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THE THREE CITIES

ROME

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PART II

IV

ON the afternoon of that same day Pierre, having leisure before him, at once thought of beginning his peregrinations through Rome by a visit on which he had set his heart. Almost immediately after the publication of "New Rome" he had been deeply moved and interested by a letter addressed to him from the Eternal City by old Count Orlando Prada, the hero of Italian independence and reunion, who, although unacquainted with him, had written spontaneously after a first hasty perusal of his book. And the letter had been a flaming protest, a cry of the patriotic faith still young in the heart of that aged man, who accused him of having forgotten Italy and claimed Rome, the new Rome, for the country which was at last free and united. Correspondence had ensued, and the priest, while clinging to his dream of Neo-Catholicism saving the world, had from afar grown attached to the man who wrote to him

with such glowing love of country and freedom. He had eventually informed him of his journey, and promised to call upon him. But the hospitality which he had accepted at the Boccanera mansion now seemed to him somewhat of an impediment; for after Benedetta's kindly, almost affectionate, greeting, he felt that he could not, on the very first day and with out warning her, sally forth to visit the father of the man from whom she had fled and from whom she now asked the Church to part her for ever. Moreover, old Orlando was actually living with his son in a little palazzo which the latter had erected at the farther end of the Via Venti Settembre.

Before venturing on any step Pierre resolved to confide in the Contessina herself; and this seemed the easier as Viscount Philibert de la Choue had told him that the young woman still retained a filial feeling, mingled with admiration, for the old hero. And indeed, at the very first words which he uttered after lunch, Benedetta promptly retorted: "But go, Monsieur l'Abbe, go at once! Old Orlando, you know, is one of our national glories—you must not be surprised to hear me call him by his Christian name. All Italy does so, from pure affection and gratitude. For my part I grew up among people who hated him, who likened him to Satan. It was only later that I learned to know him, and then I loved him, for he is certainly the most just and gentle man in the world."

She had begun to smile, but timid tears were moistening her eyes at the recollection, no doubt, of the year of suffering she had spent in her husband's house, where her only peaceful hours had been those passed with the old man. And in a lower and somewhat tremulous voice she added: "As you are going to see him, tell him from me that I still love him, and, whatever happens, shall never forget his goodness."

So Pierre set out, and whilst he was driving in a cab towards the Via Venti Settembre, he recalled to mind the heroic story of old Orlando's life which had been told him in Paris. It was like an epic poem, full of faith, bravery, and the disinterestedness of another age.

Born of a noble house of Milan, Count Orlando Prada had learnt to hate the foreigner at such an early age that, when scarcely fifteen, he already formed part of a secret society, one of the ramifications of the antique Carbonarism. This hatred of Austrian domination had been transmitted from father to son through long years, from the olden days of revolt against servitude, when the conspirators met by stealth in abandoned huts, deep in the recesses of the forests; and it was rendered the keener by the eternal dream of Italy delivered, restored to herself, transformed once more into a great sovereign nation, the worthy daughter of those who had conquered and ruled the world. Ah! that land of whilom glory, that unhappy, dismembered, parcelled Italy, the prey of a crowd of petty tyrants, constantly invaded and appropriated by neighbouring nations—how superb and ardent was that dream to free her from such long opprobrium! To defeat the foreigner, drive out the despots, awaken the people from the base misery of slavery, to proclaim Italy free and Italy united—such was the passion which then inflamed the young with inextinguishable ardour, which made the youthful Orlando's heart leap with enthusiasm. He spent his early years consumed by holy indignation, proudly and impatiently longing for an opportunity to give his blood for his country, and to die for her if he could not deliver her.

Quivering under the yoke, wasting his time in sterile conspiracies, he was living in retirement in the old family residence at Milan, when, shortly after his marriage and his twenty-fifth birthday, tidings came to him of the flight of Pius IX and the Revolution of Rome.* And at once he quitted everything, wife and hearth, and hastened to Rome as if summoned thither by the call of destiny. This was the first time that he set out scouring the roads for the attainment of independence; and how frequently, yet again and again, was he to start upon fresh campaigns, never wearying, never disheartened! And now it was that he became acquainted with Mazzini, and for a moment was inflamed with enthusiasm for that mystical unitarian Republican. He himself indulged in an ardent dream of a Universal Republic, adopted the Mazzinian device, "/Dio e popolo/" (God and the people), and followed the procession which wended its way with great pomp through insurrectionary Rome. The time was one of vast hopes, one when people already felt a need of renovated religion, and looked to the coming of a humanitarian Christ who would redeem the world yet once again. But before long a man, a captain of the ancient days, Giuseppe Garibaldi, whose epic glory was dawning, made Orlando entirely his own, transformed him into a soldier whose sole cause was freedom and union. Orlando loved Garibaldi as though the latter were a demi-god, fought beside him in defence of Republican Rome, took part in the victory of Rieti over the Neapolitans, and followed the stubborn patriot in his retreat when he sought to succour Venice, compelled as he was to relinquish the Eternal City to the French army of General Oudinot, who came thither to reinstate Pius IX. And what an extraordinary and madly heroic adventure was that of Garibaldi and Venice! Venice, which Manin, another great patriot, a martyr, had again transformed into a republican city, and which for long months had been resisting the Austrians! And Garibaldi starts with a handful of men to deliver the city, charters thirteen fishing barks, loses eight in a naval engagement, is compelled to return to the Roman shores, and there in all wretchedness is bereft of his wife, Anita, whose eyes he closes before returning to America, where, once before, he had awaited the hour of insurrection. Ah! that land of Italy, which in those days rumbled from end to end with the internal fire of patriotism, where men of faith and courage arose in every city, where riots and

insurrections burst forth on all sides like eruptions—it continued, in spite of every check, its invincible march to freedom!

* It was on November 24, 1848, that the Pope fled to Gaeta, consequent upon the insurrection which had broken out nine days previously.—Trans.

Orlando returned to his young wife at Milan, and for two years lived there, almost in concealment, devoured by impatience for the glorious morrow which was so long in coming. Amidst his fever a gleam of happiness softened his heart; a son, Luigi, was born to him, but the birth killed the mother, and joy was turned into mourning. Then, unable to remain any longer at Milan, where he was spied upon, tracked by the police, suffering also too grievously from the foreign occupation, Orlando decided to realise the little fortune remaining to him, and to withdraw to Turin, where an aunt of his wife took charge of the child. Count di Cavour, like a great statesman, was then already seeking to bring about independence, preparing Piedmont for the decisive /role/ which it was destined to play. It was the time when King Victor Emmanuel evinced flattering cordiality towards all the refugees who came to him from every part of Italy, even those whom he knew to be Republicans, compromised and flying the consequences of popular insurrection. The rough, shrewd House of Savoy had long been dreaming of bringing about Italian unity to the profit of the Piedmontese monarchy, and Orlando well knew under what master he was taking service; but in him the Republican already went behind the patriot, and indeed he had begun to question the possibility of a united Republican Italy, placed under the protectorate of a liberal Pope, as Mazzini had at one time dreamed. Was that not indeed a chimera beyond realisation which would devour generation after generation if one obstinately continued to pursue it? For his part, he did not wish to die without having slept in Rome as one of the conquerors. Even if liberty was to be lost, he desired to see his country united and erect, returning once more to life in the full sunlight. And so it was with feverish happiness that he enlisted at the outset of the war of 1859; and his heart palpitated with such force as almost to rend his breast, when, after Magenta, he entered Milan with the French army—Milan which he had quitted eight years previously, like an exile, in despair. The treaty of Villafranca which followed Solferino proved a bitter deception: Venetia was not secured, Venice remained enthralled. Nevertheless the Milanese was conquered from the foe, and then Tuscany and the duchies of Parma and Modena voted for annexation. So, at all events, the nucleus of the Italian star was formed; the country had begun to build itself up afresh around victorious Piedmont.

Then, in the following year, Orlando plunged into epopoeia once more. Garibaldi had returned from his two sojourns in America, with the halo of a legend round him—paladin-like feats in the pampas of Uruguay, an extraordinary passage from Canton to Lima—and he had returned to take part in the war of 1859, forestalling the French army, overthrowing an Austrian marshal, and entering Como, Bergamo, and Brescia. And now, all at once, folks heard that he had landed at Marsala with only a thousand men—the Thousand of Marsala, the ever illustrious handful of braves! Orlando fought in the first rank, and Palermo after three days' resistance was carried. Becoming the dictator's favourite lieutenant, he helped him to organise a government, then crossed the straits with him, and was beside him on the triumphal entry into Naples, whose king had fled. There was mad audacity and valour at that time, an explosion of the inevitable; and all sorts of supernatural stories were current—Garibaldi invulnerable, protected better by his red shirt than by the strongest armour, Garibaldi routing opposing armies like an archangel, by merely brandishing his flaming sword! The Piedmontese on their side had defeated General Lamoriciere at Castelfidardo, and were invading the States of the Church. And Orlando was there when the dictator, abdicating power, signed the decree which annexed the Two Sicilies to the Crown of Italy; even as subsequently he took part in that forlorn attempt on Rome, when the rageful cry was "Rome or Death!"—an attempt which came to a tragic issue at Aspromonte, when the little army was dispersed by the Italian troops, and Garibaldi, wounded, was taken prisoner, and sent back to the solitude of his island of Caprera, where he became but a fisherman and a tiller of the rocky soil.*

* M. Zola's brief but glowing account of Garibaldi's glorious achievements has stirred many memories in my mind. My uncle, Frank Vizetelly, the war artist of the /Illustrated London News/, whose bones lie bleaching somewhere in the Soudan, was one of Garibaldi's constant companions throughout the memorable campaign of the Two Sicilies, and afterwards he went with him to Caprera. Later, in 1870, my brother, Edward Vizetelly, acted as orderly-officer to the general when he offered the help of his sword to France.—Trans.

Six years of waiting again went by, and Orlando still dwelt at Turin, even after Florence had been chosen as the new capital. The Senate had acclaimed Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy; and Italy was indeed almost built, it lacked only Rome and Venice. But the great battles seemed all over, the epic era was closed; Venice was to be won by defeat. Orlando took part in the unlucky battle of Custozza, where he received two wounds, full of furious grief at the thought that Austria should be triumphant. But at that same moment the latter, defeated at Sadowa, relinquished Venetia, and five months later Orlando satisfied his desire to be in Venice participating in the joy of triumph, when Victor Emmanuel made his

entry amidst the frantic acclamations of the people. Rome alone remained to be won, and wild impatience urged all Italy towards the city; but friendly France had sworn to maintain the Pope, and this acted as a check. Then, for the third time, Garibaldi dreamt of renewing the feats of the old-world legends, and threw himself upon Rome like a soldier of fortune illumined by patriotism and free from every tie. And for the third time Orlando shared in that fine heroic madness destined to be vanquished at Mentana by the Pontifical Zouaves supported by a small French corps. Again wounded, he came back to Turin in almost a dying condition. But, though his spirit quivered, he had to resign himself; the situation seemed to have no outlet; only an upheaval of the nations could give Rome to Italy.

All at once the thunderclap of Sedan, of the downfall of France, resounded through the world; and then the road to Rome lay open, and Orlando, having returned to service in the regular army, was with the troops who took up position in the Campagna to ensure the safety of the Holy See, as was said in the letter which Victor Emmanuel wrote to Pius IX. There was, however, but the shadow of an engagement: General Kanzler's Pontifical Zouaves were compelled to fall back, and Orlando was one of the first to enter the city by the breach of the Porta Pia. Ah! that twentieth of September—that day when he experienced the greatest happiness of his life—a day of delirium, of complete triumph, which realised the dream of so many years of terrible contest, the dream for which he had sacrificed rest and fortune, and given both body and mind!

Then came more than ten happy years in conquered Rome—in Rome adored, flattered, treated with all tenderness, like a woman in whom one has placed one's entire hope. From her he awaited so much national vigour, such a marvellous resurrection of strength and glory for the endowment of the young nation. Old Republican, old insurrectional soldier that he was, he had been obliged to adhere to the monarchy, and accept a senatorship. But then did not Garibaldi himself—Garibaldi his divinity—likewise call upon the King and sit in parliament? Mazzini alone, rejecting all compromises, was unwilling to rest content with a united and independent Italy that was not Republican. Moreover, another consideration influenced Orlando, the future of his son Luigi, who had attained his eighteenth birthday shortly after the occupation of Rome. Though he, Orlando, could manage with the crumbs which remained of the fortune he had expended in his country's service, he dreamt of a splendid destiny for the child of his heart. Realising that the heroic age was over, he desired to make a great politician of him, a great administrator, a man who should be useful to the mighty nation of the morrow; and it was on this account that he had not rejected royal favour, the reward of long devotion, desiring, as he did, to be in a position to help, watch, and guide Luigi. Besides, was he himself so old, so used-up, as to be unable to assist in organisation, even as he had assisted in conquest? Struck by his son's quick intelligence in business matters, perhaps also instinctively divining that the battle would now continue on financial and economic grounds, he obtained him employment at the Ministry of Finances. And again he himself lived on, dreaming, still enthusiastically believing in a splendid future, overflowing with boundless hope, seeing Rome double her population, grow and spread with a wild vegetation of new districts, and once more, in his loving enraptured eyes, become the queen of the world.

But all at once came a thunderbolt. One morning, as he was going downstairs, Orlando was stricken with paralysis. Both his legs suddenly became lifeless, as heavy as lead. It was necessary to carry him up again, and never since had he set foot on the street pavement. At that time he had just completed his fifty-sixth year, and for fourteen years since he had remained in his arm-chair, as motionless as stone, he who had so impetuously trod every battlefield of Italy. It was a pitiful business, the collapse of a hero. And worst of all, from that room where he was for ever imprisoned, the old soldier beheld the slow crumbling of all his hopes, and fell into dismal melancholy, full of unacknowledged fear for the future. Now that the intoxication of action no longer dimmed his eyes, now that he spent his long and empty days in thought, his vision became clear. Italy, which he had desired to see so powerful, so triumphant in her unity, was acting madly, rushing to ruin, possibly to bankruptcy. Rome, which to him had ever been the one necessary capital, the city of unparalleled glory, requisite for the sovereign people of to-morrow, seemed unwilling to take upon herself the part of a great modern metropolis; heavy as a corpse she weighed with all her centuries on the bosom of the young nation. Moreover, his son Luigi distressed him. Rebellious to all guidance, the young man had become one of the devouring offsprings of conquest, eager to despoil that Italy, that Rome, which his father seemed to have desired solely in order that he might pillage them and batten on them. Orlando had vainly opposed Luigi's departure from the ministry, his participation in the frantic speculations on land and house property to which the mad building of the new districts had given rise. But at the same time he loved his son, and was reduced to silence, especially now when everything had succeeded with Luigi, even his most risky financial ventures, such as the transformation of the Villa Montefiori into a perfect town—a colossal enterprise in which many of great wealth had been ruined, but whence he himself had emerged with millions. And it was in part for this reason that Orlando, sad and silent, had obstinately restricted himself to one small room on the third floor of the little palazzo erected by Luigi in the Via Venti Settembre—a room where he lived cloistered with a single servant, subsisting on his own scanty

income, and accepting nothing but that modest hospitality from his son.

As Pierre reached that new Via Venti Settembre* which climbs the side and summit of the Viminal hill, he was struck by the heavy sumptuousness of the new "palaces," which betokened among the moderns the same taste for the huge that marked the ancient Romans. In the warm afternoon glow, blent of purple and old gold, the broad, triumphant thoroughfare, with its endless rows of white house-fronts, bore witness to new Rome's proud hope of futurity and sovereign power. And Pierre fairly gasped when he beheld the Palazzo delle Finanze, or Treasury, a gigantic erection, a cyclopean cube with a profusion of columns, balconies, pediments, and sculptured work, to which the building mania had given birth in a day of immoderate pride. And on the other side of the street, a little higher up, before reaching the Villa Bonaparte, stood Count Prada's little palazzo.

* The name—Twentieth September Street—was given to the thoroughfare to commemorate the date of the occupation of Rome by Victor Emmanuel's army.—Trans.

After discharging his driver, Pierre for a moment remained somewhat embarrassed. The door was open, and he entered the vestibule; but, as at the mansion in the Via Giulia, no door porter or servant was to be seen. So he had to make up his mind to ascend the monumental stairs, which with their marble balustrades seemed to be copied, on a smaller scale, from those of the Palazzo Boccanera. And there was much the same cold bareness, tempered, however, by a carpet and red door-hangings, which contrasted vividly with the white stucco of the walls. The reception-rooms, sixteen feet high, were on the first floor, and as a door chanced to be ajar he caught a glimpse of two /salons/, one following the other, and both displaying quite modern richness, with a profusion of silk and velvet hangings, gilt furniture, and lofty mirrors reflecting a pompous assemblage of stands and tables. And still there was nobody, not a soul, in that seemingly forsaken abode, which exhaled nought of woman's presence. Indeed Pierre was on the point of going down again to ring, when a footman at last presented himself.

"Count Prada, if you please."

The servant silently surveyed the little priest, and seemed to understand. "The father or the son?" he asked.

"The father, Count Orlando Prada."

"Oh! that's on the third floor." And he condescended to add: "The little door on the right-hand side of the landing. Knock loudly if you wish to be admitted."

Pierre indeed had to knock twice, and then a little withered old man of military appearance, a former soldier who had remained in the Count's service, opened the door and apologised for the delay by saying that he had been attending to his master's legs. Immediately afterwards he announced the visitor, and the latter, after passing through a dim and narrow ante-room, was lost in amazement on finding himself in a relatively small chamber, extremely bare and bright, with wall-paper of a light hue studded with tiny blue flowers. Behind a screen was an iron bedstead, the soldier's pallet, and there was no other furniture than the arm-chair in which the cripple spent his days, with a table of black wood placed near him, and covered with books and papers, and two old straw-seated chairs which served for the accommodation of the infrequent visitors. A few planks, fixed to one of the walls, did duty as book-shelves. However, the broad, clear, curtainless window overlooked the most admirable panorama of Rome that could be desired.

Then the room disappeared from before Pierre's eyes, and with a sudden shock of deep emotion he only beheld old Orlando, the old blanched lion, still superb, broad, and tall. A forest of white hair crowned his powerful head, with its thick mouth, fleshy broken nose, and large, sparkling, black eyes. A long white beard streamed down with the vigour of youth, curling like that of an ancient god. By that leonine muzzle one divined what great passions had growled within; but all, carnal and intellectual alike, had erupted in patriotism, in wild bravery, and riotous love of independence. And the old stricken hero, his torso still erect, was fixed there on his straw-seated arm-chair, with lifeless legs buried beneath a black wrapper. Alone did his arms and hands live, and his face beam with strength and intelligence.

Orlando turned towards his servant, and gently said to him: "You can go away, Batista. Come back in a couple of hours." Then, looking Pierre full in the face, he exclaimed in a voice which was still sonorous despite his seventy years: "So it's you at last, my dear Monsieur Froment, and we shall be able to chat at our ease. There, take that chair, and sit down in front of me."

He had noticed the glance of surprise which the young priest had cast upon the bareness of the room, and he gaily added: "You will excuse me for receiving you in my cell. Yes, I live here like a monk, like an old invalided soldier, henceforth withdrawn from active life. My son long begged me to take one of the

fine rooms downstairs. But what would have been the use of it? I have no needs, and I scarcely care for feather beds, for my old bones are accustomed to the hard ground. And then too I have such a fine view up here, all Rome presenting herself to me, now that I can no longer go to her."

With a wave of the hand towards the window he sought to hide the embarrassment, the slight flush which came to him each time that he thus excused his son; unwilling as he was to tell the true reason, the scruple of probity which had made him obstinately cling to his bare pauper's lodging.

"But it is very nice, the view is superb!" declared Pierre, in order to please him. "I am for my own part very glad to see you, very glad to be able to grasp your valiant hands, which accomplished so many great things."

Orlando made a fresh gesture, as though to sweep the past away. "Pooh! pooh! all that is dead and buried. Let us talk about you, my dear Monsieur Froment, you who are young and represent the present; and especially about your book, which represents the future! Ah! if you only knew how angry your book, your 'New Rome,' made me first of all."

He began to laugh, and took the book from off the table near him; then, tapping on its cover with his big, broad hand, he continued: "No, you cannot imagine with what starts of protest I read your book. The Pope, and again the Pope, and always the Pope! New Rome to be created by the Pope and for the Pope, to triumph thanks to the Pope, to be given to the Pope, and to fuse its glory in the glory of the Pope! But what about us? What about Italy? What about all the millions which we have spent in order to make Rome a great capital? Ah! only a Frenchman, and a Frenchman of Paris, could have written such a book! But let me tell you, my dear sir, if you are ignorant of it, that Rome has become the capital of the kingdom of Italy, that we here have King Humbert, and the Italian people, a whole nation which must be taken into account, and which means to keep Rome—glorious, resuscitated Rome—for itself!"

This juvenile ardour made Pierre laugh in turn. "Yes, yes," said he, "you wrote me that. Only what does it matter from my point of view? Italy is but one nation, a part of humanity, and I desire concord and fraternity among all the nations, mankind reconciled, believing, and happy. Of what consequence, then, is any particular form of government, monarchy or republic, of what consequence is any question of a united and independent country, if all mankind forms but one free people subsisting on truth and justice?"

To only one word of this enthusiastic outburst did Orlando pay attention. In a lower tone, and with a dreamy air, he resumed: "Ah! a republic. In my youth I ardently desired one. I fought for one; I conspired with Mazzini, a saintly man, a believer, who was shattered by collision with the absolute. And then, too, one had to bow to practical necessities; the most obstinate ended by submitting. And nowadays would a republic save us? In any case it would differ but little from our parliamentary monarchy. Just think of what goes on in France! And so why risk a revolution which would place power in the hands of the extreme revolutionists, the anarchists? We fear all that, and this explains our resignation. I know very well that a few think they can detect salvation in a republican federation, a reconstitution of all the former little states in so many republics, over which Rome would preside. The Vatican would gain largely by any such transformation; still one cannot say that it endeavours to bring it about; it simply regards the eventuality without disfavour. But it is a dream, a dream!"

At this Orlando's gaiety came back to him, with even a little gentle irony: "You don't know, I suppose, what it was that took my fancy in your book—for, in spite of all my protests, I have read it twice. Well, what pleased me was that Mazzini himself might almost have written it at one time. Yes! I found all my youth again in your pages, all the wild hope of my twenty-fifth year, the new religion of a humanitarian Christ, the pacification of the world effected by the Gospel! Are you aware that, long before your time, Mazzini desired the renovation of Christianity? He set dogma and discipline on one side and only retained morals. And it was new Rome, the Rome of the people, which he would have given as see to the universal Church, in which all the churches of the past were to be fused—Rome, the eternal and predestined city, the mother and queen, whose domination was to arise anew to ensure the definitive happiness of mankind! Is it not curious that all the present-day Neo-Catholicism, the vague, spiritualistic awakening, the evolution towards communion and Christian charity, with which some are making so much stir, should be simply a return of the mystical and humanitarian ideas of 1848? Alas! I saw all that, I believed and burned, and I know in what a fine mess those flights into the azure of mystery landed us! So it cannot be helped, I lack confidence."

Then, as Pierre on his side was growing impassioned and sought to reply, he stopped him: "No, let me finish. I only want to convince you how absolutely necessary it was that we should take Rome and make her the capital of Italy. Without Rome new Italy could not have existed; Rome represented the glory of ancient time; in her dust lay the sovereign power which we wished to re-establish; she brought strength, beauty, eternity to those who possessed her. Standing in the middle of our country, she was its heart, and must assuredly become its life as soon as she should be awakened from the long sleep of

ruin. Ah! how we desired her, amidst victory and amidst defeat, through years and years of frightful impatience! For my part I loved her, and longed for her, far more than for any woman, with my blood burning, and in despair that I should be growing old. And when we possessed her, our folly was a desire to behold her huge, magnificent, and commanding all at once, the equal of the other great capitals of Europe—Berlin, Paris, and London. Look at her! she is still my only love, my only consolation now that I am virtually dead, with nothing alive in me but my eyes."

With the same gesture as before, he directed Pierre's attention to the window. Under the glowing sky Rome stretched out in its immensity, empurpled and gilded by the slanting sunrays. Across the horizon, far, far away, the trees of the Janiculum stretched a green girdle, of a limpid emerald hue, whilst the dome of St. Peter's, more to the left, showed palely blue, like a sapphire bedimmed by too bright a light. Then came the low town, the old ruddy city, baked as it were by centuries of burning summers, soft to the eye and beautiful with the deep life of the past, an unbounded chaos of roofs, gables, towers, /campanili/, and cupolas. But, in the foreground under the window, there was the new city—that which had been building for the last five and twenty years—huge blocks of masonry piled up side by side, still white with plaster, neither the sun nor history having as yet robed them in purple. And in particular the roofs of the colossal Palazzo delle Finanze had a disastrous effect, spreading out like far, bare steppes of cruel hideousness. And it was upon the desolation and abomination of all the newly erected piles that the eyes of the old soldier of conquest at last rested.

Silence ensued. Pierre felt the faint chill of hidden, unacknowledged sadness pass by, and courteously waited.

"I must beg your pardon for having interrupted you just now," resumed Orlando; "but it seems to me that we cannot talk about your book to any good purpose until you have seen and studied Rome closely. You only arrived yesterday, did you not? Well, stroll about the city, look at things, question people, and I think that many of your ideas will change. I shall particularly like to know your impression of the Vatican since you have cone here solely to see the Pope and defend your book against the Index. Why should we discuss things to-day, if facts themselves are calculated to bring you to other views, far more readily than the finest speeches which I might make? It is understood, you will come to see me again, and we shall then know what we are talking about, and, maybe, agree together."

"Why certainly, you are too kind," replied Pierre. "I only came to-day to express my gratitude to you for having read my book so attentively, and to pay homage to one of the glories of Italy."

Orlando was not listening, but remained for a moment absorbed in thought, with his eyes still resting upon Rome. And overcome, despite himself, by secret disquietude, he resumed in a low voice as though making an involuntary confession: "We have gone too fast, no doubt. There were expenses of undeniable utility—the roads, ports, and railways. And it was necessary to arm the country also; I did not at first disapprove of the heavy military burden. But since then how crushing has been the war budget—a war which has never come, and the long wait for which has ruined us. Ah! I have always been the friend of France. I only reproach her with one thing, that she has failed to understand the position in which we were placed, the vital reasons which compelled us to ally ourselves with Germany. And then there are the thousand millions of /lire/* swallowed up in Rome! That was the real madness; pride and enthusiasm led us astray. Old and solitary as I've been for many years now, given to deep reflection, I was one of the first to divine the pitfall, the frightful financial crisis, the deficit which would bring about the collapse of the nation. I shouted it from the housetops, to my son, to all who came near me; but what was the use? They didn't listen; they were mad, still buying and selling and building, with no thought but for gambling booms and bubbles. But you'll see, you'll see. And the worst is that we are not situated as you are; we haven't a reserve of men and money in a dense peasant population, whose thrifty savings are always at hand to fill up the gaps caused by big catastrophes. There is no social rise among our people as yet; fresh men don't spring up out of the lower classes to reinvigorate the national blood, as they constantly do in your country. And, besides, the people are poor; they have no stockings to empty. The misery is frightful, I must admit it. Those who have any money prefer to spend it in the towns in a petty way rather than to risk it in agricultural or manufacturing enterprise. Factories are but slowly built, and the land is almost everywhere tilled in the same primitive manner as it was two thousand years ago. And then, too, take Rome—Rome, which didn't make Italy, but which Italy made its capital to satisfy an ardent, overpowering desire—Rome, which is still but a splendid bit of scenery, picturing the glory of the centuries, and which, apart from its historical splendour, has only given us its degenerate papal population, swollen with ignorance and pride! Ah! I loved Rome too well, and I still love it too well to regret being now within its walls. But, good heavens! what insanity its acquisition brought us, what piles of money it has cost us, and how heavily and triumphantly it weighs us down! Look! look!"

* 40,000,000 pounds.

He waved his hand as he spoke towards the livid roofs of the Palazzo delle Finanze, that vast and desolate steppe, as though he could see the harvest of glory all stripped off and bankruptcy appear with its fearful, threatening bareness. Restrained tears were dimming his eyes, and he looked superbly pitiful with his expression of baffled hope and grievous disquietude, with his huge white head, the muzzle of an old blanched lion henceforth powerless and caged in that bare, bright room, whose poverty-stricken aspect was instinct with so much pride that it seemed, as it were, a protest against the monumental splendour of the whole surrounding district! So those were the purposes to which the conquest had been put! And to think that he was impotent, henceforth unable to give his blood and his soul as he had done in the days gone by.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed in a final outburst; "one gave everything, heart and brain, one's whole life indeed, so long as it was a question of making the country one and independent. But, now that the country is ours, just try to stir up enthusiasm for the reorganisation of its finances! There's no ideality in that! And this explains why, whilst the old ones are dying off, not a new man comes to the front among the young ones—"

All at once he stopped, looking somewhat embarrassed, yet smiling at his feverishness. "Excuse me," he said, "I'm off again, I'm incorrigible. But it's understood, we'll leave that subject alone, and you'll come back here, and we'll chat together when you've seen everything."

From that moment he showed himself extremely pleasant, and it was apparent to Pierre that he regretted having said so much, by the seductive affability and growing affection which he now displayed. He begged the young priest to prolong his sojourn, to abstain from all hasty judgments on Rome, and to rest convinced that, at bottom, Italy still loved France. And he was also very desirous that France should love Italy, and displayed genuine anxiety at the thought that perhaps she loved her no more. As at the Boccanera mansion, on the previous evening, Pierre realised that an attempt was being made to persuade him to admiration and affection. Like a susceptible woman with secret misgivings respecting the attractive power of her beauty, Italy was all anxiety with regard to the opinion of her visitors, and strove to win and retain their love.

However, Orlando again became impassioned when he learnt that Pierre was staying at the Boccanera mansion, and he made a gesture of extreme annoyance on hearing, at that very moment, a knock at the outer door. "Come in!" he called; but at the same time he detained Pierre, saying, "No, no, don't go yet; I wish to know—"

But a lady came in—a woman of over forty, short and extremely plump, and still attractive with her small features and pretty smile swamped in fat. She was a blonde, with green, limpid eyes; and, fairly well dressed in a sober, nicely fitting mignonette gown, she looked at once pleasant, modest, and shrewd.

"Ah! it's you, Stefana," said the old man, letting her kiss him.

"Yes, uncle, I was passing by and came up to see how you were getting on."

The visitor was the Signora Sacco, niece of Prada and a Neapolitan by birth, her mother having quitted Milan to marry a certain Pagani, a Neapolitan banker, who had afterwards failed. Subsequent to that disaster Stefana had married Sacco, then merely a petty post-office clerk. He, later on, wishing to revive his father-in-law's business, had launched into all sorts of terrible, complicated, suspicious affairs, which by unforeseen luck had ended in his election as a deputy. Since he had arrived in Rome, to conquer the city in his turn, his wife had been compelled to assist his devouring ambition by dressing well and opening a /salon/; and, although she was still a little awkward, she rendered him many real services, being very economical and prudent, a thorough good housewife, with all the sterling, substantial qualities of Northern Italy which she had inherited from her mother, and which showed conspicuously beside the turbulence and carelessness of her husband, in whom flared Southern Italy with its perpetual, rageful appetite.

Despite his contempt for Sacco, old Orlando had retained some affection for his niece, in whose veins flowed blood similar to his own. He thanked her for her kind inquiries, and then at once spoke of an announcement which he had read in the morning papers, for he suspected that the deputy had sent his wife to ascertain his opinion.

"Well, and that ministry?" he asked.

The Signora had seated herself and made no haste to reply, but glanced at the newspapers strewn over the table. "Oh! nothing is settled yet," she at last responded; "the newspapers spoke out too soon. The Prime Minister sent for Sacco, and they had a talk together. But Sacco hesitates a good deal; he fears that he has no aptitude for the Department of Agriculture. Ah! if it were only the Finances—

However, in any case, he would not have come to a decision without consulting you. What do you think of it, uncle?"

He interrupted her with a violent wave of the hand: "No, no, I won't mix myself up in such matters!"

To him the rapid success of that adventurer Sacco, that schemer and gambler who had always fished in troubled waters, was an abomination, the beginning of the end. His son Luigi certainly distressed him; but it was even worse to think that—whilst Luigi, with his great intelligence and many remaining fine qualities, was nothing at all—Sacco, on the other hand, Sacco, blunderhead and ever-famished battener that he was, had not merely slipped into parliament, but was now, it seemed, on the point of securing office! A little, swarthy, dry man he was, with big, round eyes, projecting cheekbones, and prominent chin. Ever dancing and chattering, he was gifted with a showy eloquence, all the force of which lay in his voice—a voice which at will became admirably powerful or gentle! And withal an insinuating man, profiting by every opportunity, wheedling and commanding by turn.

"You hear, Stefana," said Orlando; "tell your husband that the only advice I have to give him is to return to his clerkship at the post-office, where perhaps he may be of use."

What particularly filled the old soldier with indignation and despair was that such a man, a Sacco, should have fallen like a bandit on Rome—on that Rome whose conquest had cost so many noble efforts. And in his turn Sacco was conquering the city, was carrying it off from those who had won it by such hard toil, and was simply using it to satisfy his wild passion for power and its attendant enjoyments. Beneath his wheedling air there was the determination to devour everything. After the victory, while the spoil lay there, still warm, the wolves had come. It was the North that had made Italy, whereas the South, eager for the quarry, simply rushed upon the country, preyed upon it. And beneath the anger of the old stricken hero of Italian unity there was indeed all the growing antagonism of the North towards the South—the North industrious, economical, shrewd in politics, enlightened, full of all the great modern ideas, and the South ignorant and idle, bent on enjoying life immediately, amidst childish disorder in action, and an empty show of fine sonorous words.

Stefana had begun to smile in a placid way while glancing at Pierre, who had approached the window. "Oh, you say that, uncle," she responded; "but you love us well all the same, and more than once you have given me myself some good advice, for which I'm very thankful to you. For instance, there's that affair of Attilio's—"

She was alluding to her son, the lieutenant, and his love affair with Celia, the little Princess Buongiovanni, of which all the drawing-rooms, white and black alike, were talking.

"Attilio—that's another matter!" exclaimed Orlando. "He and you are both of the same blood as myself, and it's wonderful how I see myself again in that fine fellow. Yes, he is just the same as I was at his age, good-looking and brave and enthusiastic! I'm paying myself compliments, you see. But, really now, Attilio warms my heart, for he is the future, and brings me back some hope. Well, and what about his affair?"

"Oh! it gives us a lot of worry, uncle. I spoke to you about it before, but you shrugged your shoulders, saying that in matters of that kind all that the parents had to do was to let the lovers settle their affairs between them. Still, we don't want everybody to repeat that we are urging our son to get the little princess to elope with him, so that he may afterwards marry her money and title."

At this Orlando indulged in a frank outburst of gaiety: "That's a fine scruple! Was it your husband who instructed you to tell me of it? I know, however, that he affects some delicacy in this matter. For my own part, I believe myself to be as honest as he is, and I can only repeat that, if I had a son like yours, so straightforward and good, and candidly loving, I should let him marry whomsoever he pleased in his own way. The Buongiovannis—good heavens! the Buongiovannis—why, despite all their rank and lineage and the money they still possess, it will be a great honour for them to have a handsome young man with a noble heart as their son-in-law!"

Again did Stefana assume an expression of placid satisfaction. She had certainly only come there for approval. "Very well, uncle," she replied, "I'll repeat that to my husband, and he will pay great attention to it; for if you are severe towards him he holds you in perfect veneration. And as for that ministry—well, perhaps nothing will be done, Sacco will decide according to circumstances."

She rose and took her leave, kissing the old soldier very affectionately as on her arrival. And she complimented him on his good looks, declaring that she found him as handsome as ever, and making him smile by speaking of a lady who was still madly in love with him. Then, after acknowledging the young priest's silent salutation by a slight bow, she went off, once more wearing her modest and sensible air.

For a moment Orlando, with his eyes turned towards the door, remained silent, again sad, reflecting no doubt on all the difficult, equivocal present, so different from the glorious past. But all at once he turned to Pierre, who was still waiting. "And so, my friend," said he, "you are staying at the Palazzo Boccanera? Ah! what a grievous misfortune there has been on that side too!"

However, when the priest had told him of his conversation with Benedetta, and of her message that she still loved him and would never forget his goodness to her, no matter whatever happened, he appeared moved and his voice trembled: "Yes, she has a good heart, she has no spite. But what would you have? She did not love Luigi, and he was possibly violent. There is no mystery about the matter now, and I can speak to you freely, since to my great grief everybody knows what has happened."

Then Orlando abandoned himself to his recollections, and related how keen had been his delight on the eve of the marriage at the thought that so lovely a creature would become his daughter, and set some youth and charm around his invalid's arm-chair. He had always worshipped beauty, and would have had no other love than woman, if his country had not seized upon the best part of him. And Benedetta on her side loved him, revered him, constantly coming up to spend long hours with him, sharing his poor little room, which at those times became resplendent with all the divine grace that she brought with her. With her fresh breath near him, the pure scent she diffused, the caressing womanly tenderness with which she surrounded him, he lived anew. But, immediately afterwards, what a frightful drama and how his heart had bled at his inability to reconcile the husband and the wife! He could not possibly say that his son was in the wrong in desiring to be the loved and accepted spouse. At first indeed he had hoped to soften Benedetta, and throw her into Luigi's arms. But when she had confessed herself to him in tears, owning her old love for Dario, and her horror of belonging to another, he realised that she would never yield. And a whole year had then gone by; he had lived for a whole year imprisoned in his arm-chair, with that poignant drama progressing beneath him in those luxurious rooms whence no sound even reached his ears. How many times had he not listened, striving to hear, fearing atrocious quarrels, in despair at his inability to prove still useful by creating happiness. He knew nothing by his son, who kept his own counsel; he only learnt a few particulars from Benedetta at intervals when emotion left her defenceless; and that marriage in which he had for a moment espied the much-needed alliance between old and new Rome, that unconsummated marriage filled him with despair, as if it were indeed the defeat of every hope, the final collapse of the dream which had filled his life. And he himself had ended by desiring the divorce, so unbearable had become the suffering caused by such a situation.

"Ah! my friend!" he said to Pierre; "never before did I so well understand the fatality of certain antagonism, the possibility of working one's own misfortune and that of others, even when one has the most loving heart and upright mind!"

But at that moment the door again opened, and this time, without knocking, Count Luigi Prada came in. And after rapidly bowing to the visitor, who had risen, he gently took hold of his father's hands and felt them, as if fearing that they might be too warm or too cold.

"I've just arrived from Frascati, where I had to sleep," said he; "for the interruption of all that building gives me a lot of worry. And I'm told that you spent a bad night!"

"No, I assure you."

"Oh! I knew you wouldn't own it. But why will you persist in living up here without any comfort? All this isn't suited to your age. I should be so pleased if you would accept a more comfortable room where you might sleep better."

"No, no—I know that you love me well, my dear Luigi. But let me do as my old head tells me. That's the only way to make me happy."

Pierre was much struck by the ardent affection which sparkled in the eyes of the two men as they gazed at one another, face to face. This seemed to him very touching and beautiful, knowing as he did how many contrary ideas and actions, how many moral divergencies separated them. And he next took an interest in comparing them physically. Count Luigi Prada, shorter, more thick-set than his father, had, however, much the same strong energetic head, crowned with coarse black hair, and the same frank but somewhat stern eyes set in a face of clear complexion, barred by thick moustaches. But his mouth differed—a sensual, voracious mouth it was, with wolfish teeth—a mouth of prey made for nights of rapine, when the only question is to bite, and tear, and devour others. And for this reason, when some praised the frankness in his eyes, another would retort: "Yes, but I don't like his mouth." His feet were large, his hands plump and over-broad, but admirably cared for.

And Pierre marvelled at finding him such as he had anticipated. He knew enough of his story to picture in him a hero's son spoilt by conquest, eagerly devouring the harvest garnered by his father's

glorious sword. And he particularly studied how the father's virtues had deflected and become transformed into vices in the son—the most noble qualities being perverted, heroic and disinterested energy lapsing into a ferocious appetite for possession, the man of battle leading to the man of booty, since the great gusts of enthusiasm no longer swept by, since men no longer fought, since they remained there resting, pillaging, and devouring amidst the heaped-up spoils. And the pity of it was that the old hero, the paralytic, motionless father beheld it all—beheld the degeneration of his son, the speculator and company promoter gorged with millions!

However, Orlando introduced Pierre. "This is Monsieur l'Abbe Pierre Froment, whom I spoke to you about," he said, "the author of the book which I gave you to read."

Luigi Prada showed himself very amiable, at once talking of home with an intelligent passion like one who wished to make the city a great modern capital. He had seen Paris transformed by the Second Empire; he had seen Berlin enlarged and embellished after the German victories; and, according to him, if Rome did not follow the movement, if it did not become the inhabitable capital of a great people, it was threatened with prompt death: either a crumbling museum or a renovated, resuscitated city—those were the alternatives.*

* Personally I should have thought the example of Berlin a great deterrent. The enlargement and embellishment of the Prussian capital, after the war of 1870, was attended by far greater roguery and wholesale swindling than even the previous transformation of Paris. Thousands of people too were ruined, and instead of an increase of prosperity the result was the very reverse.—Trans.

Greatly struck, almost gained over already, Pierre listened to this clever man, charmed with his firm, clear mind. He knew how skilfully Prada had manoeuvred in the affair of the Villa Montefiori, enriching himself when every one else was ruined, having doubtless foreseen the fatal catastrophe even while the gambling passion was maddening the entire nation. However, the young priest could already detect marks of weariness, precocious wrinkles and a fall of the lips, on that determined, energetic face, as though its possessor were growing tired of the continual struggle that he had to carry on amidst surrounding downfalls, the shock of which threatened to bring the most firmly established fortunes to the ground. It was said that Prada had recently had grave cause for anxiety; and indeed there was no longer any solidity to be found; everything might be swept away by the financial crisis which day by day was becoming more and more serious. In the case of Luigi, sturdy son though he was of Northern Italy, a sort of degeneration had set in, a slow rot, caused by the softening, perversive influence of Rome. He had there rushed upon the satisfaction of every appetite, and prolonged enjoyment was exhausting him. This, indeed, was one of the causes of the deep silent sadness of Orlando, who was compelled to witness the swift deterioration of his conquering race, whilst Sacco, the Italian of the South—served as it were by the climate, accustomed to the voluptuous atmosphere, the life of those sun-baked cities compounded of the dust of antiquity—bloomed there like the natural vegetation of a soil saturated with the crimes of history, and gradually grasped everything, both wealth and power.

As Orlando spoke of Stefana's visit to his son, Sacco's name was mentioned. Then, without another word, the two men exchanged a smile. A rumour was current that the Minister of Agriculture, lately deceased, would perhaps not be replaced immediately, and that another minister would take charge of the department pending the next session of the Chamber.

Next the Palazzo Boccanera was mentioned, and Pierre, his interest awakened, became more attentive. "Ah!" exclaimed Count Luigi, turning to him, "so you are staying in the Via Giulia? All the Rome of olden time sleeps there in the silence of forgetfulness."

With perfect ease he went on to speak of the Cardinal and even of Benedetta—"the Countess," as he called her. But, although he was careful to let no sign of anger escape him, the young priest could divine that he was secretly quivering, full of suffering and spite. In him the enthusiastic energy of his father appeared in a baser, degenerate form. Quitting the yet handsome Princess Flavia in his passion for Benedetta, her divinely beautiful niece, he had resolved to make the latter his own at any cost, determined to marry her, to struggle with her and overcome her, although he knew that she loved him not, and that he would almost certainly wreck his entire life. Rather than relinquish her, however, he would have set Rome on fire. And thus his hopeless suffering was now great indeed: this woman was but his wife in name, and so torturing was the thought of her disdain, that at times, however calm his outward demeanour, he was consumed by a jealous vindictive sensual madness that did not even recoil from the idea of crime.

"Monsieur l'Abbe is acquainted with the situation," sadly murmured old Orlando.

His son responded by a wave of the hand, as though to say that everybody was acquainted with it. "Ah! father," he added, "but for you I should never have consented to take part in those proceedings for

annulling the marriage! The Countess would have found herself compelled to return here, and would not nowadays be deriding us with her lover, that cousin of hers, Dario!"

At this Orlando also waved his hand, as if in protest.

"Oh! it's a fact, father," continued Luigi. "Why did she flee from here if it wasn't to go and live with her lover? And indeed, in my opinion, it's scandalous that a Cardinal's palace should shelter such goings-on!"

This was the report which he spread abroad, the accusation which he everywhere levelled against his wife, of publicly carrying on a shameless /liaison/. In reality, however, he did not believe a word of it, being too well acquainted with Benedetta's firm rectitude, and her determination to belong to none but the man she loved, and to him only in marriage. However, in Prada's eyes such accusations were not only fair play but also very efficacious.

And now, although he turned pale with covert exasperation, and laughed a hard, vindictive, cruel laugh, he went on to speak in a bantering tone of the proceedings for annulling the marriage, and in particular of the plea put forward by Benedetta's advocate Morano. And at last his language became so free that Orlando, with a glance towards the priest, gently interposed: "Luigi! Luigi!"

"Yes, you are right, father, I'll say no more," thereupon added the young Count. "But it's really abominable and ridiculous. Lisbeth, you know, is highly amused at it."

Orlando again looked displeased, for when visitors were present he did not like his son to refer to the person whom he had just named. Lisbeth Kauffmann, very blonde and pink and merry, was barely thirty years of age, and belonged to the Roman foreign colony. For two years past she had been a widow, her husband having died at Rome whither he had come to nurse a complaint of the lungs. Thenceforward free, and sufficiently well off, she had remained in the city by taste, having a marked predilection for art, and painting a little, herself. In the Via Principe Amadeo, in the new Viminal district, she had purchased a little palazzo, and transformed a large apartment on its second floor into a studio hung with old stuffs, and balmy in every season with the scent of flowers. The place was well known to tolerant and intellectual society. Lisbeth was there found in perpetual jubilation, clad in a long blouse, somewhat of a /gamine/ in her ways, trenchant too and often bold of speech, but nevertheless capital company, and as yet compromised with nobody but Prada. Their /liaison/ had begun some four months after his wife had left him, and now Lisbeth was near the time of becoming a mother. This she in no wise concealed, but displayed such candid tranquillity and happiness that her numerous acquaintances continued to visit her as if there were nothing in question, so facile and free indeed is the life of the great cosmopolitan continental cities. Under the circumstances which his wife's suit had created, Prada himself was not displeased at the turn which events had taken with regard to Lisbeth, but none the less his incurable wound still bled.

There could be no compensation for the bitterness of Benedetta's disdain, it was she for whom his heart burned, and he dreamt of one day wreaking on her a tragic punishment.

Pierre, knowing nothing of Lisbeth, failed to understand the allusions of Orlando and his son. But realising that there was some embarrassment between them, he sought to take countenance by picking from off the littered table a thick book which, to his surprise, he found to be a French educational work, one of those manuals for the /baccalaureat/,* containing a digest of the knowledge which the official programmes require. It was but a humble, practical, elementary work, yet it necessarily dealt with all the mathematical, physical, chemical, and natural sciences, thus broadly outlining the intellectual conquests of the century, the present phase of human knowledge.

* The examination for the degree of bachelor, which degree is the necessary passport to all the liberal professions in France. M. Zola, by the way, failed to secure it, being ploughed for "insufficiency in literature"!—Trans.

"Ah!" exclaimed Orlando, well pleased with the diversion, "you are looking at the book of my old friend Theophile Morin. He was one of the thousand of Marsala, you know, and helped us to conquer Sicily and Naples. A hero! But for more than thirty years now he has been living in France again, absorbed in the duties of his petty professorship, which hasn't made him at all rich. And so he lately published that book, which sells very well in France it seems; and it occurred to him that he might increase his modest profits on it by issuing translations, an Italian one among others. He and I have remained brothers, and thinking that my influence would prove decisive, he wishes to utilise it. But he is mistaken; I fear, alas! that I shall be unable to get anybody to take up his book."

At this Luigi Prada, who had again become very composed and amiable, shrugged his shoulders slightly, full as he was of the scepticism of his generation which desired to maintain things in their

actual state so as to derive the greatest profit from them. "What would be the good of it?" he murmured; "there are too many books already!"

"No, no!" the old man passionately retorted, "there can never be too many books! We still and ever require fresh ones! It's by literature, not by the sword, that mankind will overcome falsehood and injustice and attain to the final peace of fraternity among the nations—Oh! you may smile; I know that you call these ideas my fancies of '48, the fancies of a greybeard, as people say in France. But it is none the less true that Italy is doomed, if the problem be not attacked from down below, if the people be not properly fashioned. And there is only one way to make a nation, to create men, and that is to educate them, to develop by educational means the immense lost force which now stagnates in ignorance and idleness. Yes, yes, Italy is made, but let us make an Italian nation. And give us more and more books, and let us ever go more and more forward into science and into light, if we wish to live and to be healthy, good, and strong!"

With his torso erect, with his powerful leonine muzzle flaming with the white brightness of his beard and hair, old Orlando looked superb. And in that simple, candid chamber, so touching with its intentional poverty, he raised his cry of hope with such intensity of feverish faith, that before the young priest's eyes there arose another figure—that of Cardinal Boccanera, erect and black save for his snow-white hair, and likewise glowing with heroic beauty in his crumbling palace whose gilded ceilings threatened to fall about his head! Ah! the magnificent stubborn men of the past, the believers, the old men who still show themselves more virile, more ardent than the young! Those two represented the opposite poles of belief; they had not an idea, an affection in common, and in that ancient city of Rome, where all was being blown away in dust, they alone seemed to protest, indestructible, face to face like two parted brothers, standing motionless on either horizon. And to have seen them thus, one after the other, so great and grand, so lonely, so detached from ordinary life, was to fill one's day with a dream of eternity.

Luigi, however, had taken hold of the old man's hands to calm him by an affectionate filial clasp. "Yes, yes, you are right, father, always right, and I'm a fool to contradict you. Now, pray don't move about like that, for you are uncovering yourself, and your legs will get cold again."

So saying, he knelt down and very carefully arranged the wrapper; and then remaining on the floor like a child, albeit he was two and forty, he raised his moist eyes, full of mute, entreating worship towards the old man who, calmed and deeply moved, caressed his hair with a trembling touch.

Pierre had been there for nearly two hours, when he at last took leave, greatly struck and affected by all that he had seen and heard. And again he had to promise that he would return and have a long chat with Orlando. Once out of doors he walked along at random. It was barely four o'clock, and it was his idea to ramble in this wise, without any predetermined programme, through Rome at that delightful hour when the sun sinks in the refreshed and far blue atmosphere. Almost immediately, however, he found himself in the Via Nazionale, along which he had driven on arriving the previous day. And he recognised the huge livid Banca d'Italia, the green gardens climbing to the Quirinal, and the heaven-soaring pines of the Villa Aldobrandini. Then, at the turn of the street, as he stopped short in order that he might again contemplate the column of Trajan which now rose up darkly from its low piazza, already full of twilight, he was surprised to see a victoria suddenly pull up, and a young man courteously beckon to him.

"Monsieur l'Abbe Froment! Monsieur l'Abbe Froment!"

It was young Prince Dario Boccanera, on his way to his daily drive along the Corso. He now virtually subsisted on the liberality of his uncle the Cardinal, and was almost always short of money. But, like all the Romans, he would, if necessary, have rather lived on bread and water than have forgone his carriage, horse, and coachman. An equipage, indeed, is the one indispensable luxury of Rome.

"If you will come with me, Monsieur l'Abbe Froment," said the young
Prince, "I will show you the most interesting part of our city."

He doubtless desired to please Benedetta, by behaving amiably towards her protege. Idle as he was, too, it seemed to him a pleasant occupation to initiate that young priest, who was said to be so intelligent, into what he deemed the inimitable side, the true florescence of Roman life.

Pierre was compelled to accept, although he would have preferred a solitary stroll. Yet he was interested in this young man, the last born of an exhausted race, who, while seemingly incapable of either thought or action, was none the less very seductive with his high-born pride and indolence. Far more a Roman than a patriot, Dario had never had the faintest inclination to rally to the new order of things, being well content to live apart and do nothing; and passionate though he was, he indulged in no follies, being very practical and sensible at heart, as are all his fellow-citizens, despite their

apparent impetuosity. As soon as his carriage, after crossing the Piazza di Venezia, entered the Corso, he gave rein to his childish vanity, his desire to shine, his passion for gay, happy life in the open under the lovely sky. All this, indeed, was clearly expressed in the simple gesture which he made whilst exclaiming: "The Corso!"

As on the previous day, Pierre was filled with astonishment. The long narrow street again stretched before him as far as the white dazzling Piazza del Popolo, the only difference being that the right-hand houses were now steeped in sunshine, whilst those on the left were black with shadow. What! was that the Corso then, that semi-obscure trench, close pressed by high and heavy house-fronts, that mean roadway where three vehicles could scarcely pass abreast, and which serried shops lined with gaudy displays? There was neither space, nor far horizon, nor refreshing greenery such as the fashionable drives of Paris could boast! Nothing but jostling, crowding, and stifling on the little footways under the narrow strip of sky. And although Dario named the pompous and historical palaces, Bonaparte, Doria, Odescalchi, Sciarra, and Chigi; although he pointed out the column of Marcus Aurelius on the Piazza Colonna, the most lively square of the whole city with its everlasting throng of lounging, gazing, chattering people; although, all the way to the Piazza del Popolo, he never ceased calling attention to churches, houses, and side-streets, notably the Via dei Condotti, at the far end of which the Trinity de' Monti, all golden in the glory of the sinking sun, appeared above that famous flight of steps, the triumphal Scala di Spagna—Pierre still and ever retained the impression of disillusion which the narrow, airless thoroughfare had conveyed to him: the "palaces" looked to him like mournful hospitals or barracks, the Piazza Colonna suffered terribly from a lack of trees, and the Trinity de' Monti alone took his fancy by its distant radiance of fairyland.

But it was necessary to come back from the Piazza del Popolo to the Piazza di Venezia, then return to the former square, and come back yet again, following the entire Corso three and four times without wearying. The delighted Dario showed himself and looked about him, exchanging salutations. On either footway was a compact crowd of promenaders whose eyes roamed over the equipages and whose hands could have shaken those of the carriage folks. So great at last became the number of vehicles that both lines were absolutely unbroken, crowded to such a point that the coachmen could do no more than walk their horses. Perpetually going up and coming down the Corso, people scrutinised and jostled one another. It was open-air promiscuity, all Rome gathered together in the smallest possible space, the folks who knew one another and who met here as in a friendly drawing-room, and the folks belonging to adverse parties who did not speak together but who elbowed each other, and whose glances penetrated to each other's soul. Then a revelation came to Pierre, and he suddenly understood the Corso, the ancient custom, the passion and glory of the city. Its pleasure lay precisely in the very narrowness of the street, in that forced elbowing which facilitated not only desired meetings but the satisfaction of curiosity, the display of vanity, and the garnering of endless tittle-tattle. All Roman society met here each day, displayed itself, spied on itself, offering itself in spectacle to its own eyes, with such an indispensable need of thus beholding itself that the man of birth who missed the Corso was like one out of his element, destitute of newspapers, living like a savage. And withal the atmosphere was delightfully balmy, and the narrow strip of sky between the heavy, rusty mansions displayed an infinite azure purity.

Dario never ceased smiling, and slightly inclining his head while he repeated to Pierre the names of princes and princesses, dukes and duchesses—high-sounding names whose flourish had filled history, whose sonorous syllables conjured up the shock of armour on the battlefield and the splendour of papal pomp with robes of purple, tiaras of gold, and sacred vestments sparkling with precious stones. And as Pierre listened and looked he was pained to see merely some corpulent ladies or undersized gentlemen, bloated or shrunken beings, whose ill-looks seemed to be increased by their modern attire. However, a few pretty women went by, particularly some young, silent girls with large, clear eyes. And just as Dario had pointed out the Palazzo Buongiovanni, a huge seventeenth-century facade, with windows encompassed by foliaged ornamentation deplorably heavy in style, he added gaily:

"Ah! look—that's Attilio there on the footway. Young Lieutenant Sacco—you know, don't you?"

Pierre signed that he understood. Standing there in uniform, Attilio, so young, so energetic and brave of appearance, with a frank countenance softly illumined by blue eyes like his mother's, at once pleased the priest. He seemed indeed the very personification of youth and love, with all their enthusiastic, disinterested hope in the future.

"You'll see by and by, when we pass the palace again," said Dario. "He'll still be there and I'll show you something."

Then he began to talk gaily of the girls of Rome, the little princesses, the little duchesses, so discreetly educated at the convent of the Sacred Heart, quitting it for the most part so ignorant and

then completing their education beside their mothers, never going out but to accompany the latter on the obligatory drive to the Corso, and living through endless days, cloistered, imprisoned in the depths of sombre mansions. Nevertheless what tempests raged in those mute souls to which none had ever penetrated! what stealthy growth of will suddenly appeared from under passive obedience, apparent unconsciousness of surroundings! How many there were who stubbornly set their minds on carving out their lives for themselves, on choosing the man who might please them, and securing him despite the opposition of the entire world! And the lover was chosen there from among the stream of young men promenading the Corso, the lover hooked with a glance during the daily drive, those candid eyes speaking aloud and sufficing for confession and the gift of all, whilst not a breath was wafted from the lips so chastely closed. And afterwards there came love letters, furtively exchanged in church, and the winning-over of maids to facilitate stolen meetings, at first so innocent. In the end, a marriage often resulted.

Celia, for her part, had determined to win Attilio on the very first day when their eyes had met. And it was from a window of the Palazzo Buongiovanni that she had perceived him one afternoon of mortal weariness. He had just raised his head, and she had taken him for ever and given herself to him with those large, pure eyes of hers as they rested on his own. She was but an /amorosa/—nothing more; he pleased her; she had set her heart on him—him and none other. She would have waited twenty years for him, but she relied on winning him at once by quiet stubbornness of will. People declared that the terrible fury of the Prince, her father, had proved impotent against her respectful, obstinate silence. He, man of mixed blood as he was, son of an American woman, and husband of an English woman, laboured but to retain his own name and fortune intact amidst the downfall of others; and it was rumoured that as the result of a quarrel which he had picked with his wife, whom he accused of not sufficiently watching over their daughter, the Princess had revolted, full not only of the pride of a foreigner who had brought a huge dowry in marriage, but also of such plain, frank egotism that she had declared she no longer found time enough to attend to herself, let alone another. Had she not already done enough in bearing him five children? She thought so; and now she spent her time in worshipping herself, letting Celia do as she listed, and taking no further interest in the household through which swept stormy gusts.

However, the carriage was again about to pass the Buongiovanni mansion, and Dario forewarned Pierre. "You see," said he, "Attilio has come back. And now look up at the third window on the first floor."

It was at once rapid and charming. Pierre saw the curtain slightly drawn aside and Celia's gentle face appear. Closed, candid lily, she did not smile, she did not move. Nothing could be read on those pure lips, or in those clear but fathomless eyes of hers. Yet she was taking Attilio to herself, and giving herself to him without reserve. And soon the curtain fell once more.

"Ah, the little mask!" muttered Dario. "Can one ever tell what there is behind so much innocence?"

As Pierre turned round he perceived Attilio, whose head was still raised, and whose face was also motionless and pale, with closed mouth, and widely opened eyes. And the young priest was deeply touched, for this was love, absolute love in its sudden omnipotence, true love, eternal and juvenescent, in which ambition and calculation played no part.

Then Dario ordered the coachman to drive up to the Pincio; for, before or after the Corso, the round of the Pincio is obligatory on fine, clear afternoons. First came the Piazza del Popolo, the most airy and regular square of Rome, with its conjunction of thoroughfares, its churches and fountains, its central obelisk, and its two clumps of trees facing one another at either end of the small white paving-stones, betwixt the severe and sun-gilt buildings. Then, turning to the right, the carriage began to climb the inclined way to the Pincio—a magnificent winding ascent, decorated with bas-reliefs, statues, and fountains—a kind of apotheosis of marble, a commemoration of ancient Rome, rising amidst greenery. Up above, however, Pierre found the garden small, little better than a large square, with just the four necessary roadways to enable the carriages to drive round and round as long as they pleased. An uninterrupted line of busts of the great men of ancient and modern Italy fringed these roadways. But what Pierre most admired was the trees—trees of the most rare and varied kinds, chosen and tended with infinite care, and nearly always evergreens, so that in winter and summer alike the spot was adorned with lovely foliage of every imaginable shade of verdure. And beside these trees, along the fine, breezy roadways, Dario's victoria began to turn, following the continuous, unwearying stream of the other carriages.

Pierre remarked one young woman of modest demeanour and attractive simplicity who sat alone in a dark-blue victoria, drawn by a well-groomed, elegantly harnessed horse. She was very pretty, short, with chestnut hair, a creamy complexion, and large gentle eyes. Quietly robed in dead-leaf silk, she wore a large hat, which alone looked somewhat extravagant. And seeing that Dario was staring at her,

the priest inquired her name, whereat the young Prince smiled. Oh! she was nobody, La Tonietta was the name that people gave her; she was one of the few /demi-mondaines/ that Roman society talked of. Then, with the freeness and frankness which his race displays in such matters, Dario added some particulars. La Tonietta's origin was obscure; some said that she was the daughter of an innkeeper of Tivoli, and others that of a Neapolitan banker. At all events, she was very intelligent, had educated herself, and knew thoroughly well how to receive and entertain people at the little palazzo in the Via dei Mille, which had been given to her by old Marquis Manfredi now deceased. She made no scandalous show, had but one protector at a time, and the princesses and duchesses who paid attention to her at the Corso every afternoon, considered her nice-looking. One peculiarity had made her somewhat notorious. There was some one whom she loved and from whom she never accepted aught but a bouquet of white roses; and folks would smile indulgently when at times for weeks together she was seen driving round the Pincio with those pure, white bridal flowers on the carriage seat.

Dario, however, suddenly paused in his explanations to address a ceremonious bow to a lady who, accompanied by a gentleman, drove by in a large landau. Then he simply said to the priest: "My mother."

Pierre already knew of her. Viscount de la Choue had told him her story, how, after Prince Onofrio Boccanera's death, she had married again, although she was already fifty; how at the Corso, just like some young girl, she had hooked with her eyes a handsome man to her liking—one, too, who was fifteen years her junior. And Pierre also knew who that man was, a certain Jules Laporte, an ex-sergeant of the papal Swiss Guard, an ex-traveller in relics, compromised in an extraordinary "false relic" fraud; and he was further aware that Laporte's wife had made a fine-looking Marquis Montefiori of him, the last of the fortunate adventurers of romance, triumphing as in the legendary lands where shepherds are wedded to queens.

At the next turn, as the large landau again went by, Pierre looked at the couple. The Marchioness was really wonderful, blooming with all the classical Roman beauty, tall, opulent, and very dark, with the head of a goddess and regular if somewhat massive features, nothing as yet betraying her age except the down upon her upper lip. And the Marquis, the Romanised Swiss of Geneva, really had a proud bearing, with his solid soldierly figure and long wavy moustaches. People said that he was in no wise a fool but, on the contrary, very gay and very supple, just the man to please women. His wife so gloried in him that she dragged him about and displayed him everywhere, having begun life afresh with him as if she were still but twenty, spending on him the little fortune which she had saved from the Villa Montefiori disaster, and so completely forgetting her son that she only saw the latter now and again at the promenade and acknowledged his bow like that of some chance acquaintance.

"Let us go to see the sun set behind St. Peter's," all at once said
Dario, conscientiously playing his part as a showman of curiosities.

The victoria thereupon returned to the terrace, where a military band was now playing with a terrific blare of brass instruments. In order that their occupants might hear the music, a large number of carriages had already drawn up, and a growing crowd of loungers on foot had assembled there. And from that beautiful terrace, so broad and lofty, one of the most wonderful views of Rome was offered to the gaze. Beyond the Tiber, beyond the pale chaos of the new district of the castle meadows,* and between the greenery of Monte Mario and the Janiculum arose St. Peter's. Then on the left came all the olden city, an endless stretch of roofs, a rolling sea of edifices as far as the eye could reach. But one's glances always came back to St. Peter's, towering into the azure with pure and sovereign grandeur. And, seen from the terrace, the slow sunsets in the depths of the vast sky behind the colossus were sublime.

* See /ante/ note on castle meadows.

Sometimes there are topplings of sanguineous clouds, battles of giants hurling mountains at one another and succumbing beneath the monstrous ruins of flaming cities. Sometimes only red streaks or fissures appear on the surface of a sombre lake, as if a net of light has been flung to fish the submerged orb from amidst the seaweed. Sometimes, too, there is a rosy mist, a kind of delicate dust which falls, streaked with pearls by a distant shower, whose curtain is drawn across the mystery of the horizon. And sometimes there is a triumph, a /cortege/ of gold and purple chariots of cloud rolling along a highway of fire, galleys floating upon an azure sea, fantastic and extravagant pomps slowly sinking into the less and less fathomable abyss of the twilight.

But that night the sublime spectacle presented itself to Pierre with a calm, blinding, desperate grandeur. At first, just above the dome of St. Peter's, the sun, descending in a spotless, deeply limpid sky, proved yet so resplendent that one's eyes could not face its brightness. And in this resplendency the dome seemed to be incandescent, you would have said a dome of liquid silver; whilst the surrounding districts, the house-roofs of the Borgo, were as though changed into a lake of live embers.

Then, as the sun was by degrees inclined, it lost some of its blaze, and one could look; and soon afterwards sinking with majestic slowness it disappeared behind the dome, which showed forth darkly blue, while the orb, now entirely hidden, set an aureola around it, a glory like a crown of flaming rays. And then began the dream, the dazzling symbol, the singular illumination of the row of windows beneath the cupola which were transpierced by the light and looked like the ruddy mouths of furnaces, in such wise that one might have imagined the dome to be poised upon a brazier, isolated, in the air, as though raised and upheld by the violence of the fire. It all lasted barely three minutes. Down below the jumbled roofs of the Borgo became steeped in violet vapour, sank into increasing gloom, whilst from the Janiculum to Monte Mario the horizon showed its firm black line. And it was the sky then which became all purple and gold, displaying the infinite placidity of a supernatural radiance above the earth which faded into nihility. Finally the last window reflections were extinguished, the glow of the heavens departed, and nothing remained but the vague, fading roundness of the dome of St. Peter's amidst the all-invading night.

And, by some subtle connection of ideas, Pierre at that moment once again saw rising before him the lofty, sad, declining figures of Cardinal Boccanera and old Orlando. On the evening of that day when he had learnt to know them, one after the other, both so great in the obstinacy of their hope, they seemed to be there, erect on the horizon above their annihilated city, on the fringe of the heavens which death apparently was about to seize. Was everything then to crumble with them? was everything to fade away and disappear in the falling night following upon accomplished Time?

V

ON the following day Narcisse Habert came in great worry to tell Pierre that Monsignor Gamba del Zoppo complained of being unwell, and asked for a delay of two or three days before receiving the young priest and considering the matter of his audience. Pierre was thus reduced to inaction, for he dared not make any attempt elsewhere in view of seeing the Pope. He had been so frightened by Nani and others that he feared he might jeopardise everything by inconsiderate endeavours. And so he began to visit Rome in order to occupy his leisure.

His first visit was for the ruins of the Palatine. Going out alone one clear morning at eight o'clock, he presented himself at the entrance in the Via San Teodoro, an iron gateway flanked by the lodges of the keepers. One of the latter at once offered his services, and though Pierre would have preferred to roam at will, following the bent of his dream, he somehow did not like to refuse the offer of this man, who spoke French very distinctly, and smiled in a very good-natured way. He was a squatly built little man, a former soldier, some sixty years of age, and his square-cut, ruddy face was barred by thick white moustaches.

"Then will you please follow me, Monsieur l'Abbe," said he. "I can see that you are French, Monsieur l'Abbe. I'm a Piedmontese myself, but I know the French well enough; I was with them at Solferino. Yes, yes, whatever people may say, one can't forget old friendships. Here, this way, please, to the right."

Raising his eyes, Pierre had just perceived the line of cypresses edging the plateau of the Palatine on the side of the Tiber; and in the delicate blue atmosphere the intense greenery of these trees showed like a black fringe. They alone attracted the eye; the slope, of a dusty, dirty grey, stretched out bare and devastated, dotted by a few bushes, among which peeped fragments of ancient walls. All was instinct with the ravaged, leprous sadness of a spot handed over to excavation, and where only men of learning could wax enthusiastic.

"The palaces of Tiberius, Caligula, and the Flavians are up above," resumed the guide. "We must keep then for the end and go round." Nevertheless he took a few steps to the left, and pausing before an excavation, a sort of grotto in the hillside, exclaimed: "This is the Lupercal den where the wolf suckled Romulus and Remus. Just here at the entry used to stand the Ruminal fig-tree which sheltered the twins."

Pierre could not restrain a smile, so convinced was the tone in which the old soldier gave these explanations, proud as he was of all the ancient glory, and wont to regard the wildest legends as indisputable facts. However, when the worthy man pointed out some vestiges of Roma Quadrata—remnants of walls which really seemed to date from the foundation of the city—Pierre began to feel interested, and a first touch of emotion made his heart beat. This emotion was certainly not due to any beauty of scene, for he merely beheld a few courses of tufa blocks, placed one upon the other and uncemented. But a past which had been dead for seven and twenty centuries seemed to rise up before him, and those crumbling, blackened blocks, the foundation of such a mighty eclipse of power and splendour, acquired extraordinary majesty.

Continuing their inspection, they went on, skirting the hillside. The outbuildings of the palaces must have descended to this point; fragments of porticoes, fallen beams, columns and friezes set up afresh, edged the rugged path which wound through wild weeds, suggesting a neglected cemetery; and the guide repeated the words which he had used day by day for ten years past, continuing to enunciate suppositions as facts, and giving a name, a destination, a history, to every one of the fragments.

"The house of Augustus," he said at last, pointing towards some masses of earth and rubbish.

Thereupon Pierre, unable to distinguish anything, ventured to inquire:
"Where do you mean?"

"Oh!" said the man, "it seems that the walls were still to be seen at the end of the last century. But it was entered from the other side, from the Sacred Way. On this side there was a huge balcony which overlooked the Circus Maximus so that one could view the sports. However, as you can see, the greater part of the palace is still buried under that big garden up above, the garden of the Villa Mills. When there's money for fresh excavations it will be found again, together with the temple of Apollo and the shrine of Vesta which accompanied it."

Turning to the left, he next entered the Stadium, the arena erected for foot-racing, which stretched beside the palace of Augustus; and the priest's interest was now once more awakened. It was not that he found himself in presence of well-preserved and monumental remains, for not a column had remained erect, and only the right-hand walls were still standing. But the entire plan of the building had been traced, with the goals at either end, the porticus round the course, and the colossal imperial tribune which, after being on the left, annexed to the house of Augustus, had afterwards opened on the right, fitting into the palace of Septimius Severus. And while Pierre looked on all the scattered remnants, his guide went on chattering, furnishing the most copious and precise information, and declaring that the gentlemen who directed the excavations had mentally reconstructed the Stadium in each and every particular, and were even preparing a most exact plan of it, showing all the columns in their proper order and the statues in their niches, and even specifying the divers sorts of marble which had covered the walls.

"Oh! the directors are quite at ease," the old soldier eventually added with an air of infinite satisfaction. "There will be nothing for the Germans to pounce on here. They won't be allowed to set things topsy-turvy as they did at the Forum, where everybody's at sea since they came along with their wonderful science!"

Pierre—a Frenchman—smiled, and his interest increased when, by broken steps and wooden bridges thrown over gaps, he followed the guide into the great ruins of the palace of Severus. Rising on the southern point of the Palatine, this palace had overlooked the Appian Way and the Campagna as far as the eye could reach. Nowadays, almost the only remains are the substructures, the subterranean halls contrived under the arches of the terraces, by which the plateau of the hill was enlarged; and yet these dismantled substructures suffice to give some idea of the triumphant palace which they once upheld, so huge and powerful have they remained in their indestructible massiveness. Near by arose the famous Septizonium, the tower with the seven tiers of arcades, which only finally disappeared in the sixteenth century. One of the palace terraces yet juts out upon cyclopean arches and from it the view is splendid. But all the rest is a commingling of massive yet crumbling walls, gaping depths whose ceilings have fallen, endless corridors and vast halls of doubtful destination. Well cared for by the new administration, swept and cleansed of weeds, the ruins have lost their romantic wildness and assumed an aspect of bare and mournful grandeur. However, flashes of living sunlight often gild the ancient walls, penetrate by their breaches into the black halls, and animate with their dazzlement the mute melancholy of all this dead splendour now exhumed from the earth in which it slumbered for centuries. Over the old ruddy masonry, stripped of its pompous marble covering, is the purple mantle of the sunlight, draping the whole with imperial glory once more.

For more than two hours already Pierre had been walking on, and yet he still had to visit all the earlier palaces on the north and east of the plateau. "We must go back," said the guide, "the gardens of the Villa Mills and the convent of San Bonaventura stop the way. We shall only be able to pass on this side when the excavations have made a clearance. Ah! Monsieur l'Abbe, if you had walked over the Palatine merely some fifty years ago! I've seen some plans of that time. There were only some vineyards and little gardens with hedges then, a real campagna, where not a soul was to be met. And to think that all these palaces were sleeping underneath!"

Pierre followed him, and after again passing the house of Augustus, they ascended the slope and reached the vast Flavian palace,* still half buried by the neighbouring villa, and composed of a great number of halls large and small, on the nature of which scholars are still arguing. The aula regia, or throne-room, the basilica, or hall of justice, the triclinium, or dining-room, and the peristylium seem certainties; but for all the rest, and especially the small chambers of the private part of the structure,

only more or less fanciful conjectures can be offered. Moreover, not a wall is entire; merely foundations peep out of the ground, mutilated bases describing the plan of the edifice. The only ruin preserved, as if by miracle, is the house on a lower level which some assert to have been that of Livia,* a house which seems very small beside all the huge palaces, and where are three halls comparatively intact, with mural paintings of mythological scenes, flowers, and fruits, still wonderfully fresh. As for the palace of Tiberius, not one of its stones can be seen; its remains lie buried beneath a lovely public garden; whilst of the neighbouring palace of Caligula, overhanging the Forum, there are only some huge substructures, akin to those of the house of Severus—buttresses, lofty arcades, which upheld the palace, vast basements, so to say, where the praetorians were posted and gorged themselves with continual junketings. And thus this lofty plateau dominating the city merely offered some scarcely recognisable vestiges to the view, stretches of grey, bare soil turned up by the pick, and dotted with fragments of old walls; and it needed a real effort of scholarly imagination to conjure up the ancient imperial splendour which once had triumphed there.

* Begun by Vespasian and finished by Domitian.—Trans.

** Others assert it to have been the house of Germanicus, father of Caligula.—Trans.

Nevertheless Pierre's guide, with quiet conviction, persisted in his explanations, pointing to empty space as though the edifices still rose before him. "Here," said he, "we are in the Area Palatina. Yonder, you see, is the facade of Domitian's palace, and there you have that of Caligula's palace, while on turning round the temple of Jupiter Stator is in front of you. The Sacred Way came up as far as here, and passed under the Porta Mugonia, one of the three gates of primitive Rome."

He paused and pointed to the northwest portion of the height. "You will have noticed," he resumed, "that the Caesars didn't build yonder. And that was evidently because they had to respect some very ancient monuments dating from before the foundation of the city and greatly venerated by the people. There stood the temple of Victory built by Evander and his Arcadians, the Lupercal grotto which I showed you, and the humble hut of Romulus constructed of reeds and clay. Oh! everything has been found again, Monsieur l'Abbe; and, in spite of all that the Germans say there isn't the slightest doubt of it."

Then, quite abruptly, like a man suddenly remembering the most interesting thing of all, he exclaimed: "Ah! to wind up we'll just go to see the subterranean gallery where Caligula was murdered."

Thereupon they descended into a long crypto-porticus, through the breaches of which the sun now casts bright rays. Some ornaments of stucco and fragments of mosaic-work are yet to be seen. Still the spot remains mournful and desolate, well fitted for tragic horror. The old soldier's voice had become graver as he related how Caligula, on returning from the Palatine games, had been minded to descend all alone into this gallery to witness certain sacred dances which some youths from Asia were practising there. And then it was that the gloom gave Cassius Chaereas, the chief of the conspirators, an opportunity to deal him the first thrust in the abdomen. Howling with pain, the emperor sought to flee; but the assassins, his creatures, his dearest friends, rushed upon him, threw him down, and dealt him blow after blow, whilst he, mad with rage and fright, filled the dim, deaf gallery with the howling of a slaughtered beast. When he had expired, silence fell once more, and the frightened murderers fled.

The classical visit to the Palatine was now over, and when Pierre came up into the light again, he wished to rid himself of his guide and remain alone in the pleasant, dreamy garden on the summit of the height. For three hours he had been tramping about with the guide's voice buzzing in his ears. The worthy man was now talking of his friendship for France and relating the battle of Magenta in great detail. He smiled as he took the piece of silver which Pierre offered him, and then started on the battle of Solferino. Indeed, it seemed impossible to stop him, when fortunately a lady came up to ask for some information. And, thereupon, he went off with her. "Good-evening, Monsieur l'Abbe," he said; "you can go down by way of Caligula's palace."

Delightful was Pierre's relief when he was at last able to rest for a moment on one of the marble seats in the garden. There were but few clumps of trees, cypresses, box-trees, palms, and some fine evergreen oaks; but the latter, sheltering the seat, cast a dark shade of exquisite freshness around. The charm of the spot was also largely due to its dreamy solitude, to the low rustle which seemed to come from that ancient soil saturated with resounding history. Here formerly had been the pleasure grounds of the Villa Farnese which still exists though greatly damaged, and the grace of the Renascence seems to linger here, its breath passing caressingly through the shiny foliage of the old evergreen oaks. You are, as it were, enveloped by the soul of the past, an ethereal conglomeration of visions, and overhead is wafted the straying breath of innumerable generations buried beneath the sod.

After a time, however, Pierre could no longer remain seated, so powerful was the attraction of Rome, scattered all around that august summit. So he rose and approached the balustrade of a terrace; and

beneath him appeared the Forum, and beyond it the Capitoline hill. To the eye the latter now only presented a commingling of grey buildings, lacking both grandeur and beauty. On the summit one saw the rear of the Palace of the Senator, flat, with little windows, and surmounted by a high, square campanile. The large, bare, rusty-looking walls hid the church of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli and the spot where the temple of Capitoline Jove had formerly stood, radiant in all its royalty. On the left, some ugly houses rose terrace-wise upon the slope of Monte Caprino, where goats were pastured in the middle ages; while the few fine trees in the grounds of the Caffarelli palace, the present German embassy, set some greenery above the ancient Tarpeian rock now scarcely to be found, lost, hidden as it is, by buttress walls. Yet this was the Mount of the Capitol, the most glorious of the seven hills, with its citadel and its temple, the temple to which universal dominion was promised, the St. Peter's of pagan Rome; this indeed was the hill—steep on the side of the Forum, and a precipice on that of the Campus Martius—where the thunder of Jupiter fell, where in the dimmest of the far-off ages the Asylum of Romulus rose with its sacred oaks, a spot of infinite savage mystery. Here, later, were preserved the public documents of Roman grandeur inscribed on tablets of brass; hither climbed the heroes of the triumphs; and here the emperors became gods, erect in statues of marble. And nowadays the eye inquires wonderingly how so much history and so much glory can have had for their scene so small a space, such a rugged, jumbled pile of paltry buildings, a mole-hill, looking no bigger, no loftier than a hamlet perched between two valleys.

Then another surprise for Pierre was the Forum, starting from the Capitol and stretching out below the Palatine: a narrow square, close pressed by the neighbouring hills, a hollow where Rome in growing had been compelled to rear edifice close to edifice till all stifled for lack of breathing space. It was necessary to dig very deep—some fifty feet—to find the venerable republican soil, and now all you see is a long, clean, livid trench, cleared of ivy and bramble, where the fragments of paving, the bases of columns, and the piles of foundations appear like bits of bone. Level with the ground the Basilica Julia, entirely mapped out, looks like an architect's ground plan. On that side the arch of Septimius Severus alone rears itself aloft, virtually intact, whilst of the temple of Vespasian only a few isolated columns remain still standing, as if by miracle, amidst the general downfall, soaring with a proud elegance, with sovereign audacity of equilibrium, so slender and so gilded, into the blue heavens. The column of Phocas is also erect; and you see some portions of the Rostra fitted together out of fragments discovered near by. But if the eye seeks a sensation of extraordinary vastness, it must travel beyond the three columns of the temple of Castor and Pollux, beyond the vestiges of the house of the Vestals, beyond the temple of Faustina, in which the Christian Church of San Lorenzo has so composedly installed itself, and even beyond the round temple of Romulus, to light upon the Basilica of Constantine with its three colossal, gaping archways. From the Palatine they look like porches built for a nation of giants, so massive that a fallen fragment resembles some huge rock hurled by a whirlwind from a mountain summit. And there, in that illustrious, narrow, overflowing Forum the history of the greatest of nations held for centuries, from the legendary time of the Sabine women, reconciling their relatives and their ravishers, to that of the proclamation of public liberty, so slowly wrung from the patricians by the plebeians. Was not the Forum at once the market, the exchange, the tribunal, the open-air hall of public meeting? The Gracchi there defended the cause of the humble; Sylla there set up the lists of those whom he proscribed; Cicero there spoke, and there, against the rostra, his bleeding head was hung. Then, under the emperors, the old renown was dimmed, the centuries buried the monuments and temples with such piles of dust that all that the middle ages could do was to turn the spot into a cattle market! Respect has come back once more, a respect which violates tombs, which is full of feverish curiosity and science, which is dissatisfied with mere hypotheses, which loses itself amidst this historical soil where generations rise one above the other, and hesitates between the fifteen or twenty restorations of the Forum that have been planned on paper, each of them as plausible as the other. But to the mere passer-by, who is not a professional scholar and has not recently re-perused the history of Rome, the details have no significance. All he sees on this searched and scoured spot is a city's cemetery where old exhumed stones are whitening, and whence rises the intense sadness that envelops dead nations. Pierre, however, noting here and there fragments of the Sacred Way, now turning, now running down, and now ascending with their pavement of silex indented by the chariot-wheels, thought of the triumphs, of the ascent of the triumpher, so sorely shaken as his chariot jolted over that rough pavement of glory.

But the horizon expanded towards the southeast, and beyond the arches of Titus and Constantine he perceived the Colosseum. Ah! that colossus, only one-half or so of which has been destroyed by time as with the stroke of a mighty scythe, it rises in its enormity and majesty like a stone lace-work with hundreds of empty bays agape against the blue of heaven! There is a world of halls, stairs, landings, and passages, a world where one loses oneself amidst death-like silence and solitude. The furrowed tiers of seats, eaten into by the atmosphere, are like shapeless steps leading down into some old extinct crater, some natural circus excavated by the force of the elements in indestructible rock. The hot suns of eighteen hundred years have baked and scorched this ruin, which has reverted to a state of nature, bare and golden-brown like a mountain-side, since it has been stripped of its vegetation, the flora which

once made it like a virgin forest. And what an evocation when the mind sets flesh and blood and life again on all that dead osseous framework, fills the circus with the 90,000 spectators which it could hold, marshals the games and the combats of the arena, gathers a whole civilisation together, from the emperor and the dignitaries to the surging plebeian sea, all aglow with the agitation and brilliancy of an impassioned people, assembled under the ruddy reflection of the giant purple velum. And then, yet further, on the horizon, were other cyclopean ruins, the baths of Caracalla, standing there like relics of a race of giants long since vanished from the world: halls extravagantly and inexplicably spacious and lofty; vestibules large enough for an entire population; a /frigidarium/ where five hundred people could swim together; a /tepidarium/ and a /calidarium/* on the same proportions, born of a wild craving for the huge; and then the terrific massiveness of the structures, the thickness of the piles of brick-work, such as no feudal castle ever knew; and, in addition, the general immensity which makes passing visitors look like lost ants; such an extraordinary riot of the great and the mighty that one wonders for what men, for what multitudes, this monstrous edifice was reared. To-day, you would say a mass of rocks in the rough, thrown from some height for building the abode of Titans.

* Tepidarium, warm bath; calidarium, vapour bath.—Trans.

And as Pierre gazed, he became more and more immersed in the limitless past which encompassed him. On all sides history rose up like a surging sea. Those bluey plains on the north and west were ancient Etruria; those jagged crests on the east were the Sabine Mountains; while southward, the Alban Mountains and Latium spread out in the streaming gold of the sunshine. Alba Longa was there, and so was Monte Cavo, with its crown of old trees, and the convent which has taken the place of the ancient temple of Jupiter. Then beyond the Forum, beyond the Capitol, the greater part of Rome stretched out, whilst behind Pierre, on the margin of the Tiber, was the Janiculum. And a voice seemed to come from the whole city, a voice which told him of Rome's eternal life, resplendent with past greatness. He remembered just enough of what he had been taught at school to realise where he was; he knew just what every one knows of Rome with no pretension to scholarship, and it was more particularly his artistic temperament which awoke within him and gathered warmth from the flame of memory. The present had disappeared, and the ocean of the past was still rising, buoying him up, carrying him away.

And then his mind involuntarily pictured a resurrection instinct with life. The grey, dismal Palatine, razed like some accursed city, suddenly became animated, peopled, crowned with palaces and temples. There had been the cradle of the Eternal City, founded by Romulus on that summit overlooking the Tiber. There assuredly the seven kings of its two and a half centuries of monarchical rule had dwelt, enclosed within high, strong walls, which had but three gateways. Then the five centuries of republican sway spread out, the greatest, the most glorious of all the centuries, those which brought the Italic peninsula and finally the known world under Roman dominion. During those victorious years of social and war-like struggle, Rome grew and peopled the seven hills, and the Palatine became but a venerable cradle with legendary temples, and was even gradually invaded by private residences. But at last Caesar, the incarnation of the power of his race, after Gaul and after Pharsalia triumphed in the name of the whole Roman people, having completed the colossal task by which the five following centuries of imperialism were to profit, with a pompous splendour and a rush of every appetite. And then Augustus could ascend to power; glory had reached its climax; millions of gold were waiting to be filched from the depths of the provinces; and the imperial gala was to begin in the world's capital, before the eyes of the dazzled and subjected nations. Augustus had been born on the Palatine, and after Actium had given him the empire, he set his pride in reigning from the summit of that sacred mount, venerated by the people. He bought up private houses and there built his palace with luxurious splendour: an atrium upheld by four pilasters and eight columns; a peristylium encompassed by fifty-six Ionic columns; private apartments all around, and all in marble; a profusion of marble, brought at great cost from foreign lands, and of the brightest hues, resplendent like gems. And he lodged himself with the gods, building near his own abode a large temple of Apollo and a shrine of Vesta in order to ensure himself divine and eternal sovereignty. And then the seed of the imperial palaces was sown; they were to spring up, grow and swarm, and cover the entire mount.

Ah! the all-powerfulness of Augustus, his four and forty years of total, absolute, superhuman power, such as no despot has known even in his dreams! He had taken to himself every title, united every magistracy in his person. Imperator and consul, he commanded the armies and exercised executive power; pro-consul, he was supreme in the provinces; perpetual censor and princeps, he reigned over the senate; tribune, he was the master of the people. And, formerly called Octavius, he had caused himself to be declared Augustus, sacred, god among men, having his temples and his priests, worshipped in his lifetime like a divinity deigning to visit the earth. And finally he had resolved to be supreme pontiff, annexing religious to civil power, and thus by a stroke of genius attaining to the most complete dominion to which man can climb. As the supreme pontiff could not reside in a private house, he declared his abode to be State property. As the supreme pontiff could not leave the vicinity of the

temple of Vesta, he built a temple to that goddess near his own dwelling, leaving the guardianship of the ancient altar below the Palatine to the Vestal virgins. He spared no effort, for he well realised that human omnipotence, the mastery of mankind and the world, lay in that reunion of sovereignty, in being both king and priest, emperor and pope. All the sap of a mighty race, all the victories achieved, and all the favours of fortune yet to be garnered, blossomed forth in Augustus, in a unique splendour which was never again to shed such brilliant radiance. He was really the master of the world, amidst the conquered and pacified nations, encompassed by immortal glory in literature and in art. In him would seem to have been satisfied the old intense ambition of his people, the ambition which it had pursued through centuries of patient conquest, to become the people-king. The blood of Rome, the blood of Augustus, at last coruscated in the sunlight, in the purple of empire. And the blood of Augustus, of the divine, triumphant, absolute sovereign of bodies and souls, of the man in whom seven centuries of national pride had culminated, was to descend through the ages, through an innumerable posterity with a heritage of boundless pride and ambition. For it was fatal: the blood of Augustus was bound to spring into life once more and pulsate in the veins of all the successive masters of Rome, ever haunting them with the dream of ruling the whole world. And later on, after the decline and fall, when power had once more become divided between the king and the priest, the popes—their hearts burning with the red, devouring blood of their great forerunner—had no other passion, no other policy, through the centuries, than that of attaining to civil dominion, to the totality of human power.

But Augustus being dead, his palace having been closed and consecrated, Pierre saw that of Tiberius spring up from the soil. It had stood where his feet now rested, where the beautiful evergreen oaks sheltered him. He pictured it with courts, porticoes, and halls, both substantial and grand, despite the gloomy bent of the emperor who betook himself far from Rome to live amongst informers and debauchees, with his heart and brain poisoned by power to the point of crime and most extraordinary insanity. Then the palace of Caligula followed, an enlargement of that of Tiberius, with arcades set up to increase its extent, and a bridge thrown over the Forum to the Capitol, in order that the prince might go thither at his ease to converse with Jove, whose son he claimed to be. And sovereignty also rendered this one ferocious—a madman with omnipotence to do as he listed! Then, after Claudius, Nero, not finding the Palatine large enough, seized upon the delightful gardens climbing the Esquiline in order to set up his Golden House, a dream of sumptuous immensity which he could not complete and the ruins of which disappeared in the troubles following the death of this monster whom pride demented. Next, in eighteen months, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius fell one upon the other, in mire and in blood, the purple converting them also into imbeciles and monsters, gorged like unclean beasts at the trough of imperial enjoyment. And afterwards came the Flavians, at first a respite, with commonsense and human kindness: Vespasian; next Titus, who built but little on the Palatine; but then Domitian, in whom the sombre madness of omnipotence burst forth anew amidst a /regime/ of fear and spying, idiotic atrocities and crimes, debauchery contrary to nature, and building enterprises born of insane vanity instinct with a desire to outvie the temples of the gods. The palace of Domitian, parted by a lane from that of Tiberius, arose colossal-like—a palace of fairyland. There was the hall of audience, with its throne of gold, its sixteen columns of Phrygian and Numidian marble and its eight niches containing colossal statues; there were the hall of justice, the vast dining-room, the peristylium, the sleeping apartments, where granite, porphyry, and alabaster overflowed, carved and decorated by the most famous artists, and lavished on all sides in order to dazzle the world. And finally, many years later, a last palace was added to all the others—that of Septimius Severus: again a building of pride, with arches supporting lofty halls, terraced storeys, towers o'er-topping the roofs, a perfect Babylonian pile, rising up at the extreme point of the mount in view of the Appian Way, so that the emperor's compatriots—those from the province of Africa, where he was born—might, on reaching the horizon, marvel at his fortune and worship him in his glory.

And now Pierre beheld all those palaces which he had conjured up around him, resuscitated, resplendent in the full sunlight. They were as if linked together, parted merely by the narrowest of passages. In order that not an inch of that precious summit might be lost, they had sprouted thickly like the monstrous florescence of strength, power, and unbridled pride which satisfied itself at the cost of millions, bleeding the whole world for the enjoyment of one man. And in truth there was but one palace altogether, a palace enlarged as soon as one emperor died and was placed among the deities, and another, shunning the consecrated pile where possibly the shadow of death frightened him, experienced an imperious need to build a house of his own and perpetuate in everlasting stone the memory of his reign. All the emperors were seized with this building craze; it was like a disease which the very throne seemed to carry from one occupant to another with growing intensity, a consuming desire to excel all predecessors by thicker and higher walls, by a more and more wonderful profusion of marbles, columns, and statues. And among all these princes there was the idea of a glorious survival, of leaving a testimony of their greatness to dazzled and stupefied generations, of perpetuating themselves by marvels which would not perish but for ever weigh heavily upon the earth, when their own light ashes should long since have been swept away by the winds. And thus the Palatine became but the venerable base of a monstrous edifice, a thick vegetation of adjoining buildings, each new pile being

like a fresh eruption of feverish pride; while the whole, now showing the snowy brightness of white marble and now the glowing hues of coloured marble, ended by crowning Rome and the world with the most extraordinary and most insolent abode of sovereignty— whether palace, temple, basilica, or cathedral—that omnipotence and dominion have ever reared under the heavens.

But death lurked beneath this excess of strength and glory. Seven hundred and thirty years of monarchy and republic had sufficed to make Rome great; and in five centuries of imperial sway the people-king was to be devoured down to its last muscles. There was the immensity of the territory, the more distant provinces gradually pillaged and exhausted; there was the fisc consuming everything, digging the pit of fatal bankruptcy; and there was the degeneration of the people, poisoned by the scenes of the circus and the arena, fallen to the sloth and debauchery of their masters, the Caesars, while mercenaries fought the foe and tilled the soil. Already at the time of Constantine, Rome had a rival, Byzantium; disruption followed with Honorius; and then some ten emperors sufficed for decomposition to be complete, for the bones of the dying prey to be picked clean, the end coming with Romulus Augustulus, the sorry creature whose name is, so to say, a mockery of the whole glorious history, a buffet for both the founder of Rome and the founder of the empire.

The palaces, the colossal assemblage of walls, storeys, terraces, and gaping roofs, still remained on the deserted Palatine; many ornaments and statues, however, had already been removed to Byzantium. And the empire, having become Christian, had afterwards closed the temples and extinguished the fire of Vesta, whilst yet respecting the ancient Palladium. But in the fifth century the barbarians rush upon Rome, sack and burn it, and carry the spoils spared by the flames away in their chariots. As long as the city was dependent on Byzantium a custodian of the imperial palaces remained there watching over the Palatine. Then all fades and crumbles in the night of the middle ages. It would really seem that the popes then slowly took the place of the Caesars, succeeding them both in their abandoned marble halls and their ever-subsisting passion for domination. Some of them assuredly dwelt in the palace of Septimius Severus; a council of the Church was held in the Septizonium; and, later on, Gelasius II was elected in a neighbouring monastery on the sacred mount. It was as if Augustus were again rising from the tomb, once more master of the world, with a Sacred College of Cardinals resuscitating the Roman Senate. In the twelfth century the Septizonium belonged to some Benedictine monks, and was sold by them to the powerful Frangipani family, who fortified it as they had already fortified the Colosseum and the arches of Constantine and Titus, thus forming a vast fortress round about the venerable cradle of the city. And the violent deeds of civil war and the ravages of invasion swept by like whirlwinds, throwing down the walls, razing the palaces and towers. And afterwards successive generations invaded the ruins, installed themselves in them by right of trover and conquest, turned them into cellars, store-places for forage, and stables for mules. Kitchen gardens were formed, vines were planted on the spots where fallen soil had covered the mosaics of the imperial halls. All around nettles and brambles grew up, and ivy preyed on the overturned porticoes, till there came a day when the colossal assemblage of palaces and temples, which marble was to have rendered eternal, seemed to dive beneath the dust, to disappear under the surging soil and vegetation which impassive Nature threw over it. And then, in the hot sunlight, among the wild flowerets, only big, buzzing flies remained, whilst herds of goats strayed in freedom through the throne-room of Domitian and the fallen sanctuary of Apollo.

A great shudder passed through Pierre. To think of so much strength, pride, and grandeur, and such rapid ruin—a world for ever swept away! He wondered how entire palaces, yet peopled by admirable statuary, could thus have been gradually buried without any one thinking of protecting them. It was no sudden catastrophe which had swallowed up those masterpieces, subsequently to be disinterred with exclamations of admiring wonder; they had been drowned, as it were—caught progressively by the legs, the waist, and the neck, till at last the head had sunk beneath the rising tide. And how could one explain that generations had heedlessly witnessed such things without thought of putting forth a helping hand? It would seem as if, at a given moment, a black curtain were suddenly drawn across the world, as if mankind began afresh, with a new and empty brain which needed moulding and furnishing. Rome had become depopulated; men ceased to repair the ruins left by fire and sword; the edifices which by their very immensity had become useless were utterly neglected, allowed to crumble and fall. And then, too, the new religion everywhere hunted down the old one, stole its temples, overturned its gods. Earthly deposits probably completed the disaster—there were, it is said, both earthquakes and inundations—and the soil was ever rising, the alluvia of the young Christian world buried the ancient pagan society. And after the pillaging of the temples, the theft of the bronze roofs and marble columns, the climax came with the filching of the stones torn from the Colosseum and the Theatre of Marcellus, with the pounding of the statuary and sculpture-work, thrown into kilns to procure the lime needed for the new monuments of Catholic Rome.

It was nearly one o'clock, and Pierre awoke as from a dream. The sun-rays were streaming in a golden rain between the shiny leaves of the ever-green oaks above him, and down below Rome lay

dozing, overcome by the great heat. Then he made up his mind to leave the garden, and went stumbling over the rough pavement of the Clivus Victoriae, his mind still haunted by blinding visions. To complete his day, he had resolved to visit the old Appian Way during the afternoon, and, unwilling to return to the Via Giulia, he lunched at a suburban tavern, in a large, dim room, where, alone with the buzzing flies, he lingered for more than two hours, awaiting the sinking of the sun.

Ah! that Appian Way, that ancient queen of the high roads, crossing the Campagna in a long straight line with rows of proud tombs on either hand—to Pierre it seemed like a triumphant prolongation of the Palatine. He there found the same passion for splendour and domination, the same craving to eternise the memory of Roman greatness in marble and daylight. Oblivion was vanquished; the dead refused to rest, and remained for ever erect among the living, on either side of that road which was traversed by multitudes from the entire world. The deified images of those who were now but dust still gazed on the passers-by with empty eyes; the inscriptions still spoke, proclaiming names and titles. In former times the rows of sepulchres must have extended without interruption along all the straight, level miles between the tomb of Caecilia Metella and that of Casale Rotondo, forming an elongated cemetery where the powerful and wealthy competed as to who should leave the most colossal and lavishly decorated mausoleum: such, indeed, was the craving for survival, the passion for pompous immortality, the desire to deify death by lodging it in temples; whereof the present-day monumental splendour of the Genoese Campo Santo and the Roman Campo Verano is, so to say, a remote inheritance. And what a vision it was to picture all the tremendous tombs on the right and left of the glorious pavement which the legions trod on their return from the conquest of the world! That tomb of Caecilia Metella, with its bond-stones so huge, its walls so thick that the middle ages transformed it into the battlemented keep of a fortress! And then all the tombs which follow, the modern structures erected in order that the marble fragments discovered might be set in place, the old blocks of brick and concrete, despoiled of their sculptured-work and rising up like seared rocks, yet still suggesting their original shapes as shrines, /cippi/, and /sarcophagi/. There is a wondrous succession of high reliefs figuring the dead in groups of three and five; statues in which the dead live deified, erect; seats contrived in niches in order that wayfarers may rest and bless the hospitality of the dead; laudatory epitaphs celebrating the dead, both the known and the unknown, the children of Sextius Pompeius Justus, the departed Marcus Servilius Quartus, Hilarius Fuscus, Rabirius Hermodorus; without counting the sepulchres venturously ascribed to Seneca and the Horatii and Curiatii. And finally there is the most extraordinary and gigantic of all the tombs, that known as Casale Rotondo, which is so large that it has been possible to establish a farmhouse and an olive garden on its substructures, which formerly upheld a double rotunda, adorned with Corinthian pilasters, large candelabra, and scenic masks.*

* Some believe this tomb to have been that of Messalla Corvinus, the historian and poet, a friend of Augustus and Horace; others ascribe it to his son, Aurelius Messallinus Cotta.—Trans.

Pierre, having driven in a cab as far as the tomb of Caecilia Metella, continued his excursion on foot, going slowly towards Casale Rotondo. In many places the old pavement appears—large blocks of basaltic lava, worn into deep ruts that jolt the best-hung vehicles. Among the ruined tombs on either hand run bands of grass, the neglected grass of cemeteries, scorched by the summer suns and sprinkled with big violet thistles and tall sulphur-wort. Parapets of dry stones, breast high, enclose the russet roadsides, which resound with the crepitation of grasshoppers; and, beyond, the Campagna stretches, vast and bare, as far as the eye can see. A parasol pine, a eucalyptus, some olive or fig trees, white with dust, alone rise up near the road at infrequent intervals. On the left the ruddy arches of the Acqua Claudia show vigorously in the meadows, and stretches of poorly cultivated land, vineyards, and little farms, extend to the blue and lilac Sabine and Alban hills, where Frascati, Rocca di Papa, and Albano set bright spots, which grow and whiten as one gets nearer to them. Then, on the right, towards the sea, the houseless, treeless plain grows and spreads with vast, broad ripples, extraordinary ocean-like simplicity and grandeur, a long, straight line alone parting it from the sky. At the height of summer all burns and flares on this limitless prairie, then of a ruddy gold; but in September a green tinge begins to suffuse the ocean of herbage, which dies away in the pink and mauve and vivid blue of the fine sunsets.

As Pierre, quite alone and in a dreary mood, slowly paced the endless, flat highway, that resurrection of the past which he had beheld on the Palatine again confronted his mind's eye. On either hand the tombs once more rose up intact, with marble of dazzling whiteness. Had not the head of a colossal statue been found, mingled with fragments of huge sphinxes, at the foot of yonder vase-shaped mass of bricks? He seemed to see the entire colossal statue standing again between the huge, crouching beasts. Farther on a beautiful headless statue of a woman had been discovered in the cella of a sepulchre, and he beheld it, again whole, with features expressive of grace and strength smiling upon life. The inscriptions also became perfect; he could read and understand them at a glance, as if living among those dead ones of two thousand years ago. And the road, too, became peopled: the chariots thundered, the armies tramped along, the people of Rome jostled him with the feverish agitation of great

communities. It was a return of the times of the Flavians or the Antonines, the palmy years of the empire, when the pomp of the Appian Way, with its grand sepulchres, carved and adorned like temples, attained its apogee. What a monumental Street of Death, what an approach to Rome, that highway, straight as an arrow, where with the extraordinary pomp of their pride, which had survived their dust, the great dead greeted the traveller, ushered him into the presence of the living! He may well have wondered among what sovereign people, what masters of the world, he was about to find himself—a nation which had committed to its dead the duty of telling strangers that it allowed nothing whatever to perish—that its dead, like its city, remained eternal and glorious in monuments of extraordinary vastness! To think of it—the foundations of a fortress, and a tower sixty feet in diameter, that one woman might be laid to rest! And then, far away, at the end of the superb, dazzling highway, bordered with the marble of its funereal palaces, Pierre, turning round, distinctly beheld the Palatine, with the marble of its imperial palaces—the huge assemblage of palaces whose omnipotence had dominated the world!

But suddenly he started: two carabiniers had just appeared among the ruins. The spot was not safe; the authorities watched over tourists even in broad daylight. And later on came another meeting which caused him some emotion. He perceived an ecclesiastic, a tall old man, in a black cassock, edged and girt with red; and was surprised to recognise Cardinal Boccanera, who had quitted the roadway, and was slowly strolling along the band of grass, among the tall thistles and sulphur-wort. With his head lowered and his feet brushing against the fragments of the tombs, the Cardinal did not even see Pierre. The young priest courteously turned aside, surprised to find him so far from home and alone. Then, on perceiving a heavy coach, drawn by two black horses, behind a building, he understood matters. A footman in black livery was waiting motionless beside the carriage, and the coachman had not quitted his box. And Pierre remembered that the Cardinals were not expected to walk in Rome, so that they were compelled to drive into the country when they desired to take exercise. But what haughty sadness, what solitary and, so to say, ostracised grandeur there was about that tall, thoughtful old man, thus forced to seek the desert, and wander among the tombs, in order to breathe a little of the evening air!

Pierre had lingered there for long hours; the twilight was coming on, and once again he witnessed a lovely sunset. On his left the Campagna became blurred, and assumed a slaty hue, against which the yellowish arcades of the aqueduct showed very plainly, while the Alban hills, far away, faded into pink. Then, on the right, towards the sea, the planet sank among a number of cloudlets, figuring an archipelago of gold in an ocean of dying embers. And excepting the sapphire sky, studded with rubies, above the endless line of the Campagna, which was likewise changed into a sparkling lake, the dull green of the herbage turning to a liquid emerald tint, there was nothing to be seen, neither a hillock nor a flock—nothing, indeed, but Cardinal Boccanera's black figure, erect among the tombs, and looking, as it were, enlarged as it stood out against the last purple flush of the sunset.

Early on the following morning Pierre, eager to see everything, returned to the Appian Way in order to visit the catacomb of St. Calixtus, the most extensive and remarkable of the old Christian cemeteries, and one, too, where several of the early popes were buried. You ascend through a scorched garden, past olives and cypresses, reach a shanty of boards and plaster in which a little trade in "articles of piety" is carried on, and there a modern and fairly easy flight of steps enables you to descend. Pierre fortunately found there some French Trappists, who guard these catacombs and show them to strangers. One brother was on the point of going down with two French ladies, the mother and daughter, the former still comely and the other radiant with youth. They stood there smiling, though already slightly frightened, while the monk lighted some long, slim candles. He was a man with a bossy brow, the large, massive jaw of an obstinate believer and pale eyes bespeaking an ingenuous soul.

"Ah! Monsieur l'Abbe," he said to Pierre, "you've come just in time. If the ladies are willing, you had better come with us; for three Brothers are already below with people, and you would have a long time to wait. This is the great season for visitors."

The ladies politely nodded, and the Trappist handed a candle to the priest. In all probability neither mother nor daughter was devout, for both glanced askance at their new companion's cassock, and suddenly became serious. Then they all went down and found themselves in a narrow subterranean corridor. "Take care, mesdames," repeated the Trappist, lighting the ground with his candle. "Walk slowly, for there are projections and slopes."

Then, in a shrill voice full of extraordinary conviction, he began his explanations. Pierre had descended in silence, his heart beating with emotion. Ah! how many times, indeed, in his innocent seminary days, had he not dreamt of those catacombs of the early Christians, those asylums of the primitive faith! Even recently, while writing his book, he had often thought of them as of the most ancient and venerable remains of that community of the lowly and simple, for the return of which he called. But his brain was full of pages written by poets and great prose writers. He had beheld the

catacombs through the magnifying glass of those imaginative authors, and had believed them to be vast, similar to subterranean cities, with broad highways and spacious halls, fit for the accommodation of vast crowds. And now how poor and humble the reality!

"Well, yes," said the Trappist in reply to the ladies' questions, "the corridor is scarcely more than a yard in width; two persons could not pass along side by side. How they dug it? Oh! it was simple enough. A family or a burial association needed a place of sepulchre. Well, a first gallery was excavated with pickaxes in soil of this description—granular tufa, as it is called—a reddish substance, as you can see, both soft and yet resistant, easy to work and at the same time waterproof. In a word, just the substance that was needed, and one, too, that has preserved the remains of the buried in a wonderful way." He paused and brought the flamelet of his candle near to the compartments excavated on either hand of the passage. "Look," he continued, "these are the /loculi/. Well, a subterranean gallery was dug, and on both sides these compartments were hollowed out, one above the other. The bodies of the dead were laid in them, for the most part simply wrapped in shrouds. Then the aperture was closed with tiles or marble slabs, carefully cemented. So, as you can see, everything explains itself. If other families joined the first one, or the burial association became more numerous, fresh galleries were added to those already filled. Passages were excavated on either hand, in every sense; and, indeed, a second and lower storey, at times even a third, was dug out. And here, you see, we are in a gallery which is certainly thirteen feet high. Now, you may wonder how they raised the bodies to place them in the compartments of the top tier. Well, they did not raise them to any such height; in all their work they kept on going lower and lower, removing more and more of the soil as the compartments became filled. And in this wise, in these catacombs of St. Calixtus, in less than four centuries, the Christians excavated more than ten miles of galleries, in which more than a million of their dead must have been laid to rest. Now, there are dozens of catacombs; the environs of Rome are honeycombed with them. Think of that, and perhaps you will be able to form some idea of the vast number of people who were buried in this manner."

Pierre listened, feeling greatly impressed. He had once visited a coal pit in Belgium, and he here found the same narrow passages, the same heavy, stifling atmosphere, the same nihility of darkness and silence. The flamelets of the candles showed merely like stars in the deep gloom; they shed no radiance around. And he at last understood the character of this funereal, termite-like labour—these chance burrowings continued according to requirements, without art, method, or symmetry. The rugged soil was ever ascending and descending, the sides of the gallery snaked: neither plumb-line nor square had been used. All this, indeed, had simply been a work of charity and necessity, wrought by simple, willing grave-diggers, illiterate craftsmen, with the clumsy handiwork of the decline and fall. Proof thereof was furnished by the inscriptions and emblems on the marble slabs. They reminded one of the childish drawings which street urchins scrawl upon blank walls.

"You see," the Trappist continued, "most frequently there is merely a name; and sometimes there is no name, but simply the words /In Pace/. At other times there is an emblem, the dove of purity, the palm of martyrdom, or else the fish whose name in Greek is composed of five letters which, as initials, signify: 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.'"

He again brought his candle near to the marble slabs, and the palm could be distinguished: a central stroke, whence started a few oblique lines; and then came the dove or the fish, roughly outlined, a zigzag indicating a tail, two bars representing the bird's feet, while a round point simulated an eye. And the letters of the short inscriptions were all askew, of various sizes, often quite misshapen, as in the coarse handwriting of the ignorant and simple.

However, they reached a crypt, a sort of little hall, where the graves of several popes had been found; among others that of Sixtus II, a holy martyr, in whose honour there was a superbly engraved metrical inscription set up by Pope Damasus. Then, in another hall, a family vault of much the same size, decorated at a later stage, with naive mural paintings, the spot where St. Cecilia's body had been discovered was shown. And the explanations continued. The Trappist dilated on the paintings, drawing from them a confirmation of every dogma and belief, baptism, the Eucharist, the resurrection, Lazarus arising from the tomb, Jonas cast up by the whale, Daniel in the lions' den, Moses drawing water from the rock, and Christ—shown beardless, as was the practice in the early ages—accomplishing His various miracles.

"You see," repeated the Trappist, "all those things are shown there; and remember that none of the paintings was specially prepared: they are absolutely authentic."

At a question from Pierre, whose astonishment was increasing, he admitted that the catacombs had been mere cemeteries at the outset, when no religious ceremonies had been celebrated in them. It was only later, in the fourth century, when the martyrs were honoured, that the crypts were utilised for worship. And in the same way they only became places of refuge during the persecutions, when the

Christians had to conceal the entrances to them. Previously they had remained freely and legally open. This was indeed their true history: cemeteries four centuries old becoming places of asylum, ravaged at times during the persecutions; afterwards held in veneration till the eighth century; then despoiled of their holy relics, and subsequently blocked up and forgotten, so that they remained buried during more than seven hundred years, people thinking of them so little that at the time of the first searches in the fifteenth century they were considered an extraordinary discovery—an intricate historical problem—one, moreover, which only our own age has solved.

"Please stoop, mesdames," resumed the Trappist. "In this compartment here is a skeleton which has not been touched. It has been lying here for sixteen or seventeen hundred years, and will show you how the bodies were laid out. Savants say that it is the skeleton of a female, probably a young girl. It was still quite perfect last spring; but the skull, as you can see, is now split open. An American broke it with his walking stick to make sure that it was genuine."

The ladies leaned forward, and the flickering light illumined their pale faces, expressive of mingled fright and compassion. Especially noticeable was the pitiful, pain-fraught look which appeared on the countenance of the daughter, so full of life with her red lips and large black eyes. Then all relapsed into gloom, and the little candles were borne aloft and went their way through the heavy darkness of the galleries. The visit lasted another hour, for the Trappist did not spare a detail, fond as he was of certain nooks and corners, and as zealous as if he desired to work the redemption of his visitors.

While Pierre followed the others, a complete evolution took place within him. As he looked about him, and formed a more and more complete idea of his surroundings, his first stupefaction at finding the reality so different from the embellished accounts of story-tellers and poets, his disillusion at being plunged into such rudely excavated mole-burrows, gave way to fraternal emotion. It was not that he thought of the fifteen hundred martyrs whose sacred bones had rested there. But how humble, resigned, yet full of hope had been those who had chosen such a place of sepulchre! Those low, darksome galleries were but temporary sleeping-places for the Christians. If they did not burn the bodies of their dead, as the Pagans did, it was because, like the Jews, they believed in the resurrection of the body; and it was that lovely idea of sleep, of tranquil rest after a just life, whilst awaiting the celestial reward, which imparted such intense peacefulness, such infinite charm, to the black, subterranean city. Everything there spoke of calm and silent night; everything there slumbered in rapturous quiescence, patient until the far-off awakening. What could be more touching than those terra-cotta tiles, those marble slabs, which bore not even a name—nothing but the words /In Pace/—at peace. Ah! to be at peace—life's work at last accomplished; to sleep in peace, to hope in peace for the advent of heaven! And the peacefulness seemed the more delightful as it was enjoyed in such deep humility. Doubtless the diggers worked chance-wise and clumsily; the craftsmen no longer knew how to engrave a name or carve a palm or a dove. Art had vanished; but all the feebleness and ignorance were instinct with the youth of a new humanity. Poor and lowly and meek ones swarmed there, reposing beneath the soil, whilst up above the sun continued its everlasting task. You found there charity and fraternity and death; husband and wife often lying together with their offspring at their feet; the great mass of the unknown submerging the personage, the bishop, or the martyr; the most touching equality—that springing from modesty—prevailing amidst all that dust, with compartments ever similar and slabs destitute of ornament, so that rows and rows of the sleepers mingled without distinctive sign. The inscriptions seldom ventured on a word of praise, and then how prudent, how delicate it was: the men were very worthy, very pious: the women very gentle, very beautiful, very chaste. A perfume of infancy arose, unlimited human affection spread: this was death as understood by the primitive Christians—death which hid itself to await the resurrection, and dreamt no more of the empire of the world!

And all at once before Pierre's eyes arose a vision of the sumptuous tombs of the Appian Way, displaying the domineering pride of a whole civilisation in the sunlight—tombs of vast dimensions, with a profusion of marbles, grandiloquent inscriptions, and masterpieces of sculptured-work. Ah! what an extraordinary contrast between that pompous avenue of death, conducting, like a highway of triumph, to the regal Eternal City, when compared with the subterranean necropolis of the Christians, that city of hidden death, so gentle, so beautiful, and so chaste! Here only quiet slumber, desired and accepted night, resignation and patience were to be found. Millions of human beings had here laid themselves to rest in all humility, had slept for centuries, and would still be sleeping here, lulled by the silence and the gloom, if the living had not intruded on their desire to remain in oblivion so long as the trumpets of the Judgment Day did not awaken them. Death had then spoken of Life: nowhere had there been more intimate and touching life than in these buried cities of the unknown, lowly dead. And a mighty breath had formerly come from them—the breath of a new humanity destined to renew the world. With the advent of meekness, contempt for the flesh, terror and hatred of nature, relinquishment of terrestrial joys, and a passion for death, which delivers and opens the portals of Paradise, another world had begun. And the blood of Augustus, so proud of purpling in the sunlight, so fired by the passion for sovereign dominion, seemed for a moment to disappear, as if, indeed, the new world had sucked it up in

the depths of its gloomy sepulchres.

However, the Trappist insisted on showing the ladies the steps of Diocletian, and began to tell them the legend. "Yes," said he, "it was a miracle. One day, under that emperor, some soldiers were pursuing several Christians, who took refuge in these catacombs; and when the soldiers followed them inside the steps suddenly gave way, and all the persecutors were hurled to the bottom. The steps remain broken to this day. Come and see them; they are close by."

But the ladies were quite overcome, so affected by their prolonged sojourn in the gloom and by the tales of death which the Trappist had poured into their ears that they insisted on going up again. Moreover, the candles were coming to an end. They were all dazzled when they found themselves once more in the sunlight, outside the little hut where articles of piety and souvenirs were sold. The girl bought a paper weight, a piece of marble on which was engraved the fish symbolical of "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour of Mankind."

On the afternoon of that same day Pierre decided to visit St. Peter's. He had as yet only driven across the superb piazza with its obelisk and twin fountains, encircled by Bernini's colonnades, those four rows of columns and pilasters which form a girdle of monumental majesty. At the far end rises the basilica, its facade making it look smaller and heavier than it really is, but its sovereign dome nevertheless filling the heavens.

Pebbled, deserted inclines stretched out, and steps followed steps, worn and white, under the burning sun; but at last Pierre reached the door and went in. It was three o'clock. Broad sheets of light streamed in through the high square windows, and some ceremony—the vesper service, no doubt—was beginning in the Capella Clementina on the left. Pierre, however, heard nothing; he was simply struck by the immensity of the edifice, as with raised eyes he slowly walked along. At the entrance came the giant basins for holy water with their boy-angels as chubby as Cupids; then the nave, vaulted and decorated with sunken coffers; then the four cyclopean buttress-piers upholding the dome, and then again the transepts and apsis, each as large as one of our churches. And the proud pomp, the dazzling, crushing splendour of everything, also astonished him: he marvelled at the cupola, looking like a planet, resplendent with the gold and bright colours of its mosaic-work, at the sumptuous /baldacchino/ of bronze, crowning the high altar raised above the very tomb of St. Peter, and whence descend the double steps of the Confession, illumined by seven and eighty lamps, which are always kept burning. And finally he was lost in astonishment at the extraordinary profusion of marble, both white and coloured. Oh! those polychromatic marbles, Bernini's luxurious passion! The splendid pavement reflecting the entire edifice, the facings of the pilasters with their medallions of popes, the tiara and the keys borne aloft by chubby angels, the walls covered with emblems, particularly the dove of Innocent X, the niches with their colossal statues uncouth in taste, the /loggie/ and their balconies, the balustrade and double steps of the Confession, the rich altars and yet richer tombs—all, nave, aisles, transepts, and apsis, were in marble, resplendent with the wealth of marble; not a nook small as the palm of one's hand appearing but it showed the insolent opulence of marble. And the basilica triumphed, beyond discussion, recognised and admired by every one as the largest and most splendid church in the whole world—the personification of hugeness and magnificence combined.

Pierre still wandered on, gazing, overcome, as yet not distinguishing details. He paused for a moment before the bronze statue of St. Peter, seated in a stiff, hierarchical attitude on a marble pedestal. A few of the faithful were there kissing the large toe of the Saint's right foot. Some of them carefully wiped it before applying their lips; others, with no thought of cleanliness, kissed it, pressed their foreheads to it, and then kissed it again. Next, Pierre turned into the transept on the left, where stand the confessionals. Priests are ever stationed there, ready to confess penitents in every language. Others wait, holding long staves, with which they lightly tap the heads of kneeling sinners, who thereby obtain thirty days' indulgence. However, there were few people present, and inside the small wooden boxes the priests occupied their leisure time in reading and writing, as if they were at home. Then Pierre again found himself before the Confession, and gazed with interest at the eighty lamps, scintillating like stars. The high altar, at which the Pope alone can officiate, seemed wrapped in the haughty melancholy of solitude under its gigantic, flowery /baldacchino/, the casting and gilding of which cost two and twenty thousand pounds. But suddenly Pierre remembered the ceremony in the Capella Clementina, and felt astonished, for he could hear nothing of it. As he drew near a faint breath, like the far-away piping of a flute, was wafted to him. Then the volume of sound slowly increased, but it was only on reaching the chapel that he recognised an organ peal. The sunlight here filtered through red curtains drawn before the windows, and thus the chapel glowed like a furnace whilst resounding with the grave music. But in that huge pile all became so slight, so weak, that at sixty paces neither voice nor organ could be distinguished.

On entering the basilica Pierre had fancied that it was quite empty and lifeless. There were, however, some people there, but so few and far between that their presence was not noticed. A few tourists

wandered about wearily, guide-book in hand. In the grand nave a painter with his easel was taking a view, as in a public gallery. Then a French seminary went by, conducted by a prelate who named and explained the tombs. But in all that space these fifty or a hundred people looked merely like a few black ants who had lost themselves and were vainly seeking their way. And Pierre pictured himself in some gigantic gala hall or tremendous vestibule in an immeasurable palace of reception. The broad sheets of sunlight streaming through the lofty square windows of plain white glass illumined the church with blending radiance. There was not a single stool or chair: nothing but the superb, bare pavement, such as you might find in a museum, shining mirror-like under the dancing shower of sunrays. Nor was there a single corner for solitary reflection, a nook of gloom and mystery, where one might kneel and pray. In lieu thereof the sumptuous, sovereign dazzlement of broad daylight prevailed upon every side. And, on thus suddenly finding himself in this deserted opera-house, all aglow with flaring gold and purple, Pierre could but remember the quivering gloom of the Gothic cathedrals of France, where dim crowds sob and supplicate amidst a forest of pillars. In presence of all this ceremonial majesty—this huge, empty pomp, which was all Body—he recalled with a pang the emaciate architecture and statuary of the middle ages, which were all Soul. He vainly sought for some poor, kneeling woman, some creature swayed by faith or suffering, yielding in a modest half-light to thoughts of the unknown, and with closed lips holding communion with the invisible. These he found not: there was but the weary wandering of the tourists, and the bustle of the prelates conducting the young priests to the obligatory stations; while the vesper service continued in the left-hand chapel, nought of it reaching the ears of the visitors save, perhaps, a confused vibration, as of the peal of a bell penetrating from outside through the vaults above.

And Pierre then understood that this was the splendid skeleton of a colossus whence life was departing. To fill it, to animate it with a soul, all the gorgeous display of great religious ceremonies was needed; the eighty thousand worshippers which it could hold, the great pontifical pomps, the festivals of Christmas and Easter, the processions and /corteges/ displaying all the luxury of the Church amidst operatic scenery and appointments. And he tried to conjure up a picture of the past magnificence—the basilica overflowing with an idolatrous multitude, and the superhuman /cortege/ passing along whilst every head was lowered; the cross and the sword opening the march, the cardinals going two by two, like twin divinities, in their rochets of lace and their mantles and robes of red moire, which train-bearers held up behind them; and at last, with Jove-like pomp, the Pope, carried on a stage draped with red velvet, seated in an arm-chair of red velvet and gold, and dressed in white velvet, with cope of gold, stole of gold, and tiara of gold. The bearers of the /Sedia gestatoria/* shone bravely in red tunics broidered with gold. Above the one and only Sovereign Pontiff of the world the /flabelli/ waved those huge fans of feathers which formerly were waved before the idols of pagan Rome. And around the seat of triumph what a dazzling, glorious court there was! The whole pontifical family, the stream of assistant prelates, the patriarchs, the archbishops, and the bishops, with vestments and mitres of gold, the /Camerieri segreti partecipanti/ in violet silk, the /Camerieri partecipanti/ of the cape and the sword in black velvet Renascence costumes, with ruffs and golden chains, the whole innumerable ecclesiastical and laical suite, which not even a hundred pages of the "Gerarchia" can completely enumerate, the prothonotaries, the chaplains, the prelates of every class and degree, without mentioning the military household, the gendarmes with their busbies, the Palatine Guards in blue trousers and black tunics, the Swiss Guards costumed in red, yellow, and black, with breastplates of silver, suggesting the men at arms of some drama of the Romantic school, and the Noble Guards, superb in their high boots, white pigskins, red tunics, gold lace, epaulets, and helmets! However, since Rome had become the capital of Italy the doors were no longer thrown wide open; on the rare occasions when the Pope yet came down to officiate, to show himself as the supreme representative of the Divinity on earth, the basilica was filled with chosen ones. To enter it you needed a card of invitation. You no longer saw the people—a throng of fifty, even eighty, thousand Christians—flocking to the Church and swarming within it promiscuously; there was but a select gathering, a congregation of friends convened as for a private function. Even when, by dint of effort, thousands were collected together there, they formed but a picked audience invited to the performance of a monster concert.

* The chair and stage are known by that name.—Trans.

And as Pierre strolled among the bright, crude marbles in that cold if gorgeous museum, the feeling grew upon him that he was in some pagan temple raised to the deity of Light and Pomp. The larger temples of ancient Rome were certainly similar piles, upheld by the same precious columns, with walls covered with the same polychromatic marbles and vaulted ceilings having the same gilded panels. And his feeling was destined to become yet more acute after his visits to the other basilicas, which could but reveal the truth to him. First one found the Christian Church quietly, audaciously quartering itself in a pagan church, as, for instance, San Lorenzo in Miranda installed in the temple of Antoninus and Faustina, and retaining the latter's rare porticus in /cipollino/ marble and its handsome white marble entablature. Then there was the Christian Church springing from the ruins of the destroyed pagan edifice, as, for example, San Clemente, beneath which centuries of contrary beliefs are stratified: a very

ancient edifice of the time of the kings or the republic, then another of the days of the empire identified as a temple of Mithras, and next a basilica of the primitive faith. Then, too, there was the Christian Church, typified by that of Saint Agnes-beyond-the-walls which had been built on exactly the same pattern as the Roman secular basilica—that Tribunal and Exchange which accompanied every Forum. And, in particular, there was the Christian Church erected with material stolen from the demolished pagan temples. To this testified the sixteen superb columns of that same Saint Agnes, columns of various marbles filched from various gods; the one and twenty columns of Santa Maria in Trastevere, columns of all sorts of orders torn from a temple of Isis and Serapis, who even now are represented on their capitals; also the six and thirty white marble Ionic columns of Santa Maria Maggiore derived from the temple of Juno Lucina; and the two and twenty columns of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, these varying in substance, size, and workmanship, and certain of them said to have been stolen from Jove himself, from the famous temple of Jupiter Capitolinus which rose upon the sacred summit. In addition, the temples of the opulent Imperial period seemed to resuscitate in our times at San Giovanni in Laterano and San Paolo-fuori-le-mura. Was not that Basilica of San Giovanni—"the Mother and Head of all the churches of the city and the earth"—like the abode of honour of some pagan divinity whose splendid kingdom was of this world? It boasted five naves, parted by four rows of columns; it was a profusion of bas-reliefs, friezes, and entablatures, and its twelve colossal statues of the Apostles looked like subordinate deities lining the approach to the master of the gods! And did not San Paolo, lately completed, its new marbles shimmering like mirrors, recall the abode of the Olympian immortals, typical temple as it was with its majestic colonnade, its flat, gilt-panelled ceiling, its marble pavement incomparably beautiful both in substance and workmanship, its violet columns with white bases and capitals, and its white entablature with violet frieze: everywhere, indeed, you found, the mingling of those two colours so divinely carnal in their harmony. And there, as at St. Peter's, not one patch of gloom, not one nook of mystery where one might peer into the invisible, could be found! And, withal, St. Peter's remained the monster, the colossus, larger than the largest of all others, an extravagant testimony of what the mad passion for the huge can achieve when human pride, by dint of spending millions, dreams of lodging the divinity in an over-vast, over-opulent palace of stone, where in truth that pride itself, and not the divinity, triumphs!

And to think that after long centuries that gala colossus had been the outcome of the fervour of primitive faith! You found there a blossoming of that ancient sap, peculiar to the soil of Rome, which in all ages has thrown up preposterous edifices, of exaggerated hugeness and dazzling and ruinous luxury. It would seem as if the absolute masters successively ruling the city brought that passion for cyclopean building with them, derived it from the soil in which they grew, for they transmitted it one to the other, without a pause, from civilisation to civilisation, however diverse and contrary their minds. It has all been, so to say, a continuous blossoming of human vanity, a passionate desire to set one's name on an imperishable wall, and, after being master of the world, to leave behind one an indestructible trace, a tangible proof of one's passing glory, an eternal edifice of bronze and marble fit to attest that glory until the end of time. At the bottom the spirit of conquest, the proud ambition to dominate the world, subsists; and when all has crumbled, and a new society has sprung up from the ruins of its predecessor, men have erred in imagining it to be cured of the sin of pride, steeped in humility once more, for it has had the old blood in its veins, and has yielded to the same insolent madness as its ancestors, a prey to all the violence of its heredity directly it has become great and strong. Among the illustrious popes there has not been one that did not seek to build, did not revert to the traditions of the Caesars, eternising their reigns in stone and raising temples for resting-places, so as to rank among the gods. Ever the same passion for terrestrial immortality has burst forth: it has been a battle as to who should leave the highest, most substantial, most gorgeous monument; and so acute has been the disease that those who, for lack of means and opportunity, have been unable to build, and have been forced to content themselves with repairing, have, nevertheless, desired to bequeath the memory of their modest achievements to subsequent generations by commemorative marble slabs engraved with pompous inscriptions! These slabs are to be seen on every side: not a wall has ever been strengthened but some pope has stamped it with his arms, not a ruin has been restored, not a palace repaired, not a fountain cleaned, but the reigning pope has signed the work with his Roman and pagan title of "Pontifex Maximus." It is a haunting passion, a form of involuntary debauchery, the fated florescence of that compost of ruins, that dust of edifices whence new edifices are ever arising. And given the perversion with which the old Roman soil almost immediately tarnished the doctrines of Jesus, that resolute passion for domination and that desire for terrestrial glory which wrought the triumph of Catholicism in scorn of the humble and pure, the fraternal and simple ones of the primitive Church, one may well ask whether Rome has ever been Christian at all!

And whilst Pierre was for the second time walking round the huge basilica, admiring the tombs of the popes, truth, like a sudden illumination, burst upon him and filled him with its glow. Ah! those tombs! Yonder in the full sunlight, in the rosy Campagna, on either side of the Appian Way—that triumphal approach to Rome, conducting the stranger to the august Palatine with its crown of circling palaces—there arose the gigantic tombs of the powerful and wealthy, tombs of unparalleled artistic splendour,

perpetuating in marble the pride and pomp of a strong race that had mastered the world. Then, near at hand, beneath the sod, in the shrouding night of wretched mole-holes, other tombs were hidden—the tombs of the lowly, the poor, and the suffering—tombs destitute of art or display, but whose very humility proclaimed that a breath of affection and resignation had passed by, that One had come preaching love and fraternity, the relinquishment of the wealth of the earth for the everlasting joys of a future life, and committing to the soil the good seed of His Gospel, sowing the new humanity which was to transform the olden world. And, behold, from that seed, buried in the soil for centuries, behold, from those humble, unobtrusive tombs, where martyrs slept their last and gentle sleep whilst waiting for the glorious call, yet other tombs had sprung, tombs as gigantic and as pompous as the ancient, destroyed sepulchres of the idolaters, tombs uprearing their marbles among a pagan-temple-like splendour, proclaiming the same superhuman pride, the same mad passion for universal sovereignty. At the time of the Renascence Rome became pagan once more; the old imperial blood frothed up and swept Christianity away with the greatest onslaught ever directed against it. Ah! those tombs of the popes at St. Peter's, with their impudent, insolent glorification of the departed, their sumptuous, carnal hugeness, defying death and setting immortality upon this earth. There are giant popes of bronze, allegorical figures and angels of equivocal character wearing the beauty of lovely girls, of passion-compelling women with the thighs and the breasts of pagan goddesses! Paul III is seated on a high pedestal, Justice and Prudence are almost prostrate at his feet. Urban VIII is between Prudence and Religion, Innocent XI between Religion and Justice, Innocent XII between Justice and Charity, Gregory XIII between Religion and Strength. Attended by Prudence and Justice, Alexander VII appears kneeling, with Charity and Truth before him, and a skeleton rises up displaying an empty hour-glass. Clement XIII, also on his knees, triumphs above a monumental sarcophagus, against which leans Religion bearing the Cross; while the Genius of Death, his elbow resting on the right-hand corner, has two huge, superb lions, emblems of omnipotence, beneath him. Bronze bespeaks the eternity of the figures, white marble describes opulent flesh, and coloured marble winds around in rich draperies, deifying the monuments under the bright, golden glow of nave and aisles.

And Pierre passed from one tomb to the other on his way through the magnificent, deserted, sunlit basilica. Yes, these tombs, so imperial in their ostentation, were meet companions for those of the Appian Way. Assuredly it was Rome, the soil of Rome, that soil where pride and domination sprouted like the herbage of the fields that had transformed the humble Christianity of primitive times, the religion of fraternity, justice, and hope into what it now was: victorious Catholicism, allied to the rich and powerful, a huge implement of government, prepared for the conquest of every nation. The popes had awoke as Caesars. Remote heredity had acted, the blood of Augustus had bubbled forth afresh, flowing through their veins and firing their minds with immeasurable ambition. As yet none but Augustus had held the empire of the world, had been both emperor and pontiff, master of the body and the soul. And thence had come the eternal dream of the popes in despair at only holding the spiritual power, and obstinately refusing to yield in temporal matters, clinging for ever to the ancient hope that their dream might at last be realised, and the Vatican become another Palatine, whence they might reign with absolute despotism over all the conquered nations.

VI

PIERRE had been in Rome for a fortnight, and yet the affair of his book was no nearer solution. He was still possessed by an ardent desire to see the Pope, but could in no wise tell how to satisfy it, so frequent were the delays and so greatly had he been frightened by Monsignor Nani's predictions of the dire consequences which might attend any imprudent action. And so, foreseeing a prolonged sojourn, he at last betook himself to the Vicariate in order that his "celebret" might be stamped, and afterwards said his mass each morning at the Church of Santa Brigida, where he received a kindly greeting from Abbe Pisoni, Benedetta's former confessor.

One Monday evening he resolved to repair early to Donna Serafina's customary reception in the hope of learning some news and expediting his affairs. Perhaps Monsignor Nani would look in; perhaps he might be lucky enough to come across some cardinal or domestic prelate willing to help him. It was in vain that he had tried to extract any positive information from Don Vigilio, for, after a short spell of affability and willingness, Cardinal Pio's secretary had relapsed into distrust and fear, and avoided Pierre as if he were resolved not to meddle in a business which, all considered, was decidedly suspicious and dangerous. Moreover, for a couple of days past a violent attack of fever had compelled him to keep his room.

Thus the only person to whom Pierre could turn for comfort was Victorine Bosquet, the old Beauceronne servant who had been promoted to the rank of housekeeper, and who still retained a French heart after thirty years' residence in Rome. She often spoke to the young priest of Auneau, her native place, as if she had left it only the previous day; but on that particular Monday even she had lost

her wonted gay vivacity, and when she heard that he meant to go down in the evening to see the ladies she wagged her head significantly. "Ah! you won't find them very cheerful," said she. "My poor Benedetta is greatly worried. Her divorce suit is not progressing at all well."

All Rome, indeed, was again talking of this affair. An extraordinary revival of tittle-tattle had set both white and black worlds agog. And so there was no need for reticence on Victorine's part, especially in conversing with a compatriot. It appeared, then, that, in reply to Advocate Morano's memoir setting forth that the marriage had not been consummated, there had come another memoir, a terrible one, emanating from Monsignor Palma, a doctor in theology, whom the Congregation of the Council had selected to defend the marriage. As a first point, Monsignor Palma flatly disputed the alleged non-consummation, questioned the certificate put forward on Benedetta's behalf, and quoted instances recorded in scientific text-books which showed how deceptive appearances often were. He strongly insisted, moreover, on the narrative which Count Prada supplied in another memoir, a narrative well calculated to inspire doubt; and, further, he so turned and twisted the evidence of Benedetta's own maid as to make that evidence also serve against her. Finally he argued in a decisive way that, even supposing the marriage had not been consummated, this could only be ascribed to the resistance of the Countess, who had thus set at defiance one of the elementary laws of married life, which was that a wife owed obedience to her husband.

Next had come a fourth memoir, drawn up by the reporter of the Congregation, who analysed and discussed the three others, and subsequently the Congregation itself had dealt with the matter, opining in favour of the dissolution of the marriage by a majority of one vote—such a bare majority, indeed, that Monsignor Palma, exercising his rights, had hastened to demand further inquiry, a course which brought the whole /procedure/ again into question, and rendered a fresh vote necessary.

"Ah! the poor Contessina!" exclaimed Victorine, "she'll surely die of grief, for, calm as she may seem, there's an inward fire consuming her. It seems that Monsignor Palma is the master of the situation, and can make the affair drag on as long as he likes. And then a deal of money had already been spent, and one will have to spend a lot more. Abbe Pisoni, whom you know, was very badly inspired when he helped on that marriage; and though I certainly don't want to soil the memory of my good mistress, Countess Ernesta, who was a real saint, it's none the less true that she wrecked her daughter's life when she gave her to Count Prada."

The housekeeper paused. Then, impelled by an instinctive sense of justice, she resumed. "It's only natural that Count Prada should be annoyed, for he's really being made a fool of. And, for my part, as there is no end to all the fuss, and this divorce is so hard to obtain, I really don't see why the Contessina shouldn't live with her Dario without troubling any further. Haven't they loved one another ever since they were children? Aren't they both young and handsome, and wouldn't they be happy together, whatever the world might say? Happiness, /mon Dieu/! one finds it so seldom that one can't afford to let it pass."

Then, seeing how greatly surprised Pierre was at hearing such language, she began to laugh with the quiet composure of one belonging to the humble classes of France, whose only desire is a quiet and happy life, irrespective of matrimonial ties. Next, in more discreet language, she proceeded to lament another worry which had fallen on the household, another result of the divorce affair. A rupture had come about between Donna Serafina and Advocate Morano, who was very displeased with the ill success of his memoir to the congregation, and accused Father Lorenza—the confessor of the Boccanera ladies—of having urged them into a deplorable lawsuit, whose only fruit could be a wretched scandal affecting everybody. And so great had been Morano's annoyance that he had not returned to the Boccanera mansion, but had severed a connection of thirty years' standing, to the stupefaction of all the Roman drawing-rooms, which altogether disapproved of his conduct. Donna Serafina was, for her part, the more grieved as she suspected the advocate of having purposely picked the quarrel in order to secure an excuse for leaving her; his real motive, in her estimation, being a sudden, disgraceful passion for a young and intriguing woman of the middle classes.

That Monday evening, when Pierre entered the drawing-room, hung with yellow brocatelle of a flowery Louis XIV pattern, he at once realised that melancholy reigned in the dim light radiating from the lace-veiled lamps. Benedetta and Celia, seated on a sofa, were chatting with Dario, whilst Cardinal Sarno, ensconced in an arm-chair, listened to the ceaseless chatter of the old relative who conducted the little Princess to each Monday gathering. And the only other person present was Donna Serafina, seated all alone in her wonted place on the right-hand side of the chimney-piece, and consumed with secret rage at seeing the chair on the left-hand side unoccupied—that chair which Morano had always taken during the thirty years that he had been faithful to her. Pierre noticed with what anxious and then despairing eyes she observed his entrance, her glance ever straying towards the door, as though she even yet hoped for the fickle one's return. Withal her bearing was erect and proud; she seemed to be more tightly laced than ever; and there was all the wonted haughtiness on her hard-featured face,

with its jet-black eyebrows and snowy hair.

Pierre had no sooner paid his respects to her than he allowed his own worry to appear by inquiring whether they would not have the pleasure of seeing Monsignor Nani that evening. Thereupon Donna Serafina could not refrain from answering: "Oh! Monsignor Nani is forsaking us like the others. People always take themselves off when they can be of service."

She harboured a spite against the prelate for having done so little to further the divorce in spite of his many promises. Beneath his outward show of extreme willingness and caressing affability he doubtless concealed some scheme of his own which he was tenaciously pursuing. However, Donna Serafina promptly regretted the confession which anger had wrung from her, and resumed: "After all, he will perhaps come. He is so good-natured, and so fond of us."

In spite of the vivacity of her temperament she really wished to act diplomatically, so as to overcome the bad luck which had recently set in. Her brother the Cardinal had told her how irritated he was by the attitude of the Congregation of the Council; he had little doubt that the frigid reception accorded to his niece's suit had been due in part to the desire of some of his brother cardinals to be disagreeable to him. Personally, he desired the divorce, as it seemed to him the only means of ensuring the perpetuation of the family; for Dario obstinately refused to marry any other woman than his cousin. And thus there was an accumulation of disasters; the Cardinal was wounded in his pride, his sister shared his sufferings and on her own side was stricken in the heart, whilst both lovers were plunged in despair at finding their hopes yet again deferred.

As Pierre approached the sofa where the young folks were chatting he found that they were speaking of the catastrophe. "Why should you be so despondent?" asked Celia in an undertone. "After all, there was a majority of a vote in favour of annulling the marriage. Your suit hasn't been rejected; there is only a delay."

But Benedetta shook her head. "No, no! If Monsignor Palma proves obstinate his Holiness will never consent. It's all over."

"Ah! if one were only rich, very rich!" murmured Dario, with such an air of conviction that no one smiled. And, turning to his cousin, he added in a whisper: "I must really have a talk with you. We cannot go on living like this."

In a breath she responded: "Yes, you are right. Come down to-morrow evening at five. I will be here alone."

Then dreariness set in; the evening seemed to have no end. Pierre was greatly touched by the evident despair of Benedetta, who as a rule was so calm and sensible. The deep eyes which illumined her pure, delicate, infantile face were now blurred as by restrained tears. He had already formed a sincere affection for her, pleased as he was with her equable if somewhat indolent disposition, the semblance of discreet good sense with which she veiled her soul of fire. That Monday even she certainly tried to smile while listening to the pretty secrets confided to her by Celia, whose love affairs were prospering far more than her own. There was only one brief interval of general conversation, and that was brought about by the little Princess's aunt, who, suddenly raising her voice, began to speak of the infamous manner in which the Italian newspapers referred to the Holy Father. Never, indeed, had there been so much bad feeling between the Vatican and the Quirinal. Cardinal Sarno felt so strongly on the subject that he departed from his wonted silence to announce that on the occasion of the sacrilegious festivities of the Twentieth of September, celebrating the capture of Rome, the Pope intended to cast a fresh letter of protest in the face of all the Christian powers, whose indifference proved their complicity in the odious spoliation of the Church.

"Yes, indeed! what folly to try and marry the Pope and the King," bitterly exclaimed Donna Serafina, alluding to her niece's deplorable marriage.

The old maid now seemed quite beside herself; it was already so late that neither Monsignor Nani nor anybody else was expected. However, at the unhoped-for sound of footsteps her eyes again brightened and turned feverishly towards the door. But it was only to encounter a final disappointment. The visitor proved to be Narcisse Habert, who stepped up to her, apologising for making so late a call. It was Cardinal Sarno, his uncle by marriage, who had introduced him into this exclusive /salon/, where he had received a cordial reception on account of his religious views, which were said to be most uncompromising. If, however, despite the lateness of the hour, he had ventured to call there that evening, it was solely on account of Pierre, whom he at once drew on one side.

"I felt sure I should find you here," he said. "Just now I managed to see my cousin, Monsignor Gamba del Zoppo, and I have some good news for you. He will see us to-morrow at about eleven in his rooms at

the Vatican." Then, lowering his voice: "I think he will endeavour to conduct you to the Holy Father. Briefly, the audience seems to me assured."

Pierre was greatly delighted by this promised certainty, which came to him so suddenly in that dreary drawing-room, where for a couple of hours he had been gradually sinking into despair! So at last a solution was at hand!

Meantime Narcisse, after shaking hands with Dario and bowing to Benedetta and Celia, approached his uncle the Cardinal, who, having rid himself of the old relation, made up his mind to talk. But his conversation was confined to the state of his health, and the weather, and sundry insignificant anecdotes which he had lately heard. Not a word escaped him respecting the thousand complicated matters with which he dealt at the Propaganda. It was as though, once outside his office, he plunged into the commonplace and the unimportant by way of resting from the anxious task of governing the world. And after he had spoken for a time every one got up, and the visitors took leave.

"Don't forget," Narcisse repeated to Pierre, "you will find me at the Sixtine Chapel to-morrow at ten. And I will show you the Botticellis before we go to our appointment."

At half-past nine on the following morning Pierre, who had come on foot, was already on the spacious Piazza of St. Peter's; and before turning to the right, towards the bronze gate near one corner of Bernini's colonnade, he raised his eyes and lingered, gazing at the Vatican. Nothing to his mind could be less monumental than the jumble of buildings which, without semblance of architectural order or regularity of any kind, had grown up in the shadow cast by the dome of the basilica. Roofs rose one above the other and broad, flat walls stretched out chance-wise, just as wings and storeys had been added. The only symmetry observable above the colonnade was that of the three sides of the court of San Damaso, where the lofty glass-work which now encloses the old /loggie/ sparkled in the sun between the ruddy columns and pilasters, suggesting, as it were, three huge conservatories.

And this was the most beautiful palace in the world, the largest of all palaces, comprising no fewer than eleven thousand apartments and containing the most admirable masterpieces of human genius! But Pierre, disillusioned as he was, had eyes only for the lofty facade on the right, overlooking the piazza, for he knew that the second-floor windows there were those of the Pope's private apartments. And he contemplated those windows for a long time, and remembered having been told that the fifth one on the right was that of the Pope's bed-room, and that a lamp could always be seen burning there far into the night.

What was there, too, behind that gate of bronze which he saw before him—that sacred portal by which all the kingdoms of the world communicated with the kingdom of heaven, whose august vicar had secluded himself behind those lofty, silent walls? From where he stood Pierre gazed on that gate with its metal panels studded with large square-headed nails, and wondered what it defended, what it concealed, what it shut off from the view, with its stern, forbidding air, recalling that of the gate of some ancient fortress. What kind of world would he find behind it, what treasures of human charity jealously preserved in yonder gloom, what revivifying hope for the new nations hungering for fraternity and justice? He took pleasure in fancying, in picturing the one holy pastor of humanity, ever watching in the depths of that closed palace, and, while the nations strayed into hatred, preparing all for the final reign of Jesus, and at last proclaiming the advent of that reign by transforming our democracies into the one great Christian community promised by the Saviour. Assuredly the world's future was being prepared behind that bronze portal; assuredly it was that future which would issue forth.

But all at once Pierre was amazed to find himself face to face with Monsignor Nani, who had just left the Vatican on his way to the neighbouring Palace of the Inquisition, where, as Assessor, he had his residence.

"Ah! Monsignor," said Pierre, "I am very pleased. My friend Monsieur Habert is going to present me to his cousin, Monsignor Gamba del Zoppo, and I think I shall obtain the audience I so greatly desire."

Monsignor Nani smiled with his usual amiable yet keen expression. "Yes, yes, I know." But, correcting himself as it were, he added: "I share your satisfaction, my dear son. Only, you must be prudent." And then, as if fearing that the young priest might have understood by his first words that he had just seen Monsignor Gamba, the most easily terrified prelate of the whole prudent pontifical family, he related that he had been running about since an early hour on behalf of two French ladies, who likewise were dying of a desire to see the Pope. However, he greatly feared that the help he was giving them would not prove successful.

"I will confess to you, Monsignor," replied Pierre, "that I myself was getting very discouraged. Yes, it is high time I should find a little comfort, for my sojourn here is hardly calculated to brace my soul."

He went on in this strain, allowing it to be seen that the sights of Rome were finally destroying his faith. Such days as those which he had spent on the Palatine and along the Appian Way, in the Catacombs and at St. Peter's, grievously disturbed him, spoilt his dream of Christianity rejuvenated and triumphant. He emerged from them full of doubt and growing lassitude, having already lost much of his usually rebellious enthusiasm.

Still smiling, Monsignor Nani listened and nodded approvingly. Yes, no doubt that was the fatal result. He seemed to have foreseen it, and to be well satisfied thereat. "At all events, my dear son," said he, "everything is going on well, since you are now certain that you will see his Holiness."

"That is true, Monsignor; I have placed my only hope in the very just and perspicacious Leo XIII. He alone can judge me, since he alone can recognise in my book his own ideas, which I think I have very faithfully set forth. Ah! if he be willing he will, in Jesus' name and by democracy and science, save this old world of ours!"

Pierre's enthusiasm was returning again, and Nani, smiling more and more affably with his piercing eyes and thin lips, again expressed approval: "Certainly; quite so, my dear son. You will speak to him, you will see."

Then as they both raised their heads and looked towards the Vatican, Nani carried his amiability so far as to undeceive Pierre with respect to the Pope's bed-room. No, the window where a light was seen every evening was simply that of a landing where the gas was kept burning almost all night. The window of his Holiness's bed-chamber was the second one farther on. Then both relapsed into silence, equally grave as they continued to gaze at the facade.

"Well, till we meet again, my dear son," said Nani at last. "You will tell me of your interview, I hope."

As soon as Pierre was alone he went in by the bronze portal, his heart beating violently, as if he were entering some redoubtable sanctuary where the future happiness of mankind was elaborated. A sentry was on duty there, a Swiss guard, who walked slowly up and down in a grey-blue cloak, below which one only caught a glimpse of his baggy red, black, and yellow breeches; and it seemed as if this cloak of sober hue were purposely cast over a disguise in order to conceal its strangeness, which had become irksome. Then, on the right-hand, came the covered stairway conducting to the Court of San Damaso; but to reach the Sixtine Chapel it was necessary to follow a long gallery, with columns on either hand, and ascend the royal staircase, the Scala Regia. And in this realm of the gigantic, where every dimension is exaggerated and replete with overpowering majesty, Pierre's breath came short as he ascended the broad steps.

He was much surprised on entering the Sixtine Chapel, for it at first seemed to him small, a sort of rectangular and lofty hall, with a delicate screen of white marble separating the part where guests congregate on the occasion of great ceremonies from the choir where the cardinals sit on simple oaken benches, while the inferior prelates remain standing behind them. On a low platform to the right of the soberly adorned altar is the pontifical throne; while in the wall on the left opens the narrow singing gallery with its balcony of marble. And for everything suddenly to spread out and soar into the infinite one must raise one's head, allow one's eyes to ascend from the huge fresco of the Last Judgment, occupying the whole of the end wall, to the paintings which cover the vaulted ceiling down to the cornice extending between the twelve windows of white glass, six on either hand.

Fortunately there were only three or four quiet tourists there; and Pierre at once perceived Narcisse Habert occupying one of the cardinals' seats above the steps where the train-bearers crouch. Motionless, and with his head somewhat thrown back, the young man seemed to be in ecstasy. But it was not the work of Michael Angelo that he thus contemplated. His eyes never strayed from one of the earlier frescoes below the cornice; and on recognising the priest he contented himself with murmuring: "Ah! my friend, just look at the Botticelli." Then, with dreamy eyes, he relapsed into a state of rapture.

Pierre, for his part, had received a great shock both in heart and in mind, overpowered as he was by the superhuman genius of Michael Angelo. The rest vanished; there only remained, up yonder, as in a limitless heaven, the extraordinary creations of the master's art. That which at first surprised one was that the painter should have been the sole artisan of the mighty work. No marble cutters, no bronze workers, no gilders, no one of another calling had intervened. The painter with his brush had sufficed for all—for the pilasters, columns, and cornices of marble, for the statues and the ornaments of bronze, for the /fleurons/ and roses of gold, for the whole of the wondrously rich decorative work which surrounded the frescoes. And Pierre imagined Michael Angelo on the day when the bare vault was handed over to him, covered with plaster, offering only a flat white surface, hundreds of square yards to be adorned. And he pictured him face to face with that huge white page, refusing all help, driving all inquisitive folks away, jealously, violently shutting himself up alone with his gigantic task, spending four and a half years in fierce solitude, and day by day adding to his colossal work of creation. Ah! that

mighty work, a task to fill a whole lifetime, a task which he must have begun with quiet confidence in his own will and power, drawing, as it were, an entire world from his brain and flinging it there with the ceaseless flow of creative virility in the full heyday of its omnipotence.

And Pierre was yet more overcome when he began to examine these presentments of humanity, magnified as by the eyes of a visionary, overflowing in mighty sympathetic pages of cyclopean symbolisation. Royal grace and nobility, sovereign peacefulness and power—every beauty shone out like natural florescence. And there was perfect science, the most audacious foreshortening risked with the certainty of success—an everlasting triumph of technique over the difficulty which an arched surface presented. And, in particular, there was wonderful simplicity of medium; matter was reduced almost to nothingness; a few colours were used broadly without any studied search for effect or brilliancy. Yet that sufficed, the blood seethed freely, the muscles projected, the figures became animated and stood out of their frames with such energy and dash that it seemed as if a flame were flashing by aloft, endowing all those beings with superhuman and immortal life. Life, aye, it was life, which burst forth and triumphed—mighty, swarming life, miraculous life, the creation of one sole hand possessed of the supreme gift—simplicity blended with power.

That a philosophical system, a record of the whole of human destiny, should have been found therein, with the creation of the world, of man, and of woman, the fall, the chastisement, then the redemption, and finally God's judgment on the last day—this was a matter on which Pierre was unable to dwell, at this first visit, in the wondering stupor into which the paintings threw him. But he could not help noticing how the human body, its beauty, its power, and its grace were exalted! Ah! that regal Jehovah, at once terrible and paternal, carried off amid the whirlwind of his creation, his arms outstretched and giving birth to worlds! And that superb and nobly outlined Adam, with extended hand, whom Jehovah, though he touch him not, animates with his finger—a wondrous and admirable gesture, leaving a sacred space between the finger of the Creator and that of the created—a tiny space, in which, nevertheless, abides all the infinite of the invisible and the mysterious. And then that powerful yet adorable Eve, that Eve with the sturdy flanks fit for the bearing of humanity, that Eve with the proud, tender grace of a woman bent on being loved even to perdition, that Eve embodying the whole of woman with her fecundity, her seductiveness, her empire! Moreover, even the decorative figures of the pilasters at the corners of the frescoes celebrate the triumph of the flesh: there are the twenty young men radiant in their nakedness, with incomparable splendour of torso and of limb, and such intensity of life that a craze for motion seems to carry them off, bend them, throw them over in superb attitudes. And between the windows are the giants, the prophets and the sibyls—man and woman deified, with inordinate wealth of muscle and grandeur of intellectual expression. There is Jeremiah with his elbow resting on his knee and his chin on his hand, plunged as he is in reflection—in the very depths of his visions and his dreams; there is the Sibylla Erithraea, so pure of profile, so young despite the opulence of her form, and with one finger resting on the open book of destiny; there is Isaiah with the thick lips of truth, virile and haughty, his head half turned and his hand raised with a gesture of command; there is the Sibylla Cumaea, terrifying with her science and her old age, her wrinkled countenance, her vulture's nose, her square protruding chin; there is Jonah cast forth by the whale, and wondrously foreshortened, his torso twisted, his arms bent, his head thrown back, and his mouth agape and shouting: and there are the others, all of the same full-blown, majestic family, reigning with the sovereignty of eternal health and intelligence, and typifying the dream of a broader, loftier, and indestructible humanity. Moreover, in the lunettes and the arches over the windows other figures of grace, power, and beauty appear and throng, the ancestors of the Christ, thoughtful mothers with lovely nude infants, men with wondering eyes peering into the future, representatives of the punished weary race longing for the promised Redeemer; while in the pendentives of the four corners various biblical episodes, the victories of Israel over the Spirit of Evil, spring into life. And finally there is the gigantic fresco at the far end, the Last Judgment with its swarming multitude, so numerous that days and days are needed to see each figure aright, a distracted crowd, full of the hot breath of life, from the dead rising in response to the furious trumpeting of the angels, from the fearsome groups of the damned whom the demons fling into hell, even to Jesus the justiciar, surrounded by the saints and apostles, and to the radiant concourse of the blessed who ascend upheld by angels, whilst higher and still higher other angels, bearing the instruments of the Passion, triumph as in full glory. And yet, above this gigantic composition, painted thirty years subsequently, in the full ripeness of age, the ceiling retains its ethereality, its unquestionable superiority, for on it the artist bestowed all his virgin power, his whole youth, the first great flare of his genius.

And Pierre found but one word to express his feelings: Michael Angelo was the monster dominating and crushing all others. Beneath his immense achievement you had only to glance at the works of Perugino, Pinturicchio, Roselli, Signorelli, and Botticelli, those earlier frescoes, admirable in their way, which below the cornice spread out around the chapel.

Narcisse for his part had not raised his eyes to the overpowering splendour of the ceiling. Wrapt in

ecstasy, he did not allow his gaze to stray from one of the three frescoes of Botticelli. "Ah! Botticelli," he at last murmured; "in him you have the elegance and the grace of the mysterious; a profound feeling of sadness even in the midst of voluptuousness, a divination of the whole modern soul, with the most troublous charm that ever attended artist's work."

Pierre glanced at him in amazement, and then ventured to inquire: "You come here to see the Botticellis?"

"Yes, certainly," the young man quietly replied; "I only come here for him, and five hours every week I only look at his work. There, just study that fresco, Moses and the daughters of Jethro. Isn't it the most penetrating work that human tenderness and melancholy have produced?"

Then, with a faint, devout quiver in his voice and the air of a priest initiating another into the delightful but perturbing atmosphere of a sanctuary, he went on repeating the praises of Botticelli's art; his women with long, sensual, yet candid faces, supple bearing, and rounded forms showing from under light drapery; his young men, his angels of doubtful sex, blending stateliness of muscle with infinite delicacy of outline; next the mouths he painted, fleshy, fruit-like mouths, at times suggesting irony, at others pain, and often so enigmatical with their sinuous curves that one knew not whether the words they left unuttered were words of purity or filth; then, too, the eyes which he bestowed on his figures, eyes of languor and passion, of carnal or mystical rapture, their joy at times so instinct with grief as they peer into the nihility of human things that no eyes in the world could be more impenetrable. And finally there were Botticelli's hands, so carefully and delicately painted, so full of life, wantoning so to say in a free atmosphere, now joining, caressing, and even, as it were, speaking, the whole evincing such intense solicitude for gracefulness that at times there seems to be undue mannerism, though every hand has its particular expression, each varying expression of the enjoyment or pain which the sense of touch can bring. And yet there was nothing effeminate or false about the painter's work: on all sides a sort of virile pride was apparent, an atmosphere of superb passionate motion, absolute concern for truth, direct study from life, conscientiousness, veritable realism, corrected and elevated by a genial strangeness of feeling and character that imparted a never-to-be-forgotten charm even to ugliness itself.

Pierre's stupefaction, however, increased as he listened to Narcisse, whose somewhat studied elegance, whose curly hair cut in the Florentine fashion, and whose blue, mauvish eyes paling with enthusiasm he now for the first time remarked. "Botticelli," he at last said, "was no doubt a marvellous artist, only it seems to me that here, at any rate, Michael Angelo—"

But Narcisse interrupted him almost with violence. "No! no! Don't talk of him! He spoilt everything, ruined everything! A man who harnessed himself to his work like an ox, who laboured at his task like a navvy, at the rate of so many square yards a day! And a man, too, with no sense of the mysterious and the unknown, who saw everything so huge as to disgust one with beauty, painting girls like the trunks of oak-trees, women like giant butchers, with heaps and heaps of stupid flesh, and never a gleam of a divine or infernal soul! He was a mason—a colossal mason, if you like—but he was nothing more."

Weary "modern" that Narcisse was, spoilt by the pursuit of the original and the rare, he thus unconsciously gave rein to his fated hate of health and power. That Michael Angelo who brought forth without an effort, who had left behind him the most prodigious of all artistic creations, was the enemy. And his crime precisely was that he had created life, produced life in such excess that all the petty creations of others, even the most delightful among them, vanished in presence of the overflowing torrent of human beings flung there all alive in the sunlight.

"Well, for my part," Pierre courageously declared, "I'm not of your opinion. I now realise that life is everything in art; that real immortality belongs only to those who create. The case of Michael Angelo seems to me decisive, for he is the superhuman master, the monster who overwhelms all others, precisely because he brought forth that magnificent living flesh which offends your sense of delicacy. Those who are inclined to the curious, those who have minds of a pretty turn, whose intellects are ever seeking to penetrate things, may try to improve on the equivocal and invisible, and set all the charm of art in some elaborate stroke or symbolisation; but, none the less, Michael Angelo remains the all-powerful, the maker of men, the master of clearness, simplicity, and health."

At this Narcisse smiled with indulgent and courteous disdain. And he anticipated further argument by remarking: "It's already eleven. My cousin was to have sent a servant here as soon as he could receive us. I am surprised to have seen nobody as yet. Shall we go up to see the /stanze/ of Raffaelle while we wait?"

Once in the rooms above, he showed himself perfect, both lucid in his remarks and just in his appreciations, having recovered all his easy intelligence as soon as he was no longer upset by his hatred of colossal labour and cheerful decoration.

It was unfortunate that Pierre should have first visited the Sixtine Chapel; for it was necessary he should forget what he had just seen and accustom himself to what he now beheld in order to enjoy its pure beauty. It was as if some potent wine had confused him, and prevented any immediate relish of a lighter vintage of delicate fragrance. Admiration did not here fall upon one with lightning speed; it was slowly, irresistibly that one grew charmed. And the contrast was like that of Racine beside Corneille, Lamartine beside Hugo, the eternal pair, the masculine and feminine genius coupled through centuries of glory. With Raffaelle it is nobility, grace, exquisiteness, and correctness of line, and divineness of harmony that triumph. You do not find in him merely the materialist symbolism so superbly thrown off by Michael Angelo; he introduces psychological analysis of deep penetration into the painter's art. Man is shown more purified, idealised; one sees more of that which is within him. And though one may be in presence of an artist of sentimental bent, a feminine genius whose quiver of tenderness one can feel, it is also certain that admirable firmness of workmanship confronts one, that the whole is very strong and very great. Pierre gradually yielded to such sovereign masterliness, such virile elegance, such a vision of supreme beauty set in supreme perfection. But if the "Dispute on the Sacrament" and the so-called "School of Athens," both prior to the paintings of the Sixtine Chapel, seemed to him to be Raffaelle's masterpieces, he felt that in the "Burning of the Borgo," and particularly in the "Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple," and "Pope St. Leo staying Attila at the Gates of Rome," the artist had lost the flower of his divine grace, through the deep impression which the overwhelming grandeur of Michael Angelo had wrought upon him. How crushing indeed had been the blow when the Sixtine Chapel was thrown open and the rivals entered! The creations of the monster then appeared, and the greatest of the humanisers lost some of his soul at sight of them, thenceforward unable to rid himself of their influence.

From the /stanze/ Narcisse took Pierre to the /loggie/, those glazed galleries which are so high and so delicately decorated. But here you only find work which pupils executed after designs left by Raffaelle at his death. The fall was sudden and complete, and never had Pierre better understood that genius is everything—that when it disappears the school collapses. The man of genius sums up his period; at a given hour he throws forth all the sap of the social soil, which afterwards remains exhausted often for centuries. So Pierre became more particularly interested in the fine view that the /loggie/ afford, and all at once he noticed that the papal apartments were in front of him, just across the Court of San Damaso. This court, with its porticus, fountain, and white pavement, had an aspect of empty, airy, sunlit solemnity which surprised him. There was none of the gloom or pent-up religious mystery that he had dreamt of with his mind full of the surroundings of the old northern cathedrals. Right and left of the steps conducting to the rooms of the Pope and the Cardinal Secretary of State four or five carriages were ranged, the coachmen stiffly erect and the horses motionless in the brilliant light; and nothing else peopled that vast square desert of a court which, with its bareness gilded by the coruscations of its glass-work and the ruddiness of its stones, suggested a pagan temple dedicated to the sun. But what more particularly struck Pierre was the splendid panorama of Rome, for he had not hitherto imagined that the Pope from his windows could thus behold the entire city spread out before him as if he merely had to stretch forth his hand to make it his own once more.

While Pierre contemplated the scene a sound of voices caused him to turn; and he perceived a servant in black livery who, after repeating a message to Narcisse, was retiring with a deep bow. Looking much annoyed, the /attache/ approached the young priest. "Monsignor Gamba del Zoppo," said he, "has sent word that he can't see us this morning. Some unexpected duties require his presence." However, Narcisse's embarrassment showed that he did not believe in the excuse, but rather suspected some one of having so terrified his cousin that the latter was afraid of compromising himself. Obliging and courageous as Habert himself was, this made him indignant. Still he smiled and resumed: "Listen, perhaps there's a means of forcing an entry. If your time is your own we can lunch together and then return to visit the Museum of Antiquities. I shall certainly end by coming across my cousin and we may, perhaps, be lucky enough to meet the Pope should he go down to the gardens."

At the news that his audience was yet again postponed Pierre had felt keenly disappointed. However, as the whole day was at his disposal, he willingly accepted the /attache's/ offer. They lunched in front of St. Peter's, in a little restaurant of the Borgo, most of whose customers were pilgrims, and the fare, as it happened, was far from good. Then at about two o'clock they set off for the museum, skirting the basilica by way of the Piazza della Sagrestia. It was a bright, deserted, burning district; and again, but in a far greater degree, did the young priest experience that sensation of bare, tawny, sun-baked majesty which had come upon him while gazing into the Court of San Damaso. Then, as he passed the apse of St. Peter's, the enormity of the colossus was brought home to him more strongly than ever: it rose like a giant bouquet of architecture edged by empty expanses of pavement sprinkled with fine weeds. And in all the silent immensity there were only two children playing in the shadow of a wall. The old papal mint, the Zecca, now an Italian possession, and guarded by soldiers of the royal army, is on the left of the passage leading to the museums, while on the right, just in front, is one of the entrances of honour to the Vatican where the papal Swiss Guard keeps watch and ward; and this is the entrance

by which, according to etiquette, the pair-horse carriages convey the Pope's visitors into the Court of San Damaso.

Following the long lane which ascends between a wing of the palace and its garden wall, Narcisse and Pierre at last reached the Museum of Antiquities. Ah! what a museum it is, with galleries innumerable, a museum compounded of three museums, the Pio-Clementino, Chiaramonti, and the Braccio-Nuovo, and containing a whole world found beneath the soil, then exhumed, and now glorified in full sunlight. For more than two hours Pierre went from one hall to another, dazzled by the masterpieces, bewildered by the accumulation of genius and beauty. It was not only the celebrated examples of statuary, the Laocoon and the Apollo of the cabinets of the Belvedere, the Meleager, or even the torso of Hercules—that astonished him. He was yet more impressed by the /ensemble/, by the innumerable quantities of Venuses, Bacchuses, and deified emperors and empresses, by the whole superb growth of beautiful or August flesh celebrating the immortality of life. Three days previously he had visited the Museum of the Capitol, where he had admired the Venus, the Dying Gaul,* the marvellous Centaurs of black marble, and the extraordinary collection of busts, but here his admiration became intensified into stupor by the inexhaustible wealth of the galleries. And, with more curiosity for life than for art, perhaps, he again lingered before the busts which so powerfully resuscitate the Rome of history—the Rome which, whilst incapable of realising the ideal beauty of Greece, was certainly well able to create life. The emperors, the philosophers, the learned men, the poets are all there, and live such as they really were, studied and portrayed in all scrupulousness with their deformities, their blemishes, the slightest peculiarities of their features. And from this extreme solicitude for truth springs a wonderful wealth of character and an incomparable vision of the past. Nothing, indeed, could be loftier: the very men live once more, and retrace the history of their city, that history which has been so falsified that the teaching of it has caused generations of school-boys to hold antiquity in horror. But on seeing the men, how well one understands, how fully one can sympathise! And indeed the smallest bits of marble, the maimed statues, the bas-reliefs in fragments, even the isolated limbs—whether the divine arm of a nymph or the sinewy, shaggy thigh of a satyr—evoke the splendour of a civilisation full of light, grandeur, and strength.

* Best known in England, through Byron's lines, as the Dying Gladiator, though that appellation is certainly erroneous.—Trans.

At last Narcisse brought Pierre back into the Gallery of the Candelabra, three hundred feet in length and full of fine examples of sculpture. "Listen, my dear Abbe," said he. "It is scarcely more than four o'clock, and we will sit down here for a while, as I am told that the Holy Father sometimes passes this way to go down to the gardens. It would be really lucky if you could see him, perhaps even speak to him —who can tell? At all events, it will rest you, for you must be tired out."

Narcisse was known to all the attendants, and his relationship to Monsignor Gamba gave him the run of almost the entire Vatican, where he was fond of spending his leisure time. Finding two chairs, they sat down, and the /attache/ again began to talk of art.

How astonishing had been the destiny of Rome, what a singular, borrowed royalty had been hers! She seemed like a centre whither the whole world converged, but where nothing grew from the soil itself, which from the outset appeared to be stricken with sterility. The arts required to be acclimatised there; it was necessary to transplant the genius of neighbouring nations, which, once there, however, flourished magnificently. Under the emperors, when Rome was the queen of the earth, the beauty of her monuments and sculpture came to her from Greece. Later, when Christianity arose in Rome, it there remained impregnated with paganism; it was on another soil that it produced Gothic art, the Christian Art /par excellence/. Later still, at the Renascence, it was certainly at Rome that the age of Julius II and Leo X shone forth; but the artists of Tuscany and Umbria prepared the evolution, brought it to Rome that it might thence expand and soar. For the second time, indeed, art came to Rome from without, and gave her the royalty of the world by blossoming so triumphantly within her walls. Then occurred the extraordinary awakening of antiquity, Apollo and Venus resuscitated worshipped by the popes themselves, who from the time of Nicholas V dreamt of making papal Rome the equal of the imperial city. After the precursors, so sincere, tender, and strong in their art—Fra Angelico, Perugino, Botticelli, and so many others—came the two sovereigns, Michael Angelo and Raffaelle, the superhuman and the divine. Then the fall was sudden, years elapsed before the advent of Caravaggio with power of colour and modelling, all that the science of painting could achieve when bereft of genius. And afterwards the decline continued until Bernini was reached—Bernini, the real creator of the Rome of the present popes, the prodigal child who at twenty could already show a galaxy of colossal marble wenches, the universal architect who with fearful activity finished the facade, built the colonnade, decorated the interior of St. Peter's, and raised fountains, churches, and palaces innumerable. And that was the end of all, for since then Rome has little by little withdrawn from life, from the modern world, as though she, who always lived on what she derived from others, were dying of her inability to take anything more from them in order to convert it to her own glory.

"Ah! Bernini, that delightful Bernini!" continued Narcisse with his rapturous air. "He is both powerful and exquisite, his verve always ready, his ingenuity invariably awake, his fecundity full of grace and magnificence. As for their Bramante with his masterpiece, that cold, correct Cancelleria, we'll dub him the Michael Angelo and Raffaelle of architecture and say no more about it. But Bernini, that exquisite Bernini, why, there is more delicacy and refinement in his pretended bad taste than in all the hugeness and perfection of the others! Our own age ought to recognise itself in his art, at once so varied and so deep, so triumphant in its mannerisms, so full of a perturbing solicitude for the artificial and so free from the baseness of reality. Just go to the Villa Borghese to see the group of Apollo and Daphne which Bernini executed when he was eighteen,* and in particular see his statue of Santa Teresa in ecstasy at Santa Maria della Vittoria! Ah! that Santa Teresa! It is like heaven opening, with the quiver that only a purely divine enjoyment can set in woman's flesh, the rapture of faith carried to the point of spasm, the creature losing breath and dying of pleasure in the arms of the Divinity! I have spent hours and hours before that work without exhausting the infinite scope of its precious, burning symbolisation."

* There is also at the Villa Borghese Bernini's /Anchises carried by Aeneas/, which he sculptured when only sixteen. No doubt his faults were many; but it was his misfortune to belong to a decadent period.—Trans.

Narcisse's voice died away, and Pierre, no longer astonished at his covert, unconscious hatred of health, simplicity, and strength, scarcely listened to him. The young priest himself was again becoming absorbed in the idea he had formed of pagan Rome resuscitating in Christian Rome and turning it into Catholic Rome, the new political, sacerdotal, domineering centre of earthly government. Apart from the primitive age of the Catacombs, had Rome ever been Christian? The thoughts that had come to him on the Palatine, in the Appian Way, and in St. Peter's were gathering confirmation. Genius that morning had brought him fresh proof. No doubt the paganism which reappeared in the art of Michael Angelo and Raffaelle was tempered, transformed by the Christian spirit. But did it not still remain the basis? Had not the former master peered across Olympus when snatching his great nudities from the terrible heavens of Jehovah? Did not the ideal figures of Raffaelle reveal the superb, fascinating flesh of Venus beneath the chaste veil of the Virgin? It seemed so to Pierre, and some embarrassment mingled with his despondency, for all those beautiful forms glorifying the ardent passions of life, were in opposition to his dream of rejuvenated Christianity giving peace to the world and reviving the simplicity and purity of the early ages.

All at once he was surprised to hear Narcisse, by what transition he could not tell, speaking to him of the daily life of Leo XIII. "Yes, my dear Abbe, at eighty-four* the Holy Father shows the activity of a young man and leads a life of determination and hard work such as neither you nor I would care for! At six o'clock he is already up, says his mass in his private chapel, and drinks a little milk for breakfast. Then, from eight o'clock till noon, there is a ceaseless procession of cardinals and prelates, all the affairs of the congregations passing under his eyes, and none could be more numerous or intricate. At noon the public and collective audiences usually begin. At two he dines. Then comes the siesta which he has well earned, or else a promenade in the gardens until six o'clock. The private audiences then sometimes keep him for an hour or two. He sups at nine and scarcely eats, lives on nothing, in fact, and is always alone at his little table. What do you think, eh, of the etiquette which compels him to such loneliness? There you have a man who for eighteen years has never had a guest at his table, who day by day sits all alone in his grandeur! And as soon as ten o'clock strikes, after saying the Rosary with his familiars, he shuts himself up in his room. But, although he may go to bed, he sleeps very little; he is frequently troubled by insomnia, and gets up and sends for a secretary to dictate memoranda or letters to him. When any interesting matter requires his attention he gives himself up to it heart and soul, never letting it escape his thoughts. And his life, his health, lies in all this. His mind is always busy; his will and strength must always be exerting themselves. You may know that he long cultivated Latin verse with affection; and I believe that in his days of struggle he had a passion for journalism, inspired the articles of the newspapers he subsidised, and even dictated some of them when his most cherished ideas were in question."

* The reader should remember that the period selected for this narrative is the year 1894. Leo XIII was born in 1810.—Trans.

Silence fell. At every moment Narcisse craned his neck to see if the little papal /cortege/ were not emerging from the Gallery of the Tapestries to pass them on its way to the gardens. "You are perhaps aware," he resumed, "that his Holiness is brought down on a low chair which is small enough to pass through every doorway. It's quite a journey, more than a mile, through the /loggie/, the /stanze/ of Raffaelle, the painting and sculpture galleries, not to mention the numerous staircases, before he reaches the gardens, where a pair-horse carriage awaits him. It's quite fine this evening, so he will surely come. We must have a little patience."

Whilst Narcisse was giving these particulars Pierre again sank into a reverie and saw the whole

extraordinary history pass before him. First came the worldly, ostentatious popes of the Renascence, those who resuscitated antiquity with so much passion and dreamt of draping the Holy See with the purple of empire once more. There was Paul II, the magnificent Venetian who built the Palazzo di Venezia; Sixtus IV, to whom one owes the Sixtine Chapel; and Julius II and Leo X, who made Rome a city of theatrical pomp, prodigious festivities, tournaments, ballets, hunts, masquerades, and banquets. At that time the papacy had just rediscovered Olympus amidst the dust of buried ruins, and as though intoxicated by the torrent of life which arose from the ancient soil, it founded the museums, thus reviving the superb temples of the pagan age, and restoring them to the cult of universal admiration. Never had the Church been in such peril of death, for if the Christ was still honoured at St. Peter's, Jupiter and all the other gods and goddesses, with their beauteous, triumphant flesh, were enthroned in the halls of the Vatican. Then, however, another vision passed before Pierre, one of the modern popes prior to the Italian occupation—notably Pius IX, who, whilst yet free, often went into his good city of Rome. His huge red and gold coach was drawn by six horses, surrounded by Swiss Guards and followed by Noble Guards; but now and again he would alight in the Corso, and continue his promenade on foot, and then the mounted men of the escort galloped forward to give warning and stop the traffic. The carriages drew up, the gentlemen had to alight and kneel on the pavement, whilst the ladies simply rose and devoutly inclined their heads, as the Holy Father, attended by his Court, slowly wended his way to the Piazza del Popolo, smiling and blessing at every step. And now had come Leo XIII, the voluntary prisoner, shut up in the Vatican for eighteen years, and he, behind the high, silent walls, in the unknown sphere where each of his days flowed by so quietly, had acquired a more exalted majesty, instinct with sacred and redoubtable mysteriousness.

Ah! that Pope whom you no longer meet or see, that Pope hidden from the common of mankind like some terrible divinity whom the priests alone dare to approach! It is in that sumptuous Vatican which his forerunners of the Renascence built and adorned for giant festivities that he has secluded himself; it is there he lives, far from the crowd, in prison with the handsome men and the lovely women of Michael Angelo and Raffaelle, with the gods and goddesses of marble, with the whole of resplendent Olympus celebrating around him the religion of life and light. With him the entire Papacy is there steeped in paganism. What a spectacle when the slender, weak old man, all soul, so purely white, passes along the galleries of the Museum of Antiquities on his way to the gardens. Right and left the statues behold him pass with all their bare flesh. There is Jupiter, there is Apollo, there is Venus the /dominatrix/, there is Pan, the universal god in whose laugh the joys of earth ring out. Nereids bathe in transparent water. Bacchantes roll, unveiled, in the warm grass. Centaurs gallop by carrying lovely girls, faint with rapture, on their steaming haunches. Ariadne is surprised by Bacchus, Ganymede fondles the eagle, Adonis fires youth and maiden with his flame. And on and on passes the weak, white old man, swaying on his low chair, amidst that splendid triumph, that display and glorification of the flesh, which shouts aloud the omnipotence of Nature, of everlasting matter! Since they have found it again, exhumed it, and honoured it, that it is which once more reigns there imperishable; and in vain have they set vine leaves on the statues, even as they have swathed the huge figures of Michael Angelo; sex still flares on all sides, life overflows, its germs course in torrents through the veins of the world. Near by, in that Vatican library of incomparable wealth, where all human science lies slumbering, there lurks a yet more terrible danger—the danger of an explosion which would sweep away everything, Vatican and St. Peter's also, if one day the books in their turn were to awake and speak aloud as speak the beauty of Venus and the manliness of Apollo. But the white, diaphanous old man seems neither to see nor to hear, and the huge heads of Jupiter, the trunks of Hercules, the equivocal statues of Antinous continue to watch him as he passes on!

However, Narcisse had become impatient, and, going in search of an attendant, he learnt from him that his Holiness had already gone down. To shorten the distance, indeed, the /cortege/ often passes along a kind of open gallery leading towards the Mint. "Well, let us go down as well," said Narcisse to Pierre; "I will try to show you the gardens."

Down below, in the vestibule, a door of which opened on to a broad path, he spoke to another attendant, a former pontifical soldier whom he personally knew. The man at once let him pass with Pierre, but was unable to tell him whether Monsignor Gamba del Zoppo had accompanied his Holiness that day.

"No matter," resumed Narcisse when he and his companion were alone in the path; "I don't despair of meeting him—and these, you see, are the famous gardens of the Vatican."

They are very extensive grounds, and the Pope can go quite two and a half miles by passing along the paths of the wood, the vineyard, and the kitchen garden. Occupying the plateau of the Vatican hill, which the medieval wall of Leo IV still girdles, the gardens are separated from the neighbouring valleys as by a fortified rampart. The wall formerly stretched to the castle of Sant' Angelo, thereby forming what was known as the Leonine City. No inquisitive eyes can peer into the grounds excepting from the dome of St. Peter's, which casts its huge shadow over them during the hot summer weather. They are,

too, quite a little world, which each pope has taken pleasure in embellishing. There is a large parterre with lawns of geometrical patterns, planted with handsome palms and adorned with lemon and orange trees in pots; there is a less formal, a shadier garden, where, amidst deep plantations of yoke-elms, you find Giovanni Vesanzio's fountain, the Aquilone, and Pius IV's old Casino; then, too, there are the woods with their superb evergreen oaks, their thickets of plane-trees, acacias, and pines, intersected by broad avenues, which are delightfully pleasant for leisurely strolls; and finally, on turning to the left, beyond other clumps of trees, come the kitchen garden and the vineyard, the last well tended.

Whilst walking through the wood Narcisse told Pierre of the life led by the Holy Father in these gardens. He strolls in them every second day when the weather allows. Formerly the popes left the Vatican for the Quirinal, which is cooler and healthier, as soon as May arrived; and spent the dog days at Castle Gandolfo on the margins of the Lake of Albano. But nowadays the only summer residence possessed by his Holiness is a virtually intact tower of the old rampart of Leo IV. He here spends the hottest days, and has even erected a sort of pavilion beside it for the accommodation of his suite. Narcisse, like one at home, went in and secured permission for Pierre to glance at the one room occupied by the Pope, a spacious round chamber with semispherical ceiling, on which are painted the heavens with symbolical figures of the constellations; one of the latter, the lion, having two stars for eyes—stars which a system of lighting causes to sparkle during the night. The walls of the tower are so thick that after blocking up a window, a kind of room, for the accommodation of a couch, has been contrived in the embrasure. Beside this couch the only furniture is a large work-table, a dining-table with flaps, and a large regal arm-chair, a mass of gilding, one of the gifts of the Pope's episcopal jubilee. And you dream of the days of solitude and perfect silence, spent in that low donjon hall, where the coolness of a tomb prevails whilst the heavy suns of August are scorching overpowered Rome.

An astronomical observatory has been installed in another tower, surmounted by a little white cupola, which you espy amidst the greenery; and under the trees there is also a Swiss chalet, where Leo XIII is fond of resting. He sometimes goes on foot to the kitchen garden, and takes much interest in the vineyard, visiting it to see if the grapes are ripening and if the vintage will be a good one. What most astonished Pierre, however, was to learn that the Holy Father had been very fond of "sport" before age had weakened him. He was indeed passionately addicted to bird snaring. Broad-meshed nets were hung on either side of a path on the fringe of a plantation, and in the middle of the path were placed cages containing the decoys, whose songs soon attracted all the birds of the neighbourhood—red-breasts, white-throats, black-caps, nightingales, fig-peckers of all sorts. And when a numerous company of them was gathered together Leo XIII, seated out of sight and watching, would suddenly clap his hands and startle the birds, which flew up and were caught by the wings in the meshes of the nets. All that then remained to be done was to take them out of the nets and stifle them by a touch of the thumb. Roast fig-peckers are delicious.*

* Perhaps so; but what a delightful pastime for the Vicar of the Divinity!—Trans.

As Pierre came back through the wood he had another surprise. He suddenly lighted on a "Grotto of Lourdes," a miniature imitation of the original, built of rocks and blocks of cement. And such was his emotion at the sight that he could not conceal it. "It's true, then!" said he. "I was told of it, but I thought that the Holy Father was of loftier mind—free from all such base superstitions!"

"Oh!" replied Narcisse, "I fancy that the grotto dates from Pius IX, who evinced especial gratitude to our Lady of Lourdes. At all events, it must be a gift, and Leo XIII simply keeps it in repair."

For a few moments Pierre remained motionless and silent before that imitation grotto, that childish plaything. Some zealously devout visitors had left their visiting cards in the cracks of the cement-work! For his part, he felt very sad, and followed his companion with bowed head, lamenting the wretched idiocy of the world. Then, on emerging from the wood, on again reaching the parterre, he raised his eyes.

Ah! how exquisite in spite of everything was that decline of a lovely day, and what a victorious charm ascended from the soil in that part of the gardens. There, in front of that bare, noble, burning parterre, far more than under the languishing foliage of the wood or among the fruitful vines, Pierre realised the strength of Nature. Above the grass growing meagrely over the compartments of geometrical pattern which the pathways traced there were barely a few low shrubs, dwarf roses, aloes, rare tufts of withering flowers. Some green bushes still described the escutcheon of Pius IX in accordance with the strange taste of former times. And amidst the warm silence one only heard the faint crystalline murmur of the water trickling from the basin of the central fountain. But all Rome, its ardent heavens, sovereign grace, and conquering voluptuousness, seemed with their own soul to animate this vast rectangular patch of decorative gardening, this mosaic of verdure, which in its semi-abandonment and scorched decay assumed an aspect of melancholy pride, instinct with the ever returning quiver of a passion of

fire that could not die. Some antique vases and statues, whitely nude under the setting sun, skirted the parterres. And above the aroma of eucalyptus and of pine, stronger even than that of the ripening oranges, there rose the odour of the large, bitter box-shrubs, so laden with pungent life that it disturbed one as one passed as if indeed it were the very scent of the fecundity of that ancient soil saturated with the dust of generations.

"It's very strange that we have not met his Holiness," exclaimed Narcisse. "Perhaps his carriage took the other path through the wood while we were in the tower."

Then, reverting to Monsignor Gamba del Zoppo, the /attache/ explained that the functions of /Copiere/, or papal cup-bearer, which his cousin should have discharged as one of the four /Camerieri segreti partecipanti/ had become purely honorary since the dinners offered to diplomatists or in honour of newly consecrated bishops had been given by the Cardinal Secretary of State. Monsignor Gamba, whose cowardice and nullity were legendary, seemed therefore to have no other /role/ than that of enlivening Leo XIII, whose favour he had won by his incessant flattery and the anecdotes which he was ever relating about both the black and the white worlds. Indeed this fat, amiable man, who could even be obliging when his interests were not in question, was a perfect newspaper, brimful of tittle-tattle, disdaining no item of gossip whatever, even if it came from the kitchens. And thus he was quietly marching towards the cardinalate, certain of obtaining the hat without other exertion than that of bringing a budget of gossip to beguile the pleasant hours of the promenade. And Heaven knew that he was always able to garner an abundant harvest of news in that closed Vatican swarming with prelates of every kind, in that womanless pontifical family of old begowned bachelors, all secretly exercised by vast ambitions, covert and revolting rivalries, and ferocious hatreds, which, it is said, are still sometimes carried as far as the good old poison of ancient days.

All at once Narcisse stopped. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "I was certain of it. There's the Holy Father! But we are not in luck. He won't even see us; he is about to get into his carriage again."

As he spoke a carriage drew up at the verge of the wood, and a little /cortege/ emerging from a narrow path, went towards it.

Pierre felt as if he had received a great blow in the heart. Motionless beside his companion, and half hidden by a lofty vase containing a lemon-tree, it was only from a distance that he was able to see the white old man, looking so frail and slender in the wavy folds of his white cassock, and walking so very slowly with short, gliding steps. The young priest could scarcely distinguish the emaciated face of old diaphanous ivory, emphasised by a large nose which jutted out above thin lips. However, the Pontiff's black eyes were glittering with an inquisitive smile, while his right ear was inclined towards Monsignor Gamba del Zoppo, who was doubtless finishing some story at once rich and short, flowery and dignified. And on the left walked a Noble Guard; and two other prelates followed.

It was but a familiar apparition; Leo XIII was already climbing into the closed carriage. And Pierre, in the midst of that large, odoriferous, burning garden, again experienced the singular emotion which had come upon him in the Gallery of the Candelabra while he was picturing the Pope on his way between the Apollos and Venuses radiant in their triumphant nudity. There, however, it was only pagan art which had celebrated the eternity of life, the superb, almighty powers of Nature. But here he had beheld the Pontiff steeped in Nature itself, in Nature clad in the most lovely, most voluptuous, most passionate guise. Ah! that Pope, that old man strolling with his Divinity of grief, humility, and renunciation along the paths of those gardens of love, in the languid evenings of the hot summer days, beneath the caressing scents of pine and eucalyptus, ripe oranges, and tall, acrid box-shrubs! The whole atmosphere around him proclaimed the powers of the great god Pan. How pleasant was the thought of living there, amidst that magnificence of heaven and of earth, of loving the beauty of woman and of rejoicing in the fruitfulness of all! And suddenly the decisive truth burst forth that from a land of such joy and light it was only possible for a temporal religion of conquest and political domination to rise; not the mystical, pain-fraught religion of the North—the religion of the soul!

However, Narcisse led the young priest away, telling him other anecdotes as they went—anecdotes of the occasional /bonhomie/ of Leo XIII, who would stop to chat with the gardeners, and question them about the health of the trees and the sale of the oranges. And he also mentioned the Pope's former passion for a pair of gazelles, sent him from Africa, two graceful creatures which he had been fond of caressing, and at whose death he had shed tears. But Pierre no longer listened. When they found themselves on the Piazza of St. Peter's, he turned round and gazed at the Vatican once more.

His eyes had fallen on the gate of bronze, and he remembered having wondered that morning what there might be behind these metal panels ornamented with big nails. And he did not yet dare to answer the question, and decide if the new nations thirsting for fraternity and justice would really find there the religion necessary for the democracies of to-morrow; for he had not been able to probe things, and only carried a first impression away with him. But how keen it was, and how ill it boded for his dreams!

A gate of bronze! Yes, a hard, impregnable gate, so completely shutting the Vatican off from the rest of the world that nothing new had entered the palace for three hundred years. Behind that portal the old centuries, as far as the sixteenth, remained immutable. Time seemed to have stayed its course there for ever; nothing more stirred; the very costumes of the Swiss Guards, the Noble Guards, and the prelates themselves were unchanged; and you found yourself in the world of three hundred years ago, with its etiquette, its costumes, and its ideas. That the popes in a spirit of haughty protest should for five and twenty years have voluntarily shut themselves up in their palace was already regrettable; but this imprisonment of centuries within the past, within the grooves of tradition, was far more serious and dangerous. It was all Catholicism which was thus imprisoned, whose dogmas and sacerdotal organisation were obstinately immobilised. Perhaps, in spite of its apparent flexibility, Catholicism was really unable to yield in anything, under peril of being swept away, and therein lay both its weakness and its strength. And then what a terrible world was there, how great the pride and ambition, how numerous the hatreds and rivalries! And how strange the prison, how singular the company assembled behind the bars—the Crucified by the side of Jupiter Capitolinus, all pagan antiquity fraternising with the Apostles, all the splendours of the Renascence surrounding the pastor of the Gospel who reigns in the name of the humble and the poor!

The sun was sinking, the gentle, luscious sweetness of the Roman evenings was falling from the limpid heavens, and after that splendid day spent with Michael Angelo, Raffaelle, the ancients, and the Pope, in the finest palace of the world, the young priest lingered, distracted, on the Piazza of St. Peter's.

"Well, you must excuse me, my dear Abbe," concluded Narcisse. "But I will now confess to you that I suspect my worthy cousin of a fear that he might compromise himself by meddling in your affair. I shall certainly see him again, but you will do well not to put too much reliance on him."

It was nearly six o'clock when Pierre got back to the Boccanera mansion. As a rule, he passed in all modesty down the lane, and entered by the little side door, a key of which had been given him. But he had that morning received a letter from M. de la Choue, and desired to communicate it to Benedetta. So he ascended the grand staircase, and on reaching the anteroom was surprised to find nobody there. As a rule, whenever the man-servant went out Victorine installed herself in his place and busied herself with some needlework. Her chair was there, and Pierre even noticed some linen which she had left on a little table when probably summoned elsewhere. Then, as the door of the first reception-room was ajar, he at last ventured in. It was almost night there already, the twilight was softly dying away, and all at once the young priest stopped short, fearing to take another step, for, from the room beyond, the large yellow /salon/, there came a murmur of feverish, distracted words, ardent entreaties, fierce panting, a rustling and a shuffling of footsteps. And suddenly Pierre no longer hesitated, urged on despite himself by the conviction that the sounds he heard were those of a struggle, and that some one was hard pressed.

And when he darted into the further room he was stupefied, for Dario was there, no longer showing the degenerate elegance of the last scion of an exhausted race, but maddened by the hot, frantic blood of the Boccaneras which had bubbled up within him. He had clasped Benedetta by the shoulders in a frenzy of passion and was scorching her face with his hot, entreating words: "But since you say, my darling, that it is all over, that your marriage will never be dissolved—oh! why should we be wretched for ever! Love me as you do love me, and let me love you—let me love you!"

But the Contessina, with an indescribable expression of tenderness and suffering on her tearful face, repulsed him with her outstretched arms, she likewise evincing a fierce energy as she repeated: "No, no; I love you, but it must not, it must not be."

At that moment, amidst the roar of his despair, Dario became conscious that some one was entering the room. He turned and gazed at Pierre with an expression of stupefied insanity, scarce able even to recognise him. Then he carried his two hands to his face, to his bloodshot eyes and his cheeks wet with scalding tears, and fled, heaving a terrible, pain-fraught sigh in which baffled passion mingled with grief and repentance.

Benedetta seated herself, breathing hard, her strength and courage wellnigh exhausted. But as Pierre, too much embarrassed to speak, turned towards the door, she addressed him in a calmer voice: "No, no, Monsieur l'Abbe, do not go away—sit down, I pray you; I should like to speak to you for a moment."

He thereupon thought it his duty to account for his sudden entrance, and explained that he had found the door of the first /salon/ ajar, and that Victorine was not in the ante-room, though he had seen her work lying on the table there.

"Yes," exclaimed the Contessina, "Victorine ought to have been there; I saw her there but a short time

ago. And when my poor Dario lost his head I called her. Why did she not come?" Then, with sudden expansion, leaning towards Pierre, she continued: "Listen, Monsieur l'Abbe, I will tell you what happened, for I don't want you to form too bad an opinion of my poor Dario. It was all in some measure my fault. Last night he asked me for an appointment here in order that we might have a quiet chat, and as I knew that my aunt would be absent at this time to-day I told him to come. It was only natural—wasn't it?—that we should want to see one another and come to an agreement after the grievous news that my marriage will probably never be annulled. We suffer too much, and must form a decision. And so when he came this evening we began to weep and embrace, mingling our tears together. I kissed him again and again, telling him how I adored him, how bitterly grieved I was at being the cause of his sufferings, and how surely I should die of grief at seeing him so unhappy. Ah! no doubt I did wrong; I ought not to have caught him to my heart and embraced him as I did, for it maddened him, Monsieur l'Abbe; he lost his head, and would have made me break my vow to the Blessed Virgin."

She spoke these words in all tranquillity and simplicity, without sign of embarrassment, like a young and beautiful woman who is at once sensible and practical. Then she resumed: "Oh! I know my poor Dario well, but it does not prevent me from loving him; perhaps, indeed, it only makes me love him the more. He looks delicate, perhaps rather sickly, but in truth he is a man of passion. Yes, the old blood of my people bubbles up in him. I know something of it myself, for when I was a child I sometimes had fits of angry passion which left me exhausted on the floor, and even now, when the gusts arise within me, I have to fight against myself and torture myself in order that I may not act madly. But my poor Dario does not know how to suffer. He is like a child whose fancies must be gratified. And yet at bottom he has a good deal of common sense; he waits for me because he knows that the only real happiness lies with the woman who adores him."

As Pierre listened he was able to form a more precise idea of the young prince, of whose character he had hitherto had but a vague perception. Whilst dying of love for his cousin, Dario had ever been a man of pleasure. Though he was no doubt very amiable, the basis of his temperament was none the less egotism. And, in particular, he was unable to endure suffering; he loathed suffering, ugliness, and poverty, whether they affected himself or others. Both his flesh and his soul required gaiety, brilliancy, show, life in the full sunlight. And withal he was exhausted, with no strength left him but for the idle life he led, so incapable of thought and will that the idea of joining the new /regime/ had not even occurred to him. Yet he had all the unbounded pride of a Roman; sagacity—a keen, practical perception of the real—was mingled with his indolence; while his inveterate love of woman, more frequently displayed in charm of manner, burst forth at times in attacks of frantic sensuality.

"After all he is a man," concluded Benedetta in a low voice, "and I must not ask impossibilities of him." Then, as Pierre gazed at her, his notions of Italian jealousy quite upset, she exclaimed, aglow with passionate adoration: "No, no. Situated as we are, I am not jealous. I know very well that he will always return to me, and that he will be mine alone whenever I please, whenever it may be possible."

Silence followed; shadows were filling the room, the gilding of the large pier tables faded away, and infinite melancholy fell from the lofty, dim ceiling and the old hangings, yellow like autumn leaves. But soon, by some chance play of the waning light, a painting stood out above the sofa on which the Contessina was seated. It was the portrait of the beautiful young girl with the turban—Cassia Boccanera the forerunner, the /amorosa/ and avengeress. Again was Pierre struck by the portrait's resemblance to Benedetta, and, thinking aloud, he resumed: "Passion always proves the stronger; there invariably comes a moment when one succumbs—"

But Benedetta violently interrupted him: "I! I! Ah! you do not know me; I would rather die!" And with extraordinary exaltation, all aglow with love, as if her superstitious faith had fired her passion to ecstasy, she continued: "I have vowed to the Madonna that I will belong to none but the man I love, and to him only when he is my husband. And hitherto I have kept that vow, at the cost of my happiness, and I will keep it still, even if it cost me my life! Yes, we will die, my poor Dario and I, if it be necessary; but the holy Virgin has my vow, and the angels shall not weep in heaven!"

She was all in those words, her nature all simplicity, intricate, inexplicable though it might seem. She was doubtless swayed by that idea of human nobility which Christianity has set in renunciation and purity; a protest, as it were, against eternal matter, against the forces of Nature, the everlasting fruitfulness of life. But there was more than this; she reserved herself, like a divine and priceless gift, to be bestowed on the one being whom her heart had chosen, he who would be her lord and master when God should have united them in marriage. For her everything lay in the blessing of the priest, in the religious solemnisation of matrimony. And thus one understood her long resistance to Prada, whom she did not love, and her despairing, grievous resistance to Dario, whom she did love, but who was not her husband. And how torturing it was for that soul of fire to have to resist her love; how continual was the combat waged by duty in the Virgin's name against the wild, passionate blood of her race! Ignorant, indolent though she might be, she was capable of great fidelity of heart, and, moreover, she was not

given to dreaming: love might have its immaterial charms, but she desired it complete.

As Pierre looked at her in the dying twilight he seemed to see and understand her for the first time. The duality of her nature appeared in her somewhat full, fleshy lips, in her big black eyes, which suggested a dark, tempestuous night illumined by flashes of lightning, and in the calm, sensible expression of the rest of her gentle, infantile face. And, withal, behind those eyes of flame, beneath that pure, candid skin, one divined the internal tension of a superstitious, proud, and self-willed woman, who was obstinately intent on reserving herself for her one love. And Pierre could well understand that she should be adored, that she should fill the life of the man she chose with passion, and that to his own eyes she should appear like the younger sister of that lovely, tragic Cassia who, unwilling to survive the blow that had rendered self-bestowal impossible, had flung herself into the Tiber, dragging her brother Ercole and the corpse of her lover Flavio with her.

However, with a gesture of kindly affection Benedetta caught hold of Pierre's hands. "You have been here a fortnight, Monsieur l'Abbe," said she, "and I have come to like you very much, for I feel you to be a friend. If at first you do not understand us, at least pray do not judge us too severely. Ignorant as I may be, I always strive to act for the best, I assure you."

Pierre was greatly touched by her affectionate graciousness, and thanked her whilst for a moment retaining her beautiful hands in his own, for he also was becoming much attached to her. A fresh dream was carrying him off, that of educating her, should he have the time, or, at all events, of not returning home before winning her soul over to his own ideas of future charity and fraternity. Did not that adorable, unoccupied, indolent, ignorant creature, who only knew how to defend her love, personify the Italy of yesterday? The Italy of yesterday, so lovely and so sleepy, instinct with a dying grace, charming one even in her drowsiness, and retaining so much mystery in the fathomless depths of her black, passionate eyes! And what a /role/ would be that of awakening her, instructing her, winning her over to truth, making her the rejuvenated Italy of to-morrow such as he had dreamt of! Even in that disastrous marriage with Count Prada he tried to see merely a first attempt at revival which had failed, the modern Italy of the North being over-hasty, too brutal in its eagerness to love and transform that gentle, belated Rome which was yet so superb and indolent. But might he not take up the task? Had he not noticed that his book, after the astonishment of the first perusal, had remained a source of interest and reflection with Benedetta amidst the emptiness of her days given over to grief? What! was it really possible that she might find some appeasement for her own wretchedness by interesting herself in the humble, in the happiness of the poor? Emotion already thrilled her at the idea, and he, quivering at the thought of all the boundless love that was within her and that she might bestow, vowed to himself that he would draw tears of pity from her eyes.

But the night had now almost completely fallen, and Benedetta rose to ask for a lamp. Then, as Pierre was about to take leave, she detained him for another moment in the gloom. He could no longer see her; he only heard her grave voice: "You will not go away with too bad an opinion of us, will you, Monsieur l'Abbe? We love one another, Dario and I, and that is no sin when one behaves as one ought. Ah! yes, I love him, and have loved him for years. I was barely thirteen, he was eighteen, and we already loved one another wildly in those big gardens of the Villa Montefiori which are now all broken up. Ah! what days we spent there, whole afternoons among the trees, hours in secret hiding-places, where we kissed like little angels. When the oranges ripened their perfume intoxicated us. And the large box-plants, ah, /Dio!/ how they enveloped us, how their strong, acrid scent made our hearts beat! I can never smell then nowadays without feeling faint!"

A man-servant brought in the lamp, and Pierre ascended to his room. But when half-way up the little staircase he perceived Victorine, who started slightly, as if she had posted herself there to watch his departure from the /salon/. And now, as she followed him up, talking and seeking for information, he suddenly realised what had happened. "Why did you not go to your mistress instead of running off," he asked, "when she called you, while you were sewing in the ante-room?"

At first she tried to feign astonishment and reply that she had heard nothing. But her good-natured, frank face did not know how to lie, and she ended by confessing, with a gay, courageous air. "Well," she said, "it surely wasn't for me to interfere between lovers! Besides, my poor little Benedetta is simply torturing herself to death with those ideas of hers. Why shouldn't they be happy, since they love one another? Life isn't so amusing as some may think. And how bitterly one regrets not having seized hold of happiness when the time for it has gone!"

Once alone in his room, Pierre suddenly staggered, quite overcome. The great box-plants, the great box-plants with their acrid, perturbing perfume! She, Benedetta, like himself, had quivered as she smelt them; and he saw them once more in a vision of the pontifical gardens, the voluptuous gardens of Rome, deserted, glowing under the August sun. And now his whole day crystallised, assumed clear and full significance. It spoke to him of the fruitful awakening, of the eternal protest of Nature and life,

Venus and Hercules, whom one may bury for centuries beneath the soil, but who, nevertheless, one day arise from it, and though one may seek to wall them up within the domineering, stubborn, immutable Vatican, reign yet even there, and rule the whole, wide world with sovereign power!

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