, but the lady would not allow this, and King Pharaoh, taking in the situation, ruled that he must have time; so they all went away except the knight and the lady. Then the poor paladin made the best use of his time and gave his whole attention to the riddle; sometimes he winked his eyes, and sometimes he put his fist up to his head and meditated as hard as ever he could, turning first one way and then the other. But nothing came of it; he only repeated—

"Sono confuso."

The lady continued her encouragement, saying that riddles were seldom easy to guess, that he must not worry too much and the true answer would come into his head, probably while he was thinking of something else; but he only turned away and said again—

"Sono confuso."

p. 240
The lady did not mind how stupid he was, for she was really in love with him; but she began to perceive that, unless something were done, she might have to marry a man who, though very strong and clever enough to compose a riddle, was unable to wink his eyes, so she undertook to see Samson alone and try to inveigle the answer out of him. The knight, having had some experience of her powers of persuasion, was comforted, discontinued his meditations, dropped his fist, said "Addio," embraced her and left the stage.

Samson now came on and the first thing he did was to put his arm round the lady's neck. She was quite ready for him and put her arm round his. Thus they stood indulging in a little preliminary fondling till she asked him point-blank to tell her "il mistero dell' oscuro problema." He instantly removed his arm and stood off, exclaiming with great firmness—

"No, no, no, non posso!"

Thereupon she began to go away as though all was over between them. It was a simple ruse, but it deceived the framer of the riddle; he drew her towards him in repentance, put his arm round her neck again and whispered into her ear. She took a moment to consider, and then laughed. It p. 241 was not the spontaneous laugh of a person overwhelmed by the irresistible humour of a good joke, it could not well have been that, assuming that he had told her the true answer; nor was it the perfunctory laugh of a person pretending to be amused. It was a laugh of heartless mockery.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the lady.

Samson smelt mischief and brought the curtain down with a fine speech, threatening her with his wrath if she should betray him.

The next act passed in the same hall of audience; soldiers entered and stood as guards, and then came Pharaoh. He was followed by two obviously comic men, who might have been costermongers or knockabout brothers from a music hall, and one comic woman. The men wore modern shirts and trousers and long-tailed coats, or rather dressing-gowns, that had once been as good as those worn by Pharaoh and his prime minister. Turiddu told me they were Pasquino and Onofrio, and the woman, who seemed to be just an ordinary woman out of the market with an apron, was Colombina. But the people give Pasquino the pet name of Peppinino and call the woman Rosina. These are the masks of Palermo, whose origin, like that of other Italian masks, is p. 242 of great antiquity. They grew up to supply a want just as in our own day we have seen Ally Sloper growing up to supply a want of the people of London.

There was a dispute as to which of the two men Rosina was to marry, and the question had been referred to King Pharaoh who decided that it was a case for trial by riddle, and, accordingly, Rosina propounded a riddle which was in four questions; after each question Onofrio turned away his head to meditate, while Rosina, unobserved, whispered the answer into the ear of Pasquino who presently announced it in a loud voice and then danced with Rosina in triumph.

The four questions and answers were—

Q. A man that was no man—A. An eunuch—

Q. Threw a stone that was no stone—A. A pumice-stone—

Q. At a bird that was no bird—A. A bat—

Q. Sitting on a tree that was no tree—A. An elder-tree.

p. 243 This being a riddle and in dialect and, moreover, dialect spoken in the presence of a king, certainly was, or rather was intended to be, humorous. Nevertheless, King Pharaoh was as little amused as our own Queen Victoria would have been if Ally Sloper and his companions had been taken to Windsor to perform in cockney slang before her. Pharaoh had to sit it out because he was there to see fair play, but he was so bored that he failed to observe how shamelessly Rosina was cheating; so she won her cause and danced off with Pasquino.

Turiddu explained to me that elder-trees are in the habit of drying up and falling down dead, a thing not done by properly conducted trees. I asked him what all this had to do with the play. He had just bought a handful of melon seeds from a man who was pushing his way about among the audience, and was munching them contentedly, not in the least put out by the course the story had taken. He said we had been witnessing a comic interlude intentionally introduced to amuse the boys by burlesquing the situation in the principal story the extreme seriousness of which might otherwise have depressed them unduly. I had read of such things being done in mediæval mystery plays, and here was an instance in my presence and not as an imitation or p. 244 resuscitation of a dead archaism but as a vital growth.

The interlude being over, the original story was resumed. The paladin and the lady entered, followed by Pharaoh and his prime minister, who had gone off to make room for the final dance, and lastly, by Samson. The golden paladin took the stage, winking excessively, and, in a triumphant, overbearing manner, said—

“What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?”

Samson glared at the lady who ostentatiously shook her head.

“Ha, ha, ha!” jeered the paladin, and Samson covered his face for shame. The lady continued to shake her head, but, like the lady in another play, she did protest too much and Samson’s suspicions were confirmed. He exercised great self-control and appealed to Pharaoh, pointing out that it was absurd to suppose his riddle could have been guessed by an unassisted Scotchman, no matter how bright his armour, and concluded his speech by openly accusing the lady of having betrayed him. This was too much for the paladin; he drew his sword and p. 245 approached Samson to pay him out for his rudeness and for not admitting that he had been fairly beaten. Before he could finish the speech that usually precedes a stage duel, Samson, who was unarmed, knocked him down in self-defence with one blow of his fist. He fell back upon Pharaoh who happened to be standing behind him; Pharaoh fell back upon his prime minister who happened to be standing behind him; the prime minister fell back upon the lady who happened to be shaking her head in protest behind him, and all four came to the ground together. Trumpets sounded, the piano struck up, the operators stamped with their clogged feet, the audience applauded and there were calls for “Sansone,” but it was not a moment for responding to calls. Soldiers came on one by one and Samson knocked them down; they came two by two and he knocked them down; they came three by three and he knocked them down. Between his feats of strength he frequently put his long hair back with his hand, so that it should fall behind and not hinder his movements or obstruct his sight. When he had done, the curtain fell on about thirty soldiers, heaps upon heaps, writhing in their death agonies. p. 246

The next act was in a wood and there was the Highland paladin who had not been killed when Samson knocked him down; he had, however, been a good deal hurt and was winking more than ever. There were also a few soldiers who had either recovered or had not been knocked down in the previous scene; in these cases, as with earthquakes, one has to wait to find out who is killed and who survives. Turiddu said that Samson was being arrested and presently some more soldiers entered with a prisoner, but it was the wrong man; it was, in fact, Samson’s father. He

was led away in chains. Then they brought on Samson with several yards of iron chain coiled round and hanging down from his joined hands.

"Andiamo, andiamo," said the soldiers, but the jubilant paladin could not resist the temptation to stop the soldiers and make a taunting speech which amounted to—

"Here is the end of all your rage, O Sansone!"

Samson listened with great forbearance and, when it was his turn, replied in a speech full of dignity, containing a great deal about gloria and vendetta and the weight of his chains and il cuore di Sansone, and he threatened them over and over again, and struggled and shook himself and made great efforts to get free, so that the soldiers shrank back. Suddenly he broke his chains, and the soldiers all ran away and Samson after them, leaving the paladin alone. A soldier soon returned and announced that Samson was committing deeds of violence behind. This frightened the paladin; he winked nervously and hurried away, exclaiming—

"Arrest him, arrest him; I'm off," amid the derisive laughter of the audience.

Then Samson came on in his fury, armed with the jawbone of an ass; Turiddu said it was of a horse, but I knew better, at least, I knew what it ought to have been. The soldiers did their best, but he knocked them all down again as before amid immense cheering.

The next scene was outside a castle in the country. Samson came on alone with his jawbone, and stood silent, very terrible, and waiting for an opportunity to break out.

The silence was prolonged. Nothing happened. It was a pause of expectation.

Then we heard a voice, a solemn, cavernous voice with a vibrato like a cinematograph, calling loud and slow—

"Sansone, Sansone, Sansone!"

"Whose voice is that?" exclaimed Samson, looking round and seeing no one.

The voice repeated its call two or three times and at last Samson recognized it.

"E la voce del mio genitore."

"Sansone, Sansone, Sansone! In questa torre sono incarcerato."

Then Samson understood that Manoah had been arrested and imprisoned and must be delivered. He approached the castle and knocked.

"Chi è?" said the porter.

"Son io, Sansone."

We heard a movement of consternation within the castle and then Samson called out—

"Aprite."

There was more consternation and the voice of Pasquino or Onofrio was heard speaking in dialect which made the audience laugh. The castle sent a messenger who came on and asked what Samson wanted.

"Open the door and give me my father," said Samson with suppressed rage. Throughout Samson behaved with extreme moderation. But the messenger, instead of doing as he was told, approached Samson in a hostile manner. Samson took him in his arms and, with his great strength, threw him up and out of sight. We heard his body fall inside the castle walls.

"Aprite," said Samson.

Then several messengers came, sometimes singly, sometimes two together, and once four soldiers came and said—

"Va via, Sansone," but they only got themselves into trouble, for he took them all up and threw them back into the castle and we heard each of them fall separately.

"Aprite," said Samson, "datemi il mio genitore."

Then there came a comic dwarf; Samson looked at him scornfully, and saying—

"Cosa vuoi, Insetto?" took him up, twirled him round and round and threw him away.

Then Pasquino and Onofrio came on; Samson, after doing them some damage, but not so much as they deserved because they were favourites with the audience, passed by them and disappeared in the direction of the castle gate. We heard him knock and we heard the movement within, indicating serious alarm, while the masks made comments in dialect. This was repeated and repeated with a roaring crescendo until, with a crash, the walls of the castle fell upon the stage—a bushel of stones—and Samson entered carrying the castle gates under his left arm and his father on his right, and the delighted audience applauded as the curtain fell.

After this we came away, which I have often regretted since, because these marionettes were the best I had seen. They were worked by artists who understood the handling of repose and the value of small things well placed. Occasionally, it is true, the figures moved too much and were

unintentionally comic, but wonderful effects were produced by very slight movements. When a puppet was delivering a tirade, the listener, standing as motionless as one of the knights at Catania, would sometimes turn his head almost imperceptibly, or shift his weight from one leg to the other, or place his right hand on his hip with his arm a-kimbo. The action not only expressed contempt, acquiescence, or boredom as the case required, but vivified the whole scene, spreading over it like the ripples from a pebble thrown into a pond.

p. 251
If I had been as strong as Samson I would have stayed to the end, for I knew he could not be wearing all that loose, brown hair merely to toss it back when he was fighting. The Philistines would come later on and bribe the lady to entice him and see wherein his great strength lay, and he would be enticed and, forgetting how she had betrayed him over the riddle, would tell her everything; for he had a guileless, generous nature, and every time he was deceived thought it an exceptional case and no rule for future conduct. And presently the lady would make him sleep upon her knees and a young man would come with a pair of scissors and crouch under her mantle and cut off his locks and drop them into a shallow round box upon the floor, as in Carpaccio's picture in Milan, and she would wake him up, exclaiming—

"The Philistines be upon thee, Samson," and he would rise powerless and be taken and bound in fetters of brass.

p. 252
Nevertheless, the marionettes, with all the romance of their story and the unexpected way in which their movements stimulate the imagination, would certainly fail without the wizardry of the voice of the speaker, for the voice is the soul of the marionettes. And as the cobbler from Mount Eryx found his opportunity in the Death of Bradamante at Trapani, so the voice at Palermo would surely have done something with the Blinding of Samson—something perhaps not unworthy of *Total Eclipse*. It communicated to us the dignity and beauty of Samson's character; when he was observing the industrious bees it was full of pity for the dead lion, and we knew that the poor beast had had every chance of escape and had only been killed after a delay that was longer than it was judicious. And so we knew that he did not kill the soldiers till his great patience had been exhausted and the voice was full of sorrow for their death.

p. 253
Why should he be so constantly driven to use his strength? Why could he never use it without harming some one? Why was he born into a world where men played on his simplicity and women charmed him to destruction? These were the riddles that confused Samson. It seemed to him that he was no better than the Arabian giant who held the Princess of Bizerta in thrall—that cruel bully who cared not how many he killed, nor who they were, and believed every man to be as wicked as himself. Samson, each time his patience was exhausted, hated himself for what he had to do, yet no experience could shake his faith in that melancholy but attractive swindle—the ultimate goodness of man. Both Samson and the giant were as mistaken as they were powerful, but Samson, by virtue of his weakness, was the stronger man, for, while the giant's brutality aroused our hatred, Samson's nobility compelled our love.

CHAPTER XV—THE CONVERSION OF THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE

p. 254

Being alone one autumn evening in Palermo, about a year and a half after I had seen Samson, I returned to the teatrino and found it open. On asking the young man at the door whether the performance had begun and whether there was room for me, he pulled aside the curtain at the entrance and disclosed the stage full of fighting paladins and the auditorium half empty. I paid three soldi and took a seat. After the first act, I congratulated the young man at the door on the performance and told him it was not the first time I had been to his theatre, and that I was sorry to see it so empty.

p. 255
"There is no one here," he agreed; "do you know why? It is because to-night will die Guido Santo, a marionette very sympathetic to the public, they cannot bear to see his end. But it is the last night and to-morrow they will come because the story will begin all over again."

Feeling I could bear to witness the death of Guido Santo, I returned to my seat. Before the curtain drew up on the last act there entered a page who took his hat off with his right hand and stood politely bowing until the audience should be ready to listen to what he had to say. He then recited the programme for the next evening, telling us that all who came would see the baptism of Costantino, Imperatore del Mondo. As soon as he had gone, Pasquino and Onofrio came on and in dialect comically commented upon the programme.

p. 256
At the end of the entertainment, after Guido Santo was dead and the angel had come down, taken his white soul out of his mouth and carried it up to heaven, I resumed conversation with the young man at the door, and soon perceived that he was a fine natural actor who will commit a crime if he does not go on the stage as a buffo. He told me that the theatre is open all the year round; they do not make much money in the summer because the people prefer to be in the open air, but in the winter—! and his gestures indicating how they sat shoulder to shoulder and craned their necks to see over one another's heads and wiped the perspiration off their foreheads and scattered it upon the floor, were rapid, precise and eloquent. He remembered the performance of *Samson* and the crowd and, as soon as he saw I was interested, became like a puppy that has found some one to play with. If I would come to-morrow he would show me all the marionettes and tell me all the secrets of the business.

I went and was introduced to his brother, his three sisters and his father who is the proprietor of the show. It was the father's voice that I had heard in *Samson*, the buffo and his brother help in

working the marionettes and in cleaning and repairing them after the performance, the sisters do the housekeeping, speak for the women and make the dresses. They told me a great deal that I wanted to hear. For instance, they knew all about Michele and the Princess of Bizerta and told me that she is the sister of Agramante, King of Campinas and Emperor of Yundiay, and her name is Fulorinda di Nerbof di Bizerta; the name of her wicked Arabian giant is Alaballak Aizan. I had asked Pasquale in the teatrino at Trapani about them, but he had never heard of them. These p. 257 professional marionettists at Palermo had a poor opinion of the teatrino at Trapani and, from what I told them about it, said it could only be an amateur affair. They were particularly contemptuous of the management for allowing the words to be read out of a book. They ought to be improvised. At Palermo the only play that is ever read is *Samson*, which was written by a Sicilian, and even in that the comic episode of the masks with the riddle of Rosina is a home-made, unwritten interpolation.

Pharaoh has nothing to do with the Egyptian Pharaohs. Faraone is his private name and he is the king of the Philistines. The name of the paladin is Acabbo and he is a Philistine and not a Scotchman; but they excused me for falling into the error, and showed me that many of the knights wear stuff sufficiently like a Scotch plaid to deceive a mere Englishman. Moreover, Scotch knights do come into the story; Carlo Magno sends Rinaldo off to fetch recruits and he returns with an army of Scotch paladins under Zerbino, the Prince of Scotland. Samson ranks with Christians because he is on the right side in religion and that is why his skirt was really a p. 258 skirt. Acabbo ranks with Turks because he is on the wrong side in religion and that is why he wears trousers. The lady is Tanimatea, but Dalila is brought on afterwards and it is she who cuts Samson’s hair. The buffo nearly wept when I told him I had gone away without seeing the operation. However, he explained how it was done: his long brown hair is a wig and is pulled off when she uses the scissors.

They told me all about the story, or rather stories, of the paladins. First there is an *Introduction* beginning with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, and passing rapidly through his son Fiovo and his descendants to Pipino King of France and father of Carlo Magno. It lasts about a month and is followed by—

I. *The Story of the Paladins of France* with Carlo Magno, Orlando, Rinaldo, Gano di Magonza and many others. This lasts about six months and ends with the defeat and death of Orlando and the paladins at Roncisvalle. It is followed by—

II. *The Story of the Sons of the Paladins* with Palmerino d’Oliva, Tarquasso, Scolimmaro and the p. 259 crusades. This lasts about three months and is followed by—

III. *The Story of Balocco* with the valiant Paladins Trufaldino, Nitto, Vanni Caccas, Pietro Fazio, Mimico Alicata and the giant Surchianespole. This lasts about six months, and is followed by—

IV. *The Story of Michele*, Emperor of Belgium, against the Saracens. This lasts about three months and ends with the death of Guido Santo.

I had come on the last night and if I had come a few nights before, I might have happened upon the Palermitan version of what I had seen at Catania.

Among all this, which by itself would last over a year and a half, they celebrate certain anniversaries by interpolating other plays, each of which lasts one, two, or three days. Thus, at Christmas they do the Nativity, at Easter the Passion, at Midsummer the story of S. Giovanni Battista; on the 11th of May, the day Garibaldi landed at Marsala, they do the Sicilian episodes from his life; on the anniversary of the day that Musolino, the famous brigand, was arrested, they do his life and on the proper day they commemorate the execution of Anna Bonanno, la p. 260 Velenatrice, detta la Vecchia dell’ Aceto, who sold poisoned vinegar. There is no regular day for *Samson*; they do it whenever they feel inclined, that is whenever they want a few more soldi than usual, for they look upon the paladins as the pane quotidiano and on the interpolations, for which they charge extra, as feasts.

They also occasionally give a kind of music-hall entertainment and I was so fortunate as to see one.

> Piccola Serata Ballabile
>
> 1. Passo a due eseguito da due ballerini di rango Francese, viz. Miss Ella e Monsieur Canguiù.
>
> 2. Dansa del Gran Turco, fumatore di pipa.
>
> 3. L’Ubbriaco. Scena buffa.

In private life, that is behind the scenes, the ballerini are called Miss Helvet and Monsieur Mastropinnuzza. Miss Helvet first danced alone; she had six strings and two wires, not rods, and was dressed like the conventional ballet-girl with a red bodice and a diamond necklace, and she wriggled her white muslin skirts and waved a broad green ribbon. Monsieur Canguiù then danced alone; he was slightly less complicated, and kissed his hand with great frequency. They p. 261 wound up by dancing together. They twinkled their toes and alighted on the tips of them like Adeline Genée and, as their heels were cunningly jointed and balanced, they could also walk like ordinary mortals, or at least as well as any marionette. He assisted her to leap up and pose in an attitude while standing on his knee, and they waltzed round one another and did all the things

that one has learnt to expect from opera dancers.

The name of the Gran Turco was Piriteddu cu Giummu. He was accompanied by Pasquino and danced while Pasquino went and fetched him a lighted candle. He lighted his pipe at the flame and puffed real smoke out of his mouth. After which Pasquino blew out the candle and they danced together.

The Ubbriaco, whose name was Funcia, asked Pasquino for wine, and drank it out of the bottle with consequences that might have been anticipated, but may not be described. When he had done drinking, he threw the bottle away, dancing all the time. He took off his coat and threw it away, then unbuttoned his trousers and took them off, threw them away and went on dancing in his shirt.

"He is a very common man," said the buffo apologetically; "a fellow of no education."

This constant introduction of Pasquino must not be taken as involving any anachronism. Pasquino is like Love, he is not Time's fool. Never having been born, he can never die, and never to die is to be immortal. Accordingly, whenever a comic servant is wanted, whether as a messenger from a castle which is being stormed by Samson, or to assist a Grand Turk or a drunkard of no definite period, or to accompany a paladin on a journey, be put into prison with him and help him to escape, or merely on behalf of the proprietor of the show to invite the people to to-morrow's performance, Pasquino is always there, with his dialect and his comic relief, to undertake the job. He works harder than any other marionette and consequently is always requiring renovation.

There is so much renovation going on among the puppets that the buffo cannot tell exactly how many there are at any particular time. He says their number is fluid, and supposes that it rises and falls round about five hundred. They are very heavy, especially those in armour, and vary in height from twenty-six to thirty inches, giants being thirty-four inches. They must represent a large capital, for a well-made marionette in full armour will cost as much as 150 francs (£6), the elaborate ones, with tricks, and the dancers probably more; ordinary Turks and pages unarmed will cost less, say perhaps 50 francs (£2) each. Some of them have glass eyes which catch the light and brighten them up wonderfully. Many have eyes that move like Acabbo. There are two paladins who can be cut in half, one horizontally and other perpendicularly.

There was nothing the buffo and his brother could not explain, and what this implies a glance through the notes to the *Orlando Furioso*, which is only a fragment of the complete story, will show. Orlando squints, both his eyeballs are close to his nose. They told me that this is because when his uncle, Carlo Magno, met him as a child, not knowing who he was and taking a fancy to the boy, he told him to look at him, and Orlando came close and looked at him so fixedly that his eyes never returned to their normal position. He also has two little holes, one on each side of the bridge of his nose. This is because at Roncisvalle he called for help by winding his magic horn; Oliviero told him to blow louder and he blew so forcibly that he broke a blood-vessel and the blood poured out of the little holes so that he died. He could not die by being mortally wounded in the usual way, because his flesh was made of diamonds, which was a gift of God to help him to propagate the faith and to conquer the heathen.

They showed me the three separate Christs which they use at Easter, the first as he walks among the people, the second as he is on the cross and the third as he rises from the tomb, and all, especially the last, were beautiful and impressive figures.

They give two performances every day, from six to eight and from nine to eleven, all the year round, Sundays and festas included, unless some irremovable obstacle, such as an illness or a wedding in the family, or the death of the king or an earthquake, necessitates the closing of the theatre. Nearly all the rest of every day they are cleaning up and preparing for the next performance.

 On the evening when Constantine was converted to Christianity I went to both performances, being behind the scenes for the first so as to see how everything was done. Before we began, I was let into the secret of how the emperor had his leprosy lightly stitched on him in such a way that the thread could be drawn, and it would fall off at the right moment. The first performance was to a certain extent a rehearsal for the second, at least in the second there were modifications—always improvements. The father stood on one side of the stage, working some of the marionettes and speaking for them. He had a MS. book which contained little more than a list of the characters and properties and a short statement of what was to happen in each scene. He also directed his younger son who stood at the other side of the stage, working other figures and speaking for some of them, and, when there were many puppets on at once, the buffo was sent for from the front door, where he was keeping order. When there were women or angels or children to speak, one or more of the girls came down a ladder through a trap-door from the house above. To speak improvised words on a given subject, as the father did, is called "recitare a soggetto." When the girls spoke, the father prompted, if necessary, and this they call "recitare col suggeritore"—to speak, with the assistance of a prompter, words that have been learnt.

For the second performance I was among the audience, and this is what I saw. It may not be in every detail in complete accordance with the received views of historians, but the marionettes take their history wherever they find it. In this case they found it not in Gibbon but in a favourite legend of the people, and, considering that they depend upon the favour of the people, to take it from that source was a judicious proceeding.

The curtain rose on a bedroom in the palace in Rome. Constantine, Emperor of the World, was lying in just such a bed as Pasquino or Onofrio might have, with pillows and sheets and a red flowered counterpane. He was endeavouring to allay the irritation of his skin caused by the painful malady from which he had been suffering for twelve years. A sentinel stood at the foot of the bed.

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Amid shouts of “Evviva Costantino,” two Christians were brought on in chains. They knelt to the emperor who offered to spare their lives if they would become Saracens or Turks or pagans—that is, if they would adopt his religion. Of course, they indignantly refused and were led off to be burnt, leaving the emperor restlessly soliloquizing to the effect that all Christians must be burnt and all doctors, too, if they could not cure him.

This was the cue for the family doctor to enter with a specialist.

“Come sta vostra Maiestà stamattina?” inquired the family doctor, and the patient declared himself no better—he was much the same.

I expected the doctor to feel his pulse and look at his tongue, but the buffo told me that this is not done in leprosy and that it was wrong of his brother at the afternoon performance to outrage realism by making one of them lay his hand upon the emperor’s fevered brow; his father had reproved him for it and the action was not repeated in the evening. One cannot be too careful in dealing with diseases of a contagious nature.

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The doctors consulted, and with unexpected unanimity and rapidity recommended the emperor to bathe in the blood of six children. He agreed, and said to the sentinel—

“Let six children be arrested at once and brought to me.”

The sentinel showed the doctors out and departed to execute the order, returning with six children already half dead with fright. The emperor addressed him—

“Children,” he said, “for twelve years I have suffered from a painful and irritating disease. My learned physicians advise me that a bath of your blood will restore me to health. The remedy is so simple that I have resolved to try it. Of course, the first step will be to put you all to death. This I regret, but—”

Here he was interrupted by the sobs and cries of the children—

“We do not want to die, your Majesty!”

He assured them of his sympathy, but begged them not to stray from the point, explaining that, as it was a question of saving the life of the Emperor of the World, their personal wishes could not be consulted and they had better prepare to have their blood shed at once. They trembled violently and, choking with tears and anguish, knelt to him for mercy.

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“Pietà, Maiestà, pietà!”

It was a view of the situation which had not occurred to him. The children, being too young to understand the nature of his complaint, rashly leapt on the bed and embraced him. The noble sufferer reconsidered while the children continued to cry—

“Pietà, Maiestà, pietà!”

He was touched with compassion, he wavered, he could resist no longer.

“It is not just,” he declared, “to kill all these children; if that is the only remedy, I am content to die.”

So he pardoned them and they danced away, joyfully shouting, “Evviva Costantino!”

The doctors puzzled me. After languishing for twelve years, why should the patient suddenly call in a specialist? I wondered whether perhaps he disbelieved entirely in doctors, and had at last yielded to the reiterated entreaties of his adorata mamma.

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“Now do, my dear, be guided by those who must know better than yourself. It is such a pity you will persist in going on like this. If only you would try to realize how much it distresses me to witness your sufferings! Why not take a second opinion? What I always say is: Make proper inquiries, go to a good man, follow his treatment and you will derive benefit.”

Twelve years of this sort of thing would bring round the most obstinate emperor. The buffo, however, assured me that nothing of the kind had happened; no specialist had been called in, those two doctors had had charge of the case from the beginning, the emperor was an orphan who had never known a mother’s loving care and I must have been drawing upon my imagination or my personal reminiscences. Nevertheless, like a true Sicilian, he congratulated me upon the modification and promised to speak to his father about it with a view to introducing it next time the doctors come to see the emperor—that is in about a year and a half.

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And then, what became of the doctors? Were they also pardoned?—they stood more in need of pardon than the poor children. Or were they burnt for failing to cure the emperor?—which would not have been fair, seeing that he would not give their proposal a trial. The buffo explained that they knew this was to be their last chance, and that if they did not cure him in two hours they were to be burnt with the Christians. They had proposed their barbarous treatment not

expecting it to have any beneficial effect on his health but merely to gain time, and they had escaped.

As soon as the children had danced away, the patient pulled up the bed-clothes, which had become disarranged owing partly to his restlessness and partly to the children's terror, and composed himself to slumber. He slept, woke and told his dream. He slept again, woke and told his dream. He slept again and this time we saw his dream. There was a juggling with the lights and a red gauze was let down. Two quivering clouds descended from heaven; St. Peter, with the keys at his girdle, and St. Paul, with a sword, burst through. They made passes at the sleeping emperor and spoke antiphonally, one being a tenor and the other a bass. They announced that the Padre Eterno was pleased with him for pardoning the six children, and that if he would send for Silvestro, a hermit living on Monte Siràch (*i.e.* Soracte, near Rome, where there is now a church dedicated to S. Silvestro), he would be told what to do. The saints and the quivering clouds rose and disappeared. The emperor woke for the third time, called Captain Mucioalbano, told him his dream and sent him to fetch Silvestro. It was all carried out with extreme reverence and the applause was enthusiastic.

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The second act passed before the hermit's grotto on Monte Siràch. Enter Captain Mucioalbano with two comic Saracen soldiers. They have searched all the mountain and this is the only grotto they have found; they hope it will prove to be the right one, for they are tired and hungry.

"Come out, come out, come out," exclaims Captain Mucioalbano.

"You are a pagan," says a voice within.

"Yes, I know," shouts the captain, "but never mind that. Come out, I want to speak to you."

Enter, from the grotto, Silvestro who declares he will have no dealings with Turks.

"That has nothing to do with it," says the captain. "I come from Constantine, Emperor of the World,"—and he tells him about the twelve years' illness, the constant irritation and the mysterious vision.

Silvestro bows his head, crosses himself, and says—

"I understand."

"Then do not keep his Majesty waiting," says the captain. "Come at once and cure him."

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Silvestro agrees to come, but not till he has celebrated Mass, at which he invites them to be present. They laugh at the idea—Saracens at Mass, indeed!—and when they see that he is serious they laugh more; it is, in fact, such a good joke that in a spirit of What next? they accept his invitation, intending to jeer. First, however, they want something to eat. Silvestro has nothing for them; besides, one does not eat before Mass.

"But we are hungry," they say. "You don't fast all the year; what do you eat?"

Silvestro, like so many hermits, lives on roots, but he has not yet sown the seed—he will sow it now. The soldiers object, they are not going to wait four months for their dinner. Silvestro did not mean that they should: the seed will grow during Mass and they shall eat the roots afterwards. They are more amused than ever, but consent to wait. Silvestro sows his seed in two places and they all go off to Mass.

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An angel descends with ballet-girl feet, performs an elegant dance and blesses the seed, which by a simple stage trick immediately grows up in two flower-pots. The angel dances again and disappears.

Silvestro returns from Mass with the captain, who is deep in thought, and the two soldiers, who show comic incredulity in every movement. The captain tells Silvestro that during Mass he had a vision of the Passion. Silvestro is not surprised.

"Ah!" he says musingly, "yes; that, I suppose, would be so."

The captain is so much impressed he is not at all sure he ought not to be baptized. The soldiers, who are too hungry to pay any attention, interrupt—

"What about that food?"

They had been standing with their backs to the full-blown turnips. Silvestro turns them round and they are stupefied to see that the miracle has been performed. They are all three converted and insist on being baptized instantly. Silvestro performs the ceremony, somewhat perfunctorily, and promises to cure the emperor. They shout, "Evviva Silvestro!" and dance for joy as the curtain falls.

p. 275

For the third act we returned to the palace in Rome. Costantino was still in bed, his son Fiovo and his nephew Sanguineo were with him attempting to comfort him; he was pointing out that it is little use trying to comfort a man who is, and has been for twelve years, enduring such extreme discomfort. They were interrupted by a messenger who announced the return of the captain with Silvestro.

"Let them be brought in," said the emperor.

Accordingly they came, and the patient repeated to Silvestro all about the twelve years' illness

and the constant irritation. Silvestro imitated the emperor's action to show he understood how unpleasant it must be. The patient then recounted his vision and asked—

"Can you propose any remedy?"

"Become a Christian. The water of baptism will wash away your disease."

The emperor hesitated not a moment. Silvestro retired to have a cup fixed into his right fist and filled with real water, while the sufferer cleverly turned down the bedclothes and, with the assistance of Fiovo and Sanguineo, got out of bed and stood upright, showing his body and arms covered with the dreadful marks of the leprosy.

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Silvestro returned and solemnly performed the sacrament of baptism, pouring all the water over the kneeling emperor who shivered violently with the cold, so violently that, while he rose, his leprosy fell from him as it had been a garment and his flesh became as the flesh of Samson—which in fact it was, for ordinary naked men are so seldom required that by changing his head one marionette can double the parts.

Then Costantino danced for joy and embraced Silvestro, he embraced Fiovo, embraced Sanguineo, embraced Captain Mucioalbano, embraced the comic soldiers, embraced Silvestro again and made him bishop over all bishops—that is Pope of Rome. They were all dancing and embracing one another indiscriminately as the curtain fell.

CASTELLINARIA

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CHAPTER XVI—A GREAT ACTOR

Last time I was at Castellinaria there came to the town for a week a company of Sicilian actors. I was afraid the dialect would be beyond me, but Peppino assured me that it would matter very little if it were, because I should understand the gestures, and he promised to come with me and give me any explanation I wanted. So we went to the theatre the first evening. He was right about the gestures which were wonderfully expressive and, as for the dialect, it may have been because he interpreted the long speeches that I found the first two acts of *La Morte Civile* rather dull. He admitted that it was so, but things would improve as soon as Giovanni appeared.

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In the third act a haggard, hunted creature, in a peasant's dress which he had borrowed or stolen, wandered in among the actors; Peppino whispered that he had escaped from prison. I could not take my eyes off him; every movement, every attitude, every gesture was full of beauty, nobility and significance, and his voice was a halo of romance. I thought no more about leaving the theatre. The part has been played by many famous actors, but the long account of how and why he killed his man can never have been more finely delivered. I saw him do the deed. I saw him turn and gaze upon the body while he wiped the blood off the knife and wrung it from his hands. He sat on a chair during the whole speech and I was surprised into believing I understood every word, whereas I understood none, for it was all in the dialect of Catania and Peppino, who was as much carried away as I was, forgot to interpret. And when, still sitting on his chair, he came to his escape from prison, he seemed to lift the roof off the theatre and to fill the place with freedom and fresh air.

Peppino, before his uncle died, thought of going on the stage and passed a year with Giovanni and his company in Catania and on tour, he therefore knew him quite well and at the end of the play took me round to his dressing-room. It was Carlo Magno in his palace receiving a couple of friendly sovereigns, though we were none of us dressed for our parts. I told him that he was the greatest dramatic artist I had ever seen and that he had given me a new standard whereby to judge of acting. I said that when he first appeared I thought he really was an escaped convict who had lost his way in the streets and come on the stage for shelter, and that he was going to interrupt the play, as the theatre cat sometimes does. Suddenly, in a flash, I saw what was before me in two senses at once, and knew that it must be Giovanni acting, and the sorrow for the poor hunted wretch was turned to joy at seeing a man do something supremely well. He was as pleased as a boy with a new half-sovereign, particularly when I compared him to the theatre cat, and said, with charming simplicity—

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"Thank you. Yes; that is because of the realism; that is my art."

Peppino and I sat up late that night talking about him. He was then about thirty-five, with a large repertoire and a reputation extending through Europe and America. When he was about fourteen his father, who owned and worked the most famous marionette theatre in Catania, died suddenly, leaving the family unprovided for. He took over the business and kept his mother, his sister and his young brother. He spoke for the men figures himself, and his sister for the women. He says that in this way he learned his art, but other men have had similar training without arriving at such mastery. He has a passion for doing things thoroughly, and so thoroughly well did he manage his theatre that Catania was delighted with him. Three or four years after his father's death, one of the celebrated Italian actors came to the town and they gave him a private performance of the *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The celebrated actor advised him not to waste his time with marionettes, but to act himself. The theatre was barely large enough, only

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six or seven paces across, but it could be made to do, and he followed the advice, giving, at first, in the Catanian dialect, plays of which nothing was written except, perhaps, a sketch of the plot. Formerly, when reading was a rarer accomplishment than it is now, it would have been of little use to write the words.

p. 283 These plays are full of violence and vendetta, jealousy, murder and the elementary passions. The audience are uneducated, simple people who look for the same thing over and over again, as children love the same story and resent any radical change. This makes it easier to carry one through than it would be if subtleties or much novelty were to be attempted. I had seen some of these plays in Catania, and it may make matters clearer to give a short account of one; it was not until Peppino told me about them that I understood that the words were improvised.

In the first act Pietro Longo discovers that his sister has been betrayed, shoots her seducer and is taken by the police.

The second act passes in prison. Two convicts are talking and a third, a stupid fellow, old, dirty, only half clothed, is sitting apart, stitching together a few more rags. Singing is heard without. Every one in the theatre who had passed under prison walls by night had heard such music and had seen the singers crouching in the shadows; we all knew it was a signal. The two convicts go to the window and reply. p. 284 A stone is thrown in, wrapped up in a letter, which tells them that Pietro Longo has killed one of their gang and will be taken to their prison; it is for them to avenge the murder. They confer and agree that the stupid fellow shall be their instrument. They call him from his occupation and instruct him. They tell him that a prisoner will be brought in, he is to ask his name, if he replies “Pietro Longo,” he is to stab him with the knife which they give him. He is so stupid that they have to act it for him, and to make him imitate them till they think he can be trusted. They hide. A prisoner is brought in and talks to the stupid fellow. The stupid fellow has been in prison for years and has talked to hundreds of prisoners. In the course of conversation, without any particular intention, for he has forgotten all about his lesson, he asks the prisoner his name.

“Pietro Longo.”

The stupid fellow remembers that this is his cue for doing something, but cannot remember what. His arm accidentally hits the knife which is stuck in his belt; of course, this is the prisoner he is to kill; he takes out his knife, opens it with his teeth and attacks Pietro who, though unarmed, is able to defend himself. p. 285 This puts the stupid fellow out, he was told nothing about the prisoner defending himself. The two convicts, who have been watching, get impatient, come from their hiding and encourage him. This makes matters worse, he was told nothing about this either. He is irritated, he grows wilder and, in a fury, suddenly turns from Pietro and murders the two convicts instead.

The two acts were of about equal length; the first existed merely to introduce the second, and the second merely to introduce the stupid fellow whose part was nearly all gesture and, as I afterwards ascertained, was taken by Giovanni’s brother, Domenico. He may have spoken twenty words, he was too stupid to speak more; the others spoke a good deal, but, except that they had been told beforehand, as to each act, about as much as the reader has been told about the second, all they said was impromptu, so that each repetition, like a Japanese netsuke, would be a unique work of art.

Remembering how continually Sicilians use gesture in ordinary life, it will be understood that in such a play the actual words are of secondary importance. p. 286 Giovanni, in working the marionettes had become familiar with all the types that in different grades of society reappear in all plays—the good king, the proud tyrant, the traitor, the faithful friend, the young lover, the noble mother and so on; and, as the words were always improvised, except in such plays as *Cavalleria Rusticana*, which are exceptional with the Sicilian marionettes, his memory had become stored with conventional phrases suitable for all the usual stage emergencies and always ready for impromptu delivery. His fellow-actors were also familiar with them, having heard the phrases over and over again, and seen the types with their appropriate gestures from their early youth as members of the marionette audience.

It is claimed for this kind of impromptu acting that the actors are freer than when speaking words they have learnt, and can therefore behave with more naturalness. It is the difference between delivering an extempore speech and reciting one that has been learnt—the difference between “recitare a soggetto” and “recitare col suggeritore.” So great is the freedom that an actor may introduce anything appropriate that occurs to him at the moment, and the others must be ready to fall in with it. p. 287 Peppino told me that one night in Catania, after the performance, he was sitting in the cool with Giovanni’s family on the pavement and in the road, outside the theatre, when an old beggar stopped to beg. He had come a long way, he knew no one in the town, he had nothing to eat, nowhere to sleep, no money. The mother gave him a penny, Giovanni gave him another, his brother, Domenico, another—every one gave something. The beggar, seeing all that wealth lying in the hollow of his hand, and knowing that he was now safe for a few days, burst into tears and turned away speechless. At the sight of this, Domenico called to him, went after him, met him, emptied his pockets, gave him all he had, took his head in his hands, kissed him on both cheeks, dismissed him, returned to his family and was received with an approval that was too deep for words. Such an improvised incident, the sudden outcome of uncontrollable emotion, may be seen any day in Sicily and might be introduced any evening into one of these unwritten plays by any actor who should take it into his head to do it. The audience, p. 288 who would probably have seen the play before, would recognize that here was an impromptu

interpolation, and would applaud the actor both for the idea and for the way it was carried out.

Gradually Giovanni added written plays and a prompter, and was the first to take on tour a company of actors performing in a Sicilian dialect. He also included plays written in Italian. These written plays, though constructed with more care, did not depart far from the style with which he began. Giovanni still frequently returns from prison, but as he never forfeits the sympathy of the audience, if he really committed the crime it was in self-defence. Whatever the play may be, it always contains, besides the inevitable scenes of violence, many other passages such as hearing a letter read (he is then a simple fellow who cannot read), collapsing in the presence of the Madonna (he is then deeply religious), dancing at a festa (he is a perfect dancer), confiding, with his last breath, the name of his murderer to his young brother who promises to execute the vendetta. In these passages his humour, his delicacy, his grace, his tenderness, his voice and, most wonderful of all, his apparently intense belief in the reality of everything he says and does make one forget how crude and transpontine the bare theme is. p. 289

On my saying I should like to see more of him, Peppino asked why I had come away so soon. I had thought he must be tired and would want to be alone and change his dress.

“Never is he alone,” said Peppino. “Surely now shall he be suppering by his friends.”

We thought it too late to go and look for him then, so we determined to ask ourselves to supper after the play the following evening.

CHAPTER XVII—SUPPER WITH THE PLAYERS

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Next evening the play was *Feudalismo*. Giovanni does not return from prison; he is a shepherd and is made to marry a girl without being told of the relations that had subsisted between her and his lord. He and his wife fall in love with one another, he discovers the deception, kills his lord and carries his wife off on his shoulders to live happily with him among his sheep in the mountains.

We went round to his dressing-room after the performance to congratulate him; when he began to bring the interview to a close, saying that no doubt it was now my bedtime, I interrupted—

“If you are going to supper presently, may I be allowed to accompany you?”

He was delighted, patted me on the back and exclaimed, “Bravo, bravo!”

It took us some time to get away; most of the company came into his dressing-room to say “Good-night” to him, p. 291 men, women and children all came; each of the children expected some little attention, and Giovanni playing with a child is a beautiful sight. Then there were congratulating friends clustering round him and managers and secretaries waiting for instructions. At last, with only about fifteen others, we proceeded, stopping on the way for a prickly drink to cool us after the performance, and the barman was so overcome by the honour of serving Giovanni that we had the greatest difficulty in forcing him to accept payment. We arrived at a small piazza where five or six more of the company were waiting for us at a restaurant.

Tables were set out under the stars and we sat down to supper which was the same for all: stock fish (which they called pesce stocco and sometimes stocca fiscia), bread and wine. Giovanni kissed the loaf before cutting it, as he does on the stage.

After supper it was proposed that we should play at Tocco. I did not thoroughly understand the game, but it was something of this kind: Wine was sent for and we all threw out one or more fingers of one hand, perhaps there might be seventy-two fingers; then we were counted, p. 292 beginning with the one who had proposed the game and going over us again and again until seventy-two was reached with some one who thereupon became padrone of the wine. He was entitled to drink it all, but every Sicilian is a born gentleman, so he appointed one of the company presidente and another sotto-presidente, poured out a little wine for himself and handed the bottle to the presidente, who again might drink it all if he liked. But the game was that he made a speech proposing so-and-so as a suitable person to be invited to drink, and the sotto-presidente made another speech giving his reasons for agreeing or differing. Any one who considered himself aggrieved might plead for himself, and there was some risk in giving the verdict against him because sooner or later he was pretty certain to become presidente or sotto-presidente and to take his revenge. This gave opportunities for declamation and gesticulation and resulted in much merriment.

Some discussion presently arose as to how far Africa and America are the same place: one of the actors, who had not forgotten his geography, said it was well known that they are separate p. 293 countries, being, in fact, two of the quarters of the globe. Whereupon Peppino remembered how when he was at school one of the boys, on being asked to name the quarters of the globe, replied—

“The five quarters of the globe are four in number and they are the three following, viz. Europe and Asia.”

“Bravo, bravo!” shouted Giovanni, and repeated the sentence several times in his deep, rich voice.

But however amusing this might be, it did not convince us all that the two names might not apply to one place; so the geographical actor went further and told us that Africa had been known since

the earliest ages, that it was not very far from Sicily and contained Tunis, a city which the company had visited on one of their tours, whereas America was a long way off, on the other side of the world, and had been discovered in comparatively recent times, and, strange to say, by an Italian. Giovanni at once showed great interest.

"Tell us about it," he said, leaning forward.

"His name was Cristoforo Colombo," said the actor. "He was poor and confided his difficulty to a priest who happened to be the queen's confessor and a kind-hearted man. This priest went to the p. 294 queen and said, 'May it please your Majesty, I have a friend, Cristoforo Colombo, who wishes to discover America but he has no money to buy ships.' The queen thought it would be a good thing that America should be discovered and promised to give him as much money as he wanted for the purpose."

"Oh, bel!" exclaimed Giovanni. "Let us drink the health of the good queen."

"She died some years ago," said the actor in a warning tone.

"Then," said Giovanni, bowing his head reverently and crossing himself, "let us drink to the repose of her blessed soul."

We did so and had all about the voyage and the tunnies, the flight of the birds, the alarm of the crew when the meteor appeared, their disappointment when the fancied land vanished in the morning, their wonder at the distant moving light, their impatience and their turbulence. All this he did, still sitting on his seat and gesticulating. When he came to the mutiny he rose. He was peculiarly well able to tell us about the mutiny because, in addition to the usual sources of information, he had recently taken part in a performance of the story got up for a charity in Palermo and he had been the one chosen by lot to kill Colombo. He conspired apart with p. 295 imaginary sailors, occasionally glancing and pointing furtively towards the other end of the piazza. When the murder had been sufficiently agreed upon, he snatched a knife off the supper-table and, hiding himself behind our chairs, crept cautiously towards that part of the deck where Colombo stood busily discovering America through a telescope, the invention of another Italian named Galileo (who was born some seventy years later). He took the knife from between his teeth where he had been carrying it, and was about to commit the dastardly act when Colombo turned round, seized him by the collar, flung him away and had him put into chains. He was brought up again when land was in sight and told to look ahead.

"But what do I see?" said the sailor, shading his eyes. "What strange vegetation is yonder and what unknown beasts? When I look upon these potatoes, this tobacco for the nose, all these elephants and cucumbers and trees full of monkeys, it appears to me that I am taking part in the discovery of America. O noble captain! Pietà, pietà!"

With this he knelt at the feet of Colombo who pardoned him, and the sailors embraced and wept p. 296 for joy.

And all the time Giovanni sat gazing and listening with all his eyes, his ears, his expressive hands and his eloquent back as though it was the first he had ever heard of it, which can hardly have been the case. More probably he was considering and criticizing the speaker's delivery and mentally casting him for a part in a new play, for he lives in his art; his meals, his sleep, his recreations are all arranged with a view to the theatre whose only rival in his affections is his mother.

Then we went on with the game, if this did not form part of it, and I was given some wine and invited to drink. It was an occasion not to be passed over in silence, so, although I am not good at speech-making, I rose with my glass in my right hand and, laying my left on Giovanni's shoulder said—

"Quattro sono le cinque parti del mondo e sono le tre seguenti: Sicilia, Inghilterra."

Giovanni led the applause with shouts of "Bravo, bravo!" but before I could drink, my glory slipped off me, the stars went out and the world came to an end. I had spilt my wine. He saw my p. 297 distress and at once took charge of the situation—

"Oh, che bel augurio!" he exclaimed.

I tried to apologize.

"No, no, it will bring us good fortune," and turning sorrow into joy again, he dipped his finger in the spilt wine and anointed my forehead and the back of my neck; I did the same to him; he took up the bottle, flourished it in the air, sprinkling every one of us with wine, and then flung it away empty over our heads, so that it crashed down on the pavement and the pieces skated across the piazza, bang up against the opposite house. Thus we baptized our friendship and in a fresh bottle drank to its eternal continuance. He then became Carlo Magno again and declared that I was padrone of the theatre, and that if I did not come every night to see him act, and to supper afterwards, there would be an eruption of Mount Etna and he would never speak to me again.

Presently a greasy, throaty voice began to infect the air with reminiscences of *O Sole Mio*! Nearer and nearer it came until it floated into the piazza and a drunken vagabond reeled past us and out of sight. It was a disturbance and we rose to go. I paid sevenpence for my supper, *i.e.* p. 298 fourpence for the pesce stocco and bread, a penny for the wine, a penny for my share of the tocco

wine and a penny for the waiter. Giovanni was pleased with me for giving the waiter a penny. He said I had done quite right because the waiter (who had never seen me before) was very fond of me. It was now half-past two and I supposed we might be going to bed, but on the way we sat down outside a second caffè, had some more tables out and ordered coffee. *O Sole Mio*! sailed towards us again, followed by the drunken man. They wanted to send him away, but Giovanni, watching him, said—

"Let him stay. Give me a cigarette, some one"—as usual he had smoked all his own.

He handed the cigarette to the man who accepted it and stood gesticulating, trying to light it and mumbling unsteadily till he veered off and capsized in a heap, spluttering and muttering in the gutter.

I said, "You have been taking a lesson for your next drunken man."

"Of course I have," he replied.

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It was past three by the time we left the second caffè, but we drifted into a third and, after liqueur, really did at last set about going seriously to bed; but what with seeing one another home, trying to find the reason why *Feudalismo* was a better play than *La Morte Civile* (no one had any doubt that it was, but the reason was involved in declamation and gesticulation) and one thing and another, it was past four before we separated. We were standing on the pavement outside the albergo, our numbers reduced to ten or twelve; instead of saying "Good-night" to me in the usual way, Giovanni put his hands on my shoulders and said—

"Enrico mio! Caro fratello! Io ti voglio bene assai, assai, assai!"

These were his words, but, without his voice, they can convey no idea of the great burst of emotion with which he pronounced the "bene," or of the sobbing diminuendo with which he repeated the "assai."

Next morning there was a rehearsal at noon and plenty of work to be got through, because the tour was only beginning, and there were six new plays added to the repertoire and fifteen new performers to the company, which numbers in all forty-four persons.

p. 300

Giovanni sat with the prompter at a table and the actors went through various passages requiring consideration. He was too intent upon getting things right to waste any time by losing his temper, nor did I ever see any sign of irritation or hear him speak a hasty word. It is true he kicked Pietro off the stage one day, but he did it with the volcanic energy of Vanni kicking his wife out of the house at the end of the second act of *La Zolfara*. And Pietro was not really touched, he had acted in many unwritten dramas, understood in a moment, played up with the correct stage exit and we all laughed at the impromptu burlesque—or modificazione, as one of them called it.

If Giovanni was not satisfied, he got up and showed the actor how he wanted the passage done. If Berto still failed to satisfy him, he was immediately replaced by Ernesto, if Ernesto could not do it, there was always Pietro who could do nearly anything. Berto was the only one of the company who had any self-consciousness in his acting or, rather, in his attempts at acting. Probably he will return to the drapery shop in which he has hitherto been an assistant, after a pleasant wanderjahr with the company. Ernesto has been some time on the stage and was formerly a barber; he is, in fact, still a barber and shaves the company, thereby adding to his salary, the greater part of which he sends every week to his wife who is at home with his two children.

p. 301

Sicilians do not like being separated from their families and, as travelling expenses are paid, if the husband and wife are both employed in the theatre, it costs no more to bring the children than to leave them at home. The principal lady is the wife of one of the young actors and they have brought the baby. The brother of this lady is chief stage carpenter and property-man, and is married to another lady of the company. One of the under-carpenters is stepson of the chief comic who was formerly a fruit seller and is a little fellow of inexhaustible drollery with a flavour of Dan Leno in his method.

I dined one day with the actor who does old priests, respectable commissaries of police, chief peasants and anything of that kind, a man of about forty who formerly kept a shop and sold grain. His wife, the daughter of artists, is about the same age and does comic mothers, women who know a thing or two and won't stand any nonsense, garrulous duennas and so on. They had brought four of their children and occupied a fairly large room with a kitchen, which they had taken for the week. The children also act if required; one of them, Lola, a girl between five and six, was on the stage all through the first act of one of the plays; she had only a few words to speak, and all the rest of the time was moving about; she tried the rocking-chair, she stood irresolute on the side of one foot leaning against a table with a finger to her mouth, she found a ball, tossed it up, missed it and ran after it, she climbed up to a table, got a piece of bread and ate it. She had not been taught any of this business. They had merely said to her, "Play about, Lola," and, being the daughter of artists, she had played about with an unconscious spontaneity that was startling. Had there been an irritable uncle on the scene he must have exclaimed—

p. 302

"For goodness' sake, do send that child to bed."

p. 303

Lola was at home upon the stage and was acting accordingly, if it can properly be called acting, at any rate she was playing. What was Giovanni doing at supper? Is Giovanni only an actor when on the stage and when everything he says and does has been thought out? Is he a great actor by

virtue of producing the illusion of being a Lola? And is Lola not really an actress at all, because she has not prepared what she is doing and is not even trying to produce any illusion? What is acting? And what is realism? Here are more problems for discussion at supper under the stars and on the way to bed at four o'clock in the morning—problems not easily solved by a company of gesticulating freebooters who are for ever making raids, first into stage-land, then into real life, and lifting incidents across the border into that buffer-state where they lead a joyous life between the two.

CHAPTER XVIII—A YOUNG CRITIC

p. 304

One day after rehearsal I had an appointment with a young man whose acquaintance I had made the previous evening behind the scenes. He was sitting on a packing-case, exchanging compliments with the head fireman, and inquired whether I was looking for anything; finding I wanted a seat he took me under his protection, scoured the theatre for a chair, and put it for me in a corner with a view of the stage. There was only room for one chair, so he sat on my knee and put his arm round my neck to keep himself in place. He was absorbed by the performance, but, while the curtain was down, had leisure to tell me that his name was Domenico, that he was nearly thirteen years old and brother to one of the ladies of the company; he was at school in the town and his sister had got him a week's holiday and taken him to stay with her. p. 305

"And so they call you Domenico," said I, just to keep things going.

"No," he replied, "they call me Micio."

"Why do they do that if your name is Domenico?"

"Because they are all very fond of me. Domenico is my name as I said, but Micio is a caress."

"I see; then may I also call you Micio?"

"Of course you may, and I hope you will."

He was very fond of reading and wanted me to lend him a story-book, but *Tristram Shandy*, which was the nearest approach to a story-book I had with me, was in English, so that would not do. Then he began searching my pockets for chocolate, but there, again, he was disappointed. It was to give me an opportunity of remedying these deficiencies in my equipment that we made our appointment, and he was to do the bargaining. During rehearsal I consulted his sister, which I suppose would have been the correct thing to do in England, but she only shook her finger at him, and he only laughed and played at hiding his fresh brown face and his curly black head in p. 306 her white skirts; she might as well have shaken her finger at the scirocco.

The child put his hand in mine and avoiding the glare of the big streets, led me through narrow lanes to one of the gates of the town. There had been a storm the previous night, so sudden that our supper had been spoilt before we could get it under cover and we had to begin again inside the restaurant. The clouds had all cleared away and the panorama, as seen from the gate, was at its best with the sun beating down on the slopes of the mountain-side and sprinkling sapphires all over the sea.

Micio, however, had not come to admire the view; he turned from it to the books that were laid out on a shady ledge of the town-wall and began to consider those with the illustrated covers. He wanted them all, not simultaneously but one after the other. He paused before *Uno Strano Delitto* but, the crime being too strange to be comprehensible, we passed on to *Guirlanda Sanguinosa*, a lady dressed in bridal attire but, doubtless through exposure to the weather, the blood had faded off the wreath of orange blossoms, so we took up another. *Il Bacio del Cadavere* p. 307 was about a lady in evening dress who had got out of cab No. 3402 which was waiting for her in the moonlight while she conversed with the porter at the gates of the cemetery; Micio's anxiety to ascertain whether the interview was preliminary or subsequent to the corpse's kiss was not acute enough to induce him to buy the book. There was another about a kiss, *Bacio Infame*, on which a lady with a stiletto was defending herself from a bad man. All these were enticing, but we hoped to do better, and I began to blush for the somewhat thin plot of *Tristram Shandy* and to be thankful that my copy was not in Italian. Finally he took *La Mano del Defunto*: at the back of a sepulchral chamber in a violated coffin, from which the lid had been removed, lay the body of a woman, shockingly disarranged, over the edge hung her right arm, the hand had been cut off and was being carried away by a city gent in tall hat, unbuttoned frock coat, jaunty tie, yellow boots and streaky trousers; he had a dark lantern with the help of which he had committed the sacrilege—very horrible which attracted Micio, and only twenty-five centimes which attracted me. We might possibly have done better, but we should have had to search a long time. So we p. 308 bought it and thought we might take something else as well. Now, it seemed to me, was the time for *Carlo Magno and the Paladins* or the *Life of Musolino*, or *Robinson Crusoe*, or *Don Quixote*, or *The Three Musketeers*, but he had read them all, years ago. *The Arabian Nights* was new to him, but it was marked ten francs. In voluble Sicilian he expressed my views by telling the bookseller it was ridiculously too expensive and that he could give no more than two francs fifty centimes—he never gave more for a book. The man held out for five francs. The boy laughed at him. They declaimed and gesticulated and swore at each other until, at last, Micio, a baffled paladin, wiped his brow wearily as though there was no doing anything with these people, and told me to take three francs out of my purse and give them to the brigand, who politely wrapped up our purchases and we strolled off.

“Now,” said Micio as we approached the chocolate shop, “we did rather well over the *Arabian Nights*—saved seven francs—do you think it would be extravagant if we were to have an ice to restore us after our struggles?” p. 309

Of course I agreed, though I had not myself done any struggling, and, as we sat at our little table eating our ices, we talked about the theatre. I said I had never seen such acting; leaving Giovanni out of consideration, all the company knew how to produce the illusion of reality even down to Lola. Micio had no opinion of Lola. She was not to be considered seriously as an actress; she might become one some day, but she was only a child. All the children of artists can do as well as she, but no one can really act who has not suffered. He himself used to act quite as well as Lola, but had not appeared on the stage for a long while—not since he had been at school. He could do better now.

“When I see the others acting,” he said, “I am not moved, it is like reading an index. But when I see Giovanni, it is all different, it is like reading a romance and it makes me cry.”

He found fault with some of the plays for not being worthy of the actor. Too many of them were little more than disconnected incidents, strung together to provide opportunities for effects, but p. 310 with no more plot than the doings of the paladins in the marionette theatres. They were like the Pietro Longo play, which I had told him about, and he said that, if that was really all of it, it began with one story and ended with another and cried aloud for a third act to hold it together.

“Pietro must escape from prison,” said Micio; “he must return home and we must know whether his sister died or went into a convent or married the policeman.”

“What is the stupid fellow to do?” I inquired, “the play was made for him.”

“He must escape too, Pietro will help him because they will become friends; besides, any one can escape from a stage prison, especially if the knives are not taken away from the convicts. And then he can do whatever the author likes.

“But it is always so in life,” he continued, with a sigh, “we must not be discontented because the best we can get is not the best we can imagine. I am still young, but not too young to have kn---Let us not talk about that. What did you think of the play last night?”

I replied that it was a fine play.

He agreed, saying it was “strepitosamente bello.” It opened with a state of things easily p. 311 comprehensible and of great interest. There were no tedious explanatory speeches, but plenty of action leading naturally to a catastrophe which was at once seen to be inevitable, though no one could have predicted precisely that. And the conclusion sent the audience away feeling that something tremendous had happened, and that the state of things existing at the beginning could never exist again.

“That is how a play should be,” said Micio.

I took a leaf out of Giovanni’s book and patted him on the back.

“Bravo, Micio, bravo! No one has yet said anything like that at supper. This is the second time this morning that you have expressed my thoughts for me. We must get your sister to let you sit up with us one of these evenings. You would keep us straight.”

“They know all about it,” he replied, “especially Giovanni, he knows everything. But they don’t say it because they like to go on talking.”

“There! now you have done it a third time. You appear to me to know all about it too. How did p. 312 you find it all out? They did not teach it you at school, did they?”

“I do not remember that any one ever taught it me,” he replied; “I seem to have known it always. It cannot be otherwise. It is like eating cheese with maccaroni.”

“We seldom eat maccaroni in England,” said I, in defence, “and when we do we usually eat sugar with it; perhaps that is why we are so slow.”

This was a mistake because I wanted him to talk more about the theatre, and there is something quicksilverish in Micio’s temperament; having got on the maccaroni he did not care to return to art.

“What do you eat in England if you do not eat maccaroni? Do you eat chocolate?”

Which reintroduced the original question, and when we had attended to that, it was nearly four o’clock, his sister’s dinner-hour and time for him to go home.

In the natural order of things, Micio, being the son of artists, will return to the stage. Should he fail as an adult actor, he will perhaps travel in tiles or in ecclesiastical millinery, or he may get employment on the railway, or as a clerk in the office of the cemetery. I should like to know p. 313 when the time comes, for I feel towards him somewhat as he feels towards Pietro Longo. And there is a chance that he will tell me, for we promised to exchange postcards, and before parting he gave me his address—

(Indirizzo)
All’ Egregio Giovanotto Micio Boccadifuoco,

Four o'clock was also Giovanni's dinner-hour, and this was the day he had promised to dine with me. I was in some fear lest I might choose the wrong restaurant or order something that would disagree with him; the evening's entertainment, on which the whole town depended, was at stake. But I need not have worried about it. Giovanni lives so entirely among people who are devoted to him that he habitually takes the lead in everything. Consequently he chose the restaurant, and its name was *Quo Vadis*? He also brought a couple of friends, ordered the dinner and, as a matter of course, took me for a drive afterwards to the lighthouse and back.

p. 314

As we drove through the town, he pointed out the municipio, the post-office, the old Saracen palace, and the other objects of interest. When we got into the country, it occurred to me that I might not again have Giovanni all to myself, it was the first time we had been alone. If I could now get him to talk about his art, he might tell me exactly how deeply he feels the emotions which he expresses with so much conviction. I considered how to begin. I had better ask him first which was his favourite character. I turned to put the question. He had fallen asleep, and gave me rather an anxious time, for he repeatedly seemed to be on the point of rolling out of the carriage. It was a relief when, at last, the clattering of the horse's hoofs on the paved streets woke him up, and there was no longer any necessity to hold him in by the coat-tail.

"There now," said Giovanni, as he helped me out, "we have had a delightful drive. Is this your umbrella?" he added, handing it to me; "if I had known you had brought that, I would have put it up to keep the sun off you while you were asleep."

p. 315

I had not expected this and looked into his eye for a twinkle, I saw nothing but grave politeness and the kindest consideration for my comfort. There are moments when one may regret not having been brought up on impromptu plays; Pietro would have known at once what to do. I could only ask, rather feebly—

"Have I been to sleep?"—a question to which, of course, he did not know the answer; he was quite capable of inventing one, however, so I hastily went on about the umbrella: "Thank you very much. I am afraid it would have been of no use. I intended to take it to be mended. I had an accident with it in the storm last night. Look," and I opened it.

"You will never get that mended. You must buy a new one. Why, it is broken into as many pieces as the quarters of the globe. Ha, ha! The two parts of Enrico's umbrella are three in number and they are the four following, viz. the handle, the ribs, the silk, most of the stick and—and—yes, and this little bit broken off from the end."

"Bravo, Giovanni, bravo!"

"You are coming to see me act this evening?"

"Of course I am."

"And to supper afterwards?"

p. 316

"Certainly, if I may. I do not want to cause an eruption of Mount Etna, and I do not want you to leave off speaking to me."

"Bravo, bravo!" And away he went, apologizing for leaving me by saying he really must try to get a little sleep before nine o'clock or he would be no good at the performance. And this time I fancied there was something of a twinkle in his eye.

Four o'clock P.M. is not such a bad dinner-hour when one is going to bed at four A.M. And four A.M. is not such a bad time for going to bed in Sicily. At some seasons it is better for getting up and then one takes one's siesta during the heat of the day. Either way some alteration of one's usual habits is a good thing on a holiday, and any one in want of a thorough change from the life of the ordinary Londoner might do worse—or, as I should prefer to say, could hardly do better—than spend a week with a Sicilian Dramatic Company.

CHAPTER XIX—BRANCACCIA

p. 317

After the players were gone I resumed my normal habits. One morning, as Peppino and I were returning to colazione he asked me whether I had seen the procession down on the shore.

"Of course I saw it, but I did not know what it was all about."

"That," said he, "was the bishop; he go to bless the sea and pray God to send the tunnies. Every spring shall be coming always the tunnies, but if to don't bless the sea, then to be coming few tunnies; if to bless the sea then to be coming plenty many tunnies."

"It was a beautiful procession," I said. "I knew it was the bishop; I saw his mitre and the vestments and the gilded crosses and the smoke of the incense in the sunlight. But do you think it is quite sportsmanlike to pray that many tunnies may be killed?"

p. 318

"Yes," said Peppino, "it is right to pray to win the battle, and we battle the tunnies so we may pray."

"It is not quite the same thing," said I. "In battle the enemy has a religion too and can pray

against us: it may be fair if both pray equally, especially if both have the same religion. But it is taking a mean advantage of the poor tunnies to pray against them, for they have no religion.”

“Perhaps they have,” said Peppino. “Perhaps they have Signor Vescovo down in the sea and make a procession with tunny priests very well dressed, and bells and banners and incense and singing, and to pray against the death and the boiling in oil, and to escape to be eaten.”

“I should like to see that procession,” I said.

I knew that Peppino had sporting instincts to which I could appeal because, a few days before, he had taken me into his room and shown me the cups he had won. Some of them were English, for when in London he was not occupied as a waiter without intermission; his recreation was to retire from business occasionally for a few weeks, go into training and appear as a champion bicyclist. So that, after my frugal chop and potato in Holborn, I had been in the habit of giving p. 319 twopence to an athlete famous enough to have had his portrait in the illustrated papers—that is, if his recollection of me in Holborn was not his invention; anyhow, there were the cups.

It had come to pass by this time that Peppino and I took our meals together and we were attended by the waiter, a native of Messina, named Letterio. This name is given to many of the boys of Messina, and the girls are called Letteria. It seems that when St. Paul was at Messina the citizens gave him a congratulatory address for the Madonna; he took it back with him and gave it to her in Jerusalem. She, in reply, sent them a letter in Hebrew which they have now in the cathedral. At least they have a translation of it. Or, to be exact, a translation of a translation of it. The first translation was into Greek and the second into Latin. This is the letter after which the children are baptized. It is to be hoped they have another translation ready in Sicilian, or perhaps in Tuscan, to take its place in case anything should happen to it. Letterio could not tell me the contents of the letter, but he knew it was in the Duomo and was his padrona, and was p. 320 sure that, though only a translation, the meaning of the original had been religiously preserved.

Peppino never spoke a word to Letterio; he talked to me and gesticulated. When he held out one hand flat and patted it with the other, I did not pay much attention to the gesture, assuming that he was merely emphasizing what he was saying to me, and that Letterio brought cutlets because it was time for them. When he tumbled his hands rapidly one over the other and Letterio brought salad, I did not see that it was cause and effect. But when he put his hand to his mouth as though drinking and Letterio brought another bottle of wine, I saw that Peppino had not been saying everything twice over to me, once with words and once with gestures, as a Sicilian usually does, but that he had been carrying on two independent conversations with two people simultaneously.

Talking about Letterio’s name naturally led us to talk about baptisms, and so we returned to the subject of marriage. Another friend of Peppino’s was to be married that evening—yes, poor man! The church was to bless the union at four o’clock next morning, after which the happy pair p. 321 would drive down to the station in a cart, the side panels painted with scenes from the story of Orlando out of the marionette theatre, and the back panel with a ballet girl over the words “Viva la Divina Provvidenza.” Then they would take the train to Palermo for a honeymoon of three days. The interval between the two ceremonies was to be spent in dancing and, if I liked, Peppino would take me to see it.

So in the evening we went to a house at the other end of the town, “far away—beyond the Cappucini,” as Peppino said. We entered by a back door which led directly into a small bedroom containing the music: one clarionet, a quartet of Saxhorns, and one trombone. The room also contained four babies in one bed, and two more on a mattress on the floor, all peacefully sleeping. These were the babies that had succumbed to the late hour, their mothers having brought them because they wanted their suppers, and would presently want their breakfasts. We sat among the band and the babies for some time to get accustomed to the noise, and then passed into the room where the dancing was going on. All round sat the friends and relations, p. 322 some with babies, some without; and all the ladies very serious, the bride in the middle chair of a row along one wall was so desperately serious that she was quite forbidding.

As when the traveller asks the chambermaid if he can have his linen back from the wash in time to catch an early train, and notices an expression passing across her face as she replies, “Impossibilissimo!”—well knowing that nothing is easier, only she wants an extra fifty centimes—even such an expression did I see not passing across the face of the bride, but frozen upon it as she sat with her back up against the wall frowning on the company. Peppino said she was all right. Brides have to behave like this; they consider it modest and maiden-like to appear to take no interest or pleasure in their wedding ceremonies.

The bridegroom was a very different sort of person—gay, alert and all the time dancing, talking, laughing and gesticulating with every one, as though his good spirits and vitality were inexhaustible.

The guests on the chairs left space for only two couples at a time. At the first opportunity Peppino began to dance, choosing for his partner a young lady who was not merely the prettiest p. 323 girl in the room, but the most beautiful girl I have ever seen. She was also an exception to the other ladies in that she looked happy, especially when dancing with Peppino. She had a quantity of fine, black, curly hair, a dark complexion and surprising eyes, like Love-in-a-mist when the morning sun shines on it, full of laughter and good humour. Her eyelids, her nose and chin, her full lips and the curves of her cheeks were modelled with the delicate precision of a violin, and when she moved it was with that wave-o’-the-sea motion which Florizel observed in Perdita’s

dancing. I put her black hair and complexion down to some Arabian ancestor, and her blue eyes to some Norman strain.

"Who is that wonderfully beautiful girl you have been dancing with, Peppino?" said I.

He replied, with a rather bored air, that her name was Brancaccia, and that she was the daughter of a distant cousin of his father who kept a curiosity shop in the corso.

"How long has this been going on, Peppino? Why did you never mention Brancaccia to me before?"

p. 324
He replied in a tone, as though closing the discussion, that there had never been any reason to mention her, that he had known her all her life, and she was nothing to him.

I changed the subject and, saying it was a long time since I had been to a ball, asked if there was anything I ought to do. He said that I was expected to dance. Now my dancing days terminated many years ago when I was told that my dancing was the very prose of motion, but I did not want to say so, because I thought it just possible I might be allowed to dance with Brancaccia if I played my cards judiciously; so I merely said modestly I was afraid of knocking up against the other couple. Peppino silenced this objection by promising to dance with me himself, and to see that all went well. So I danced a waltz with Peppino. He, of course, complimented me upon my proficiency, and told me I ought now to dance with the bridegroom. So I danced another waltz with the bridegroom. He then said it was expected that I should dance with the bride. This naturally alarmed me, but I boldly asked her and she consented with a stiff bow: we performed a polka together and I restored her to her seat, feeling as though I had crossed from Siracusa to p. 325 Valletta in a storm, more frightened than hurt, it is true, but glad it was over, especially as I now considered myself entitled to introduce the subject of dancing with Brancaccia. Peppino received the proposition without enthusiasm, saying she was her own mistress and I could do as I liked.

"But first," he said, "there shall be a contraddanza; did you know what is contraddanza? All right, I shall tell you. A dancing man shall be crying to the people to do and they shall do, but if to don't know, better to don't dance or would come confusion; better to see and to expect."

"All right, Peppino," I said. "I don't know enough about it; I will look on and wait, and when it is over I shall ask Brancaccia to dance a waltz with me."

Peppino paid no attention: he was off and busy superintending the preparations for the contraddanza.

Eight couples stood in the middle of the room, space being made for them by removing the chairs they left unoccupied, and by the remaining guests packing themselves more closely into the corners. The dancers stood in a circle, men and women alternately, and the circle sometimes p. 326 became a square, as in a quadrille, and sometimes two parallel rows, as in Sir Roger de Coverley. One of the men dancers, shouting in dialect, gave short staccato directions which the others carried out. This brightened up the party, and some of the women began to look less gloomy, but a week of contraddanze would not have brought the best of them up to the standard of Brancaccia. I approached her and said—

"Signorina, will you do me the favour of dancing with me?"

Another man was about to make a similar request and the girl might have been in a difficulty had not Peppino, who happened to be hovering near, made a gesture and taken the other man away. She rose and we danced a waltz. As we went round and round I saw Peppino talking with the other man and watching us, and then it flashed into my head that he had planned all this. He and Brancaccia were in love with one another, any one could tell that, and he wanted me to meet her so that he could talk to me about her afterwards. I said to Brancaccia—

p. 327
"What is Peppino saying to the gentleman?"

She, looking up and smiling, in an amused and friendly way, said—

"Oh! Peppino is always talking to people."

"Some of them seem to enjoy his conversation."

"Do you mean the gentleman?" she said, looking away.

"No, I do not," I replied, and she blushed delightfully.

As I led her back to her seat, I said, "If Peppino asks me about my partner, I shall tell him that I have just danced with the most beautiful and charming young lady in the world, and that her future husband, whoever he may be, will be an extremely fortunate man."

She replied, "Thank you very much, but I do not suppose Peppino will ask you anything about me."

"I shall tell him what I think of you whether he asks me or not," said I, bowing.

It was now nearly two o'clock and I got Peppino to take me away. Remembering what Brancaccia had said, I began at once—

p. 328
"What a wonderfully beautiful and charming girl Brancaccia is; she seems to me to be the most desirable young lady I have ever met." There was a pause, and I added, "You are a bachelor,

Peppino, Brancaccia is unmarried and she is quite different from all the other young ladies.”

“That,” he replied, “is what says my mother. But womans it is always like that. First she will be mother, not satisfied; then she will be grandmother, not satisfied.”

“Of course, if you are too much occupied there is an end of the matter. But, you know, you have as much time as any one else, twenty-four hours in the day, and some of the others find that enough. Would not Brancaccia be exactly the woman to help you to run the albergo and to look after your parents in their old age?”

He admitted that she had the reputation of being an admirable housekeeper and that he had never heard anything against her. So I went on and said all I could think of in favour of matrimony, to which he listened without attempting to interrupt. I finished by saying that if he did marry Brancaccia and it turned out unsuccessful he was not to blame me. He replied with great decision that I need not fear anything of the kind, for he had made up his mind never to marry any one, and certainly not Brancaccia.

p. 329

* * * * *

Soon after the wedding festa I returned to London. Peppino and I exchanged several postcards, but Brancaccia’s name was never mentioned in any of his. After a year I received a letter from him. [329]

“Castellinaria.

“Pregiatissimo e Indimenticabile Signore!

“Sono già più di dodeci mesi che non ho il piacere di vedere la sua grata persona sulla nostra spiaggia.

“Con vero piacere Le faccio sapere che mio caro padre gode buonissima salute e che desidera grandemente di rivederla.

“Tre mesi fa il mio cuore è stato distrutto, causa la salita al cielo della mia adorata mamma. Non posso trovare parole per esprimerle il mio cordoglio. Sarebbe stato meglio che il buon Dio avesse preso anche me, perchè non prenderò più alcun piacere nella vita.

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“Vi annuncio che Domenica prossima si celebrerà il mio matrimonio.

“Non posso mai dimenticare la sua squisita cortesia ed il gentile pensiero che nutre a mio riguardo. La prego credere che io sono ora, e per tutta la mia vita sarò, a Lei legato di affezione, divozione e rispetto.

“Pampalone Giuseppe.”

I replied in a letter of congratulation to the bride and bridegroom, wishing them every happiness, sending them a wedding present and promising to come and see them as soon as possible. In due course I received a box of sugar-plums and a letter signed by Peppino and Brancaccia asking me to be godfather to their first son when he should he born—an honour which, of course, I accepted. I trust that at the christening festa this book may not be thought unworthy to take the place of the more conventional silver mug.

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THE END

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Footnotes.

[151] ’Αναγωγια (Sc. ιερά) offerings made at departure, a feast of Aphrodite at Eryx. Καταγωγια the festival of the return opp. to αναγωγια.—Liddell and Scott’s Lexicon.

[154] Taken partly from oral tradition and partly from *Le Glorie di Maria SS. Immaculata*, *sotto il titolo di Custonaci*, by Maestro F. Giuseppe Castronuovo, and *Feste Patronali in Sicilia*, by Giuseppe Pitrè. Torino Palermo Carlo Clausen, 1900.

[329] Translation:

Castellinaria.

Most Precious and Unforgettable Sir!

It is now more than twelve months since I had the pleasure of seeing your grateful person upon our shore.

I have real pleasure in telling you that my dear father is in the enjoyment of good health and greatly desires to see you again.

Three months ago my heart was destroyed in consequence of the ascent into heaven of my adored mamma. I cannot find words to express to you my grief. It would have been better if the good God had taken me as well, for I shall have no more pleasure in life.

I announce to you that on Sunday next my wedding will be celebrated.

I can never forget your exquisite courtesy and the kind thoughts you nourish with regard to me. I beg you to believe that I am now, and for all my life shall be, bound to you by affection, devotion and respect.

PAMPALONE GIUSEPPE.

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