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## **THE THREE CITIES**

ROME

BY

EMILE ZOLA

TRANSLATED BY ERNEST A. VIZETELLY

PART IV

X

IN his anxiety to bring things to a finish, Pierre wished to begin his campaign on the very next day. But on whom should he first call if he were to steer clear of blunders in that intricate and conceited ecclesiastical world? The question greatly perplexed him; however, on opening his door that morning he luckily perceived Don Vigilio in the passage, and with a sudden inspiration asked him to step inside. He realised that this thin little man with the saffron face, who always trembled with fever and displayed such exaggerated, timorous discretion, was in reality well informed, mixed up in everything. At one period it had seemed to Pierre that the secretary purposely avoided him, doubtless for fear of compromising himself; but recently Don Vigilio had proved less unsociable, as though he were not far from sharing the impatience which must be consuming the young Frenchman amidst his long enforced

inactivity. And so, on this occasion, he did not seek to avoid the chat on which Pierre was bent.

"I must apologise," said the latter, "for asking you in here when things are in such disorder. But I have just received some more linen and some winter clothing from Paris. I came, you know, with just a little valise, meaning to stay for a fortnight, and yet I've now been here for nearly three months, and am no more advanced than I was on the morning of my arrival."

Don Vigilio nodded. "Yes, yes, I know," said he.

Thereupon Pierre explained to him that Monsignor Nani had informed him, through the Contessina, that he now ought to act and see everybody for the defence of his book. But he was much embarrassed, as he did not know in what order to make his visits so that they might benefit him. For instance, ought he to call in the first place on Monsignor Fornaro, the /consulatore/ selected to report on his book, and whose name had been given him?

"Ah!" exclaimed Don Vigilio, quivering; "has Monsignor Nani gone as far as that—given you the reporter's name? That's even more than I expected." Then, forgetting his prudence, yielding to his secret interest in the affair, he resumed: "No, no; don't begin with Monsignor Fornaro. Your first visit should be a very humble one to the Prefect of the Congregation of the Index—his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti; for he would never forgive you for having offered your first homage to another should he some day hear of it." And, after a pause, Don Vigilio added, in a low voice, amidst a faint, feverish shiver: "And he /would/ hear of it; everything becomes known."

Again he hesitated, and then, as if yielding to sudden, sympathetic courage, he took hold of the young Frenchman's hands. "I swear to you, my dear Monsieur Froment," he said, "that I should be very happy to help you, for you are a man of simple soul, and I really begin to feel worried for you. But you must not ask me for impossibilities. Ah! if you only knew—if I could only tell you of all the perils which surround us! However, I think I can repeat to you that you must in no wise rely on my patron, his Eminence Cardinal Boccanera. He has expressed absolute disapproval of your book in my presence on several occasions. Only he is a saint, a most worthy, honourable man; and, though he won't defend you, he won't attack you—he will remain neutral out of regard for his niece, whom he loves so dearly, and who protects you. So, when you see him, don't plead your cause; it would be of no avail, and might even irritate him."

Pierre was not particularly distressed by this news, for at his first interview with the Cardinal, and on the few subsequent occasions when he had respectfully visited him, he had fully understood that his Eminence would never be other than an adversary. "Well," said he, "I will wait on him to thank him for his neutrality."

But at this all Don Vigilio's terrors returned. "No, no, don't do that; he would perhaps realise that I have spoken to you, and then what a disaster—my position would be compromised. I've said nothing, nothing! See the cardinals to begin with, see all the cardinals. Let it be understood between us that I've said nothing more." And, on that occasion at any rate, Don Vigilio would speak no further, but left the room shuddering and darting fiery, suspicious glances on either side of the corridor.

Pierre at once went out to call on Cardinal Sanguinetti. It was ten o'clock, and there was a chance that he might find him at home. This cardinal resided on the first floor of a little palazzo in a dark, narrow street near San Luigi dei Francesi.\* There was here none of the giant ruin full of princely and melancholy grandeur amidst which Cardinal Boccanera so stubbornly remained. The old regulation gala suite of rooms had been cut down just like the number of servants. There was no throne-room, no red hat hanging under a /baldacchino/, no arm-chair turned to the wall pending a visit from the Pope. A couple of apartments served as ante-rooms, and then came a /salon/ where the Cardinal received; and there was no luxury, indeed scarcely any comfort; the furniture was of mahogany, dating from the empire period, and the hangings and carpets were dusty and faded by long use. Moreover, Pierre had to wait a long time for admittance, and when a servant, leisurely putting on his jacket, at last set the door ajar, it was only to say that his Eminence had been away at Frascati since the previous day.

\* This is the French church of Rome, and is under the protection of the French Government.—  
Trans.

Pierre then remembered that Cardinal Sanguinetti was one of the suburban bishops. At his see of Frascati he had a villa where he occasionally spent a few days whenever a desire for rest or some political motive impelled him to do so.

"And will his Eminence soon return?" Pierre inquired.

"Ah! we don't know. His Eminence is poorly, and expressly desired us to send nobody to worry him."

When Pierre reached the street again he felt quite bewildered by this disappointment. At first he wondered whether he had not better call on Monsignor Fornaro without more ado, but he recollected Don Vigilio's advice to see the cardinals first of all, and, an inspiration coming to him, he resolved that his next visit should be for Cardinal Sarno, whose acquaintance he had eventually made at Donna Serafina's Mondays. In spite of Cardinal Sarno's voluntary self-effacement, people looked upon him as one of the most powerful and redoubtable members of the Sacred College, albeit his nephew Narcisse Habert declared that he knew no man who showed more obtuseness in matters which did not pertain to his habitual occupations. At all events, Pierre thought that the Cardinal, although not a member of the Congregation of the Index, might well give him some good advice, and possibly bring his great influence to bear on his colleagues.

The young man straightway betook himself to the Palace of the Propaganda, where he knew he would find the Cardinal. This palace, which is seen from the Piazza di Spagna, is a bare, massive corner pile between two streets. And Pierre, hampered by his faulty Italian, quite lost himself in it, climbing to floors whence he had to descend again, and finding himself in a perfect labyrinth of stairs, passages, and halls. At last he luckily came across the Cardinal's secretary, an amiable young priest, whom he had already seen at the Boccanera mansion. "Why, yes," said the secretary, "I think that his Eminence will receive you. You did well to come at this hour, for he is always here of a morning. Kindly follow me, if you please."

Then came a fresh journey. Cardinal Sarno, long a Secretary of the Propaganda, now presided over the commission which controlled the organisation of worship in those countries of Europe, Africa, America, and Oceanica where Catholicism had lately gained a footing; and he thus had a private room of his own with special officers and assistants, reigning there with the ultra-methodical habits of a functionary who had grown old in his arm-chair, closely surrounded by nests of drawers, and knowing nothing of the world save the usual sights of the street below his window.

The secretary left Pierre on a bench at the end of a dark passage, which was lighted by gas even in full daylight. And quite a quarter of an hour went by before he returned with his eager, affable air. "His Eminence is conferring with some missionaries who are about to leave Rome," he said; "but it will soon be over, and he told me to take you to his room, where you can wait for him."

As soon as Pierre was alone in the Cardinal's sanctum he examined it with curiosity. Fairly spacious, but in no wise luxurious, it had green paper on its walls, and its furniture was of black wood and green damask. From two windows overlooking a narrow side street a mournful light reached the dark wall-paper and faded carpets. There were a couple of pier tables and a plain black writing-table, which stood near one window, its worn mole-skin covering littered with all sorts of papers. Pierre drew near to it for a moment, and glanced at the arm-chair with damaged, sunken seat, the screen which sheltered it from draughts, and the old inkstand splotched with ink. And then, in the lifeless and oppressive atmosphere, the disquieting silence, which only the low rumbles from the street disturbed, he began to grow impatient.

However, whilst he was softly walking up and down he suddenly espied a map affixed to one wall, and the sight of it filled him with such absorbing thoughts that he soon forgot everything else. It was a coloured map of the world, the different tints indicating whether the territories belonged to victorious Catholicism or whether Catholicism was still warring there against unbelief; these last countries being classified as vicariates or prefectures, according to the general principles of organisation. And the whole was a graphic presentment of the long efforts of Catholicism in striving for the universal dominion which it has sought so unremittingly since its earliest hour. God has given the world to His Church, but it is needful that she should secure possession of it since error so stubbornly abides. From this has sprung the eternal battle, the fight which is carried on, even in our days, to win nations over from other religions, as it was in the days when the Apostles quitted Judaea to spread abroad the tidings of the Gospel. During the middle ages the great task was to organise conquered Europe, and this was too absorbing an enterprise to allow of any attempt at reconciliation with the dissident churches of the East. Then the Reformation burst forth, schism was added to schism, and the Protestant half of Europe had to be reconquered as well as all the orthodox East.

War-like ardour, however, awoke at the discovery of the New World. Rome was ambitious of securing that other side of the earth, and missions were organised for the subjection of races of which nobody had known anything the day before, but which God had, nevertheless, given to His Church, like all the others. And by degrees the two great divisions of Christianity were formed, on one hand the Catholic nations, those where the faith simply had to be kept up, and which the Secretariate of State installed at the Vatican guided with sovereign authority, and on the other the schismatical or pagan nations which were to be brought back to the fold or converted, and over which the Congregation of the Propaganda sought to reign. Then this Congregation had been obliged to divide itself into two branches in order to facilitate its work—the Oriental branch, which dealt with the dissident sects of the East, and the Latin

branch, whose authority extended over all the other lands of mission: the two forming a vast organisation—a huge, strong, closely meshed net cast over the whole world in order that not a single soul might escape.

It was in presence of that map that Pierre for the first time became clearly conscious of the mechanism which for centuries had been working to bring about the absorption of humanity. The Propaganda, richly dowered by the popes, and disposing of a considerable revenue, appeared to him like a separate force, a papacy within the papacy, and he well understood that the Prefect of the Congregation should be called the "Red Pope," for how limitless were the powers of that man of conquest and domination, whose hands stretched from one to the other end of the earth. Allowing that the Cardinal Secretary held Europe, that diminutive portion of the globe, did not he, the Prefect, hold all the rest—the infinity of space, the distant countries as yet almost unknown? Besides, statistics showed that Rome's uncontested dominion was limited to 200 millions of Apostolic and Roman Catholics; whereas the schismatics of the East and the Reformation, if added together, already exceeded that number, and how small became the minority of the true believers when, besides the schismatics, one brought into line the 1000 millions of infidels who yet remained to be converted. The figures struck Pierre with a force which made him shudder. What! there were 5 million Jews, nearly 200 million Mahommedans, more than 700 million Brahmanists and Buddhists, without counting another 100 million pagans of divers creeds, the whole making 1000 millions, and against these the Christians could marshal barely more than 400 millions, who were divided among themselves, ever in conflict, one half with Rome and the other half against her? Was it possible that in 1800 years Christianity had not proved victorious over even one-third of mankind, and that Rome, the eternal and all-powerful, only counted a sixth part of the nations among her subjects? Only one soul saved out of every six—how fearful was the disproportion! However, the map spoke with brutal eloquence: the red-tinted empire of Rome was but a speck when compared with the yellow-hued empire of the other gods—the endless countries which the Propaganda still had to conquer. And the question arose: How many centuries must elapse before the promises of the Christ were realised, before the whole world were gained to Christianity, before religious society spread over secular society, and there remained but one kingdom and one belief? And in presence of this question, in presence of the prodigious labour yet to be accomplished, how great was one's astonishment when one thought of Rome's tranquil serenity, her patient stubbornness, which has never known doubt or weariness, her bishops and ministers toiling without cessation in the conviction that she alone will some day be the mistress of the world!

\* Some readers may question certain of the figures given by M. Zola, but it must be remembered that all such calculations (even those of the best "authorities") are largely guesswork. I myself think that there are more than 5 million Jews, and more than 200 millions of Mahommedans, but I regard the alleged number of Brahmanists and Buddhists as exaggerated. On the other hand, some statistical tables specify 80 millions of Confucianists, of whom M. Zola makes no separate mention. However, as regards the number of Christians in the world, the figures given above are, within a few millions, probably accurate.—Trans.

Narcisse had told Pierre how carefully the embassies at Rome watched the doings of the Propaganda, for the missions were often the instruments of one or another nation, and exercised decisive influence in far-away lands. And so there was a continual struggle, in which the Congregation did all it could to favour the missionaries of Italy and her allies. It had always been jealous of its French rival, "L'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi," installed at Lyons, which is as wealthy in money as itself, and richer in men of energy and courage. However, not content with levelling tribute on this French association, the Propaganda thwarted it, sacrificed it on every occasion when it had reason to think it might achieve a victory. Not once or twice, but over and over again had the French missionaries, the French orders, been driven from the scenes of their labours to make way for Italians or Germans. And Pierre, standing in that mournful, dusty room, which the sunlight never brightened, pictured the secret hot-bed of political intrigue masked by the civilising ardour of faith. Again he shuddered as one shudders when monstrous, terrifying things are brought home to one. And might not the most sensible be overcome? Might not the bravest be dismayed by the thought of that universal engine of conquest and domination, which worked with the stubbornness of eternity, not merely content with the gain of souls, but ever seeking to ensure its future sovereignty over the whole of corporeal humanity, and—pending the time when it might rule the nations itself—disposing of them, handing them over to the charge of this or that temporary master, in accordance with its good pleasure. And then, too, what a prodigious dream! Rome smiling and tranquilly awaiting the day when she will have united Christians, Mahommedans, Brahmanists, and Buddhists into one sole nation, of whom she will be both the spiritual and the temporal queen!

However, a sound of coughing made Pierre turn, and he started on perceiving Cardinal Sarno, whom he had not heard enter. Standing in front of that map, he felt like one caught in the act of prying into a secret, and a deep flush overspread his face. The Cardinal, however, after looking at him fixedly with

his dim eyes, went to his writing-table, and let himself drop into the arm-chair without saying a word. With a gesture he dispensed Pierre of the duty of kissing his ring.

"I desired to offer my homage to your Eminence," said the young man. "Is your Eminence unwell?"

"No, no, it's nothing but a dreadful cold which I can't get rid of. And then, too, I have so many things to attend to just now."

Pierre looked at the Cardinal as he appeared in the livid light from the window, puny, lopsided, with the left shoulder higher than the right, and not a sign of life on his worn and ashen countenance. The young priest was reminded of one of his uncles, who, after thirty years spent in the offices of a French public department, displayed the same lifeless glance, parchment-like skin, and weary hebetation. Was it possible that this withered old man, so lost in his black cassock with red edging, was really one of the masters of the world, with the map of Christendom so deeply stamped on his mind, albeit he had never left Rome, that the Prefect of the Propaganda did not take a decision without asking his opinion?

"Sit down, Monsieur l'Abbe," said the Cardinal. "So you have come to see me—you have something to ask of me!" And, whilst disposing himself to listen, he stretched out his thin bony hands to finger the documents heaped up before him, glancing at each of them like some general, some strategist, profoundly versed in the science of his profession, who, although his army is far away, nevertheless directs it to victory from his private room, never for a moment allowing it to escape his mind.

Pierre was somewhat embarrassed by such a plain enunciation of the interested object of his visit; still, he decided to go to the point. "Yes, indeed," he answered, "it is a liberty I have taken to come and appeal to your Eminence's wisdom for advice. Your Eminence is aware that I am in Rome for the purpose of defending a book of mine, and I should be grateful if your Eminence would help and guide me." Then he gave a brief account of the present position of the affair, and began to plead his cause; but as he continued speaking he noticed that the Cardinal gave him very little attention, as though indeed he were thinking of something else, and failed to understand.

"Ah! yes," the great man at last muttered, "you have written a book. There was some question of it at Donna Serafina's one evening. But a priest ought not to write; it is a mistake for him to do so. What is the good of it? And the Congregation of the Index must certainly be in the right if it is prosecuting your book. At all events, what can I do? I don't belong to the Congregation, and I know nothing, nothing about the matter."

Pierre, pained at finding him so listless and indifferent, went on trying to enlighten and move him. But he realised that this man's mind, so far-reaching and penetrating in the field in which it had worked for forty years, closed up as soon as one sought to divert it from its specialty. It was neither an inquisitive nor a supple mind. All trace of life faded from the Cardinal's eyes, and his entire countenance assumed an expression of mournful imbecility. "I know nothing, nothing," he repeated, "and I never recommend anybody." However, at last he made an effort: "But Nani is mixed up in this," said he. "What does Nani advise you to do?"

"Monsignor Nani has been kind enough to reveal to me that the reporter is Monsignor Fornaro, and advises me to see him."

At this Cardinal Sarno seemed surprised and somewhat roused. A little light returned to his eyes. "Ah! really," he rejoined, "ah! really— Well, if Nani has done that he must have some idea. Go and see Monsignor Fornaro." Then, after rising and dismissing his visitor, who was compelled to thank him, bowing deeply, he resumed his seat, and a moment later the only sound in the lifeless room was that of his bony fingers turning over the documents before him.

Pierre, in all docility, followed the advice given him, and immediately betook himself to the Piazza Navona, where, however, he learnt from one of Monsignor Fornaro's servants that the prelate had just gone out, and that to find him at home it was necessary to call in the morning at ten o'clock. Accordingly it was only on the following day that Pierre was able to obtain an interview. He had previously made inquiries and knew what was necessary concerning Monsignor Fornaro. Born at Naples, he had there begun his studies under the Barnabites, had finished them at the Seminario Romano, and had subsequently, for many years, been a professor at the University Gregoriana. Nowadays Consultor to several Congregations and a Canon of Santa Maria Maggiore, he placed his immediate ambition in a Canonry at St. Peter's, and harboured the dream of some day becoming Secretary of the Consistorial Congregation, a post conducting to the cardinalate. A theologian of remarkable ability, Monsignor Fornaro incurred no other reproach than that of occasionally sacrificing to literature by contributing articles, which he carefully abstained from signing, to certain religious reviews. He was also said to be very worldly.

Pierre was received as soon as he had sent in his card, and perhaps he would have fancied that his visit was expected had not an appearance of sincere surprise, blended with a little anxiety, marked his reception.

"Monsieur l'Abbe Froment, Monsieur l'Abbe Froment," repeated the prelate, looking at the card which he still held. "Kindly step in—I was about to forbid my door, for I have some urgent work to attend to. But no matter, sit down."

Pierre, however, remained standing, quite charmed by the blooming appearance of this tall, strong, handsome man who, although five and forty years of age, was quite fresh and rosy, with moist lips, caressing eyes, and scarcely a grey hair among his curly locks. Nobody more fascinating and decorative could be found among the whole Roman prelacy. Careful of his person undoubtedly, and aiming at a simple elegance, he looked really superb in his black cassock with violet collar. And around him the spacious room where he received his visitors, gaily lighted as it was by two large windows facing the Piazza Navona, and furnished with a taste nowadays seldom met with among the Roman clergy, diffused a pleasant odour and formed a setting instinct with kindly cheerfulness.

"Pray sit down, Monsieur l'Abbe Froment," he resumed, "and tell me to what I am indebted for the honour of your visit."

He had already recovered his self-possession and assumed a /naif/, purely obliging air; and Pierre, though the question was only natural, and he ought to have foreseen it, suddenly felt greatly embarrassed, more embarrassed indeed than in Cardinal Sarno's presence. Should he go to the point at once, confess the delicate motive of his visit? A moment's reflection showed him that this would be the best and worthier course. "Dear me, Monseigneur," he replied, "I know very well that the step I have taken in calling on you is not usually taken, but it has been advised me, and it has seemed to me that among honest folks there can never be any harm in seeking in all good faith to elucidate the truth."

"What is it, what is it, then?" asked the prelate with an expression of perfect candour, and still continuing to smile.

"Well, simply this. I have learnt that the Congregation of the Index has handed you my book 'New Rome,' and appointed you to examine it; and I have ventured to present myself before you in case you should have any explanations to ask of me."

But Monsignor Fornaro seemed unwilling to hear any more. He had carried both hands to his head and drawn back, albeit still courteous. "No, no," said he, "don't tell me that, don't continue, you would grieve me dreadfully. Let us say, if you like, that you have been deceived, for nothing ought to be known, in fact nothing is known, either by others or myself. I pray you, do not let us talk of such matters."

Pierre, however, had fortunately remarked what a decisive effect was produced when he had occasion to mention the name of the Assessor of the Holy Office. So it occurred to him to reply: "I most certainly do not desire to give you the slightest cause for embarrassment, Monseigneur, and I repeat to you that I would never have ventured to importune you if Monsignor Nani himself had not acquainted me with your name and address."

This time the effect was immediate, though Monsignor Fornaro, with that easy grace which he introduced into all things, made some ceremony about surrendering. He began by a demurrer, speaking archly with subtle shades of expression. "What! is Monsignor Nani the tattler! But I shall scold him, I shall get angry with him! And what does he know? He doesn't belong to the Congregation; he may have been led into error. You must tell him that he has made a mistake, and that I have nothing at all to do with your affair. That will teach him not to reveal needful secrets which everybody respects!" Then, in a pleasant way, with winning glance and flowery lips, he went on: "Come, since Monsignor Nani desires it, I am willing to chat with you for a moment, my dear Monsieur Froment, but on condition that you shall know nothing of my report or of what may have been said or done at the Congregation."

Pierre in his turn smiled, admiring how easy things became when forms were respected and appearances saved. And once again he began to explain his case, the profound astonishment into which the prosecution of his book had thrown him, and his ignorance of the objections which were taken to it, and for which he had vainly sought a cause.

"Really, really," repeated the prelate, quite amazed at so much innocence. "The Congregation is a tribunal, and can only act when a case is brought before it. Proceedings have been taken against your book simply because it has been denounced."

"Yes, I know, denounced."

"Of course. Complaint was laid by three French bishops, whose names you will allow me to keep secret, and it consequently became necessary for the Congregation to examine the incriminated work."

Pierre looked at him quite scared. Denounced by three bishops? Why? With what object? Then he thought of his protector. "But Cardinal Bergerot," said he, "wrote me a letter of approval, which I placed at the beginning of my work as a preface. Ought not a guarantee like that to have been sufficient for the French episcopacy?"

Monsignor Fornaro wagged his head in a knowing way before making up his mind to reply: "Ah! yes, no doubt, his Eminence's letter, a very beautiful letter. I think, however, that it would have been much better if he had not written it, both for himself and for you especially." Then as the priest, whose surprise was increasing, opened his mouth to urge him to explain himself, he went on: "No, no, I know nothing, I say nothing. His Eminence Cardinal Bergerot is a saintly man whom everybody venerates, and if it were possible for him to sin it would only be through pure goodness of heart."

Silence fell. Pierre could divine that an abyss was opening, and dared not insist. However, he at last resumed with some violence: "But, after all, why should my book be prosecuted, and the books of others be left untouched? I have no intention of acting as a denouncer myself, but how many books there are to which Rome closes her eyes, and which are far more dangerous than mine can be!"

This time Monsignor Fornaro seemed glad to be able to support Pierre's views. "You are right," said he, "we cannot deal with every bad book, and it greatly distresses us. But you must remember what an incalculable number of works we should be compelled to read. And so we have to content ourselves with condemning the worst /en bloc/."

Then he complacently entered into explanations. In principle, no printer ought to send any work to press without having previously submitted the manuscript to the approval of the bishop of the diocese. Nowadays, however, with the enormous output of the printing trade, one could understand how terribly embarrassed the bishops would be if the printers were suddenly to conform to the Church's regulation. There was neither the time nor the money, nor were there the men necessary for such colossal labour. And so the Congregation of the Index condemned /en masse/, without examination, all works of certain categories: first, books which were dangerous for morals, all erotic writings, and all novels; next the various bibles in the vulgar tongue, for the perusal of Holy Writ without discretion was not allowable; then the books on magic and sorcery, and all works on science, history, or philosophy that were in any way contrary to dogma, as well as the writings of heresiarchs or mere ecclesiastics discussing religion, which should never be discussed. All these were wise laws made by different popes, and were set forth in the preface to the catalogue of forbidden books which the Congregation published, and without them this catalogue, to have been complete, would in itself have formed a large library. On turning it over one found that the works singled out for interdiction were chiefly those of priests, the task being so vast and difficult that Rome's concern extended but little beyond the observance of good order within the Church. And Pierre and his book came within the limit.

"You will understand," continued Monsignor Fornaro, "that we have no desire to advertise a heap of unwholesome writings by honouring them with special condemnation. Their name is legion in every country, and we should have neither enough paper nor enough ink to deal with them all. So we content ourselves with condemning one from time to time, when it bears a famous name and makes too much noise, or contains disquieting attacks on the faith. This suffices to remind the world that we exist and defend ourselves without abandoning aught of our rights or duties."

"But my book, my book," exclaimed Pierre, "why these proceedings against my book?"

"I am explaining that to you as far as it is allowable for me to do, my dear Monsieur Froment. You are a priest, your book is a success, you have published a cheap edition of it which sells very readily; and I don't speak of its literary merit, which is remarkable, for it contains a breath of real poetry which transported me, and on which I must really compliment you. However, under the circumstances which I have enumerated, how could we close our eyes to such a work as yours, in which the conclusion arrived at is the annihilation of our holy religion and the destruction of Rome?"

Pierre remained open-mouthed, suffocating with surprise. "The destruction of Rome!" he at last exclaimed; "but I desire to see Rome rejuvenated, eternal, again the queen of the world." And, once more mastered by his glowing enthusiasm, he defended himself and confessed his faith: Catholicism reverting to the principles and practices of the primitive Church, drawing the blood of regeneration from the fraternal Christianity of Jesus; the Pope, freed from all terrestrial royalty, governing the whole of humanity with charity and love, and saving the world from the frightful social cataclysm that threatens it by leading it to the real Kingdom of God: the Christian communion of all nations united in one nation only. "And can the Holy Father disavow me?" he continued. "Are not these his secret ideas, which people are beginning to divine, and does not my only offence lie in having expressed them

perhaps too soon and too freely? And if I were allowed to see him should I not at once obtain from him an order to stop these proceedings?"

Monsignor Fornaro no longer spoke, but wagged his head without appearing offended by the priest's juvenile ardour. On the contrary, he smiled with increasing amiability, as though highly amused by so much innocence and imagination. At last he gaily responded, "Oh! speak on, speak on; it isn't I who will stop you. I'm forbidden to say anything. But the temporal power, the temporal power."

"Well, what of the temporal power?" asked Pierre.

The prelate had again become silent, raising his amiable face to heaven and waving his white hands with a pretty gesture. And when he once more opened his mouth it was to say: "Then there's your new religion—for the expression occurs twice: the new religion, the new religion—ah, /Dio/!"

Again he became restless, going off into an ecstasy of wonderment, at sight of which Pierre impatiently exclaimed: "I do not know what your report will be, Monseigneur, but I declare to you that I have had no desire to attack dogma. And, candidly now, my whole book shows that I only sought to write a work of pity and salvation. It is only justice that some account should be taken of one's intentions."

Monsignor Fornaro had become very calm and paternal again. "Oh! intentions! intentions!" he said as he rose to dismiss his visitor. "You may be sure, my dear Monsieur Froment, that I feel much honoured by your visit. Naturally I cannot tell you what my report will be; as it is, we have talked too much about it, and, in fact, I ought to have refused to listen to your defence. At the same time, you will always find me ready to be of service to you in anything that does not go against my duty. But I greatly fear that your book will be condemned." And then, as Pierre again started, he added: "Well, yes. It is facts that are judged, you know, not intentions. So all defence is useless; the book is there, and we take it such as it is. However much you may try to explain it, you cannot alter it. And this is why the Congregation never calls the accused parties before it, and never accepts from them aught but retraction pure and simple. And, indeed, the wisest course would be for you to withdraw your book and make your submission. No? You won't? Ah! how young you are, my friend!"

He laughed yet more loudly at the gesture of revolt, of indomitable pride which had just escaped his young friend, as he called him. Then, on reaching the door, he again threw off some of his reserve, and said in a low voice, "Come, my dear Abbe, there is something I will do for you. I will give you some good advice. At bottom, I myself am nothing. I deliver my report, and it is printed, and the members of the Congregation read it, but are quite free to pay no attention to it. However, the Secretary of the Congregation, Father Dangelis, can accomplish everything, even impossibilities. Go to see him; you will find him at the Dominican convent behind the Piazza di Spagna. Don't name me. And for the present good-bye, my dear fellow, good-bye."

Pierre once more found himself on the Piazza Navona, quite dazed, no longer knowing what to believe or hope. A cowardly idea was coming over him; why should he continue this struggle, in which his adversaries remained unknown and indiscernible? Why carry obstinacy any further, why linger any longer in that impassionating but deceptive Rome? He would flee that very evening, return to Paris, disappear there, and forget his bitter disillusion in the practice of humble charity. He was traversing one of those hours of weakness when the long-dreamt-of task suddenly seems to be an impossibility. However, amidst his great confusion he was nevertheless walking on, going towards his destination. And when he found himself in the Corso, then in the Via dei Condotti, and finally in the Piazza di Spagna, he resolved that he would at any rate see Father Dangelis. The Dominican convent is there, just below the Trinity de' Monti.

Ah! those Dominicans! Pierre had never thought of them without a feeling of respect with which mingled a little fear. What vigorous pillars of the principle of authority and theocracy they had for centuries proved themselves to be! To them the Church had been indebted for its greatest measure of authority; they were the glorious soldiers of its triumph. Whilst St. Francis won the souls of the humble over to Rome, St. Dominic, on Rome's behalf, subjected all the superior souls—those of the intelligent and powerful. And this he did with passion, amidst a blaze of faith and determination, making use of all possible means, preachings, writings, and police and judicial pressure. Though he did not found the Inquisition, its principles were his, and it was with fire and sword that his fraternal, loving heart waged war on schism. Living like his monks, in poverty, chastity, and obedience—the great virtues of those times of pride and licentiousness—he went from city to city, exhorting the impious, striving to bring them back to the Church and arraigning them before the ecclesiastical courts when his preachings did not suffice. He also laid siege to science, sought to make it his own, dreamt of defending God with the weapons of reason and human knowledge like a true forerunner of the angelic St. Thomas, that light of the middle ages, who joined the Dominican order and set everything in his "Summa Theologiae," psychology, logic, policy, and morals. And thus it was that the Dominicans filled the world, upholding



the doctrines of Rome in the most famous pulpits of every nation, and contending almost everywhere against the free spirit of the Universities, like the vigilant guardians of dogma that they were, the unwearied artisans of the fortunes of the popes, the most powerful amongst all the artistic, scientific, and literary workers who raised the huge edifice of Catholicism such as it exists to-day.

However, Pierre, who could feel that this edifice was even now tottering, though it had been built, people fancied, so substantially as to last through all eternity, asked himself what could be the present use of the Dominicans, those toilers of another age, whose police system and whose tribunals had perished beneath universal execration, whose voices were no longer listened to, whose books were but seldom read, and whose /role/ as /savants/ and civilisers had come to an end in presence of latter-day science, the truths of which were rending dogma on all sides. Certainly the Dominicans still form an influential and prosperous order; but how far one is from the times when their general reigned in Rome, Master of the Holy Palace, with convents and schools, and subjects throughout Europe! Of all their vast inheritance, so far as the Roman curia is concerned, only a few posts now remain to them, and among others the Secretaryship of the Congregation of the Index, a former dependency of the Holy Office where they once despotically ruled.

Pierre was immediately ushered into the presence of Father Dangelis. The convent parlour was vast, bare, and white, flooded with bright sunshine. The only furniture was a table and some stools; and a large brass crucifix hung from the wall. Near the table stood the Father, a very thin man of about fifty, severely draped in his ample white habit and black mantle. From his long ascetic face, with thin lips, thin nose, and pointed, obstinate chin, his grey eyes shone out with a fixity that embarrassed one. And, moreover, he showed himself very plain and simple of speech, and frigidly polite in manner.

"Monsieur l'Abbe Froment—the author of 'New Rome,' I suppose?" Then seating himself on one stool and pointing to another, he added: "Pray acquaint me with the object of your visit, Monsieur l'Abbe."

Thereupon Pierre had to begin his explanation, his defence, all over again; and the task soon became the more painful as his words fell from his lips amidst death-like silence and frigidity. Father Dangelis did not stir; with his hands crossed upon his knees he kept his sharp, penetrating eyes fixed upon those of the priest. And when the latter had at last ceased speaking, he slowly said: "I did not like to interrupt you, Monsieur l'Abbe, but it was not for me to hear all this. Process against your book has begun, and no power in the world can stay or impede its course. I do not therefore realise what it is that you apparently expect of me."

In a quivering voice Pierre was bold enough to answer: "I look for some kindness and justice."

A pale smile, instinct with proud humility, arose to the Dominican's lips. "Be without fear," he replied, "God has ever deigned to enlighten me in the discharge of my modest duties. Personally, be it said, I have no justice to render; I am but an employee whose duty is to classify matters and draw up documents concerning them. Their Eminences, the members of the Congregation, will alone pronounce judgment on your book. And assuredly they will do so with the help of the Holy Spirit. You will only have to bow to their sentence when it shall have been ratified by his Holiness."

Then he broke off the interview by rising, and Pierre was obliged to do the same. The Dominican's words were virtually identical with those that had fallen from Monsignor Fornaro, but they were spoken with cutting frankness, a sort of tranquil bravery. On all sides Pierre came into collision with the same anonymous force, the same powerful engine whose component parts sought to ignore one another. For a long time yet, no doubt, he would be sent from one to the other, without ever finding the volitional element which reasoned and acted. And the only thing that he could do was to bow to it all.

However, before going off, it occurred to him once more to mention the name of Monsignor Nani, the powerful effect of which he had begun to realise. "I ask your pardon," he said, "for having disturbed you to no purpose, but I simply deferred to the kind advice of Monsignor Nani, who has condescended to show me some interest."

The effect of these words was unexpected. Again did Father Dangelis's thin face brighten into a smile, but with a twist of the lips, sharp with ironical contempt. He had become yet paler, and his keen intelligent eyes were flaming. "Ah! it was Monsignor Nani who sent you!" he said. "Well, if you think you need a protector, it is useless for you to apply to any other than himself. He is all-powerful. Go to see him; go to see him!"

And that was the only encouragement Pierre derived from his visit: the advice to go back to the man who had sent him. At this he felt that he was losing ground, and he resolved to return home in order to reflect on things and try to understand them before taking any further steps. The idea of questioning Don Vigilio at once occurred to him, and that same evening after supper he luckily met the secretary in the corridor, just as, candle in hand, he was on his way to bed.

"I have so many things that I should like to say to you," Pierre said to him. "Can you kindly come to my rooms for a moment?"

But the other promptly silenced him with a gesture, and then whispered: "Didn't you see Abbe Paparelli on the first floor? He was following us, I'm sure."

Pierre often saw the train-bearer roaming about the house, and greatly disliked his stealthy, prying ways. However, he had hitherto attached no importance to him, and was therefore much surprised by Don Vigilio's question. The other, without awaiting his reply, had returned to the end of the corridor, where for a long while he remained listening. Then he came back on tip-toe, blew out his candle, and darted into Pierre's sitting-room. "There—that's done," he murmured directly the door was shut. "But if it is all the same to you, we won't stop in this sitting-room. Let us go into your bed-room. Two walls are better than one."

When the lamp had been placed on the table and they found themselves seated face to face in that bare, faded bed-chamber, Pierre noticed that the secretary was suffering from a more violent attack of fever than usual. His thin puny figure was shivering from head to foot, and his ardent eyes had never before blazed so blackly in his ravaged, yellow face. "Are you poorly?" asked Pierre. "I don't want to tire you."

"Poorly, yes, I am on fire—but I want to talk. I can't bear it any longer. One always has to relieve oneself some day or other."

Was it his complaint that he desired to relieve; or was he anxious to break his long silence in order that it might not stifle him? This at first remained uncertain. He immediately asked for an account of the steps that Pierre had lately taken, and became yet more restless when he heard how the other had been received by Cardinal Sarno, Monsignor Fornaro, and Father Dangelis. "Yes, that's quite it," he repeated, "nothing astonishes me nowadays, and yet I feel indignant on your account. Yes, it doesn't concern me, but all the same it makes me ill, for it reminds me of all my own troubles. You must not rely on Cardinal Sarno, remember, for he is always elsewhere, with his mind far away, and has never helped anybody. But that Fornaro, that Fornaro!"

"He seemed to me very amiable, even kindly disposed," replied Pierre; "and I really think that after our interview, he will considerably soften his report."

"He! Why, the gentler he was with you the more grievously he will saddle you! He will devour you, fatten himself with such easy prey. Ah! you don't know him, /dilizioso/ that he is, ever on the watch to rear his own fortune on the troubles of poor devils whose defeat is bound to please the powerful. I prefer the other one, Father Dangelis, a terrible man, no doubt, but frank and brave and of superior mind. I must admit, however, that he would burn you like a handful of straw if he were the master. And ah! if I could tell you everything, if I could show you the frightful under-side of this world of ours, the monstrous, ravenous ambition, the abominable network of intrigues, venality, cowardice, treachery, and even crime!"

On seeing Don Vigilio so excited, in such a blaze of spite, Pierre thought of extracting from him some of the many items of information which he had hitherto sought in vain. "Well, tell me merely what is the position of my affair," he responded. "When I questioned you on my arrival here you said that nothing had yet reached Cardinal Boccanera. But all information must now have been collected, and you must know of it. And, by the way, Monsignor Fornaro told me that three French bishops had asked that my book should be prosecuted. Three bishops, is it possible?"

Don Vigilio shrugged his shoulders. "Ah!" said he, "yours is an innocent soul! I'm surprised that there were /only/ three! Yes, several documents relating to your affair are in our hands; and, moreover, things have turned out much as I suspected. The three bishops are first the Bishop of Tarbes, who evidently carries out the vengeance of the Fathers of Lourdes; and then the Bishops of Poitiers and Evreux, who are both known as uncompromising Ultramontanists and passionate adversaries of Cardinal Bergerot. The Cardinal, you know, is regarded with disfavour at the Vatican, where his Gallican ideas and broad liberal mind provoke perfect anger. And don't seek for anything else. The whole affair lies in that: an execution which the powerful Fathers of Lourdes demand of his Holiness, and a desire to reach and strike Cardinal Bergerot through your book, by means of the letter of approval which he imprudently wrote to you and which you published by way of preface. For a long time past the condemnations of the Index have largely been secret knock-down blows levelled at Churchmen. Denunciation reigns supreme, and the law applied is that of good pleasure. I could tell you some almost incredible things, how perfectly innocent books have been selected among a hundred for the sole object of killing an idea or a man; for the blow is almost always levelled at some one behind the author, some one higher than he is. And there is such a hot-bed of intrigue, such a source of abuses in

this institution of the Index, that it is tottering, and even among those who surround the Pope it is felt that it must soon be freshly regulated if it is not to fall into complete discredit. I well understand that the Church should endeavour to retain universal power, and govern by every fit weapon, but the weapons must be such as one can use without their injustice leading to revolt, or their antique childishness provoking merriment!"

Pierre listened with dolorous astonishment in his heart. Since he had been at Rome and had seen the Fathers of the Grotto saluted and feared there, holding an authoritative position, thanks to the large alms which they contributed to the Peter's Pence, he had felt that they were behind the proceedings instituted against him, and realised that he would have to pay for a certain page of his book in which he had called attention to an iniquitous displacement of fortune at Lourdes, a frightful spectacle which made one doubt the very existence of the Divinity, a continual cause of battle and conflict which would disappear in the truly Christian society of to-morrow. And he could also now understand that his delight at the loss of the temporal power must have caused a scandal, and especially that the unfortunate expression "a new religion" had alone been sufficient to arm /delatores/ against him. But that which amazed and grieved him was to learn that Cardinal Bergerot's letter was looked upon as a crime, and that his (Pierre's) book was denounced and condemned in order that adversaries who dared not attack the venerable pastor face to face might, deal him a cowardly blow from behind. The thought of afflicting that saintly man, of serving as the implement to strike him in his ardent charity, cruelly grieved Pierre. And how bitter and disheartening it was to find the most hideous questions of pride and money, ambition and appetite, running riot with the most ferocious egotism, beneath the quarrels of those leaders of the Church who ought only to have contended together in love for the poor!

And then Pierre's mind revolted against that supremely odious and idiotic Index. He now understood how it worked, from the arrival of the denunciations to the public posting of the titles of the condemned works. He had just seen the Secretary of the Congregation, Father Dangelis, to whom the denunciations came, and who then investigated the affair, collecting all documents and information concerning it with the passion of a cultivated authoritarian monk, who dreamt of ruling minds and consciences as in the heroic days of the Inquisition. Then, too, Pierre had visited one of the consultive prelates, Monsignor Fornaro, who was so ambitious and affable, and so subtle a theologian that he would have discovered attacks against the faith in a treatise on algebra, had his interests required it. Next there were the infrequent meetings of the cardinals, who at long intervals voted for the interdiction of some hostile book, deeply regretting that they could not suppress them all; and finally came the Pope, approving and signing the decrees, which was a mere formality, for were not all books guilty? But what an extraordinary wretched Bastille of the past was that aged Index, that senile institution now sunk into second childhood. One realised that it must have been a formidable power when books were rare and the Church had tribunals of blood and fire to enforce her edicts. But books had so greatly multiplied, the written, printed thoughts of mankind had swollen into such a deep broad river, that they had swept all opposition away, and now the Index was swamped and reduced to powerlessness, compelled more and more to limit its field of action, to confine itself to the examination of the writings of ecclesiastics, and even in this respect it was becoming corrupt, fouled by the worst passions and changed into an instrument of intrigue, hatred, and vengeance. Ah! that confession of decay, of paralysis which grew more and more complete amidst the scornful indifference of the nations. To think that Catholicism, the once glorious agent of civilisation, had come to such a pass that it cast books into hell-fire by the heap; and what books they were, almost the entire literature, history, philosophy, and science of the past and the present! Few works, indeed, are published nowadays that would not fall under the ban of the Church. If she seems to close her eyes, it is in order to avoid the impossible task of hunting out and destroying everything. Yet she stubbornly insists on retaining a semblance of sovereign authority over human intelligence, just as some very aged queen, dispossessed of her states and henceforth without judges or executioners, might continue to deliver vain sentences to which only an infinitesimal minority would pay heed. But imagine the Church momentarily victorious, miraculously mastering the modern world, and ask yourself what she, with her tribunals to condemn and her gendarmes to enforce, would do with human thought. Imagine a strict application of the Index regulations: no printer able to put anything whatever to press without the approval of his bishop, and even then every book laid before the Congregation, the past expunged, the present throttled, subjected to an intellectual Reign of Terror! Would not the closing of every library perforce ensue, would not the long heritage of written thought be cast into prison, would not the future be barred, would not all progress, all conquest of knowledge, be totally arrested? Rome herself is nowadays a terrible example of such a disastrous experiment—Rome with her congealed soil, her dead sap, killed by centuries of papal government, Rome which has become so barren that not a man, not a work has sprung from her midst even after five and twenty years of awakening and liberty! And who would accept such a state of things, not among people of revolutionary mind, but among those of religious mind that might possess any culture and breadth of view? Plainly enough it was all mere childishness and absurdity.

Deep silence reigned, and Pierre, quite upset by his reflections, made a gesture of despair whilst glancing at Don Vigilio, who sat speechless in front of him. For a moment longer, amidst the death-like quiescence of that old sleeping mansion, both continued silent, seated face to face in the closed chamber which the lamp illumined with a peaceful glow. But at last Don Vigilio leant forward, his eyes sparkling, and with a feverish shiver murmured: "It is they, you know, always they, at the bottom of everything."

Pierre, who did not understand, felt astonished, indeed somewhat anxious at such a strange remark coming without any apparent transition. "Who are /they/?" he asked.

"The Jesuits!"

In this reply the little, withered, yellow priest had set all the concentrated rage of his exploding passion. Ah! so much the worse if he had perpetrated a fresh act of folly. The cat was out of the bag at last! Nevertheless, he cast a final suspicious glance around the walls. And then he relieved his mind at length, with a flow of words which gushed forth the more irresistibly since he had so long held them in check. "Ah! the Jesuits, the Jesuits! You fancy that you know them, but you haven't even an idea of their abominable actions and incalculable power. They it is whom one always comes upon, everywhere, in every circumstance. Remember /that/ whenever you fail to understand anything, if you wish to understand it. Whenever grief or trouble comes upon you, whenever you suffer, whenever you weep, say to yourself at once: 'It is they; they are there!' Why, for all I know, there may be one of them under that bed, inside that cupboard. Ah! the Jesuits, the Jesuits! They have devoured me, they are devouring me still, they will leave nothing of me at last, neither flesh nor bone."

Then, in a halting voice, he related the story of his life, beginning with his youth, which had opened so hopefully. He belonged to the petty provincial nobility, and had been dowered with a fairly large income, besides a keen, supple intelligence, which looked smilingly towards the future. Nowadays, he would assuredly have been a prelate, on the road to high dignities, but he had been foolish enough to speak ill of the Jesuits and to thwart them in two or three circumstances. And from that moment, if he were to be believed, they had caused every imaginable misfortune to rain upon him: his father and mother had died, his banker had robbed him and fled, good positions had escaped him at the very moment when he was about to occupy them, the most awful misadventures had pursued him amidst the duties of his ministry to such a point indeed, that he had narrowly escaped interdiction. It was only since Cardinal Boccanera, compassionating his bad luck, had taken him into his house and attached him to his person, that he had enjoyed a little repose. "Here I have a refuge, an asylum," he continued. "They execrate his Eminence, who has never been on their side, but they haven't yet dared to attack him or his servants. Oh! I have no illusions, they will end by catching me again, all the same. Perhaps they will even hear of our conversation this evening, and make me pay dearly for it; for I do wrong to speak, I speak in spite of myself. They have stolen all my happiness, and brought all possible misfortune on me, everything that was possible, everything—you hear me!"

Increasing discomfort was taking possession of Pierre, who, seeking to relieve himself by a jest, exclaimed: "Come, come, at any rate it wasn't the Jesuits who gave you the fever."

"Yes, yes, it was!" Don Vigilio violently declared. "I caught it on the bank of the Tiber one evening, when I went to weep there in my grief at having been driven from the little church where I officiated."

Pierre, hitherto, had never believed in the terrible legend of the Jesuits. He belonged to a generation which laughed at the idea of wehr-wolves, and considered the /bourgeois/ fear of the famous black men, who hid themselves in walls and terrorised families, to be a trifle ridiculous. To him all such things seemed to be nursery tales, exaggerated by religious and political passion. And so it was with amazement that he examined Don Vigilio, suddenly fearing that he might have to deal with a maniac.

Nevertheless he could not help recalling the extraordinary story of the Jesuits. If St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic are the very soul and spirit of the middle ages, its masters and teachers, the former a living expression of all the ardent, charitable faith of the humble, and the other defending dogma and fixing doctrines for the intelligent and the powerful, on the other hand Ignatius de Loyola appeared on the threshold of modern times to save the tottering heritage by accommodating religion to the new developments of society, thereby ensuring it the empire of the world which was about to appear.

At the advent of the modern era it seemed as if the Deity were to be vanquished in the uncompromising struggle with sin, for it was certain that the old determination to suppress Nature, to kill the man within man, with his appetites, passions, heart, and blood, could only result in a disastrous defeat, in which, indeed, the Church found herself on the very eve of sinking; and it was the Jesuits who came to extricate her from this peril and reinvigorate her by deciding that it was she who now ought to go to the world, since the world seemed unwilling to go any longer to her. All lay in that; you find the Jesuits declaring that one can enter into arrangements with heaven; they bend and adjust themselves to

the customs, prejudices, and even vices of the times; they smile, all condescension, cast rigourism aside, and practice the diplomacy of amiability, ever ready to turn the most awful abominations "to the greater glory of God." That is their motto, their battle-cry, and thence springs the moral principle which many regard as their crime: that all means are good to attain one's end, especially when that end is the furtherance of the Deity's interests as represented by those of the Church. And what overwhelming success attends the efforts of the Jesuits! they swarm and before long cover the earth, on all sides becoming uncontested masters. They shrive kings, they acquire immense wealth, they display such victorious power of invasion that, however humbly they may set foot in any country, they soon wholly possess it: souls, bodies, power, and fortune alike falling to them. And they are particularly zealous in founding schools, they show themselves to be incomparable moulders of the human brain, well understanding that power always belongs to the morrow, to the generations which are growing up and whose master one must be if one desire to reign eternally. So great is their power, based on the necessity of compromise with sin, that, on the morrow of the Council of Trent, they transform the very spirit of Catholicism, penetrate it, identify it with themselves and become the indispensable soldiers of the papacy which lives by them and for them. And from that moment Rome is theirs, Rome where their general so long commands, whence so long go forth the directions for the obscure tactics which are blindly followed by their innumerable army, whose skilful organisation covers the globe as with an iron network hidden by the velvet of hands expert in dealing gently with poor suffering humanity. But, after all, the most prodigious feature is the stupefying vitality of the Jesuits who are incessantly tracked, condemned, executed, and yet still and ever erect. As soon as their power asserts itself, their unpopularity begins and gradually becomes universal. Hoots of execration arise around them, abominable accusations, scandalous law cases in which they appear as corruptors and felons. Pascal devotes them to public contempt, parliaments condemn their books to be burnt, universities denounce their system of morals and their teaching as poisonous. They foment such disturbances, such struggles in every kingdom, that organised persecution sets in, and they are soon driven from everywhere. During more than a century they become wanderers, expelled, then recalled, passing and repassing frontiers, leaving a country amidst cries of hatred to return to it as soon as quiet has been restored. Finally, for supreme disaster, they are suppressed by one pope, but another re-establishes them, and since then they have been virtually tolerated everywhere. And in the diplomatic self-effacement, the shade in which they have the prudence to sequester themselves, they are none the less triumphant, quietly confident of their victory like soldiers who have once and for ever subdued the earth.

Pierre was aware that, judging by mere appearances, the Jesuits were nowadays dispossessed of all influence in Rome. They no longer officiated at the Gesu, they no longer directed the Collegio Romano, where they formerly fashioned so many souls; and with no abode of their own, reduced to accept foreign hospitality, they had modestly sought a refuge at the Collegio Germanico, where there is a little chapel. There they taught and there they still confessed, but without the slightest bustle or display. Was one to believe, however, that this effacement was but masterly cunning, a feigned disappearance in order that they might really remain secret, all-powerful masters, the hidden hand which directs and guides everything? People certainly said that the proclamation of papal Infallibility had been their work, a weapon with which they had armed themselves whilst feigning to bestow it on the papacy, in readiness for the coming decisive task which their genius foresaw in the approaching social upheavals. And thus there might perhaps be some truth in what Don Vigilio, with a shiver of mystery, related about their occult sovereignty, a seizin, as it were, of the government of the Church, a royalty ignored but nevertheless complete.

As this idea occurred to Pierre, a dim connection between certain of his experiences arose in his mind and he all at once inquired: "Is Monsignor Nani a Jesuit, then?"

These words seemed to revive all Don Vigilio's anxious passion. He waved his trembling hand, and replied: "He? Oh, he's too clever, too skilful by far to have taken the robe. But he comes from that Collegio Romano where his generation grew up, and he there imbibed that Jesuit genius which adapted itself so well to his own. Whilst fully realising the danger of wearing an unpopular and embarrassing livery, and wishing to be free, he is none the less a Jesuit in his flesh, in his bones, in his very soul. He is evidently convinced that the Church can only triumph by utilising the passions of mankind, and withal he is very fond of the Church, very pious at bottom, a very good priest, serving God without weakness in gratitude for the absolute power which God gives to His ministers. And besides, he is so charming, incapable of any brutal action, full of the good breeding of his noble Venetian ancestors, and deeply versed in knowledge of the world, thanks to his experiences at the nunciatures of Paris, Vienna, and other places, without mentioning that he knows everything that goes on by reason of the delicate functions which he has discharged for ten years past as Assessor of the Holy Office. Yes, he is powerful, all-powerful, and in him you do not have the furtive Jesuit whose robe glides past amidst suspicion, but the head, the brain, the leader whom no uniform designates."

This reply made Pierre grave, for he was quite willing to admit that an opportunist code of morals,

like that of the Jesuits, was inoculable and now predominated throughout the Church. Indeed, the Jesuits might disappear, but their doctrine would survive them, since it was the one weapon of combat, the one system of strategy which might again place the nations under the dominion of Rome. And in reality the struggle which continued lay precisely in the attempts to accommodate religion to the century, and the century to religion. Such being the case, Pierre realised that such men as Monsignor Nani might acquire vast and even decisive importance.

"Ah! if you knew, if you knew," continued Don Vigilio, "he's everywhere, he has his hand in everything. For instance, nothing has ever happened here, among the Boccaneras, but I've found him at the bottom of it, tangling or untangling the threads according to necessities with which he alone is acquainted."

Then, in the unquenchable fever for confiding things which was now consuming him, the secretary related how Monsignor Nani had most certainly brought on Benedetta's divorce case. The Jesuits, in spite of their conciliatory spirit, have always taken up a hostile position with regard to Italy, either because they do not despair of reconquering Rome, or because they wait to treat in due season with the ultimate and real victor, whether King or Pope. And so Nani, who had long been one of Donna Serafina's intimates, had helped to precipitate the rupture with Prada as soon as Benedetta's mother was dead. Again, it was he who, to prevent any interference on the part of the patriotic Abbe Pisoni, the young woman's confessor and the artisan of her marriage, had urged her to take the same spiritual director as her aunt, Father Lorenza, a handsome Jesuit with clear and kindly eyes, whose confessional in the chapel of the Collegio Germanico was incessantly besieged by penitents. And it seemed certain that this manoeuvre had brought about everything; what one cleric working for Italy had done, was to be undone by another working against Italy. Why was it, however, that Nani, after bringing about the rupture, had momentarily ceased to show all interest in the affair to the point even of jeopardising the suit for the dissolution of the marriage? And why was he now again busying himself with it, setting Donna Serafina in action, prompting her to buy Monsignor Palma's support, and bringing his own influence to bear on the cardinals of the Congregation? There was mystery in all this, as there was in everything he did, for his schemes were always complicated and distant in their effects. However, one might suppose that he now wished to hasten the marriage of Benedetta and Dario, in order to stop all the abominable rumours which were circulating in the white world; unless, indeed, this divorce secured by pecuniary payments and the pressure of notorious influences were an intentional scandal at first spun out and now hastened, in order to harm Cardinal Boccanera, whom the Jesuits might desire to brush aside in certain eventualities which were possibly near at hand.

"To tell the truth, I rather incline to the latter view," said Don Vigilio, "the more so indeed as I learnt this evening that the Pope is not well. With an old man of eighty-four the end may come at any moment, and so the Pope can never catch cold but what the Sacred College and the prelaties are all agog, stirred by sudden ambitious rivalries. Now, the Jesuits have always opposed Cardinal Boccanera's candidature. They ought to be on his side, on account of his rank, and his uncompromising attitude towards Italy, but the idea of giving themselves such a master disquiets them, for they consider him unseasonably rough and stern, too violent in his faith, which unbending as it is would prove dangerous in these diplomatic times through which the Church is passing. And so I should in no wise be astonished if there were an attempt to discredit him and render his candidature impossible, by employing the most underhand and shameful means."

A little quiver of fear was coming over Pierre. The contagion of the unknown, of the black intrigues plotted in the dark, was spreading amidst the silence of the night in the depths of that palace, near that Tiber, in that Rome so full of legendary tragedies. But all at once the young man's mind reverted to himself, to his own affair. "But what is my part in all this?" he asked: "why does Monsignor Nani seem to take an interest in me? Why is he mixed up in the proceedings against my book?"

"Oh! one never knows, one never knows exactly!" replied Don Vigilio, waving his arms. "One thing I can say, that he only knew of the affair when the denunciations of the three bishops were already in the hands of Father Dangelis; and I have also learnt that he then tried to stop the proceedings, which he no doubt thought both useless and impolitic. But when a matter is once before the Congregation it is almost impossible for it to be withdrawn, and Monsignor Nani must also have come into collision with Father Dangelis who, like a faithful Dominican, is the passionate adversary of the Jesuits. It was then that he caused the Contessina to write to Monsieur de la Choue, requesting him to tell you to hasten here in order to defend yourself, and to arrange for your acceptance of hospitality in this mansion, during your stay."

This revelation brought Pierre's emotion to a climax. "You are sure of that?" he asked.

"Oh! quite sure. I heard Nani speak of you one Monday, and some time ago I told you that he seemed to know all about you, as if he had made most minute inquiries. My belief is that he had already read

your book, and was extremely preoccupied about it."

"Do you think that he shares my ideas, then? Is he sincere, is he defending himself while striving to defend me?"

"Oh! no, no, not at all. Your ideas, why he certainly hates them, and your book and yourself as well. You have no idea what contempt for the weak, what hatred of the poor, and love of authority and domination he conceals under his caressing amiability. Lourdes he might abandon to you, though it embodies a marvellous weapon of government; but he will never forgive you for being on the side of the little ones of the world, and for pronouncing against the temporal power. If you only heard with what gentle ferocity he derides Monsieur de la Choue, whom he calls the weeping willow of Neo-Catholicism!"

Pierre carried his hands to his temples and pressed his head despairingly. "Then why, why, tell me I beg of you, why has he brought me here and kept me here in this house at his disposal? Why has he promenaded me up and down Rome for three long months, throwing me against obstacles and wearying me, when it was so easy for him to let the Index condemn my book if it embarrassed him? It's true, of course, that things would not have gone quietly, for I was disposed to refuse submission and openly confess my new faith, even against the decisions of Rome."

Don Vigilio's black eyes flared in his yellow face: "Perhaps it was that which he wished to prevent. He knows you to be very intelligent and enthusiastic, and I have often heard him say that intelligence and enthusiasm should not be fought openly."

Pierre, however, had risen to his feet, and instead of listening, was striding up and down the room as though carried away by the whirlwind of his thoughts. "Come, come," he said at last, "it is necessary that I should know and understand things if I am to continue the struggle. You must be kind enough to give me some detailed particulars about each of the persons mixed up in my affair. Jesuits, Jesuits everywhere? /Mon Dieu/, it may be so, you are perhaps right! But all the same you must point out the different shades to me. Now, for instance, what of that Fornaro?"

"Monsignor Fornaro, oh! he's whatever you like. Still he also was brought up at the Collegio Romano, so you may be certain that he is a Jesuit, a Jesuit by education, position, and ambition. He is longing to become a cardinal, and if he some day becomes one, he'll long to be the next pope. Besides, you know, every one here is a candidate to the papacy as soon as he enters the seminary."

"And Cardinal Sanguinetti?"

"A Jesuit, a Jesuit! To speak plainly, he was one, then ceased to be one, and is now undoubtedly one again. Sanguinetti has flirted with every influence. It was long thought that he was in favour of conciliation between the Holy See and Italy; but things drifted into a bad way, and he violently took part against the usurpers. In the same style he has frequently fallen out with Leo XIII and then made his peace. To-day at the Vatican, he keeps on a footing of diplomatic reserve. Briefly he only has one object, the tiara, and even shows it too plainly, which is a mistake, for it uses up a candidate. Still, just at present the struggle seems to be between him and Cardinal Boccanera. And that's why he has gone over to the Jesuits again, utilising their hatred of his rival, and anticipating that they will be forced to support /him/ in order to defeat the other. But I doubt it, they are too shrewd, they will hesitate to patronise a candidate who is already so compromised. He, blunder-head, passionate and proud as he is, doubts nothing, and since you say that he is now at Frascati, I'm certain that he made all haste to shut himself up there with some grand strategical object in view, as soon as he heard of the Pope's illness."

"Well, and the Pope himself, Leo XIII?" asked Pierre.

This time Don Vigilio slightly hesitated, his eyes blinking. Then he said: "Leo XIII? He is a Jesuit, a Jesuit! Oh! I know it is said that he sides with the Dominicans, and this is in a measure true, for he fancies that he is animated with their spirit and he has brought St. Thomas into favour again, and has restored all the ecclesiastical teaching of doctrine. But there is also the Jesuit, remember, who is one involuntarily and without knowing it, and of this category the present Pope will prove the most famous example. Study his acts, investigate his policy, and you will find that everything in it emanates from the Jesuit spirit. The fact is that he has unwittingly become impregnated with that spirit, and that all the influence, directly or indirectly brought to bear on him comes from a Jesuit centre. Ah! why don't you believe me? I repeat that the Jesuits have conquered and absorbed everything, that all Rome belongs to them from the most insignificant cleric to his Holiness in person."

Then he continued, replying to each fresh name that Pierre gave with the same obstinate, maniacal cry: "Jesuit, Jesuit!" It seemed as if a Churchman could be nothing else, as if each answer were a confirmation of the proposition that the clergy must compound with the modern world if it desired to

preserve its Deity. The heroic age of Catholicism was accomplished, henceforth it could only live by dint of diplomacy and ruses, concessions and arrangements. "And that Paparelli, he's a Jesuit too, a Jesuit!" Don Vigilio went on, instinctively lowering his voice. "Yes, the humble but terrible Jesuit, the Jesuit in his most abominable /role/ as a spy and a perverter! I could swear that he has merely been placed here in order to keep watch on his Eminence! And you should see with what supple talent and craft he has performed his task, to such a point indeed that it is now he alone who wills and orders things. He opens the door to whomsoever he pleases, uses his master like something belonging to him, weighs on each of his resolutions, and holds him in his power by dint of his stealthy unremitting efforts. Yes! it's the lion conquered by the insect; the infinitesimally small disposing of the infinitely great; the train-bearer—whose proper part is to sit at his cardinal's feet like a faithful hound—in reality reigning over him, and impelling him in whatsoever direction he chooses. Ah! the Jesuit! the Jesuit! Mistrust him when you see him gliding by in his shabby old cassock, with the flabby wrinkled face of a devout old maid. And make sure that he isn't behind the doors, or in the cupboards, or under the beds. Ah! I tell you that they'll devour you as they've devoured me; and they'll give you the fever too, perhaps even the plague if you are not careful!"

Pierre suddenly halted in front of his companion. He was losing all assurance, both fear and rage were penetrating him. And, after all, why not? These extraordinary stories must be true. "But in that case give me some advice," he exclaimed, "I asked you to come in here this evening precisely because I no longer know what to do, and need to be set in the right path—" Then he broke off and again paced to and fro, as if urged into motion by his exploding passion. "Or rather no, tell me nothing!" he abruptly resumed. "It's all over; I prefer to go away. The thought occurred to me before, but it was in a moment of cowardice and with the idea of disappearing and of returning to live in peace in my little nook: whereas now, if I go off, it will be as an avenger, a judge, to cry aloud to all the world from Paris, to proclaim what I have seen in Rome, what men have done there with the Christianity of Jesus, the Vatican falling into dust, the corpse-like odour which comes from it, the idiotic illusions of those who hope that they will one day see a renaissance of the modern soul arise from a sepulchre where the remnants of dead centuries rot and slumber. Oh! I will not yield, I will not make my submission, I will defend my book by a fresh one. And that book, I promise you, will make some noise in the world, for it will sound the last agony of a dying religion, which one must make all haste to bury lest its remains should poison the nations!"

All this was beyond Don Vigilio's mind. The Italian priest, with narrow belief and ignorant terror of the new ideas, awoke within him. He clasped his hands, affrighted. "Be quiet, be quiet! You are blaspheming! And, besides, you cannot go off like that without again trying to see his Holiness. He alone is sovereign. And I know that I shall surprise you; but Father Dangelis has given you in jest the only good advice that can be given: Go back to see Monsignor Nani, for he alone will open the door of the Vatican for you."

Again did Pierre give a start of anger: "What! It was with Monsignor Nani that I began, from him that I set out; and I am to go back to him? What game is that? Can I consent to be a shuttlecock sent flying hither and thither by every battledore? People are having a game with me!"

Then, harassed and distracted, the young man fell on his chair in front of Don Vigilio, who with his face drawn by his prolonged vigil, and his hands still and ever faintly trembling, remained for some time silent. At last he explained that he had another idea. He was slightly acquainted with the Pope's confessor, a Franciscan father, a man of great simplicity, to whom he might recommend Pierre. This Franciscan, despite his self-effacement, would perhaps prove of service to him. At all events he might be tried. Then, once more, silence fell, and Pierre, whose dreamy eyes were turned towards the wall, ended by distinguishing the old picture which had touched him so deeply on the day of his arrival. In the pale glow of the lamp it gradually showed forth and lived, like an incarnation of his own case, his own futile despair before the sternly closed portal of truth and justice. Ah! that outcast woman, that stubborn victim of love, weeping amidst her streaming hair, her visage hidden whilst with pain and grief she sank upon the steps of that palace whose door was so pitilessly shut—how she resembled him! Draped with a mere strip of linen, she was shivering, and amidst the overpowering distress of her abandonment she did not reveal her secret, misfortune, or transgression, whichever it might be. But he, behind her close-pressed hands, endowed her with a face akin to his own: she became his sister, as were all the poor creatures without roof or certainty who weep because they are naked and alone, and wear out their strength in seeking to force the wicked thresholds of men. He could never gaze at her without pitying her, and it stirred him so much that evening to find her ever so unknown, nameless and visageless, yet steeped in the most bitter tears, that he suddenly began to question his companion.

"Tell me," said he, "do you know who painted that old picture? It stirs me to the soul like a masterpiece."

Stupefied by this unexpected question, the secretary raised his head and looked, feeling yet more



astonished when he had examined the blackened, forsaken panel in its sorry frame.

"Where did it come from?" resumed Pierre; "why has it been stowed away in this room?"

"Oh!" replied Don Vigilio, with a gesture of indifference, "it's nothing. There are heaps of valueless old paintings everywhere. That one, no doubt, has always been here. But I don't know; I never noticed it before."

Whilst speaking he had at last risen to his feet, and this simple action had brought on such a fit of shivering that he could scarcely take leave, so violently did his teeth chatter with fever. "No, no, don't show me out," he stammered, "keep the lamp here. And to conclude: the best course is for you to leave yourself in the hands of Monsignor Nani, for he, at all events, is a superior man. I told you on your arrival that, whether you would or not, you would end by doing as he desired. And so what's the use of struggling? And mind, not a word of our conversation to-night; it would mean my death."

Then he noiselessly opened the doors, glanced distrustfully into the darkness of the passage, and at last ventured out and disappeared, regaining his own room with such soft steps that not the faintest footfall was heard amidst the tomb-like slumber of the old mansion.

On the morrow, Pierre, again mastered by a desire to fight on to the very end, got Don Vigilio to recommend him to the Pope's confessor, the Franciscan friar with whom the secretary was slightly acquainted. However, this friar proved to be an extremely timid if worthy man, selected precisely on account of his great modesty, simplicity, and absolute lack of influence in order that he might not abuse his position with respect to the Holy Father. And doubtless there was an affectation of humility on the latter's part in taking for confessor a member of the humblest of the regular orders, a friend of the poor, a holy beggar of the roads. At the same time the friar certainly enjoyed a reputation for oratory; and hidden by a veil the Pope at times listened to his sermons; for although as infallible Sovereign Pontiff Leo XIII could not receive lessons from any priest, it was admitted that as a man he might reap profit by listening to good discourse. Nevertheless apart from his natural eloquence, the worthy friar was really a mere washer of souls, a confessor who listens and absolves without even remembering the impurities which he removes in the waters of penitence. And Pierre, finding him really so poor and such a cipher, did not insist on an intervention which he realised would be futile.

All that day the young priest was haunted by the figure of that ingenuous lover of poverty, that delicious St. Francis, as Narcisse Habert was wont to say. Pierre had often wondered how such an apostle, so gentle towards both animate and inanimate creation, and so full of ardent charity for the wretched, could have arisen in a country of egotism and enjoyment like Italy, where the love of beauty alone has remained queen. Doubtless the times have changed; yet what a strong sap of love must have been needed in the old days, during the great sufferings of the middle ages, for such a consoler of the humble to spring from the popular soil and preach the gift of self to others, the renunciation of wealth, the horror of brutal force, the equality and obedience which would ensure the peace of the world. St. Francis trod the roads clad as one of the poorest, a rope girdling his grey gown and his bare feet shod with sandals, and he carried with him neither purse nor staff. And he and his brethren spoke aloud and freely, with sovereign florescence of poetry and boldness of truth, attacking the rich and the powerful, and daring even to denounce the priests of evil life, the debauched, simoniacal, and perjured bishops. A long cry of relief greeted the Franciscans, the people followed them in crowds—they were the friends, the liberators of all the humble ones who suffered. And thus, like revolutionaries, they at first so alarmed Rome, that the popes hesitated to authorise their Order. When they at last gave way it was assuredly with the hope of using this new force for their own profit, by conquering the whole vague mass of the lowly whose covert threats have ever growled through the ages, even in the most despotic times. And thenceforward in the sons of St. Francis the Church possessed an ever victorious army—a wandering army which spread over the roads, in the villages and through the towns, penetrating to the firesides of artisan and peasant, and gaining possession of all simple hearts. How great the democratic power of such an Order which had sprung from the very entrails of the people! And thence its rapid prosperity, its teeming growth in a few years, friaries arising upon all sides, and the third Order\* so invading the secular population as to impregnate and absorb it. And that there was here a genuine growth of the soil, a vigorous vegetation of the plebeian stock was shown by an entire national art arising from it—the precursors of the Renaissance in painting and even Dante himself, the soul of Italia's genius.

\* The Franciscans, like the Dominicans and others, admit, in addition to the two Orders of friars and nuns, a third Order comprising devout persons of either sex who have neither the vocation nor the opportunity for cloistered life, but live in the world, privately observing the chief principles of the fraternity with which they are connected. In central and southern Europe members of these third Orders are still numerous.—Trans.

For some days now, in the Rome of the present time, Pierre had been coming into contact with those

great Orders of the past. The Franciscans and the Dominicans were there face to face in their vast convents of prosperous aspect. But it seemed as if the humility of the Franciscans had in the long run deprived them of influence. Perhaps, too, their /role/ as friends and liberators of the people was ended since the people now undertook to liberate itself. And so the only real remaining battle was between the Dominicans and the Jesuits, both of whom still claimed to mould the world according to their particular views. Warfare between them was incessant, and Rome—the supreme power at the Vatican—was ever the prize for which they contended. But, although the Dominicans had St. Thomas on their side, they must have felt that their old dogmatic science was crumbling, compelled as they were each day to surrender a little ground to the Jesuits whose principles accorded better with the spirit of the century. And, in addition to these, there were the white-robed Carthusians, those very holy, pure, and silent meditators who fled from the world into quiet cells and cloisters, those despairing and consoled ones whose numbers may decrease but whose Order will live for ever, even as grief and desire for solitude will live. And then there were the Benedictines whose admirable rules have sanctified labour, passionate toilers in literature and science, once powerful instruments of civilisation, enlarging universal knowledge by their immense historical and critical works. These Pierre loved, and with them would have sought a refuge two centuries earlier, yet he was astonished to find them building on the Aventine a huge dwelling, for which Leo XIII has already given millions, as if the science of to-day and to-morrow were yet a field where they might garner harvests. But /cui bono/, when the workmen have changed, and dogmas are there to bar the road—dogmas which totter, no doubt, but which believers may not fling aside in order to pass onward? And finally came the swarm of less important Orders, hundreds in number; there were the Carmelites, the Trappists, the Minims, the Barnabites, the Lazzarists, the Eudists, the Mission Fathers, the Servites, the Brothers of the Christian Doctrine; there were the Bernadines, the Augustinians, the Theatines, the Observants, the Passionists, the Celestines, and the Capuchins, without counting the corresponding Orders of women or the Poor Clares, or the innumerable nuns like those of the Visitation and the Calvary. Each community had its modest or sumptuous dwelling, certain districts of Rome were entirely composed of convents, and behind the silent lifeless facades all those people buzzed, intrigued, and waged the everlasting warfare of rival interests and passions. The social evolution which produced them had long since ceased, still they obstinately sought to prolong their life, growing weaker and more useless day by day, destined to a slow agony until the time shall come when the new development of society will leave them neither foothold nor breathing space.

And it was not only with the regulars that Pierre came in contact during his peregrinations through Rome; indeed, he more particularly had to deal with the secular clergy, and learnt to know them well. A hierarchical system which was still vigorously enforced maintained them in various ranks and classes. Up above, around the Pope, reigned the pontifical family, the high and noble cardinals and prelates whose conceit was great in spite of their apparent familiarity. Below them the parish clergy formed a very worthy middle class of wise and moderate minds; and here patriot priests were not rare. Moreover, the Italian occupation of a quarter of a century, by installing in the city a world of functionaries who saw everything that went on, had, curiously enough, greatly purified the private life of the Roman priesthood, in which under the popes women, beyond all question, played a supreme part. And finally one came to the plebeian clergy whom Pierre studied with curiosity, a collection of wretched, grimy, half-naked priests who like famished animals prowled around in search of masses, and drifted into disreputable taverns in the company of beggars and thieves. However, he was more interested by the floating population of foreign priests from all parts of Christendom—the adventurers, the ambitious ones, the believers, the madmen whom Rome attracted just as a lamp at night time attracts the insects of the gloom. Among these were men of every nationality, position, and age, all lashed on by their appetites and scrambling from morn till eve around the Vatican, in order to snap at the prey which they hoped to secure. He found them everywhere, and told himself with some shame that he was one of them, that the unit of his own personality served to increase the incredible number of cassocks that one encountered in the streets. Ah! that ebb and flow, that ceaseless tide of black gowns and frocks of every hue! With their processions of students ever walking abroad, the seminaries of the different nations would alone have sufficed to drape and decorate the streets, for there were the French and the English all in black, the South Americans in black with blue sashes, the North Americans in black with red sashes, the Poles in black with green sashes, the Greeks in blue, the Germans in red, the Scots in violet, the Romans in black or violet or purple, the Bohemians with chocolate sashes, the Irish with red lappets, the Spaniards with blue cords, to say nothing of all the others with broderie and bindings and buttons in a hundred different styles. And in addition there were the confraternities, the penitents, white, black, blue, and grey, with sleeveless frocks and capes of different hue, grey, blue, black, or white. And thus even nowadays Papal Rome at times seemed to resuscitate, and one could realise how tenaciously and vivaciously she struggled on in order that she might not disappear in the cosmopolitan Rome of the new era. However, Pierre, whilst running about from one prelate to another, frequenting priests and crossing churches, could not accustom himself to the worship, the Roman piety which astonished him when it did not wound him. One rainy Sunday morning, on entering Santa Maria Maggiore, he fancied himself in some waiting-room, a very splendid

one, no doubt, but where God seemed to have no habitation. There was not a bench, not a chair in the nave, across which people passed, as they might pass through a railway station, wetting and soiling the precious mosaic pavement with their muddy shoes; and tired women and children sat round the bases of the columns, even as in railway stations one sees people sitting and waiting for their trains during the great crushes of the holiday season. And for this tramping throng of folks of small degree, who had looked in /en passant/, a priest was saying a low mass in a side chapel, before which a narrow file of standing people had gathered, extending across the nave, and recalling the crowds which wait in front of theatres for the opening of the doors. At the elevation of the host one and all inclined themselves devoutly, but almost immediately afterwards the gathering dispersed. And indeed why linger? The mass was said. Pierre everywhere found the same form of attendance, peculiar to the countries of the sun; the worshippers were in a hurry and only favoured the Deity with short familiar visits, unless it were a question of some gala scene at San Paolo or San Giovanni in Laterano or some other of the old basilicas. It was only at the Gesu, on another Sunday morning, that the young priest came upon a high-mass congregation, which reminded him of the devout throngs of the North. Here there were benches and women seated, a worldly warmth and cosiness under the luxurious, gilded, carved, and painted roof, whose tawny splendour is very fine now that time has toned down the eccentricities of the decoration. But how many of the churches were empty, among them some of the most ancient and venerable, San Clemente, Sant' Agnese, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, where during the offices one saw but a few believers of the neighbourhood. Four hundred churches were a good many for even Rome to people; and, indeed, some were merely attended on fixed ceremonial occasions, and a good many merely opened their doors once every year—on the feast day, that is, of their patron saint. Some also subsisted on the lucky possession of a fetish, an idol compassionate to human sufferings. Santa Maria in Ara Coeli possessed the miraculous little Jesus, the "Bambino," who healed sick children, and Sant' Agostino had the "Madonna del Parto," who grants a happy delivery to mothers. Then others were renowned for the holy water of their fonts, the oil of their lamps, the power of some wooden saint or marble virgin. Others again seemed forsaken, given up to tourists and the perquisites of beadles, like mere museums peopled with dead gods: Finally others disturbed one's faith by the suggestiveness of their aspects, as, for instance, that Santa Maria Rotonda, which is located in the Pantheon, a circular hall recalling a circus, where the Virgin remains the evident tenant of the Olympian deities.

Pierre took no little interest in the churches of the poor districts, but did not find there the keen faith and the throngs he had hoped for. One afternoon, at Santa Maria in Trastevere, he heard the choir in full song, but the church was quite empty, and the chant had a most lugubrious sound in such a desert. Then, another day, on entering San Crisogono, he found it draped, probably in readiness for some festival on the morrow. The columns were cased with red damask, and between them were hangings and curtains alternately yellow and blue, white and red; and the young man fled from such a fearful decoration as gaudy as that of a fair booth. Ah! how far he was from the cathedrals where in childhood he had believed and prayed! On all sides he found the same type of church, the antique basilica accommodated to the taste of eighteenth-century Rome. Though the style of San Luigi dei Francesi is better, more soberly elegant, the only thing that touched him even there was the thought of the heroic or saintly Frenchmen, who sleep in foreign soil beneath the flags. And as he sought for something Gothic, he ended by going to see Santa Maria sopra Minerva,\* which, he was told, was the only example of the Gothic style in Rome. Here his stupefaction attained a climax at sight of the clustering columns cased in stucco imitating marble, the ogives which dared not soar, the rounded vaults condemned to the heavy majesty of the dome style. No, no, thought he, the faith whose cooling cinders lingered there was no longer that whose brazier had invaded and set all Christendom aglow! However, Monsignor Fornaro whom he chanced to meet as he was leaving the church, inveighed against the Gothic style as rank heresy. The first Christian church, said the prelate, had been the basilica, which had sprung from the temple, and it was blasphemy to assert that the Gothic cathedral was the real Christian house of prayer, for Gothic embodied the hateful Anglo-Saxon spirit, the rebellious genius of Luther. At this a passionate reply rose to Pierre's lips, but he said nothing for fear that he might say too much. However, he asked himself whether in all this there was not a decisive proof that Catholicism was the very vegetation of Rome, Paganism modified by Christianity. Elsewhere Christianity has grown up in quite a different spirit, to such a point that it has risen in rebellion and schismatically turned against the mother-city. And the breach has ever gone on widening, the dissemblance has become more and more marked; and amidst the evolution of new societies, yet a fresh schism appears inevitable and proximate in spite of all the despairing efforts to maintain union.

\* So called because it occupies the site of a temple to Minerva.—Trans.

While Pierre thus visited the Roman churches, he also continued his efforts to gain support in the matter of his book, his irritation tending to such stubbornness, that if in the first instance he failed to obtain an interview, he went back again and again to secure one, steadfastly keeping his promise to call in turn upon each cardinal of the Congregation of the Index. And as a cardinal may belong to several

Congregations, it resulted that he gradually found himself roaming through those former ministries of the old pontifical government which, if less numerous than formerly, are still very intricate institutions, each with its cardinal-prefect, its cardinal-members, its consultative prelates, and its numerous employees. Pierre repeatedly had to return to the Cancellaria, where the Congregation of the Index meets, and lost himself in its world of staircases, corridors, and halls. From the moment he passed under the porticus he was overcome by the icy shiver which fell from the old walls, and was quite unable to appreciate the bare, frigid beauty of the palace, Bramante's masterpiece though it be, so purely typical of the Roman Renaissance. He also knew the Propaganda where he had seen Cardinal Sarno; and, sent as he was hither and thither, in his efforts to gain over influential prelates, chance made him acquainted with the other Congregations, that of the Bishops and Regulars, that of the Rites and that of the Council. He even obtained a glimpse of the Consistorial, the Dataria,\* and the sacred Penitentiary. All these formed part of the administrative mechanism of the Church under its several aspects—the government of the Catholic world, the enlargement of the Church's conquests, the administration of its affairs in conquered countries, the decision of all questions touching faith, morals, and individuals, the investigation and punishment of offences, the grant of dispensations and the sale of favours. One can scarcely imagine what a fearful number of affairs are each morning submitted to the Vatican, questions of the greatest gravity, delicacy, and intricacy, the solution of which gives rise to endless study and research. It is necessary to reply to the innumerable visitors who flock to Rome from all parts, and to the letters, the petitions, and the batches of documents which are submitted and require to be distributed among the various offices. And Pierre was struck by the deep and discreet silence in which all this colossal labour was accomplished; not a sound reaching the streets from the tribunals, parliaments, and factories for the manufacture of saints and nobles, whose mechanism was so well greased, that in spite of the rust of centuries and the deep and irremediable wear and tear, the whole continued working without clank or creak to denote its presence behind the walls. And did not that silence embody the whole policy of the Church, which is to remain mute and await developments? Nevertheless what a prodigious mechanism it was, antiquated no doubt, but still so powerful! And amidst those Congregations how keenly Pierre felt himself to be in the grip of the most absolute power ever devised for the domination of mankind. However much he might notice signs of decay and coming ruin he was none the less seized, crushed, and carried off by that huge engine made up of vanity and venality, corruption and ambition, meanness and greatness. And how far, too, he now was from the Rome that he had dreamt of, and what anger at times filled him amidst his weariness, as he persevered in his resolve to defend himself!

\* It is from the Dataria that bulls, rescripts, letters of appointment to benefices, and dispensations of marriage, are issued, after the affixture of the date and formula /Datum Romae/, "Given at Rome."—Trans.

All at once certain things which he had never understood were explained to him. One day, when he returned to the Propaganda, Cardinal Sarno spoke to him of Freemasonry with such icy rage that he was abruptly enlightened. Freemasonry had hitherto made him smile; he had believed in it no more than he had believed in the Jesuits. Indeed, he had looked upon the ridiculous stories which were current—the stories of mysterious, shadowy men who governed the world with secret incalculable power—as mere childish legends. In particular he had been amazed by the blind hatred which maddened certain people as soon as Freemasonry was mentioned. However, a very distinguished and intelligent prelate had declared to him, with an air of profound conviction, that at least on one occasion every year each masonic Lodge was presided over by the Devil in person, incarnate in a visible shape! And now, by Cardinal Sarno's remarks, he understood the rivalry, the furious struggle of the Roman Catholic Church against that other Church, the Church of over the way.\* Although the former counted on her own triumph, she none the less felt that the other, the Church of Freemasonry, was a competitor, a very ancient enemy, who indeed claimed to be more ancient than herself, and whose victory always remained a possibility. And the friction between them was largely due to the circumstance that they both aimed at universal sovereignty, and had a similar international organisation, a similar net thrown over the nations, and in a like way mysteries, dogmas, and rites. It was deity against deity, faith against faith, conquest against conquest: and so, like competing tradesmen in the same street, they were a source of mutual embarrassment, and one of them was bound to kill the other. But if Roman Catholicism seemed to Pierre to be worn out and threatened with ruin, he remained quite as sceptical with regard to the power of Freemasonry. He had made inquiries as to the reality of that power in Rome, where both Grand Master and Pope were enthroned, one in front of the other. He was certainly told that the last Roman princes had thought themselves compelled to become Freemasons in order to render their own difficult position somewhat easier and facilitate the future of their sons. But was this true? had they not simply yielded to the force of the present social evolution? And would not Freemasonry eventually be submerged by its own triumph—that of the ideas of justice, reason, and truth, which it had defended through the dark and violent ages of history? It is a thing which constantly happens; the victory of an idea kills the sect which has propagated it, and renders the apparatus with which the members of the sect surrounded themselves, in order to fire

imaginings, both useless and somewhat ridiculous. Carbonarism did not survive the conquest of the political liberties which it demanded; and on the day when the Catholic Church crumbles, having accomplished its work of civilisation, the other Church, the Freemasons' Church of across the road, will in a like way disappear, its task of liberation ended. Nowadays the famous power of the Lodges, hampered by traditions, weakened by a ceremonial which provokes laughter, and reduced to a simple bond of brotherly agreement and mutual assistance, would be but a sorry weapon of conquest for humanity, were it not that the vigorous breath of science impels the nations onwards and helps to destroy the old religions.

\* Some readers may think the above passages an exaggeration, but such is not the case. The hatred with which the Catholic priesthood, especially in Italy, Spain, and France, regards Freemasonry is remarkable. At the moment of writing these lines I have before me several French clerical newspapers, which contain the most abusive articles levelled against President Faure solely because he is a Freemason. One of these prints, a leading journal of Lyons, tells the French President that he cannot serve both God and the Devil; and that if he cannot give up Freemasonry he would do well to cease desecrating the abode of the Deity by his attendance at divine service.—Trans.

However, all Pierre's journeyings and applications brought him no certainty; and, while stubbornly clinging to Rome, intent on fighting to the very end, like a soldier who will not believe in the possibility of defeat, he remained as anxious as ever. He had seen all the cardinals whose influence could be of use to him. He had seen the Cardinal Vicar, entrusted with the diocese of Rome, who, like the man of letters he was, had spoken to him of Horace, and, like a somewhat blundering politician, had questioned him about France, the Republic, the Army, and the Navy Estimates, without dealing in the slightest degree with the incriminated book. He had also seen the Grand Penitentiary, that tall old man, with fleshless, ascetic face, of whom he had previously caught a glimpse at the Boccanera mansion, and from whom he now only drew a long and severe sermon on the wickedness of young priests, whom the century had perverted and who wrote most abominable books. Finally, at the Vatican, he had seen the Cardinal Secretary, in some wise his Holiness's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the great power of the Holy See, whom he had hitherto been prevented from approaching by terrifying warnings as to the possible result of an unfavourable reception. However, whilst apologising for calling at such a late stage, he had found himself in presence of a most amiable man, whose somewhat rough appearance was softened by diplomatic affability, and who, after making him sit down, questioned him with an air of interest, listened to him, and even spoke some words of comfort. Nevertheless, on again reaching the Piazza of St. Peter's, Pierre well understood that his affair had not made the slightest progress, and that if he ever managed to force the Pope's door, it would not be by way of the Secretariate of State. And that evening he returned home quite exhausted by so many visits, in such distraction at feeling that little by little he had been wholly caught in that huge mechanism with its hundred wheels, that he asked himself in terror what he should do on the morrow now that there remained nothing for him to do—unless, indeed, it were to go mad.

However, meeting Don Vigilio in a passage of the house, he again wished to ask him for some good advice. But the secretary, who had a gleam of terror in his eyes, silenced him, he knew not why, with an anxious gesture. And then in a whisper, in Pierre's ear, he said: "Have you seen Monsignor Nani? No! Well, go to see him, go to see him. I repeat that you have nothing else to do!"

Pierre yielded. And indeed why should he have resisted? Apart from the motives of ardent charity which had brought him to Rome to defend his book, was he not there for a self-educating, experimental purpose? It was necessary that he should carry his attempts to the very end.

On the morrow, when he reached the colonnade of St. Peter's, the hour was so early that he had to wait there awhile. He had never better realised the enormity of those four curving rows of columns, forming a forest of gigantic stone trunks among which nobody ever promenades. In fact, the spot is a grandiose and dreary desert, and one asks oneself the why and wherefore of such a majestic porticus. Doubtless, however, it was for its sole majesty, for the mere pomp of decoration, that this colonnade was reared; and therein, again, one finds the whole Roman spirit. However, Pierre at last turned into the Via di Sant' Offizio, and passing the sacristy of St. Peter's, found himself before the Palace of the Holy Office in a solitary silent district, which the footfall of pedestrians or the rumble of wheels but seldom disturbs. The sun alone lives there, in sheets of light which spread slowly over the small, white paving. You divine the vicinity of the Basilica, for there is a smell as of incense, a cloisteral quiescence as of the slumber of centuries. And at one corner the Palace of the Holy Office rises up with heavy, disquieting bareness, only a single row of windows piercing its lofty, yellow front. The wall which skirts a side street looks yet more suspicious with its row of even smaller casements, mere peep-holes with glaucous panes. In the bright sunlight this huge cube of mud-coloured masonry ever seems asleep, mysterious, and closed like a prison, with scarcely an aperture for communication with the outer world.

Pierre shivered, but then smiled as at an act of childishness, for he reflected that the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition, nowadays the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, was no longer the institution it had been, the purveyor of heretics for the stake, the occult tribunal beyond appeal which had right of life and death over all mankind. True, it still laboured in secrecy, meeting every Wednesday, and judging and condemning without a sound issuing from within its walls. But on the other hand if it still continued to strike at the crime of heresy, if it smote men as well as their works, it no longer possessed either weapons or dungeons, steel or fire to do its bidding, but was reduced to a mere /role/ of protest, unable to inflict aught but disciplinary penalties even upon the ecclesiastics of its own Church.

When Pierre on entering was ushered into the reception-room of Monsignor Nani who, as assessor, lived in the palace, he experienced an agreeable surprise. The apartment faced the south, and was spacious and flooded with sunshine. And stiff as was the furniture, dark as were the hangings, an exquisite sweetness pervaded the room, as though a woman had lived in it and accomplished the prodigy of imparting some of her own grace to all those stern-looking things. There were no flowers, yet there was a pleasant smell. A charm expanded and conquered every heart from the very threshold.

Monsignor Nani at once came forward, with a smile on his rosy face, his blue eyes keenly glittering, and his fine light hair powdered by age. With hands outstretched, he exclaimed: "Ah! how kind of you to have come to see me, my dear son! Come, sit down, let us have a friendly chat." Then with an extraordinary display of affection, he began to question Pierre: "How are you getting on? Tell me all about it, exactly what you have done."

Touched in spite of Don Vigilio's revelations, won over by the sympathy which he fancied he could detect, Pierre thereupon confessed himself, relating his visits to Cardinal Sarno, Monsignor Fornaro and Father Dangelis, his applications to all the influential cardinals, those of the Index, the Grand Penitentiary, the Cardinal Vicar, and the Cardinal Secretary; and dwelling on his endless journeys from door to door through all the Congregations and all the clergy, that huge, active, silent bee-hive amidst which he had wearied his feet, exhausted his limbs, and bewildered his poor brain. And at each successive Station of this Calvary of entreaty, Monsignor Nani, who seemed to listen with an air of rapture, exclaimed: "But that's very good, that's capital! Oh! your affair is progressing. Yes, yes, it's progressing marvellously well."

He was exultant, though he allowed no unseemly irony to appear, while his pleasant, penetrating eyes fathomed the young priest, to ascertain if he had been brought to the requisite degree of obedience. Had he been sufficiently wearied, disillusioned and instructed in the reality of things, for one to finish with him? Had three months' sojourn in Rome sufficed to turn the somewhat mad enthusiast of the first days into an unimpassioned or at least resigned being?

However, all at once Monsignor Nani remarked: "But, my dear son, you tell me nothing of his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti."

"The fact is, Monseigneur, that his Eminence is at Frascati, so I have been unable to see him."

Thereupon the prelate, as if once more postponing the /denouement/ with the secret enjoyment of an artistic /diplomate/, began to protest, raising his little plump hands with the anxious air of a man who considers everything lost: "Oh! but you must see his Eminence; it is absolutely necessary! Think of it! The Prefect of the Index! We can only act after your visit to him, for as you have not seen /him/ it is as if you had seen nobody. Go, go to Frascati, my dear son."

And thereupon Pierre could only bow and reply: "I will go, Monseigneur."

## XI

ALTHOUGH Pierre knew that he would be unable to see Cardinal Sanguinetti before eleven o'clock, he nevertheless availed himself of an early train, so that it was barely nine when he alighted at the little station of Frascati. He had already visited the place during his enforced idleness, when he had made the classical excursion to the Roman castles which extend from Frascati to Rocco di Papa, and from Rocco di Papa to Monte Cavo, and he was now delighted with the prospect of strolling for a couple of hours along those first slopes of the Alban hills, where, amidst rushes, olives, and vines, Frascati, like a promontory, overlooks the immense ruddy sea of the Campagna even as far as Rome, which, six full leagues away, wears the whitish aspect of a marble isle.

Ah! that charming Frascati, on its greeny knoll at the foot of the wooded Tusculan heights, with its famous terrace whence one enjoys the finest view in the world, its old patrician villas with proud and

elegant Renaissance facades and magnificent parks, which, planted with cypress, pine, and ilex, are for ever green! There was a sweetness, a delight, a fascination about the spot, of which Pierre would have never wearied. And for more than an hour he had wandered blissfully along roads edged with ancient, knotty olive-trees, along dingle ways shaded by the spreading foliage of neighbouring estates, and along perfumed paths, at each turn of which the Campagna was seen stretching far away, when all at once he was accosted by a person whom he was both surprised and annoyed to meet. He had strolled down to some low ground near the railway station, some old vineyards where a number of new houses had been built of recent years, and suddenly saw a stylish pair-horse victoria, coming from the direction of Rome, draw up close by, whilst its occupant called to him: "What! Monsieur l'Abbe Froment, are you taking a walk here, at this early hour?"

Thereupon Pierre recognised Count Luigi Prada, who alighted, shook hands with him and began to walk beside him, whilst the empty carriage went on in advance. And forthwith the Count explained his tastes: "I seldom take the train," he said, "I drive over. It gives my horses an outing. I have interests over here as you may know, a big building enterprise which is unfortunately not progressing very well. And so, although the season is advanced, I'm obliged to come rather more frequently than I care to do."

As Prada suggested, Pierre was acquainted with the story. The Boccaneras had been obliged to sell a sumptuous villa which a cardinal of their family had built at Frascati in accordance with the plans of Giacomo della Porta, during the latter part of the sixteenth century: a regal summer-residence it had been, finely wooded, with groves and basins and cascades, and in particular a famous terrace projecting like a cape above the Roman Campagna whose expanse stretches from the Sabine mountains to the Mediterranean sands. Through the division of the property, Benedetta had inherited from her mother some very extensive vineyards below Frascati, and these she had brought as dowry to Prada at the very moment when the building mania was extending from Rome into the provinces. And thereupon Prada had conceived the idea of erecting on the spot a number of middle-class villas like those which litter the suburbs of Paris. Few purchasers, however, had come forward, the financial crash had supervened, and he was now with difficulty liquidating this unlucky business, having indemnified his wife at the time of their separation.

"And then," he continued, addressing Pierre, "one can come and go as one likes with a carriage, whereas, on taking the train, one is at the mercy of the time table. This morning, for instance, I have appointments with contractors, experts, and lawyers, and I have no notion how long they will keep me. It's a wonderful country, isn't it? And we are quite right to be proud of it in Rome. Although I may have some worries just now, I can never set foot here without my heart beating with delight."

A circumstance which he did not mention, was that his /amica/, Lisbeth Kauffmann, had spent the summer in one of the newly erected villas, where she had installed her studio and had been visited by all the foreign colony, which tolerated her irregular position on account of her gay spirits and artistic talent. Indeed, people had even ended by accepting the outcome of her connection with Prada, and a fortnight previously she had returned to Rome, and there given birth to a son—an event which had again revived all the scandalous tittle-tattle respecting Benedetta's divorce suit. And Prada's attachment to Frascati doubtless sprang from the recollection of the happy hours he had spent there, and the joyful pride with which the birth of the boy inspired him.

Pierre, for his part, felt ill at ease in the young Count's presence, for he had an instinctive hatred of money-mongers and men of prey. Nevertheless, he desired to respond to his amiability, and so inquired after his father, old Orlando, the hero of the Liberation.

"Oh!" replied Prada, "excepting for his legs he's in wonderfully good health. He'll live a hundred years. Poor father! I should so much have liked to install him in one of these little houses, last summer. But I could not get him to consent; he's determined not to leave Rome; he's afraid, perhaps, that it might be taken away from him during his absence." Then the young Count burst into a laugh, quite merry at the thought of jeering at the heroic but no longer fashionable age of independence. And afterwards he said, "My father was speaking of you again only yesterday, Monsieur l'Abbe. He is astonished that he has not seen you lately."

This distressed Pierre, for he had begun to regard Orlando with respectful affection. Since his first visit, he had twice called on the old hero, but the latter had refused to broach the subject of Rome so long as his young friend should not have seen, felt, and understood everything. There would be time for a talk later on, said he, when they were both in a position to formulate their conclusions.

"Pray tell Count Orlando," responded Pierre, "that I have not forgotten him, and that, if I have deferred a fresh visit, it is because I desire to satisfy him. However, I certainly will not leave Rome without going to tell him how deeply his kind greeting has touched me."

Whilst talking, the two men slowly followed the ascending road past the newly erected villas, several

of which were not yet finished. And when Prada learned that the priest had come to call on Cardinal Sanguinetti, he again laughed, with the laugh of a good-natured wolf, showing his white fangs. "True," he exclaimed, "the Cardinal has been here since the Pope has been laid up. Ah! you'll find him in a pretty fever."

"Why?"

"Why, because there's bad news about the Holy Father this morning. When I left Rome it was rumoured that he had spent a fearful night."

So speaking, Prada halted at a bend of the road, not far from an antique chapel, a little church of solitary, mournful grace of aspect, on the verge of an olive grove. Beside it stood a ruinous building, the old parsonage, no doubt, whence there suddenly emerged a tall, knotty priest with coarse and earthy face, who, after roughly locking the door, went off in the direction of the town.

"Ah!" resumed the Count in a tone of raillery, "that fellow's heart also must be beating violently; he's surely gone to your Cardinal in search of news."

Pierre had looked at the priest. "I know him," he replied; "I saw him, I remember, on the day after my arrival at Cardinal Boccanera's. He brought the Cardinal a basket of figs and asked him for a certificate in favour of his young brother, who had been sent to prison for some deed of violence—a knife thrust if I recollect rightly. However, the Cardinal absolutely refused him the certificate."

"It's the same man," said Prada, "you may depend on it. He was often at the Villa Boccanera formerly; for his young brother was gardener there. But he's now the client, the creature of Cardinal Sanguinetti. Santobono his name is, and he's a curious character, such as you wouldn't find in France, I fancy. He lives all alone in that falling hovel, and officiates at that old chapel of St. Mary in the Fields, where people don't go to hear mass three times in a year. Yes, it's a perfect sinecure, which with its stipend of a thousand francs enables him to live there like a peasant philosopher, cultivating the somewhat extensive garden whose big walls you see yonder."

The close to which he called attention stretched down the slope behind the parsonage, without an aperture, like some savage place of refuge into which not even the eye could penetrate. And all that could be seen above the left-hand wall was a superb, gigantic fig-tree, whose big leaves showed blackly against the clear sky. Prada had moved on again, and continued to speak of Santobono, who evidently interested him. Fancy, a patriot priest, a Garibaldian! Born at Nemi, in that yet savage nook among the Alban hills, he belonged to the people and was still near to the soil. However, he had studied, and knew sufficient history to realise the past greatness of Rome, and dream of the re-establishment of Roman dominion as represented by young Italy. And he had come to believe, with passionate fervour, that only a great pope could realise his dream by seizing upon power, and then conquering all the other nations. And what could be easier, since the Pope commanded millions of Catholics? Did not half Europe belong to him? France, Spain, and Austria would give way as soon as they should see him powerful, dictating laws to the world. Germany and Great Britain, indeed all the Protestant countries, would also inevitably be conquered, for the papacy was the only dike that could be opposed to error, which must some day fatally succumb in its efforts against such a barrier. Politically, however, Santobono had declared himself for Germany, for he considered that France needed to be crushed before she would throw herself into the arms of the Holy Father. And thus contradictions and fancies clashed in his foggy brain, whose burning ideas swiftly turned to violence under the influence of primitive, racial fierceness. Briefly, the priest was a barbarian upholder of the Gospel, a friend of the humble and woeful, a sectarian of that school which is capable alike of great virtues and great crimes.

"Yes," concluded Prada, "he is now devoted to Cardinal Sanguinetti because he believes that the latter will prove the great pope of to-morrow, who is to make Rome the one capital of the nations. At the same time he doubtless harbours a lower personal ambition, that of attaining to a canonry or of gaining assistance in the little worries of life, as when he wished to extricate his brother from trouble. Here, you know, people stake their luck on a cardinal just as they nurse a 'trey' in the lottery, and if their cardinal proves the winning number and becomes pope they gain a fortune. And that's why you now see Santobono striding along yonder, all anxiety to know if Leo XIII will die and Sanguinetti don the tiara."

"Do you think the Pope so very ill, then?" asked Pierre, both anxious and interested.

The Count smiled and raised both arms: "Ah!" said he, "can one ever tell? They all get ill when their interest lies that way. However, I believe that the Pope is this time really indisposed; a complaint of the bowels, it is said; and at his age, you know, the slightest indisposition may prove fatal."

The two men took a few steps in silence, then the priest again asked a question: "Would Cardinal



Sanguinetti have a great chance if the Holy See were vacant?"

"A great chance! Ah! that's another of those things which one never knows. The truth is people class Sanguinetti among the acceptable candidates, and if personal desire sufficed he would certainly be the next pope, for ambition consumes him to the marrow, and he displays extraordinary passion and determination in his efforts to succeed. But therein lies his very weakness; he is using himself up, and he knows it. And so he must be resolved to every step during the last days of battle. You may be quite sure that if he has shut himself up here at this critical time, it is in order that he may the better direct his operations from a distance, whilst at the same time feigning a retreat, a disinterestedness which is bound to have a good effect."

Then Prada began to expatiate on Sanguinetti with no little complacency, for he liked the man's spirit of intrigue, his keen, conquering appetite, his excessive, and even somewhat blundering activity. He had become acquainted with him on his return from the nunciature at Vienna, when he had already resolved to win the tiara. That ambition explained everything, his quarrels and reconciliations with the reigning pope, his affection for Germany, followed by a sudden evolution in the direction of France, his varying attitude with regard to Italy, at first a desire for agreement, and then absolute rejection of all compromises, a refusal to grant any concession, so long as Rome should not be evacuated. This, indeed, seemed to be Sanguinetti's definite position; he made a show of disliking the wavering sway of Leo XIII, and of retaining a fervent admiration for Pius IX, the great, heroic pope of the days of resistance, whose goodness of heart had proved no impediment to unshakable firmness. And all this was equivalent to a promise that he, Sanguinetti, would again make kindness exempt from weakness, the rule of the Church, and would steer clear of the dangerous compounding of politics. At bottom, however, politics were his only dream, and he had even formulated a complete programme of intentional vagueness, which his clients and creatures spread abroad with an air of rapturous mystery. However, since a previous indisposition of the Pope's, during the spring, he had been living in mortal disquietude, for it had then been rumoured that the Jesuits would resign themselves to support Cardinal Pio Boccanera, although the latter scarcely favoured them. He was rough and stern, no doubt, and his extreme bigotry might be a source of danger in this tolerant age; but, on the other hand, was he not a patrician, and would not his election imply that the papacy would never cease to claim the temporal power? From that moment Boccanera had been the one man whom Sanguinetti feared, for he beheld himself despoiled of his prize, and spent his time in devising plans to rid himself of such a powerful rival, repeating abominable stories of Cardinal Pio's alleged complaisance with regard to Benedetta and Dario, and incessantly representing him as Antichrist, the man of sin, whose reign would consummate the ruin of the papacy. Finally, to regain the support of the Jesuits, Sanguinetti's last idea was to repeat through his familiars that for his part he would not merely maintain the principle of the temporal power intact, but would even undertake to regain that power. And he had a full plan on the subject, which folks confided to one another in whispers, a plan which, in spite of its apparent concessions, would lead to the overwhelming victory of the Church. It was to raise the prohibition which prevented Catholics from voting or becoming candidates at the Italian elections; to send a hundred, then two hundred, and then three hundred deputies to the Chamber, and in that wise to overthrow the House of Savoy, and establish a Federation of the Italian provinces, whereof the Holy Father, once more placed in possession of Rome, would become the august and sovereign President.

As Prada finished he again laughed, showing his white teeth—teeth which would never readily relinquish the prey they held. "So you see," he added, "we need to defend ourselves, since it's a question of turning us out. Fortunately, there are some little obstacles in the way of that. Nevertheless, such dreams naturally have great influence on excited minds, such as that of Santobono, for instance. He's a man whom one word from Sanguinetti would lead far indeed. Ah! he has good legs. Look at him up yonder, he has already reached the Cardinal's little palace—that white villa with the sculptured balconies."

Pierre raised his eyes and perceived the episcopal residence, which was one of the first houses of Frascati. Of modern construction and Renaissance style, it overlooked the immensity of the Roman Campagna.

It was now eleven o'clock, and as the young priest, before going up to pay his own visit, bade the Count good-bye, the latter for a moment kept hold of his hand. "Do you know," said he, "it would be very kind of you to lunch with me—will you? Come and join me at that restaurant yonder with the pink front as soon as you are at liberty. I shall have settled my own business in an hour's time, and I shall be delighted to have your company at table."

Pierre began by declining, but he could offer no possible excuse, and at last surrendered, won over, despite himself, by Prada's real charm of manner. When they had parted, the young priest only had to climb a street in order to reach the Cardinal's door. With his natural expansiveness and craving for popularity, Sanguinetti was easy of access, and at Frascati in particular his doors were flung open even

to the most humble cassocks. So Pierre was at once ushered in, a circumstance which somewhat surprised him, for he remembered the bad humour of the servant whom he had seen on calling at the Cardinal's residence in Rome, when he had been advised to forego the journey, as his Eminence did not like to be disturbed when he was ill. However, nothing spoke of illness in that pleasant villa, flooded with sunshine. True, the waiting-room, where he was momentarily left alone, displayed neither luxury nor comfort; but it was brightened by the finest light in the world, and overlooked that extraordinary Campagna, so flat, so bare, and so unique in its beauty, for in front of it one ever dreams and sees the past arise. And so, whilst waiting, Pierre stationed himself at an open window, conducting on to a balcony, and his eyes roamed over the endless sea of herbage to the far-away whiteness of Rome, above which rose the dome of St. Peter's, at that distance a mere sparkling speck, barely as large as the nail of one's little finger.

However, the young man had scarcely taken up this position when he was surprised to hear some people talking, their words reaching him with great distinctness. And on leaning forward he realised that his Eminence in person was standing on another balcony close by, and conversing with a priest, only a portion of whose cassock could be seen. Still, this sufficed for Pierre to recognise Santobono. His first impulse, dictated by natural discretion, was to withdraw from the window, but the words he next heard riveted him to the spot.

"We shall know in a moment," his Eminence was saying in his full voice. "I sent Eufemio to Rome, for he is the only person in whom I've any confidence. And see, there is the train bringing him back."

A train, still as small as a plaything, could in fact be seen approaching over the vast plain, and doubtless it was to watch for its arrival that Sanguinetti had stationed himself on the balcony. And there he lingered, with his eyes fixed on distant Rome. Then Santobono, in a passionate voice, spoke some words which Pierre imperfectly understood, but the Cardinal with clear articulation rejoined, "Yes, yes, my dear fellow, a catastrophe would be a great misfortune. Ah! may his Holiness long be preserved to us." Then he paused, and as he was no hypocrite, gave full expression to the thoughts which were in his mind: "At least, I hope that he will be preserved just now, for the times are bad, and I am in frightful anguish. The partisans of Antichrist have lately gained much ground."

A cry escaped Santobono: "Oh! your Eminence will act and triumph."

"I, my dear fellow? What would you have me do? I am simply at the disposal of my friends, those who are willing to believe in me, with the sole object of ensuring the victory of the Holy See. It is they who ought to act, it is they—each according to the measure of his means—who ought to bar the road to the wicked in order that the righteous may succeed. Ah! if Antichrist should reign—"

The recurrence of this word Antichrist greatly disturbed Pierre; but he suddenly remembered what the Count had told him: Antichrist was Cardinal Boccanera.

"Think of that, my dear fellow," continued Sanguinetti. "Picture Antichrist at the Vatican, consummating the ruin of religion by his implacable pride, his iron will, his gloomy passion for nihilism; for there can be no doubt of it, he is the Beast of Death announced by the prophecies, the Beast who will expose one and all to the danger of being swallowed up with him in his furious rush into abysmal darkness. I know him; he only dreams of obstinacy and destruction, he will seize the pillars of the temple and shake them in order that he may sink beneath the ruins, he and the whole Catholic world! In less than six months he will be driven from Rome, at strife with all the nations, execrated by Italy, and roaming the world like the phantom of the last pope!"

It was with a low growl, suggestive of a stifled oath, that Santobono responded to this frightful prediction. But the train had now reached the station, and among the few passengers who had alighted, Pierre could distinguish a little Abbe, who was walking so fast that his cassock flapped against his hips. It was Abbe Eufemio, the Cardinal's secretary, and when he had perceived his Eminence on the balcony he lost all self-respect, and broke into a run, in order that he might the sooner ascend the sloping street. "Ah! here's Eufemio," exclaimed the Cardinal, quivering with anxiety. "We shall know now, we shall know now."

The secretary had plunged into the doorway below, and he climbed the stairs with such rapidity that almost immediately afterwards Pierre saw him rush breathlessly across the waiting-room, and vanish into the Cardinal's sanctum. Sanguinetti had quitted the balcony to meet his messenger, but soon afterwards he returned to it asking questions, venting exclamations, raising, in fact, quite a tumult over the news which he had received. "And so it's really true, the night was a bad one. His Holiness scarcely slept! Colic, you were told? But nothing could be worse at his age; it might carry him off in a couple of hours. And the doctors, what do they say?"

The answer did not reach Pierre, but he understood its purport as the Cardinal in his naturally loud

voice resumed: "Oh! the doctors never know. Besides, when they refuse to speak death is never far off. /Dio!/ what a misfortune if the catastrophe cannot be deferred for a few days!"

Then he became silent, and Pierre realised that his eyes were once more travelling towards Rome, gazing with ambitious anguish at the dome of St. Peter's, that little, sparkling speck above the vast, ruddy plain. What a commotion, what agitation if the Pope were dead! And he wished that it had merely been necessary for him to stretch forth his arm in order to take and hold the Eternal City, the Holy City, which, yonder on the horizon, occupied no more space than a heap of gravel cast there by a child's spade. And he was already dreaming of the coming Conclave, when the canopy of each other cardinal would fall, and his own, motionless and sovereign, would crown him with purple.

"But you are right, my friend!" he suddenly exclaimed, addressing Santobono, "one must act, the salvation of the Church is at stake. And, besides, it is impossible that Heaven should not be with us, since our sole desire is its triumph. If necessary, at the supreme moment, Heaven will know how to crush Antichrist."

Then, for the first time, Pierre distinctly heard the voice of Santobono, who, gruffly, with a sort of savage decision, responded: "Oh! if Heaven is tardy it shall be helped."

That was all; the young man heard nothing further save a confused murmur of voices. The speakers quitted the balcony, and his spell of waiting began afresh in the sunlit /salon/ so peaceful and delightful in its brightness. But all at once the door of his Eminence's private room was thrown wide open and a servant ushered him in; and he was surprised to find the Cardinal alone, for he had not witnessed the departure of the two priests, who had gone off by another door. The Cardinal, with his highly coloured face, big nose, thick lips, square-set, vigorous figure, which still looked young despite his sixty years, was standing near a window in the bright golden light. He had put on the paternal smile with which he greeted even the humblest from motives of good policy, and as soon as Pierre had knelt and kissed his ring, he motioned him to a chair. "Sit down, dear son, sit down. You have come of course about that unfortunate affair of your book. I am very pleased indeed to be able to speak with you about it."

He himself then took a chair in front of that window overlooking Rome whence he seemed unable to drag himself. And the young priest, whilst apologising for coming to disturb his rest, perceived that he scarcely listened, for his eyes again sought the prey which he so ardently coveted. Yet the semblance of good-natured attention was perfect, and Pierre marvelled at the force of will which this man must possess to appear so calm, so interested in the affairs of others, when such a tempest was raging in him.

"Your Eminence will, I hope, kindly forgive me," continued the young priest.

"But you have done right to come, since I am kept here by my failing health," said the Cardinal. "Besides, I am somewhat better, and it is only natural that you should wish to give me some explanations and defend your work and enlighten my judgment. In fact, I was astonished at not yet having seen you, for I know that your faith in your cause is great and that you spare no steps to convert your judges. So speak, my dear son, I am listening and shall be pleased indeed if I can absolve you."

Pierre was caught by these kind words, and a hope returned to him, that of winning the support of the all-powerful Prefect of the Index. He already regarded this ex-nuncio—who at Brussels and Vienna had acquired the worldly art of sending people away satisfied with indefinite promises though he meant to grant them nothing—as a man of rare intelligence and exquisite cordiality. And so once more he regained the fervour of his apostolate to express his views respecting the future Rome, the Rome he dreamt of, which was destined yet again to become the mistress of the world if she would return to the Christianity of Jesus, to an ardent love for the weak and the humble.

Sanguinetti smiled, wagged his head, and raised exclamations of rapture: "Very good, very good indeed, perfect! Oh! I agree with you, dear son. One cannot put things better. It is quite evident; all good minds must agree with you." And then, said he, the poetic side deeply touched him. Like Leo XIII—and doubtless in a spirit of rivalry—he courted the reputation of being a very distinguished Latinist, and professed a special and boundless affection for Virgil. "I know, I know," he exclaimed, "I remember your page on the return of spring, which consoles the poor whom winter has frozen. Oh! I read it three times over! And are you aware that your writing is full of Latin turns of style. I noticed more than fifty expressions which could be found in the 'Bucolics.' Your book is a charm, a perfect charm!"

As he was no fool, and realised that the little priest before him was a man of high intelligence, he ended by interesting himself, not in Pierre personally, but in the profit which he might possibly derive from him. Amidst his feverish intrigues, he unceasingly sought to utilise all the qualities possessed by those whom God sent to him that might in any way be conducive to his own triumph. So, for a moment, he turned away from Rome and looked his companion in the face, listening to him and asking himself in

what way he might employ him—either at once in the crisis through which he was passing, or later on when he should be pope. But the young priest again made the mistake of attacking the temporal power, and of employing that unfortunate expression, "a new religion." Thereupon the Cardinal stopped him with a gesture, still smiling, still retaining all his amiability, although the resolution which he had long since formed became from that moment definitive. "You are certainly in the right on many points, my dear son," he said, "and I often share your views—share them completely. But come, you are doubtless not aware that I am the protector of Lourdes here at Rome. And so, after the page which you have written about the Grotto, how can I possibly pronounce in your favour and against the Fathers?"

Pierre was utterly overcome by this announcement, for he was indeed unaware of the Cardinal's position with respect to Lourdes, nobody having taken the precaution to warn him. However, each of the Catholic enterprises distributed throughout the world has a protector at Rome, a cardinal who is designated by the Pope to represent it and, if need be, to defend it.

"Those good Fathers!" Sanguinetti continued in a gentle voice, "you have caused them great grief, and really our hands are tied, we cannot add to their sorrow. If you only knew what a number of masses they send us! I know more than one of our poor priests who would die of hunger if it were not for them."

Pierre could only bow beneath the blow. Once more he found himself in presence of the pecuniary question, the necessity in which the Holy See is placed to secure the revenue it requires one year with another. And thus the Pope was ever in servitude, for if the loss of Rome had freed him of the cares of state, his enforced gratitude for the alms he received still riveted him to earth. So great, indeed, were the requirements, that money was the ruler, the sovereign power, before which all bowed at the Court of Rome.

And now Sanguinetti rose to dismiss his visitor. "You must not despair, dear son," he said effusively. "I have only my own vote, you know, and I promise you that I will take into account the excellent explanations which you have just given me. And who can tell? If God be with you, He will save you even in spite of all!" This speech formed part of the Cardinal's usual tactics; for one of his principles was never to drive people to extremes by sending them away hopeless. What good, indeed, would it do to tell this one that the condemnation of his book was a foregone conclusion, and that his only prudent course would be to disavow it? Only a savage like Boccanera breathed anger upon fiery souls and plunged them into rebellion. "You must hope, hope!" repeated Sanguinetti with a smile, as if implying a multitude of fortunate things which he could not plainly express.

Thereupon Pierre, who was deeply touched, felt born anew. He even forgot the conversation he had surprised, the Cardinal's keen ambition and covert rage with his redoubtable rival. Besides, might not intelligence take the place of heart among the powerful? If this man should some day become pope, and had understood him, might he not prove the pope who was awaited, the pope who would accept the task of reorganising the Church of the United States of Europe, and making it the spiritual sovereign of the world? So he thanked him with emotion, bowed, and left him to his dream, standing before that widely open window whence Rome appeared to him, glittering like a jewel, even indeed as the tiara of gold and gems, in the splendour of the autumn sun.

It was nearly one o'clock when Pierre and Count Prada were at last able to sit down to /dejeuner/ in the little restaurant where they had agreed to meet. They had both been delayed by their affairs. However, the Count, having settled some worrying matters to his own advantage, was very lively, whilst the priest on his side was again hopeful, and yielded to the delightful charm of that last fine day. And so the meal proved a very pleasant one in the large, bright room, which, as usual at that season of the year, was quite deserted. Pink and blue predominated in the decoration, but Cupids fluttered on the ceiling, and landscapes, vaguely recalling the Roman castles, adorned the walls. The things they ate were fresh, and they drank the wine of Frascati, to which the soil imparts a kind of burnt flavour as if the old volcanoes of the region had left some little of their fire behind.

For a long while the conversation ranged over those wild and graceful Alban hills, which, fortunately for the pleasure of the eye, overlook the flat Roman Campagna. Pierre, who had made the customary carriage excursion from Frascati to Nemi, still felt its charm and spoke of it in glowing language. First came the lovely road from Frascati to Albano, ascending and descending hillsides planted with reeds, vines, and olive-trees, amongst which one obtained frequent glimpses of the Campagna's wavy immensity. On the right-hand the village of Rocca di Papa arose in amphitheatrical fashion, showing whitely on a knoll below Monte Cavo, which was crowned by lofty and ancient trees. And from this point of the road, on looking back towards Frascati, one saw high up, on the verge of a pine wood the ruins of Tusculum, large ruddy ruins, baked by centuries of sunshine, and whence the boundless panorama must have been superb. Next one passed through Marino, with its sloping streets, its large cathedral, and its black decaying palace belonging to the Colonnas. Then, beyond a wood of ilex-trees,

the lake of Albano was skirted with scenery which has no parallel in the world. In front, beyond the clear mirror of motionless water, were the ruins of Alba Longa; on the left rose Monte Cavo with Rocca di Papa and Palazzuolo; whilst on the right Castel Gandolfo overlooked the lake as from the summit of a cliff. Down below in the extinct crater, as in the depths of a gigantic cup of verdure, the lake slept heavy and lifeless: a sheet of molten metal, which the sun on one side streaked with gold, whilst the other was black with shade. And the road then ascended all the way to Castel Gandolfo, which was perched on its rock, like a white bird betwixt the lake and the sea. Ever refreshed by breezes, even in the most burning hours of summer, the little place was once famous for its papal villa, where Pius IX loved to spend hours of indolence, and whither Leo XIII has never come. And next the road dipped down, and the ilex-trees appeared again, ilex-trees famous for their size, a double row of monsters with twisted limbs, two and three hundred years old. Then one at last reached Albano, a small town less modernised and less cleansed than Frascati, a patch of the old land which has retained some of its ancient wildness; and afterwards there was Ariccia with the Palazzo Chigi, and hills covered with forests and viaducts spanning ravines which overflowed with foliage; and there was yet Genzano, and yet Nemi, growing still wilder and more remote, lost in the midst of rocks and trees.

Ah! how ineffaceable was the recollection which Pierre had retained of Nemi, Nemi on the shore of its lake, Nemi so delicious and fascinating from afar, conjuring up all the ancient legends of fairy towns springing from amidst the greenery of mysterious waters, but so repulsively filthy when one at last reaches it, crumbling on all sides but yet dominated by the Orsini tower, as by the evil genius of the middle ages, which there seems to perpetuate the ferocious habits, the violent passions, the knife thrusts of the past! Thence came that Santobono whose brother had killed, and who himself, with his eyes of crime glittering like live embers, seemed to be consumed by a murderous flame. And the lake, that lake round like an extinguished moon fallen into the depths of a former crater, a deeper and less open cup than that of the lake of Albano, a cup rimmed with trees of wondrous vigour and density! Pines, elms, and willows descend to the very margin, with a green mass of tangled branches which weigh each other down. This formidable fecundity springs from the vapour which constantly arises from the water under the parching action of the sun, whose rays accumulate in this hollow till it becomes like a furnace. There is a warm, heavy dampness, the paths of the adjacent gardens grow green with moss, and in the morning dense mists often fill the large cup with white vapour, as with the steaming milk of some sorceress of malevolent craft. And Pierre well remembered how uncomfortable he had felt before that lake where ancient atrocities, a mysterious religion with abominable rites, seemed to slumber amidst the superb scenery. He had seen it at the approach of evening, looking, in the shade of its forest girdle, like a plate of dull metal, black and silver, motionless by reason of its weight. And that water, clear and yet so deep, that water deserted, without a bark upon its surface, that water august, lifeless, and sepulchral, had left him a feeling of inexpressible sadness, of mortal melancholy, the hopelessness of great solitary passion, earth and water alike swollen by the mute spasms of germs, troublous in their fecundity. Ah! those black and plunging banks, and that black mournful lake prone at the bottom!\*

\* Some literary interest attaches to M. Zola's account of Nemi, whose praises have been sung by a hundred poets. It will be observed that he makes no mention of Egeria. The religion distinguished by abominable practices to which he alludes, may perhaps be the worship of the Egyptian Diana, who had a famous temple near Nemi, which was excavated by Lord Savile some ten years ago, when all the smaller objects discovered were presented to the town of Nottingham. At this temple, according to some classical writers, the chief priest was required to murder his predecessor, and there were other abominable usages.—Trans.

Count Prada began to laugh when Pierre told him of these impressions. "Yes, yes," said he, "it's true, Nemi isn't always gay. In dull weather I have seen the lake looking like lead, and even the full sunshine scarcely animates it. For my part, I know I should die of /ennui/ if I had to live face to face with that bare water. But it is admired by poets and romantic women, those who adore great tragedies of passion."

Then, as he and Pierre rose from the table to go and take coffee on the terrace of the restaurant, the conversation changed: "Do you mean to attend Prince Buongiovanni's reception this evening?" the Count inquired. "It will be a curious sight, especially for a foreigner, and I advise you not to miss it."

"Yes, I have an invitation," Pierre replied. "A friend of mine, Monsieur Narcisse Habert, an /attache/ at our embassy, procured it for me, and I am going with him."

That evening, indeed, there was to be a /fete/ at the Palazzo Buongiovanni on the Corso, one of the few galas that take place in Rome each winter. People said that this one would surpass all others in magnificence, for it was to be given in honour of the betrothal of little Princess Celia. The Prince, her father, after boxing her ears, it was rumoured, and narrowly escaping an attack of apoplexy as the result of a frightful fit of anger, had, all at once, yielded to her quiet, gentle stubbornness, and

consented to her marriage with Lieutenant Attilio, the son of Minister Sacco. And all the drawing-rooms of Rome, those of the white world quite as much as those of the black, were thoroughly upset by the tidings.

Count Prada made merry over the affair. "Ah! you'll see a fine sight!" he exclaimed. "Personally, I'm delighted with it all for the sake of my good cousin Attilio, who is really a very nice and worthy fellow. And nothing in the world would keep me from going to see my dear uncle Sacco make his entry into the ancient /salons/ of the Buongiovanni. It will be something extraordinary and superb. He has at last become Minister of Agriculture, you know. My father, who always takes things so seriously, told me this morning that the affair so worried him he hadn't closed his eyes all night."

The Count paused, but almost immediately added: "I say, it is half-past two and you won't have a train before five o'clock. Do you know what you ought to do? Why, drive back to Rome with me in my carriage."

"No, no," rejoined Pierre, "I'm deeply obliged to you but I'm to dine with my friend Narcisse this evening, and I mustn't be late."

"But you won't be late—on the contrary! We shall start at three and reach Rome before five o'clock. There can't be a more pleasant promenade when the light falls; and, come, I promise you a splendid sunset."

He was so pressing that the young priest had to accept, quite subjugated by so much amiability and good humour. They spent another half-hour very pleasantly in chatting about Rome, Italy, and France. Then, for a moment, they went up into Frascati where the Count wished to say a few words to a contractor, and just as three o'clock was striking they started off, seated side by side on the soft cushions and gently rocked by the motion of the victoria as the two horses broke into a light trot. As Prada had predicted, that return to Rome across the bare Campagna under the vast limpid heavens at the close of such a mild autumn day proved most delightful. First of all, however, the victoria had to descend the slopes of Frascati between vineyards and olive-trees. The paved road snaked, and was but little frequented; they merely saw a few peasants in old felt hats, a white mule, and a cart drawn by a donkey, for it is only upon Sundays that the /osterie/ or wine-shops are filled and that artisans in easy circumstances come to eat a dish of kid at the surrounding /bastides/. However, at one turn of the road they passed a monumental fountain. Then a flock of sheep momentarily barred the way before defiling past. And beyond the gentle undulations of the ruddy Campagna Rome appeared amidst the violet vapours of evening, sinking by degrees as the carriage itself descended to a lower and lower level. There came a moment when the city was a mere thin grey streak, speckled whitely here and there by a few sunlit house-fronts. And then it seemed to plunge below the ground—to be submerged by the swell of the far-spreading fields.

The victoria was now rolling over the plain, leaving the Alban hills behind, whilst before it and on either hand came the expanse of meadows and stubbles. And then it was that the Count, after leaning forward, exclaimed: "Just look ahead, yonder, there's our man of this morning, Santobono in person—what a strapping fellow he is, and how fast he walks! My horses can scarcely overtake him."

Pierre in his turn leant forward and likewise perceived the priest of St. Mary in the Fields, looking tall and knotty, fashioned as it were with a bill-hook. Robed in a long black cassock, he showed like a vigorous splotch of ink amidst the bright sunshine streaming around him; and he was walking on at such a fast, stern, regular pace that he suggested Destiny on the march. Something, which could not be well distinguished, was hanging from his right arm.

When the carriage had at last overtaken him Prada told the coachman to slacken speed, and then entered into conversation.

"Good-day, Abbe; you are well, I hope?" he asked.

"Very well, Signor Conte, I thank you."

"And where are you going so bravely?"

"Signor Conte, I am going to Rome."

"What! to Rome, at this late hour?"

"Oh! I shall be there nearly as soon as yourself. The distance doesn't frighten me, and money's quickly earned by walking."

Scarcely turning his head to reply, stepping out beside the wheels, Santobono did not miss a stride.

And Prada, diverted by the meeting, whispered to Pierre: "Wait a bit, he'll amuse us." Then he added aloud: "Since you are going to Rome, Abbe, you had better get in here; there's room for you."

Santobono required no pressing, but at once accepted the offer. "Willingly; a thousand thanks," he said. "It's still better to save one's shoe leather."

Then he got in and installed himself on the bracket-seat, declining with abrupt humility the place which Pierre politely offered him beside the Count. The young priest and the latter now saw that the object he was carrying was a little basket of fresh figs, nicely arranged and covered with leaves.

The horses set off again at a faster trot, and the carriage rolled on and on over the superb, flat plain. "So you are going to Rome?" the Count resumed in order to make Santobono talk.

"Yes," the other replied, "I am taking his Eminence Cardinal Boccanera these few figs, the last of the season: a little present which I had promised him." He had placed the basket on his knees and was holding it between his big knotty hands as if it were something rare and fragile.

"Ah! some of the famous figs of your garden," said Prada. "It's quite true, they are like honey. But why don't you rid yourself of them. You surely don't mean to keep them on your knees all the way to Rome. Give them to me, I'll put them in the hood."

However, Santobono became quite agitated, and vigorously declined the offer. "No, no, a thousand thanks! They don't embarrass me in the least; they are very well here; and in this way I shall be sure that no accident will befall them."

His passion for the fruit he grew quite amused Prada, who nudged Pierre, and then inquired: "Is the Cardinal fond of your figs?"

"Oh! his Eminence condescends to adore them. In former years, when he spent the summer at the villa, he would never touch the figs from other trees. And so, you see, knowing his tastes, it costs me very little to gratify him."

Whilst making this reply Santobono had shot such a keen glance in the direction of Pierre that the Count felt it necessary to introduce them to one another. This he did saying: "As it happens, Monsieur l'Abbe Froment is stopping at the Palazzo Boccanera; he has been there for three months or so."

"Yes, I'm aware of it," Santobono quietly replied; "I found Monsieur l'Abbe with his Eminence one day when I took some figs to the Palazzo. Those were less ripe, but these are perfect." So speaking he gave the little basket a complacent glance, and seemed to press it yet more closely between his huge and hairy fingers.

Then came a spell of silence, whilst on either hand the Campagna spread out as far as the eye could reach. All houses had long since disappeared; there was not a wall, not a tree, nothing but the undulating expanse whose sparse, short herbage was, with the approach of winter, beginning to turn green once more. A tower, a half-fallen ruin which came into sight on the left, rising in solitude into the limpid sky above the flat, boundless line of the horizon, suddenly assumed extraordinary importance. Then, on the right, the distant silhouettes of cattle and horses were seen in a large enclosure with wooden rails. Urged on by the goad, oxen, still yoked, were slowly coming back from ploughing; whilst a farmer, cantering beside the ploughed land on a little sorrel nag, gave a final look round for the night. Now and again the road became peopled. A *biroccino*, an extremely light vehicle with two huge wheels and a small seat perched upon the springs, whisked by like a gust of wind. From time to time also the victoria passed a *carrotino*, one of the low carts in which peasants, sheltered by a kind of bright-hued tent, bring the wine, vegetables, and fruit of the castle-lands to Rome. The shrill tinkling of horses' bells was heard afar off as the animals followed the well-known road of their own accord, their peasant drivers usually being sound asleep. Women with bare, black hair, scarlet neckerchiefs, and skirts caught up, were seen going home in groups of three and four. And then the road again emptied, and the solitude became more and more complete, without a wayfarer or an animal appearing for miles and miles, whilst yonder, at the far end of the lifeless sea, so grandiose and mournful in its monotony, the sun continued to descend from the infinite vault of heaven.

"And the Pope, Abbe, is he dead?" Prada suddenly inquired.

Santobono did not even start. "I trust," he replied in all simplicity, "that his Holiness still has many long years to live for the triumph of the Church."

"So you had good news this morning when you called on your bishop, Cardinal Sanguinetti?"

This time the priest was unable to restrain a slight start. Had he been seen, then? In his haste he had failed to notice the two men following the road behind him. However, he at once regained self-possession, and replied: "Oh! one can never tell exactly whether news is good or bad. It seems that his Holiness passed a somewhat painful night, but I devoutly hope that the next will be a better one." Then he seemed to meditate for a moment, and added: "Moreover, if God should have deemed it time to call his Holiness to Himself, He would not leave His flock without a shepherd. He would have already chosen and designated the Sovereign Pontiff of to-morrow."

This superb answer increased Prada's gaiety. "You are really extraordinary, Abbe," he said. "So you think that popes are solely created by the grace of the Divinity! The pope of to-morrow is chosen up in heaven, eh, and simply waits? Well, I fancied that men had something to do with the matter. But perhaps you already know which cardinal it is that the divine favour has thus elected in advance?"

Then, like the unbeliever he was, he went on with his facile jests, which left the priest unruffled. In fact, the latter also ended by laughing when the Count, after alluding to the gambling passion which at each fresh Conclave sets wellnigh the whole population of Rome betting for or against this or that candidate, told him that he might easily make his fortune if he were in the divine secret. Next the talk turned on the three white cassocks of different sizes which are always kept in readiness in a cupboard at the Vatican. Which of them would be required on this occasion?—the short one, the long one, or the one of medium size? Each time that the reigning pope falls somewhat seriously ill there is in this wise an extraordinary outburst of emotion, a keen awakening of all ambitions and intrigues, to such a point that not merely in the black world, but throughout the city, people have no other subject of curiosity, conversation, and occupation than that of discussing the relative claims of the cardinals and predicting which of them will be elected.

"Come, come," Prada resumed, "since you know the truth, I'm determined that you shall tell me. Will it be Cardinal Moretta?"

Santobono, in spite of his evident desire to remain dignified and disinterested, like a good, pious priest, was gradually growing impassioned, yielding to the hidden fire which consumed him. And this interrogatory finished him off; he could no longer restrain himself, but replied: "Moretta! What an idea! Why, he is sold to all Europe!"

"Well, will it be Cardinal Bartolini?"

"Oh! you can't think that. Bartolini has used himself up in striving for everything and getting nothing."

"Will it be Cardinal Dozio, then?"

"Dozio, Dozio! Why, if Dozio were to win one might altogether despair of our Holy Church, for no man can have a baser mind than he!"

Prada raised his hands, as if he had exhausted the serious candidates. In order to increase the priest's exasperation he maliciously refrained from naming Cardinal Sanguinetti, who was certainly Santobono's nominee. All at once, however, he pretended to make a good guess, and gaily exclaimed: "Ah! I have it; I know your man—Cardinal Boccanera!"

The blow struck Santobono full in the heart, wounding him both in his rancour and his patriotic faith. His terrible mouth was already opening, and he was about to shout "No! no!" with all his strength, but he managed to restrain the cry, compelled as he was to silence by the present on his knees—that little basket of figs which he pressed so convulsively with both hands; and the effort which he was obliged to make left him quivering to such a point that he had to wait some time before he could reply in a calm voice: "His most reverend Eminence Cardinal Boccanera is a saintly man, well worthy of the throne, and my only fear is that, with his hatred of new Italy, he might bring us warfare."

Prada, however, desired to enlarge the wound. "At all events," said he, "you accept him and love him too much not to rejoice over his chances of success. And I really think that we have arrived at the truth, for everybody is convinced that the Conclave's choice cannot fall elsewhere. Come, come; Boccanera is a very tall man, so it's the long white cassock which will be required."

"The long cassock, the long cassock," growled Santobono, despite himself; "that's all very well, but—"

Then he stopped short, and, again overcoming his passion, left his sentence unfinished. Pierre, listening in silence, marvelled at the man's self-restraint, for he remembered the conversation which he had overheard at Cardinal Sanguinetti's. Those figs were evidently a mere pretext for gaining admission to the Boccanera mansion, where some friend—Abbe Paparelli, no doubt—could alone supply certain positive information which was needed. But how great was the command which the hot-blooded



priest exercised over himself amidst the riotous impulses of his soul!

On either side of the road the Campagna still and ever spread its expanse of verdure, and Prada, who had become grave and dreamy, gazed before him without seeing anything. At last, however, he gave expression to his thoughts. "You know, Abbe, what will be said if the Pope should die this time. That sudden illness, those colics, those refusals to make any information public, mean nothing good—Yes, yes, poison, just as for the others!"

Pierre gave a start of stupefaction. The Pope poisoned! "What! Poison? Again?" he exclaimed as he gazed at his companions with dilated eyes. Poison at the end of the nineteenth century, as in the days of the Borgias, as on the stage in a romanticist melodrama! To him the idea appeared both monstrous and ridiculous.

Santobono, whose features had become motionless and impenetrable, made no reply. But Prada nodded, and the conversation was henceforth confined to him and the young priest. "Why, yes, poison," he replied. "The fear of it has remained very great in Rome. Whenever a death seems inexplicable, either by reason of its suddenness or the tragic circumstances which attend it, the unanimous thought is poison. And remark this: in no city, I believe, are sudden deaths so frequent. The causes I don't exactly know, but some doctors put everything down to the fevers. Among the people, however, the one thought is poison, poison with all its legends, poison which kills like lightning and leaves no trace, the famous recipe bequeathed from age to age, through the emperors and the popes, down to these present times of middle-class democracy."

As he spoke he ended by smiling, for he was inclined to be somewhat sceptical on the point, despite the covert terror with which he was inspired by racial and educational causes. However, he quoted instances. The Roman matrons had rid themselves of their husbands and lovers by employing the venom of red toads. Locusta, in a more practical spirit, sought poison in plants, one of which, probably aconite, she was wont to boil. Then, long afterwards, came the age of the Borgias, and subsequently, at Naples, La Toffana sold a famous water, doubtless some preparation of arsenic, in phials decorated with a representation of St. Nicholas of Bari. There were also extraordinary stories of pins, a prick from which killed one like lightning, of cups of wine poisoned by the infusion of rose petals, of woodcocks cut in half with prepared knives, which poisoned but one-half of the bird, so that he who partook of that half was killed. "I myself, in my younger days," continued Prada, "had a friend whose bride fell dead in church during the marriage service through simply inhaling a bouquet of flowers. And so isn't it possible that the famous recipe may really have been handed down, and have remained known to a few adepts?"

"But chemistry has made too much progress," Pierre replied. "If mysterious poisons were believed in by the ancients and remained undetected in their time it was because there were no means of analysis. But the drug of the Borgias would now lead the simpleton who might employ it straight to the Assizes. Such stories are mere nonsense, and at the present day people scarcely tolerate them in newspaper serials and shockers."

"Perhaps so," resumed the Count with his uneasy smile. "You are right, no doubt—only go and tell that to your host, for instance, Cardinal Boccanera, who last summer held in his arms an old and deeply-loved friend, Monsignor Gallo, who died after a seizure of a couple of hours."

"But apoplexy may kill one in two hours, and aneurism only takes two minutes."

"True, but ask the Cardinal what he thought of his friend's prolonged shudders, the leaden hue which overcame his face, the sinking of his eyes, and the expression of terror which made him quite unrecognisable. The Cardinal is convinced that Monsignor Gallo was poisoned, because he was his dearest confidant, the counsellor to whom he always listened, and whose wise advice was a guarantee of success."

Pierre's bewilderment was increasing, and, irritated by the impassibility of Santobono, he addressed him direct. "It's idiotic, it's awful! Does your reverence also believe in these frightful stories?"

But the priest of Frascati gave no sign. His thick, passionate lips remained closed while his black glowing eyes never ceased to gaze at Prada. The latter, moreover, was quoting other instances. There was the case of Monsignor Nazzarelli, who had been found in bed, shrunken and calcined like carbon. And there was that of Monsignor Brando, struck down in his sacerdotal vestments at St. Peter's itself, in the very sacristy, during vespers!

"Ah! /Mon Dieu!/" sighed Pierre, "you will tell me so much that I myself shall end by trembling, and sha'n't dare to eat anything but boiled eggs as long as I stay in this terrible Rome of yours."

For a moment this whimsical reply enlivened both the Count and Pierre. But it was quite true that their conversation showed Rome under a terrible aspect, for it conjured up the Eternal City of Crime, the city of poison and the knife, where for more than two thousand years, ever since the raising of the first bit of wall, the lust of power, the frantic hunger for possession and enjoyment, had armed men's hands, ensanguined the pavements, and cast victims into the river and the ground. Assassinations and poisonings under the emperors, poisonings and assassinations under the popes, ever did the same torrent of abominations strew that tragic soil with death amidst the sovereign glory of the sun.

"All the same," said the Count, "those who take precautions are perhaps not ill advised. It is said that more than one cardinal shudders and mistrusts people. One whom I know will never eat anything that has not been bought and prepared by his own cook. And as for the Pope, if he is anxious—"

Pierre again raised a cry of stupefaction. "What, the Pope himself! The Pope afraid of being poisoned!"

"Well, my dear Abbe, people commonly assert it. There are certainly days when he considers himself more menaced than anybody else. And are you not aware of the old Roman view that a pope ought never to live till too great an age, and that when he is so obstinate as not to die at the right time he ought to be assisted? As soon as a pope begins to fall into second childhood, and by reason of his senility becomes a source of embarrassment, and possibly even danger, to the Church, his right place is heaven. Moreover, matters are managed in a discreet manner; a slight cold becomes a decent pretext to prevent him from tarrying any longer on the throne of St. Peter."

Prada then gave some curious details. One prelate, it was said, wishing to dispel his Holiness's fears, had devised an elaborate precautionary system which, among other things, was to comprise a little padlocked vehicle, in which the food destined for the frugal pontifical table was to be securely placed before leaving the kitchen, so that it might not be tampered with on its way to the Pope's apartments. However, this project had not yet been carried into effect.

"After all," the Count concluded with a laugh, "every pope has to die some day, especially when his death is needful for the welfare of the Church. Isn't that so, Abbe?"

Santobono, whom he addressed, had a moment previously lowered his eyes as if to contemplate the little basket of figs which he held on his lap with as much care as if it had been the Blessed Sacrament. On being questioned in such a direct, sharp fashion he could not do otherwise than look up. However, he did not depart from his prolonged silence, but limited his answer to a slow nod.

"And it is God alone, and not poison, who causes one to die. Is that not so, Abbe?" repeated Prada. "It is said that those were the last words of poor Monsignor Gallo before he expired in the arms of his friend Cardinal Boccanera."

For the second time Santobono nodded without speaking. And then silence fell, all three sinking into a dreamy mood.

Meantime, without a pause, the carriage rolled on across the immensity of the Campagna. The road, straight as an arrow, seemed to extend into the infinite. As the sun descended towards the horizon the play of light and shade became more marked on the broad undulations of the ground which stretched away, alternately of a pinky green and a violet grey, till they reached the distant fringe of the sky. At the roadside on either hand there were still and ever tall withered thistles and giant fennel with yellow umbels. Then, after a time, came a team of four oxen, that had been kept ploughing until late, and stood forth black and huge in the pale atmosphere and mournful solitude. Farther on some flocks of sheep, whence the breeze wafted a tallowy odour, set patches of brown amidst the herbage, which once more was becoming verdant; whilst at intervals a dog was heard to bark, his voice the only distinct sound amidst the low quivering of that silent desert where the sovereign peacefulness of death seemed to reign. But all at once a light melody arose and some larks flew up, one of them soaring into the limpid golden heavens. And ahead, at the far extremity of the pure sky, Rome, with her towers and domes, grew larger and larger, like a city of white marble springing from a mirage amidst the greenery of some enchanted garden.

"Matteo!" Prada called to his coachman, "pull up at the Osteria Romana." And to his companions he added: "Pray excuse me, but I want to see if I can get some new-laid eggs for my father. He is so fond of them."

A few minutes afterwards the carriage stopped. At the very edge of the road stood a primitive sort of inn, bearing the proud and sonorous name of "Antica Osteria Romana." It had now become a mere house of call for carters and chance sportsmen, who ventured to drink a flagon of white wine whilst eating an omelet and a slice of ham. Occasionally, on Sundays, some of the humble classes would walk

over from Rome and make merry there; but the week days often went by without a soul entering the place, such was its isolation amidst the bare Campagna.

The Count was already springing from the carriage. "I shall only be a minute," said he as he turned away.

The /osteria/ was a long, low pile with a ground floor and one upper storey, the last being reached by an outdoor stairway built of large blocks of stone which had been scorched by the hot suns. The entire place, indeed, was corroded, tinged with the hue of old gold. On the ground floor one found a common room, a cart-house, and a stable with adjoining sheds. At one side, near a cluster of parasol pines—the only trees that could grow in that ungrateful soil—there was an arbour of reeds where five or six rough wooden tables were set out. And, as a background to this sorry, mournful nook of life, there arose a fragment of an ancient aqueduct whose arches, half fallen and opening on to space, alone interrupted the flat line of the horizon.

All at once, however, the Count retraced his steps, and, addressing Santobono, exclaimed: "I say, Abbe, you'll surely accept a glass of white wine. I know that you are a bit of a vine grower, and they have a little white wine here which you ought to make acquaintance with."

Santobono again required no pressing, but quietly alighted. "Oh! I know it," said he; "it's a wine from Marino; it's grown in a lighter soil than ours at Frascati."

Then, as he would not relax his hold on his basket of figs, but even now carried it along with him, the Count lost patience. "Come, you don't want that basket," said he; "leave it in the carriage."

The priest gave no reply, but walked ahead, whilst Pierre also made up his mind to descend from the carriage in order to see what a suburban /osteria/ was like. Prada was known at this place, and an old woman, tall, withered, but looking quite queenly in her wretched garments, had at once presented herself. On the last occasion when the Count had called she had managed to find half a dozen eggs. This time she said she would go to see, but could promise nothing, for the hens laid here and there all over the place, and she could never tell what eggs there might be.

"All right!" Prada answered, "go and look; and meantime we will have a /caraffa/ of white wine."

The three men entered the common room, which was already quite dark. Although the hot weather was now over, one heard the buzzing of innumerable flies immediately one reached the threshold, and a pungent odour of acidulous wine and rancid oil caught one at the throat. As soon as their eyes became accustomed to the dimness they were able to distinguish the spacious, blackened, malodorous chamber, whose only furniture consisted of some roughly made tables and benches. It seemed to be quite empty, so complete was the silence, apart from the buzz of the flies. However, two men were seated there, two wayfarers who remained mute and motionless before their untouched, brimming glasses. Moreover, on a low chair near the door, in the little light which penetrated from without, a thin, sallow girl, the daughter of the house, sat idle, trembling with fever, her hands close pressed between her knees.

Realising that Pierre felt uncomfortable there, the Count proposed that they should drink their wine outside. "We shall be better out of doors," said he, "it's so very in mild this evening."

Accordingly, whilst the mother looked for the eggs, and the father mended a wheel in an adjacent shed, the daughter was obliged to get up shivering to carry the flagon of wine and the three glasses to the arbour, where she placed them on one of the tables. And, having pocketed the price of the wine—threepence—in silence, she went back to her seat with a sullen look, as if annoyed at having been compelled to make such a long journey. Meanwhile the three men had sat down, and Prada gaily filled each of the glasses, although Pierre declared that he was quite unable to drink wine between his meals. "Pooh, pooh," said the Count, "you can always clink glasses with us. And now, Abbe, isn't this little wine droll? Come, here's to the Pope's better health, since he's unwell!"

Santobono at one gulp emptied his glass and clacked his tongue. With gentle, paternal care he had deposited his basket on the ground beside him: and, taking off his hat, he drew a long breath. The evening was really delightful. A superb sky of a soft golden hue stretched over that endless sea of the Campagna which was soon to fall asleep with sovereign quiescence. And the light breeze which went by amidst the deep silence brought with it an exquisite odour of wild herbs and flowers.

"How pleasant it is!" muttered Pierre, affected by the surrounding charm.  
"And what a desert for eternal rest, forgetfulness of all the world!"

Prada, who had emptied the flagon by filling Santobono's glass a second time, made no reply; he was silently amusing himself with an occurrence which at first he was the only one to observe. However,

with a merry expression of complicity, he gave the young priest a wink, and then they both watched the dramatic incidents of the affair. Some scraggy fowls were wandering round them searching the yellow turf for grasshoppers; and one of these birds, a little shiny black hen with an impudent manner, had caught sight of the basket of figs and was boldly approaching it. When she got near, however, she took fright, and retreated somewhat, with neck stiffened and head turned, so as to cast suspicious glances at the basket with her round sparkling eye. But at last covetousness gained the victory, for she could see one of the figs between the leaves, and so she slowly advanced, lifting her feet very high at each step; and, all at once, stretching out her neck, she gave the fig a formidable peck, which ripped it open and made the juice exude.

Prada, who felt as happy as a child, was then able to give vent to the laughter which he had scarcely been able to restrain: "Look out, Abbe," he called, "mind your figs!"

At that very moment Santobono was finishing his second glass of wine with his head thrown back and his eyes blissfully raised to heaven. He gave a start, looked round, and on seeing the hen at once understood the position. And then came a terrible outburst of anger, with sweeping gestures and terrible invectives. But the hen, who was again pecking, would not be denied; she dug her beak into the fig and carried it off, flapping her wings, so quick and so comical that Prada, and Pierre as well, laughed till tears came into their eyes, their merriment increasing at sight of the impotent fury of Santobono, who, for a moment, pursued the thief, threatening her with his fist.

"Ah!" said the Count, "that's what comes of not leaving the basket in the carriage. If I hadn't warned you the hen would have eaten all the figs."

The priest did not reply, but, growling out vague imprecations, placed the basket on the table, where he raised the leaves and artistically rearranged the fruit so as to fill up the void. Then, the harm having been repaired as far as was possible, he at last calmed down.

It was now time for them to resume their journey, for the sun was sinking towards the horizon, and night would soon fall. Thus the Count ended by getting impatient. "Well, and those eggs?" he called.

Then, as the woman did not return, he went to seek her. He entered the stable, and afterwards the cart-house, but she was neither here nor there. Next he went towards the rear of the /osteria/ in order to look in the sheds. But all at once an unexpected spectacle made him stop short. The little black hen was lying on the ground, dead, killed as by lightning. She showed no sign of hurt; there was nothing but a little streamlet of violet blood still trickling from her beak. Prada was at first merely astonished. He stooped and touched the hen. She was still warm and soft like a rag. Doubtless some apoplectic stroke had killed her. But immediately afterwards he became fearfully pale; the truth appeared to him, and turned him as cold as ice. In a moment he conjured up everything: Leo XIII attacked by illness, Santobono hurrying to Cardinal Sanguinetti for tidings, and then starting for Rome to present a basket of figs to Cardinal Boccanera. And Prada also remembered the conversation in the carriage: the possibility of the Pope's demise, the candidates for the tiara, the legendary stories of poison which still fostered terror in and around the Vatican; and he once more saw the priest, with his little basket on his knees, lavishing paternal attention on it, and he saw the little black hen pecking at the fruit and fleeing with a fig on her beak. And now that little black hen lay there, suddenly struck down, dead!

His conviction was immediate and absolute. But he did not have time to decide what course he should take, for a voice behind him exclaimed: "Why, it's the little hen; what's the matter with her?"

The voice was that of Pierre, who, letting Santobono climb into the carriage alone, had in his turn come round to the rear of the house in order to obtain a better view of the ruined aqueduct among the parasol pines.

Prada, who shuddered as if he himself were the culprit, answered him with a lie, a lie which he did not premeditate, but to which he was impelled by a sort of instinct. "But she's dead," he said. . . . "Just fancy, there was a fight. At the moment when I got here that other hen, which you see yonder, sprang upon this one to get the fig, which she was still holding, and with a thrust of the beak split her head open. . . . The blood's flowing, as you can see yourself."

Why did he say these things? He himself was astonished at them whilst he went on inventing them. Was it then that he wished to remain master of the situation, keep the abominable secret entirely to himself, in order that he might afterwards act in accordance with his own desires? Certainly his feelings partook of shame and embarrassment in presence of that foreigner, whilst his personal inclination for violence set some admiration amidst the revolt of his conscience, and a covert desire arose within him to examine the matter from the standpoint of his interests before he came to a decision. But, on the other hand, he claimed to be a man of integrity, and would assuredly not allow people to be poisoned.

Pierre, who was compassionately inclined towards all creation, looked at the hen with the emotion which he always felt at the sudden severance of life. However, he at once accepted Prada's story. "Ah! those fowls!" said he. "They treat one another with an idiotic ferocity which even men can scarcely equal. I kept fowls at home at one time, and one of the hens no sooner hurt her leg than all the others, on seeing the blood oozing, would flock round and peck at the limb till they stripped it to the bone."

Prada, however, did not listen, but at once went off; and it so happened that the woman was, on her side, looking for him in order to hand him four eggs which, after a deal of searching, she had discovered in odd corners about the house. The Count made haste to pay for them, and called to Pierre, who was lingering behind: "We must look sharp! We sha'n't reach Rome now until it is quite dark."

They found Santobono quietly waiting in the carriage, where he had again installed himself on the bracket with his spine resting against the box-seat and his long legs drawn back under him, and he again had the little basket of figs on his knees, and clasped it with his big knotty hands as though it were something fragile and rare which the slightest jolting might damage. His cassock showed like a huge blot, and in his coarse ashen face, that of a peasant yet near to the wild soil and but slightly polished by a few years of theological studies, his eyes alone seemed to live, glowing with the dark flame of a devouring passion. On seeing him seated there in such composure Prada could not restrain a slight shudder. Then, as soon as the victoria was again rolling along the road, he exclaimed: "Well, Abbe, that glass of wine will guarantee us against the malaria. The Pope would soon be cured if he could imitate our example."

Santobono's only reply was a growl. He was in no mood for conversation, but wrapped himself in perfect silence, as in the night which was slowly falling. And Prada in his turn ceased to speak, and, with his eyes still fixed upon the other, reflected on the course that he should follow.

The road turned, and then the carriage rolled on and on over another interminable straight highway with white paving, whose brilliancy made the road look like a ribbon of snow stretching across the Campagna, where delicate shadows were slowly falling. Gloom gathered in the hollows of the broad undulations whence a tide of violet hue seemed to spread over the short herbage until all mingled and the expanse became an indistinct swell of neutral hue from one to the other horizon. And the solitude was now yet more complete; a last indolent cart had gone by and a last tinkling of horses' bells had subsided in the distance. There was no longer a passer-by, no longer a beast of the fields to be seen, colour and sound died away, all forms of life sank into slumber, into the serene stillness of nihilism. Some fragments of an aqueduct were still to be seen at intervals on the right hand, where they looked like portions of gigantic millepeds severed by the scythe of time; next, on the left, came another tower, whose dark and ruined pile barred the sky as with a huge black stake; and then the remains of another aqueduct spanned the road, assuming yet greater dimensions against the sunset glow. Ah! that unique hour, the hour of twilight in the Campagna, when all is blotted out and simplified, the hour of bare immensity, of the infinite in its simplest expression! There is nothing, nothing all around you, but the flat line of the horizon with the one splotch of an isolated tower, and yet that nothing is instinct with sovereign majesty.

However, on the left, towards the sea, the sun was setting, descending in the limpid sky like a globe of fire of blinding redness. It slowly plunged beneath the horizon, and the only sign of cloud was some fiery vapour, as if indeed the distant sea had seethed at contact with that royal and flaming visit. And directly the sun had disappeared the heavens above it purpled and became a lake of blood, whilst the Campagna turned to grey. At the far end of the fading plain there remained only that purple lake whose brasier slowly died out behind the black arches of the aqueduct, while in the opposite direction the scattered arches remained bright and rosy against a pewter-like sky. Then the fiery vapour was dissipated, and the sunset ended by fading away. One by one the stars came out in the pacified vault, now of an ashen blue, while the lights of Rome, still far away on the verge of the horizon, scintillated like the lamps of light-houses.

And Prada, amidst the dreamy silence of his companions and the infinite melancholy of the evening and the inexpressible distress which even he experienced, continued to ask himself what course he should adopt. Again and again he mentally repeated that he could not allow people to be poisoned. The figs were certainly intended for Cardinal Boccanera, and on the whole it mattered little to him whether there were a cardinal the more or the fewer in the world. Moreover, it had always seemed to him best to let Destiny follow its course; and, infidel that he was, he saw no harm in one priest devouring another. Again, it might be dangerous for him to intervene in that abominable affair, to mix himself up in the base, fathomless intrigues of the black world. But on the other hand the Cardinal was not the only person who lived in the Boccanera mansion, and might not the figs go to others, might they not be eaten by people to whom no harm was intended? This idea of a treacherous chance haunted him, and in spite of every effort the figures of Benedetta and Dario rose up before him, returned and imposed themselves on him though he again and again sought to banish them from his mind. What if Benedetta,

what if Dario should partake of that fruit? For Benedetta he felt no fear, for he knew that she and her aunt ate their meals by themselves, and that their cuisine and the Cardinal's had nothing in common. But Dario sat at his uncle's table every day, and for a moment Prada, pictured the young Prince suddenly seized with a spasm, then falling, like poor Monsignor Gallo, into the Cardinal's arms with livid face and receding eyes, and dying within two hours.

But no, no! That would be frightful, he could not suffer such an abomination. And thereupon he made up his mind. He would wait till the night had completely gathered round and would then simply take the basket from Santobono's lap and fling it into some dark hollow without saying a word. The priest would understand him. The other one, the young Frenchman, would perhaps not even notice the incident. Besides, that mattered little, for he would not even attempt to explain his action. And he felt quite calm again when the idea occurred to him to throw the basket away while the carriage passed through the Porta Furba, a couple of miles or so before reaching Rome. That would suit him exactly; in the darkness of the gateway nothing whatever would be seen.

"We stopped too long at that /osteria/," he suddenly exclaimed aloud, turning towards Pierre. "We sha'n't reach Rome much before six o'clock. Still you will have time to dress and join your friend." And then without awaiting the young man's reply he said to Santobono: "Your figs will arrive very late, Abbe."

"Oh!" answered the priest, "his Eminence receives until eight o'clock. And, besides, the figs are not for this evening. People don't eat figs in the evening. They will be for to-morrow morning." And thereupon he again relapsed into silence.

"For to-morrow morning—yes, yes, no doubt," repeated Prada. "And the Cardinal will be able to thoroughly regale himself if nobody helps him to eat the fruit."

Thereupon Pierre, without pausing to reflect, exclaimed: "He will no doubt eat it by himself, for his nephew, Prince Dario, must have started to-day for Naples on a little convalescence trip to rid himself of the effects of the accident which laid him up during the last month." Then, having got so far, the young priest remembered to whom he was speaking, and abruptly stopped short.

The Count noticed his embarrassment. "Oh! speak on, my dear Monsieur Froment," said he, "you don't offend me. It's an old affair now. So that young man has left, you say?"

"Yes, unless he has postponed his departure. However, I don't expect to find him at the palazzo when I get there."

For a moment the only sound was that of the continuous rumble of the wheels. Prada again felt worried, a prey to the discomfort of uncertainty. Why should he mix himself up in the affair if Dario were really absent? All the ideas which came to him tired his brain, and he ended by thinking aloud: "If he has gone away it must be for propriety's sake, so as to avoid attending the Buongiovanni reception, for the Congregation of the Council met this morning to give its decision in the suit which the Countess has brought against me. Yes, I shall know by and by whether our marriage is to be dissolved."

It was in a somewhat hoarse voice that he spoke these words, and one could realise that the old wound was again bleeding within him. Although Lisbeth had borne him a son, the charge levelled against him in his wife's petition for divorce still filled him with blind fury each time that he thought of it. And all at once he shuddered violently, as if an icy blast had darted through his frame. Then, turning the conversation, he added: "It's not at all warm this evening. This is the dangerous hour of the Roman climate, the twilight hour when it's easy to catch a terrible fever if one isn't prudent. Here, pull the rug over your legs, wrap it round you as carefully as you can."

Then, as they drew near the Porta Furba, silence again fell, more profound, like the slumber which was invincibly spreading over the Campagna, now steeped in night. And at last, in the bright starlight, appeared the gate, an arch of the Acqua Felice, under which the road passed. From a distance, this fragment seemed to bar the way with its mass of ancient half-fallen walls. But afterwards the gigantic arch where all was black opened like a gaping porch. And the carriage passed under it in darkness whilst the wheels rumbled with increased sonority.

When the victoria emerged on the other side, Santobono still had the little basket of figs upon his knees and Prada looked at it, quite overcome, asking himself what sudden paralysis of the hands had prevented him from seizing it and throwing it into the darkness. Such had still been his intention but a few seconds before they passed under the arch. He had even given the basket a final glance in order that he might the better realise what movements he should make. What had taken place within him then? At present he was yielding to increasing irresolution, henceforth incapable of decisive action, feeling a need of delay in order that he might, before everything else, fully satisfy himself as to what

was likely to happen. And as Dario had doubtless gone away and the figs would certainly not be eaten until the following morning, what reason was there for him to hurry? He would know that evening if the Congregation of the Council had annulled his marriage, he would know how far the so-called "Justice of God" was venal and mendacious! Certainly he would suffer nobody to be poisoned, not even Cardinal Boccanera, though the latter's life was of little account to him personally. But had not that little basket, ever since leaving Frascati, been like Destiny on the march? And was it not enjoyment, the enjoyment of omnipotence, to be able to say to himself that he was the master who could stay that basket's course, or allow it to go onward and accomplish its deadly purpose? Moreover, he yielded to the dimmest of mental struggles, ceasing to reason, unable to raise his hand, and yet convinced that he would drop a warning note into the letter-box at the palazzo before he went to bed, though at the same time he felt happy in the thought that if his interest directed otherwise he would not do so.

And the remainder of the journey was accomplished in silent weariness, amidst the shiver of evening which seemed to have chilled all three men. In vain did the Count endeavour to escape from the battle of his thoughts, by reverting to the Buongiovanni reception, and giving particulars of the splendours which would be witnessed at it: his words fell sparsely in an embarrassed and absent-minded way. Then he sought to inspirit Pierre by speaking to him of Cardinal Sanguinetti's amiable manner and fair words, but although the young priest was returning home well pleased with his journey, in the idea that with a little help he might yet triumph, he scarcely answered the Count, so wrapt he was in his reverie. And Santobono, on his side, neither spoke nor moved. Black like the night itself, he seemed to have vanished. However, the lights of Rome were increasing in number, and houses again appeared on either hand, at first at long intervals, and then in close succession. They were suburban houses, and there were yet more fields of reeds, quickset hedges, olive-trees overtopping long walls, and big gateways with vase-surmounted pillars; but at last came the city with its rows of small grey houses, its petty shops and its dingy taverns, whence at times came shouts and rumours of battle.

Prada insisted on setting his companions down in the Via Giulia, at fifty paces from the palazzo. "It doesn't inconvenience me at all," said he to Pierre. "Besides, with the little time you have before you, it would never do for you to go on foot."

The Via Giulia was already steeped in slumber, and wore a melancholy aspect of abandonment in the dreary light of the gas lamps standing on either hand. And as soon as Santobono had alighted from the carriage, he took himself off without waiting for Pierre, who, moreover, always went in by the little door in the side lane.

"Good-bye, Abbe," exclaimed Prada.

"Good-bye, Count, a thousand thanks," was Santobono's response.

Then the two others stood watching him as he went towards the Boccanera mansion, whose old, monumental entrance, full of gloom, was still wide open. For a moment they saw his tall, rugged figure erect against that gloom. Then in he plunged, he and his little basket, bearing Destiny.

## XII

IT was ten o'clock when Pierre and Narcisse, after dining at the Caffè di Roma, where they had long lingered chatting, at last walked down the Corso towards the Palazzo Buongiovanni. They had the greatest difficulty to reach its entrance, for carriages were coming up in serried files, and the inquisitive crowd of on-lookers, who pressed even into the roadway, in spite of the injunctions of the police, was growing so compact that even the horses could no longer approach. The ten lofty windows on the first floor of the long monumental facade shone with an intense white radiance, the radiance of electric lamps, which illumined the street like sunshine, spreading over the equipages aground in that human sea, whose billows of eager, excited faces rolled to and fro amidst an extraordinary tumult.

And in all this there was not merely the usual curiosity to see uniforms go by and ladies in rich attire alight from their carriages, for Pierre soon gathered from what he heard that the crowd had come to witness the arrival of the King and Queen, who had promised to appear at the ball given by Prince Buongiovanni, in celebration of the betrothal of his daughter Celia to Lieutenant Attilio Sacco, the son of one of his Majesty's ministers. Moreover, people were enraptured with this marriage, the happy ending of a love story which had impassioned the whole city: to begin with, love at first sight, with the suddenness of a lightning-flash, and then stubborn fidelity triumphing over all obstacles, amidst romantic circumstances whose story sped from lip to lip, moistening every eye and stirring every heart.

It was this story that Narcisse had related at dessert to Pierre, who already knew some portion of it. People asserted that if the Prince had ended by yielding after a final terrible scene, it was only from

fear of seeing Celia elope from the palace with her lover. She did not threaten to do so, but, amidst her virginal calmness, there was so much contempt for everything foreign to her love, that her father felt her to be capable of acting with the greatest folly in all ingenuousness. Only indifference was manifested by the Prince's wife, a phlegmatic and still beautiful Englishwoman, who considered that she had done quite enough for the household by bringing her husband a dowry of five millions, and bearing him five children. The Prince, anxious and weak despite his violence, in which one found a trace of the old Roman blood, already spoilt by mixture with that of a foreign race, was nowadays ever influenced in his actions by the fear that his house and fortune—which hitherto had remained intact amidst the accumulated ruins of the /patriziato/—might suddenly collapse. And in finally yielding to Celia, he must have been guided by the idea of rallying to the new /regime/ through his daughter, so as to have one foot firmly set at the Quirinal, without withdrawing the other from the Vatican. It was galling, no doubt; his pride must have bled at the idea of allying his name with that of such low folks as the Saccos. But then Sacco was a minister, and had sped so quickly from success to success that it seemed likely he would rise yet higher, and, after the portfolio of Agriculture, secure that of Finances, which he had long coveted. And an alliance with Sacco meant the certain favour of the King, an assured retreat in that direction should the papacy some day collapse. Then, too, the Prince had made inquiries respecting the son, and was somewhat disarmed by the good looks, bravery, and rectitude of young Attilio, who represented the future, and possibly the glorious Italy of to-morrow. He was a soldier, and could be helped forward to the highest rank. And people spitefully added that the last reason which had influenced the Prince, who was very avaricious, and greatly worried by the thought that his fortune must be divided among his five children,\* was that an opportunity presented itself for him to bestow a ridiculously small dowry on Celia. However, having consented to the marriage, he resolved to give a splendid /fete/, such as was now seldom witnessed in Rome, throwing his doors open to all the rival sections of society, inviting the sovereigns, and setting the palazzo ablaze as in the grand days of old. In doing this he would necessarily have to expend some of the money to which he clung, but a boastful spirit incited him to show the world that he at any rate had not been vanquished by the financial crisis, and that the Buongiovannis had nothing to hide and nothing to blush for. To tell the truth, some people asserted that this bravado had not originated with himself, but had been instilled into him without his knowledge by the quiet and innocent Celia, who wished to exhibit her happiness to all applauding Rome.

\* The Italian succession law is similar to the French. Children cannot be disinherited. All property is divided among them, and thus the piling up of large hereditary fortunes is prevented.—Trans.

"Dear me!" said Narcisse, whom the throng prevented from advancing. "We shall never get in. Why, they seem to have invited the whole city." And then, as Pierre seemed surprised to see a prelate drive up in his carriage, the /attache/ added: "Oh! you will elbow more than one of them upstairs. The cardinals won't like to come on account of the presence of the King and Queen, but the prelates are sure to be here. This, you know, is a neutral drawing-room where the black and the white worlds can fraternise. And then too, there are so few /fetes/ that people rush on them."

He went on to explain that there were two grand balls at Court every winter, but that it was only under exceptional circumstances that the /patriziato/ gave similar /galas/. Two or three of the black /salons/ were opened once in a way towards the close of the Carnival, but little dances among intimates replaced the pompous entertainments of former times. Some princesses moreover merely had their day. And as for the few white /salons/ that existed, these likewise retained the same character of intimacy, more or less mixed, for no lady had yet become the undisputed queen of the new society.

"Well, here we are at last," resumed Narcisse as they eventually climbed the stairs.

"Let us keep together," Pierre somewhat anxiously replied. "My only acquaintance is with the /fiancee/, and I want you to introduce me."

However, a considerable effort was needed even to climb the monumental staircase, so great was the crush of arriving guests. Never, in the old days of wax candles and oil lamps, had this staircase offered such a blaze of light. Electric lamps, burning in clusters in superb bronze candelabra on the landings, steeped everything in a white radiance. The cold stucco of the walls was hidden by a series of lofty tapestries depicting the story of Cupid and Psyche, marvels which had remained in the family since the days of the Renaissance. And a thick carpet covered the worn marble steps, whilst clumps of evergreens and tall spreading palms decorated every corner. An affluence of new blood warmed the antique mansion that evening; there was a resurrection of life, so to say, as the women surged up the staircase, smiling and perfumed, bare-shouldered, and sparkling with diamonds.

At the entrance of the first reception-room Pierre at once perceived Prince and Princess Buongiovanni, standing side by side and receiving their guests. The Prince, a tall, slim man with fair complexion and hair turning grey, had the pale northern eyes of his American mother in an energetic



face such as became a former captain of the popes. The Princess, with small, delicate, and rounded features, looked barely thirty, though she had really passed her fortieth year. And still pretty, displaying a smiling serenity which nothing could disconcert, she purely and simply basked in self-adoration. Her gown was of pink satin, and a marvellous parure of large rubies set flamelets about her dainty neck and in her fine, fair hair. Of her five children, her son, the eldest, was travelling, and three of the girls, mere children, were still at school, so that only Celia was present, Celia in a modest gown of white muslin, fair like her mother, quite bewitching with her large innocent eyes and her candid lips, and retaining to the very end of her love story the semblance of a closed lily of impenetrable, virginal mysteriousness. The Saccos had but just arrived, and Attilio, in his simple lieutenant's uniform, had remained near his betrothed, so naively and openly delighted with his great happiness that his handsome face, with its caressing mouth and brave eyes, was quite resplendent with youth and strength. Standing there, near one another, in the triumph of their passion they appeared like life's very joy and health, like the personification of hope in the morrow's promises; and the entering guests who saw them could not refrain from smiling and feeling moved, momentarily forgetting their loquacious and malicious curiosity to give their hearts to those chosen ones of love who looked so handsome and so enraptured.

Narcisse stepped forward in order to present Pierre, but Celia anticipated him. Going to meet the young priest she led him to her father and mother, saying: "Monsieur l'Abbe Pierre Froment, a friend of my dear Benedetta." Ceremonious salutations followed. Then the young girl, whose graciousness greatly touched Pierre, said to him: "Benedetta is coming with her aunt and Dario. She must be very happy this evening! And you will also see how beautiful she will be."

Pierre and Narcisse next began to congratulate her, but they could not remain there, the throng was ever jostling them; and the Prince and Princess, quite lost in the crush, had barely time to answer the many salutations with amiable, continuous nods. And Celia, after conducting the two friends to Attilio, was obliged to return to her parents so as to take her place beside them as the little queen of the /fete/.

Narcisse was already slightly acquainted with Attilio, and so fresh congratulations ensued. Then the two friends manoeuvred to find a spot where they might momentarily tarry and contemplate the spectacle which this first /salon/ presented. It was a vast hall, hung with green velvet broidered with golden flowers, and contained a very remarkable collection of weapons and armour, breast-plates, battle-axes, and swords, almost all of which had belonged to the Buongioannis of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And amidst those stern implements of war there was a lovely sedan-chair of the last century, gilded and decorated with delicate paintings. It was in this chair that the Prince's great-grandmother, the celebrated Bettina, whose beauty was historical, had usually been carried to mass. On the walls, moreover, there were numerous historical paintings: battles, peace congresses, and royal receptions in which the Buongioannis had taken part, without counting the many family portraits, tall and proud figures of sea-captains, commanders in the field, great dignitaries of the Church, prelates and cardinals, amongst whom, in the place of honour, appeared the family pope, the white-robed Buongiovanni whose accession to the pontifical throne had enriched a long line of descendants. And it was among those armours, near that coquettish sedan, and below those antique portraits, that the Saccos, husband and wife, had in their turn just halted, at a few steps from the master and mistress of the house, in order to secure their share of congratulations and bows.

"Look over there!" Narcisse whispered to Pierre, "those are the Saccos in front of us, that dark little fellow and the lady in mauve silk."

Pierre promptly recognised the bright face and pleasant smile of Stefana, whom he had already met at old Orlando's. But he was more interested in her husband, a dark dry man, with big eyes, sallow complexion, prominent chin, and vulturine nose. Like some gay Neapolitan "Pulcinello," he was dancing, shouting, and displaying such infectious good humour that it spread to all around him. He possessed a wonderful gift of speech, with a voice that was unrivalled as an instrument of fascination and conquest; and on seeing how easily he ingratiated himself with the people in that drawing-room, one could understand his lightning-like successes in the political world. He had manoeuvred with rare skill in the matter of his son's marriage, affecting such exaggerated delicacy of feeling as to set himself against the lovers, and declare that he would never consent to their union, as he had no desire to be accused of stealing a dowry and a title. As a matter of fact, he had only yielded after the Buongioannis had given their consent, and even then he had desired to take the opinion of old Orlando, whose lofty integrity was proverbial. However, he knew right well that he would secure the old hero's approval in this particular affair, for Orlando made no secret of his opinion that the Buongioannis ought to be glad to admit his grand-nephew into their family, as that handsome young fellow, with brave and healthy heart, would help to regenerate their impoverished blood. And throughout the whole affair, Sacco had shrewdly availed himself of Orlando's famous name, for ever talking of the relationship between them, and displaying filial veneration for this glorious founder of the country, as if indeed he had no suspicion that the latter despised and execrated him and mourned his accession to power in the conviction that

he would lead Italy to shame and ruin.

"Ah!" resumed Narcisse addressing Pierre, "he's one of those supple, practical men who care nothing for a smack in the face. It seems that unscrupulous individuals like himself become necessary when states get into trouble and have to pass through political, financial, and moral crises. It is said that Sacco with his imperturbable assurance and ingenious and resourceful mind has quite won the King's favour. Just look at him! Why, with that crowd of courtiers round him, one might think him the master of this palace!"

And indeed the guests, after passing the Prince and Princess with a bow, at once congregated around Sacco, for he represented power, emoluments, pensions, and crosses; and if folks still smiled at seeing his dark, turbulent, and scraggy figure amidst that framework of family portraits which proclaimed the mighty ancestry of the Buongiovannis, they none the less worshipped him as the personification of the new power, the democratic force which was confusedly rising even from the old Roman soil where the /patriziato/ lay in ruins.

"What a crowd!" muttered Pierre. "Who are all these people?"

"Oh!" replied Narcisse, "it is a regular mixture. These people belong neither to the black nor the white world; they form a grey world as it were. The evolution was certain; a man like Cardinal Boccanera may retain an uncompromising attitude, but a whole city, a nation can't. The Pope alone will always say no and remain immutable. But everything around him progresses and undergoes transformation, so that in spite of all resistance, Rome will become Italian in a few years' time. Even now, whenever a prince has two sons only one of them remains on the side of the Vatican, the other goes over to the Quirinal. People must live, you see; and the great families threatened with annihilation have not sufficient heroism to carry obstinacy to the point of suicide. And I have already told you that we are here on neutral ground, for Prince Buongiovanni was one of the first to realise the necessity of conciliation. He feels that his fortune is perishing, he does not care to risk it either in industry or in speculation, and already sees it portioned out among his five children, by whose descendants it will be yet further divided; and this is why he prudently makes advances to the King without, however, breaking with the Pope. In this /salon/, therefore, you see a perfect picture of the /debacle/, the confusion which reigns in the Prince's ideas and opinions." Narcisse paused, and then began to name some of the persons who were coming in. "There's a general," said he, "who has become very popular since his last campaign in Africa. There will be a great many military men here this evening, for all Attilio's superiors have been invited, so as to give the young man an /entourage/ of glory. Ah! and there's the German ambassador. I fancy that nearly all the Corps Diplomatique will come on account of their Majesties' presence. But, by way of contrast, just look at that stout fellow yonder. He's a very influential deputy, a /parvenu/ of the new middle class. Thirty years ago he was merely one of Prince Albertini's farmers, one of those /mercanti di campagna/ who go about the environs of Rome in stout boots and a soft felt hat. And now look at that prelate coming in—"

"Oh! I know him," Pierre interrupted. "He's Monsignor Fornaro."

"Exactly, Monsignor Fornaro, a personage of some importance. You told me, I remember, that he is the reporter of the Congregation in that affair of your book. A most delightful man! Did you see how he bowed to the Princess? And what a noble and graceful bearing he has in his little mantle of violet silk!"

Then Narcisse went on enumerating the princes and princesses, the dukes and duchesses, the politicians and functionaries, the diplomatists and ministers, and the officers and well-to-do middle-class people, who of themselves made up a most wonderful medley of guests, to say nothing of the representatives of the various foreign colonies, English people, Americans, Germans, Spaniards, and Russians, in a word, all ancient Europe, and both Americas. And afterwards the young man reverted to the Saccos, to the little Signora Sacco in particular, in order to tell Pierre of the heroic efforts which she had made to open a /salon/ for the purpose of assisting her husband's ambition. Gentle and modest as she seemed, she was also very shrewd, endowed with genuine qualities, Piedmontese patience and strength of resistance, orderly habits and thriftiness. And thus it was she who re-established the equilibrium in household affairs which her husband by his exuberance so often disturbed. He was indeed greatly indebted to her, though nobody suspected it. At the same time, however, she had so far failed in her attempts to establish a white /salon/ which should take the lead in influencing opinion. Only the people of her own set visited her, not a single prince ever came, and her Monday dances were the same as in a score of other middle-class homes, having no brilliancy and no importance. In fact, the real white /salon/, which should guide men and things and sway all Rome was still in dreamland.

"Just notice her keen smile as she examines everything here," resumed Narcisse. "She's teaching herself and forming plans, I'm sure of it. Now that she is about to be connected with a princely family she probably hopes to receive some of the best society."

Large as was the room, the crowd in it had by this time grown so dense that the two friends were pressed back to a wall, and felt almost stifled. The /attache/ therefore decided to lead the priest elsewhere, and as they walked along he gave him some particulars concerning the palace, which was one of the most sumptuous in Rome, and renowned for the magnificence of its reception-rooms. Dancing took place in the picture gallery, a superb apartment more than sixty feet long, with eight windows overlooking the Corso; while the buffet was installed in the Hall of the Antiques, a marble hall, which among other precious things contained a statue of Venus, rivalling the one at the Capitol. Then there was a suite of marvellous /salons/, still resplendent with ancient luxury, hung with the rarest stuffs, and retaining some unique specimens of old-time furniture, on which covetous antiquaries kept their eyes fixed, whilst waiting and hoping for the inevitable future ruin. And one of these apartments, the little Saloon of the Mirrors, was particularly famous. Of circular shape and Louis XV style, it was surrounded by mirrors in /rococo/ frames, extremely rich, and most exquisitely carved.

"You will see all that by and by," continued Narcisse. "At present we had better go in here if we want to breathe a little. It is here that the arm-chairs from the adjacent gallery have been brought for the accommodation of the ladies who desire to sit down and be seen and admired."

The apartment they entered was a spacious one, draped with the most superb Genoese velvet, that antique /jardiniere/ velvet with pale satin ground, and flowers once of dazzling brightness, whose greens and blues and reds had now become exquisitely soft, with the subdued, faded tones of old floral love-tokens. On the pier tables and in the cabinets all around were some of the most precious curios in the palace, ivory caskets, gilt and painted wood carvings, pieces of antique plate—briefly, a collection of marvels. And several ladies, fleeing the crush, had already taken refuge on the numerous seats, clustering in little groups, and laughing and chatting with the few gentlemen who had discovered this retreat of grace and /galanterie/. In the bright glow of the lamps nothing could be more delightful than the sight of all those bare, sheeny shoulders, and those supple necks, above whose napes were coiled tresses of fair or raven hair. Bare arms emerged like living flowers of flesh from amidst the mingling lace and silk of soft-hued bodices. The fans played slowly, as if to heighten the fires of the precious stones, and at each beat wafted around an /odore di femina/ blended with a predominating perfume of violets.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Narcisse, "there's our good friend Monsignor Nani bowing to the Austrian ambassadress."

As soon as Nani perceived the young priest and his companion he came towards them, and the trio then withdrew into the embrasure of a window in order that they might chat for a moment at their ease. The prelate was smiling like one enchanted with the beauty of the /fete/, but at the same time he retained all the serenity of innocence, as if he had not even noticed the exhibition of bare shoulders by which he was surrounded. "Ah, my dear son!" he said to Pierre, "I am very pleased to see you! Well, and what do you think of our Rome when she makes up her mind to give /fetes/?"

"Why, it is superb, Monseigneur."

Then, in an emotional manner, Nani spoke of Celia's lofty piety; and, in order to give the Vatican the credit of this sumptuous /gala/, affected to regard the Prince and Princess as staunch adherents of the Church, as if he were altogether unaware that the King and Queen were presently coming. And afterwards he abruptly exclaimed: "I have been thinking of you all day, my dear son. Yes, I heard that you had gone to see his Eminence Cardinal Sanguinetti. Well, and how did he receive you?"

"Oh! in a most paternal manner," Pierre replied. "At first he made me understand the embarrassment in which he was placed by his position as protector of Lourdes; but just as I was going off he showed himself charming, and promised me his help with a delicacy which deeply touched me."

"Did he indeed, my dear son? But it doesn't surprise me, his Eminence is so good-hearted!"

"And I must add, Monseigneur, that I came back with a light and hopeful heart. It now seems to me as if my suit were half gained."

"Naturally, I understand it," replied Nani, who was still smiling with that keen, intelligent smile of his, sharpened by a touch of almost imperceptible irony. And after a short pause he added in a very simple way: "The misfortune is that on the day before yesterday your book was condemned by the Congregation of the Index, which was convoked by its Secretary expressly for that purpose. And the judgment will be laid before his Holiness, for him to sign it, on the day after to-morrow."

Pierre looked at the prelate in bewilderment. Had the old mansion fallen on his head he would not have felt more overcome. What! was it all over? His journey to Rome, the experiment he had come to attempt there, had resulted in that defeat, of which he was thus suddenly apprised amidst that

betrothal /fete/. And he had not even been able to defend himself, he had sacrificed his time without finding any one to whom he might speak, before whom he might plead his cause! Anger was rising within him, and he could not prevent himself from muttering bitterly: "Ah! how I have been duped! And that Cardinal who said to me only this morning: 'If God be with you he will save you in spite of everything.' Yes, yes, I now understand him; he was juggling with words, he only desired a disaster in order that submission might lead me to Heaven! Submit, indeed, ah! I cannot, I cannot yet! My heart is too full of indignation and grief."

Nani examined and studied him with curiosity. "But my dear son," he said, "nothing is final so long as the Holy Father has not signed the judgment. You have all to-morrow and even the morning of the day after before you. A miracle is always possible." Then, lowering his voice and drawing Pierre on one side whilst Narcisse in an aesthetical spirit examined the ladies, he added: "Listen, I have a communication to make to you in great secrecy. Come and join me in the little Saloon of the Mirrors by and by, during the Cotillon. We shall be able to talk there at our ease."

Pierre nodded, and thereupon the prelate discreetly withdrew and disappeared in the crowd. However, the young man's ears were buzzing; he could no longer hope; what indeed could he accomplish in one day since he had lost three months without even being able to secure an audience with the Pope? And his bewilderment increased as he suddenly heard Narcisse speaking to him of art. "It's astonishing how the feminine figure has deteriorated in these dreadful democratic days. It's all fat and horribly common. Not one of those women yonder shows the Florentine contour, with small bosom and slender, elegant neck. Ah! that one yonder isn't so bad perhaps, the fair one with her hair coiled up, whom Monsignor Fornaro has just approached."

For a few minutes indeed Monsignor Fornaro had been fluttering from beauty to beauty, with an amiable air of conquest. He looked superb that evening with his lofty decorative figure, blooming cheeks, and victorious affability. No unpleasant scandal was associated with his name; he was simply regarded as a prelate of gallant ways who took pleasure in the society of ladies. And he paused and chatted, and leant over their bare shoulders with laughing eyes and humid lips as if experiencing a sort of devout rapture. However, on perceiving Narcisse whom he occasionally met, he at once came forward and the /attache/ had to bow to him. "You have been in good health I hope, Monseigneur, since I had the honour of seeing you at the embassy."

"Oh! yes, I am very well, very well indeed. What a delightful /fete/, is it not?"

Pierre also had bowed. This was the man whose report had brought about the condemnation of his book; and it was with resentment that he recalled his caressing air and charming greeting, instinct with such lying promise. However, the prelate, who was very shrewd, must have guessed that the young priest was already acquainted with the decision of the Congregation, and have thought it more dignified to abstain from open recognition; for on his side he merely nodded and smiled at him. "What a number of people!" he went on, "and how many charming persons there are! It will soon be impossible for one to move in this room."

All the seats in fact were now occupied by ladies, and what with the strong perfume of violets and the exhalations of warm necks and shoulders the atmosphere was becoming most oppressive. The fans flapped more briskly, and clear laughter rang out amidst a growing hubbub of conversation in which the same words constantly recurred. Some news, doubtless, had just arrived, some rumour was being whispered from group to group, throwing them all into feverish excitement. As it happened, Monsignor Fornaro, who was always well informed, desired to be the proclaimer of this news, which nobody as yet had ventured to announce aloud.

"Do you know what is exciting them all?" he inquired.

"Is it the Holy Father's illness?" asked Pierre in his anxiety. "Is he worse this evening?"

The prelate looked at him in astonishment, and then somewhat impatiently replied: "Oh, no, no. His Holiness is much better, thank Heaven. A person belonging to the Vatican was telling me just now that he was able to get up this afternoon and receive his intimates as usual."

"All the same, people have been alarmed," interrupted Narcisse. "I must confess that we did not feel easy at the embassy, for a Conclave at the present time would be a great worry for France. She would exercise no influence at it. It is a great mistake on the part of our Republican Government to treat the Holy See as of no importance! However, can one ever tell whether the Pope is ill or not? I know for a certainty that he was nearly carried off last winter when nobody breathed a word about any illness, whereas on the last occasion when the newspapers killed him and talked about a dreadful attack of bronchitis, I myself saw him quite strong and in the best of spirits! His reported illnesses are mere matters of policy, I fancy."\*

\* There is much truth in this; but the reader must not imagine that the Pope is never ill. At his great age, indispositions are only natural.—Trans.

With a hasty gesture, however, Monsignor Fornaro brushed this importunate subject aside. "No, no," said he, "people are tranquillised and no longer talk of it. What excites all those ladies is that the Congregation of the Council to-day voted the dissolution of the Prada marriage by a great majority."

Again did Pierre feel moved. However, not having had time to see any members of the Boccanera family on his return from Frascati he feared that the news might be false and said so. Thereupon the prelate gave his word of honour that things were as he stated. "The news is certain," he declared. "I had it from a member of the Congregation." And then, all at once, he apologised and hurried off: "Excuse me but I see a lady whom I had not yet caught sight of, and desire to pay my respects to her."

He at once hastened to the lady in question, and, being unable to sit down, inclined his lofty figure as if to envelop her with his gallant courtesy; whilst she, young, fresh, and bare-shouldered, laughed with a pearly laugh as his cape of violet silk lightly brushed her sheeny skin.

"You know that person, don't you?" Narcisse inquired of Pierre. "No! Really? Why, that is Count Prada's /inamorata/, the charming Lisbeth Kauffmann, by whom he has just had a son. It's her first appearance in society since that event. She's a German, you know, and lost her husband here. She paints a little; in fact, rather nicely. A great deal is forgiven to the ladies of the foreign colony, and this one is particularly popular on account of the very affable manner in which she receives people at her little palazzo in the Via Principe Amedeo. As you may imagine, the news of the dissolution of that marriage must amuse her!"

She looked really exquisite, that Lisbeth, very fair, rosy, and gay, with satiny skin, soft blue eyes, and lips wreathed in an amiable smile, which was renowned for its grace. And that evening, in her gown of white silk spangled with gold, she showed herself so delighted with life, so securely happy in the thought that she was free, that she loved and was loved in return, that the whispered tidings, the malicious remarks exchanged behind the fans of those around her, seemed to turn to her personal triumph. For a moment all eyes had sought her, and people talked of the outcome of her connection with Prada, the man whose manhood the Church solemnly denied by its decision of that very day! And there came stifled laughter and whispered jests, whilst she, radiant in her insolent serenity, accepted with a rapturous air the gallantry of Monsignor Fornaro, who congratulated her on a painting of the Virgin with the lily, which she had lately sent to a fine-art show.

Ah! that matrimonial nullity suit, which for a year had supplied Rome with scandal, what a final hubbub it occasioned as the tidings of its termination burst forth amidst that ball! The black and white worlds had long chosen it as a battlefield for the exchange of incredible slander, endless gossip, the most nonsensical tittle-tattle. And now it was over; the Vatican with imperturbable impudence had pronounced the marriage null and void on the ground that the husband was no man, and all Rome would laugh over the affair, with that free scepticism which it displayed as soon as the pecuniary affairs of the Church came into question. The incidents of the struggle were already common property: Prada's feelings revolting to such a point that he had withdrawn from the contest, the Boccaneras moving heaven and earth in their feverish anxiety, the money which they had distributed among the creatures of the various cardinals in order to gain their influence, and the large sum which they had indirectly paid for the second and favourable report of Monsignor Palma. People said that, altogether, more than a hundred thousand francs had been expended, but this was not thought over-much, as a well-known French countess had been obliged to disburse nearly ten times that amount to secure the dissolution of her marriage. But then the Holy Father's need was so great! And, moreover, nobody was angered by this venality; it merely gave rise to malicious witticisms; and the fans continued waving in the increasing heat, and the ladies quivered with contentment as the whispered pleasantries took wing and fluttered over their bare shoulders.

"Oh! how pleased the Contessina must be!" Pierre resumed. "I did not understand what her little friend, Princess Celia, meant by saying when we came in that she would be so happy and beautiful this evening. It is doubtless on that account that she is coming here, after cloistering herself all the time the affair lasted, as if she were in mourning."

However, Lisbeth's eyes had chanced to meet those of Narcisse, and as she smiled at him he was, in his turn, obliged to pay his respects to her, for, like everybody else of the foreign colony, he knew her through having visited her studio. He was again returning to Pierre when a fresh outburst of emotion stirred the diamond aigrettes and the flowers adorning the ladies' hair. People turned to see what was the matter, and again did the hubbub increase. "Ah! it's Count Prada in person!" murmured Narcisse, with an admiring glance. "He has a fine bearing, whatever folks may say. Dress him up in velvet and gold, and what a splendid, unscrupulous, fifteenth-century adventurer he would make!"

Prada entered the room, looking quite gay, in fact, almost triumphant. And above his large, white shirtfront, edged by the black of his coat, he really had a commanding, predacious expression, with his frank, stern eyes, and his energetic features barred by a large black moustache. Never had a more rapturous smile of sensuality revealed the wolfish teeth of his voracious mouth. With rapid glances he took stock of the women, dived into their very souls. Then, on seeing Lisbeth, who looked so pink, and fair, and girlish, his expression softened, and he frankly went up to her, without troubling in the slightest degree about the ardent, inquisitive eyes which were turned upon him. As soon as Monsignor Fornaro had made room, he stooped and conversed with the young woman in a low tone. And she no doubt confirmed the news which was circulating, for as he again drew himself erect, he laughed a somewhat forced laugh, and made an involuntary gesture.

However, he then caught sight of Pierre, and joined him in the embrasure of the window; and when he had also shaken hands with Narcisse, he said to the young priest with all his wonted /bravura/: "You recollect what I told you as we were coming back from Frascati? Well, it's done, it seems, they've annulled my marriage. It's such an impudent, such an imbecile decision, that I still doubted it a moment ago!"

"Oh! the news is certain," Pierre made bold to reply. "It has just been confirmed to us by Monsignor Fornaro, who had it from a member of the Congregation. And it is said that the majority was very large."

Prada again shook with laughter. "No, no," said he, "such a farce is beyond belief! It's the finest smack given to justice and common-sense that I know of. Ah! if the marriage can also be annulled by the civil courts, and if my friend whom you see yonder be only willing, we shall amuse ourselves in Rome! Yes, indeed, I'd marry her at Santa Maria Maggiore with all possible pomp. And there's a dear little being in the world who would take part in the /fete/ in his nurse's arms!"

He laughed too loud as he spoke, alluded in too brutal a fashion to his child, that living proof of his manhood. Was it suffering that made his lips curve upwards and reveal his white teeth? It could be divined that he was quivering, fighting against an awakening of covert, tumultuous passion, which he would not acknowledge even to himself.

"And you, my dear Abbe?" he hastily resumed. "Do you know the other report? Do you know that the Countess is coming here?" It was thus, by force of habit, that he designated Benedetta, forgetting that she was no longer his wife.

"Yes, I have just been told so," Pierre replied; and then he hesitated for a moment before adding, with a desire to prevent any disagreeable surprise: "And we shall no doubt see Prince Dario also, for he has not started for Naples as I told you. Something prevented his departure at the last moment, I believe. At least so I gathered from a servant."

Prada no longer laughed. His face suddenly became grave, and he contented himself with murmuring: "Ah! so the cousin is to be of the party. Well, we shall see them, we shall see them both!"

Then, whilst the two friends went on chatting, he became silent, as if serious considerations impelled him to reflect. And suddenly making a gesture of apology he withdrew yet farther into the embrasure in which he stood, pulled a note-book out of his pocket, and tore from it a leaf on which, without modifying his handwriting otherwise than by slightly enlarging it, he pencilled these four lines: "A legend avers that the fig tree of Judas now grows at Frascati, and that its fruit is deadly for him who may desire to become Pope. Eat not the poisoned figs, nor give them either to your servants or your fowls." Then he folded the paper, fastened it with a postage stamp, and wrote on it the address: "To his most Reverend and most Illustrious Eminence, Cardinal Boccanera." And when he had placed everything in his pocket again, he drew a long breath and once more called back his laugh.

A kind of invincible discomfort, a far-away terror had momentarily frozen him. Without being guided by any clear train of reasoning, he had felt the need of protecting himself against any cowardly temptation, any possible abomination. He could not have told what course of ideas had induced him to write those four lines without a moment's delay, on the very spot where he stood, under penalty of contributing to a great catastrophe. But one thought was firmly fixed in his brain, that on leaving the ball he would go to the Via Giulia and throw that note into the letter-box at the Palazzo Boccanera. And that decided, he was once more easy in mind.

"Why, what is the matter with you, my dear Abbe?" he inquired on again joining in the conversation of the two friends. "You are quite gloomy." And on Pierre telling him of the bad news which he had received, the condemnation of his book, and the single day which remained to him for action if he did not wish his journey to Rome to result in defeat, he began to protest as if he himself needed agitation and diversion in order to continue hopeful and bear the ills of life. "Never mind, never mind, don't

worry yourself," said he, "one loses all one's strength by worrying. A day is a great deal, one can do ever so many things in a day. An hour, a minute suffices for Destiny to intervene and turn defeat into victory!" He grew feverish as he spoke, and all at once added, "Come, let's go to the ball-room. It seems that the scene there is something prodigious."

Then he exchanged a last loving glance with Lisbeth whilst Pierre and Narcisse followed him, the three of them extricating themselves from their corner with the greatest difficulty, and then wending their way towards the adjoining gallery through a sea of serried skirts, a billowy expanse of necks and shoulders whence ascended the passion which makes life, the odour alike of love and of death.

With its eight windows overlooking the Corso, their panes uncurtained and throwing a blaze of light upon the houses across the road, the picture gallery, sixty-five feet in length and more than thirty in breadth, spread out with incomparable splendour. The illumination was dazzling. Clusters of electric lamps had changed seven pairs of huge marble candelabra into gigantic /torcheres/, akin to constellations; and all along the cornice up above, other lamps set in bright-hued floral glasses formed a marvellous garland of flaming flowers: tulips, paeonies, and roses. The antique red velvet worked with gold, which draped the walls, glowed like a furnace fire. About the doors and windows there were hangings of old lace brodered with flowers in coloured silk whose hues had the very intensity of life. But the sight of sights beneath the sumptuous panelled ceiling adorned with golden roses, the unique spectacle of a richness not to be equalled, was the collection of masterpieces such as no museum could excel. There were works of Raffaele and Titian, Rembrandt and Rubens, Velasquez and Ribera, famous works which in this unexpected illumination suddenly showed forth, triumphant with youth regained, as if awakened to the immortal life of genius. And, as their Majesties would not arrive before midnight, the ball had just been opened, and flights of soft-hued gowns were whirling in a waltz past all the pompous throng, the glittering jewels and decorations, the gold-brodered uniforms and the pearl-brodered robes, whilst silk and satin and velvet spread and overflowed upon every side.

"It is prodigious, really!" declared Prada with his excited air; "let us go this way and place ourselves in a window recess again. There is no better spot for getting a good view without being too much jostled."

They lost Narcisse somehow or other, and on reaching the desired recess found themselves but two, Pierre and the Count. The orchestra, installed on a little platform at the far end of the gallery, had just finished the waltz, and the dancers, with an air of giddy rapture, were slowly walking through the crowd when a fresh arrival caused every head to turn. Donna Serafina, arrayed in a robe of purple silk as if she had worn the colours of her brother the Cardinal, was making a royal entry on the arm of Consistorial-Advocate Morano. And never before had she laced herself so tightly, never had her waist looked so slim and girlish; and never had her stern, wrinkled face, which her white hair scarcely softened, expressed such stubborn and victorious domination. A discreet murmur of approval ran round, a murmur of public relief as it were, for all Roman society had condemned the unworthy conduct of Morano in severing a connection of thirty years to which the drawing-rooms had grown as accustomed as if it had been a legal marriage. The rupture had lasted for two months, to the great scandal of Rome where the cult of long and faithful affections still abides. And so the reconciliation touched every heart and was regarded as one of the happiest consequences of the victory which the Boccaneras had that day gained in the affair of Benedetta's marriage. Morano repentant and Donna Serafina reappearing on his arm, nothing could have been more satisfactory; love had conquered, decorum was preserved and good order re-established.

But there was a deeper sensation as soon as Benedetta and Dario were seen to enter, side by side, behind the others. This tranquil indifference for the ordinary forms of propriety, on the very day when the marriage with Prada had been annulled, this victory of love, confessed and celebrated before one and all, seemed so charming in its audacity, so full of the bravery of youth and hope, that the pair were at once forgiven amidst a murmur of universal admiration. And as in the case of Celia and Attilio, all hearts flew to them, to their radiant beauty, to the wondrous happiness that made their faces so resplendent. Dario, still pale after his long convalescence, somewhat slight and delicate of build, with the fine clear eyes of a big child, and the dark curly beard of a young god, bore himself with a light pride, in which all the old princely blood of the Boccaneras could be traced. And Benedetta, she so white under her casque of jetty hair, she so calm and so sensible, wore her lovely smile, that smile so seldom seen on her face but which was irresistibly fascinating, transfiguring her, imparting the charm of a flower to her somewhat full mouth, and filling the infinite of her dark and fathomless eyes with a radiance as of heaven. And in this gay return of youth and happiness, an exquisite instinct had prompted her to put on a white gown, a plain girlish gown which symbolised her maidenhood, which told that she had remained through all a pure untarnished lily for the husband of her choice. And nothing of her form was to be seen, not a glimpse of bosom or shoulder. It was as if the impenetrable, redoubtable mystery of love, the sovereign beauty of woman slumbered there, all powerful, but veiled with white. Again, not a jewel appeared on her fingers or in her ears. There was simply a necklace

falling about her /corsage/, but a necklace fit for royalty, the famous pearl necklace of the Boccaneras, which she had inherited from her mother, and which was known to all Rome—pearls of fabulous size cast negligently about her neck, and sufficing, simply as she was gowned, to make her queen of all.

"Oh!" murmured Pierre in ecstasy, "how happy and how beautiful she is!"

But he at once regretted that he had expressed his thoughts aloud, for beside him he heard a low plaint, an involuntary growl which reminded him of the Count's presence. However, Prada promptly stifled this cry of returning anguish, and found strength enough to affect a brutish gaiety: "The devil!" said he, "they have plenty of impudence. I hope we shall see them married and bedded at once!" Then regretting this coarse jest which had been prompted by the revolt of passion, he sought to appear indifferent: "She looks very nice this evening," he said; "she has the finest shoulders in the world, you know, and its a real success for her to hide them and yet appear more beautiful than ever."

He went on speaking, contriving to assume an easy tone, and giving various little particulars about the Countess as he still obstinately called the young woman. However, he had drawn rather further into the recess, for fear, no doubt, that people might remark his pallor, and the painful twitch which contracted his mouth. He was in no state to fight, to show himself gay and insolent in presence of the joy which the lovers so openly and naively expressed. And he was glad of the respite which the arrival of the King and Queen at this moment offered him. "Ah! here are their Majesties!" he exclaimed, turning towards the window. "Look at the scramble in the street!"

Although the windows were closed, a tumult could be heard rising from the footways. And Pierre on looking down saw, by the light of the electric lamps, a sea of human heads pour over the road and encompass the carriages. He had several times already seen the King during the latter's daily drives to the grounds of the Villa Borghese, whither he came like any private gentleman—unguarded, unescorted, with merely an aide-de-camp accompanying him in his victoria. At other times he drove a light phaeton with only a footman in black livery to attend him. And on one occasion Pierre had seen him with the Queen, the pair of them seated side by side like worthy middle-class folks driving abroad for pleasure. And, as the royal couple went by, the busy people in the streets and the promenaders in the public gardens contented themselves with wafting them an affectionate wave of the hand, the most expansive simply approaching to smile at them, and no one importuning them with acclamations. Pierre, who harboured the traditional idea of kings closely guarded and passing processionally with all the accompaniment of military pomp, was therefore greatly surprised and touched by the amiable /bonhomie/ of this royal pair, who went wherever they listed in full security amidst the smiling affection of their people. Everybody, moreover, had told him of the King's kindness and simplicity, his desire for peace, and his passion for sport, solitude, and the open air, which, amidst the worries of power, must often have made him dream of a life of freedom far from the imperious duties of royalty for which he seemed unfitted.\* But the Queen was yet more tenderly loved. So naturally and serenely virtuous that she alone remained ignorant of the scandals of Rome, she was also a woman of great culture and great refinement, conversant with every field of literature, and very happy in being so intelligent, so superior to those around her—a pre-eminence which she realised and which she was fond of showing, but in the most natural and most graceful of ways.

\* King Humbert inherited these tastes from his father Victor Emanuel, who was likewise a great sportsman and had a perfect horror of court life, pageantry, and the exigencies of politics.—Trans.

Like Pierre, Prada had remained with his face to the window, and suddenly pointing to the crowd he said: "Now that they have seen the Queen they will go to bed well pleased. And there isn't a single police agent there, I'm sure. Ah! to be loved, to be loved!" Plainly enough his distress of spirit was coming back, and so, turning towards the gallery again, he tried to play the jester. "Attention, my dear Abbe, we mustn't miss their Majesties' entry. That will be the finest part of the /fete/!"

A few minutes went by, and then, in the very midst of a polka, the orchestra suddenly ceased playing. But a moment afterwards, with all the blare of its brass instruments, it struck up the Royal March. The dancers fled in confusion, the centre of the gallery was cleared, and the King and Queen entered, escorted by the Prince and Princess Buongiovanni, who had received them at the foot of the staircase. The King was in ordinary evening dress, while the Queen wore a robe of straw-coloured satin, covered with superb white lace; and under the diadem of brilliants which encircled her beautiful fair hair, she looked still young, with a fresh and rounded face, whose expression was all amiability, gentleness, and wit. The music was still sounding with the enthusiastic violence of welcome. Behind her father and mother, Celia appeared amidst the press of people who were following to see the sight; and then came Attilio, the Saccos, and various relatives and official personages. And, pending the termination of the Royal March, only salutations, glances, and smiles were exchanged amidst the sonorous music and dazzling light; whilst all the guests crowded around on tip-toe, with outstretched necks and glittering eyes—a rising tide of heads and shoulders, flashing with the fires of precious stones.



At last the march ended and the presentations began. Their Majesties were already acquainted with Celia, and congratulated her with quite affectionate kindness. However, Sacco, both as minister and father, was particularly desirous of presenting his son Attilio. He bent his supple spine, and summoned to his lips the fine words which were appropriate, in such wise that he contrived to make the young man bow to the King in the capacity of a lieutenant in his Majesty's army, whilst his homage as a handsome young man, so passionately loved by his betrothed was reserved for Queen Margherita. Again did their Majesties show themselves very gracious, even towards the Signora Sacco who, ever modest and prudent, had remained in the background. And then occurred an incident that was destined to give rise to endless gossip. Catching sight of Benedetta, whom Count Prada had presented to her after his marriage, the Queen, who greatly admired her beauty and charm of manner, addressed her a smile in such wise that the young woman was compelled to approach. A conversation of some minutes' duration ensued, and the Contessina was favoured with some extremely amiable expressions which were perfectly audible to all around. Most certainly the Queen was ignorant of the event of the day, the dissolution of Benedetta's marriage with Prada, and her coming union with Dario so publicly announced at this /gala/, which now seemed to have been given to celebrate a double betrothal. Nevertheless that conversation caused a deep impression; the guests talked of nothing but the compliments which Benedetta had received from the most virtuous and intelligent of queens, and her triumph was increased by it all, she became yet more beautiful and more victorious amidst the happiness she felt at being at last able to bestow herself on the spouse of her choice, that happiness which made her look so radiant.

But, on the other hand, the torture which Prada experienced now became intense. Whilst the sovereigns continued conversing, the Queen with the ladies who came to pay her their respects, the King with the officers, diplomatists, and other important personages who approached him, Prada saw none but Benedetta—Benedetta congratulated, caressed, exalted by affection and glory. Dario was near her, flushing with pleasure, radiant like herself. It was for them that this ball had been given, for them that the lamps shone out, for them that the music played, for them that the most beautiful women of Rome had bared their bosoms and adorned them with precious stones. It was for them that their Majesties had entered to the strains of the Royal March, for them that the /fete/ was becoming like an apotheosis, for them that a fondly loved queen was smiling, appearing at that betrothal /gala/ like the good fairy of the nursery tales, whose coming betokens life-long happiness. And for Prada, this wondrously brilliant hour when good fortune and joyfulness attained their apogee, was one of defeat. It was fraught with the victory of that woman who had refused to be his wife in aught but name, and of that man who now was about to take her from him: such a public, ostentatious, insulting victory that it struck him like a buffet in the face. And not merely did his pride and passion bleed for that: he felt that the triumph of the Saccos dealt a blow to his fortune. Was it true, then, that the rough conquerors of the North were bound to deteriorate in the delightful climate of Rome, was that the reason why he already experienced such a sensation of weariness and exhaustion? That very morning at Frascati in connection with that disastrous building enterprise he had realised that his millions were menaced, albeit he refused to admit that things were going badly with him, as some people rumoured. And now, that evening, amidst that /fete/ he beheld the South victorious, Sacco winning the day like one who feeds at his ease on the warm prey so gluttonously pounced upon under the flaming sun.

And the thought of Sacco being a minister, an intimate of the King, allying himself by marriage to one of the noblest families of the Roman aristocracy, and already laying hands on the people and the national funds with the prospect of some day becoming the master of Rome and Italy—that thought again was a blow for the vanity of this man of prey, for the ever voracious appetite of this enjoyer, who felt as if he were being pushed away from table before the feast was over! All crumbled and escaped him, Sacco stole his millions, and Benedetta tortured his flesh, stirring up that awful wound of unsatisfied passion which never would be healed.

Again did Pierre hear that dull plaint, that involuntary despairing growl, which had upset him once before. And he looked at the Count, and asked him: "Are you suffering?" But on seeing how livid was the face of Prada, who only retained his calmness by a superhuman effort, he regretted his indiscreet question, which, moreover, remained unanswered. And then to put the other more at ease, the young priest went on speaking, venting the thoughts which the sight before him inspired: "Your father was right," said he, "we Frenchmen whose education is so full of the Catholic spirit, even in these days of universal doubt, we never think of Rome otherwise than as the old Rome of the popes. We scarcely know, we can scarcely understand the great changes which, year by year, have brought about the Italian Rome of the present day. Why, when I arrived here, the King and his government and the young nation working to make a great capital for itself, seemed to me of no account whatever! Yes, I dismissed all that, thought nothing of it, in my dream of resuscitating a Christian and evangelical Rome, which should assure the happiness of the world."

He laughed as he spoke, pitying his own artlessness, and then pointed towards the gallery where

Prince Buongiovanni was bowing to the King whilst the Princess listened to the gallant remarks of Sacco: a scene full of symbolism, the old papal aristocracy struck down, the /parvenus/ accepted, the black and white worlds so mixed together that one and all were little else than subjects, on the eve of forming but one united nation. That conciliation between the Quirinal and the Vatican which in principle was regarded as impossible, was it not in practice fatal, in face of the evolution which went on day by day? People must go on living, loving, and creating life throughout the ages. And the marriage of Attilio and Celia would be the symbol of the needful union: youth and love triumphing over ancient hatred, all quarrels forgotten as a handsome lad goes by, wins a lovely girl, and carries her off in his arms in order that the world may last.

"Look at them!" resumed Pierre, "how handsome and young and gay both the /fiances/ are, all confidence in the future. Ah! I well understand that your King should have come here to please his minister and win one of the old Roman families over to his throne; it is good, brave, and fatherly policy. But I like to think that he has also realised the touching significance of that marriage—old Rome, in the person of that candid, loving child giving herself to young Italy, that upright, enthusiastic young man who wears his uniform so jauntily. And may their nuptials be definitive and fruitful; from them and from all the others may there arise the great nation which, now that I begin to know you, I trust you will soon become!"

Amidst the tottering of his former dream of an evangelical and universal Rome, Pierre expressed these good wishes for the Eternal City's future fortune with such keen and deep emotion that Prada could not help replying: "I thank you; that wish of yours is in the heart of every good Italian."

But his voice quavered, for even whilst he was looking at Celia and Attilio, who stood smiling and talking together, he saw Benedetta and Dario approach them, wearing the same joyful expression of perfect happiness. And when the two couples were united, so radiant and so triumphant, so full of superb and happy life, he no longer had strength to stay there, see them, and suffer.

"I am frightfully thirsty," he hoarsely exclaimed. "Let's go to the buffet to drink something." And, thereupon, in order to avoid notice, he so manoeuvred as to glide behind the throng, skirting the windows in the direction of the entrance to the Hall of the Antiques, which was beyond the gallery.

Whilst Pierre was following him they were parted by an eddy of the crowd, and the young priest found himself carried towards the two loving couples who still stood chatting together. And Celia, on recognising him, beckoned to him in a friendly way. With her passionate cult for beauty, she was enraptured with the appearance of Benedetta, before whom she joined her little lily hands as before the image of the Madonna. "Oh! Monsieur l'Abbe," said she, "to please me now, do tell her how beautiful she is, more beautiful than anything on earth, more beautiful than even the sun, and the moon and stars. If you only knew, my dear, it makes me quiver to see you so beautiful as that, as beautiful as happiness, as beautiful as love itself!"

Benedetta began to laugh, while the two young men made merry. "But you are as beautiful as I am, darling," said the Contessina. "And if we are beautiful it is because we are happy."

"Yes, yes, happy," Celia gently responded. "Do you remember the evening when you told me that one didn't succeed in marrying the Pope and the King? But Attilio and I are marrying them, and yet we are very happy."

"But we don't marry them, Dario and I! On the contrary!" said Benedetta gaily. "No matter; as you answered me that same evening, it is sufficient that we should love one another, love saves the world."

When Pierre at last succeeded in reaching the door of the Hall of the Antiques, where the buffet was installed, he found Prada there, motionless, gazing despite himself on the galling spectacle which he desired to flee. A power stronger than his will had kept him there, forcing him to turn round and look, and look again. And thus, with a bleeding heart, he still lingered and witnessed the resumption of the dancing, the first figure of a quadrille which the orchestra began to play with a lively flourish of its brass instruments. Benedetta and Dario, Celia and Attilio were /vis-à-vis/. And so charming and delightful was the sight which the two couples presented dancing in the white blaze, all youth and joy, that the King and Queen drew near to them and became interested. And soon bravos of admiration rang out, while from every heart spread a feeling of infinite tenderness.

"I'm dying of thirst, let's go!" repeated Prada, at last managing to wrench himself away from the torturing sight.

He called for some iced lemonade and drank the glassful at one draught, gulping it down with the greedy eagerness of a man stricken with fever, who will never more be able to quench the burning fire within him.

The Hall of the Antiques was a spacious room with mosaic pavement, and decorations of stucco; and a famous collection of vases, bas-reliefs, and statues, was disposed along its walls. The marbles predominated, but there were a few bronzes, and among them a dying gladiator of extreme beauty. The marvel however was the famous statue of Venus, a companion to that of the Capitol, but with a more elegant and supple figure and with the left arm falling loosely in a gesture of voluptuous surrender. That evening a powerful electric reflector threw a dazzling light upon the statue, which, in its divine and pure nudity, seemed to be endowed with superhuman, immortal life. Against the end-wall was the buffet, a long table covered with an embroidered cloth and laden with fruit, pastry, and cold meats. Sheaves of flowers rose up amidst bottles of champagne, hot punch, and iced /sorbetto/, and here and there were marshalled armies of glasses, tea-cups, and broth-bowls, a perfect wealth of sparkling crystal, porcelain, and silver. And a happy innovation had been to fill half of the hall with rows of little tables, at which the guests, in lieu of being obliged to refresh themselves standing, were able to sit down and order what they desired as in a cafe.

At one of these little tables, Pierre perceived Narcisse seated near a young woman, whom Prada, on approaching, recognised to be Lisbeth. "You find me, you see, in delightful company," gallantly exclaimed the /attache/. "As we lost one another, I could think of nothing better than of offering madame my arm to bring her here."

"It was, in fact, a good idea," said Lisbeth with her pretty laugh, "for I was feeling very thirsty."

They had ordered some iced coffee, which they were slowly sipping out of little silver-gilt spoons.

"I have a terrible thirst, too," declared the Count, "and I can't quench it. You will allow us to join you, will you not, my dear sir? Some of that coffee will perhaps calm me." And then to Lisbeth he added, "Ah! my dear, allow me to introduce to you Monsieur l'Abbe Froment, a young French priest of great distinction."

Then for a long time they all four remained seated at that table, chatting and making merry over certain of the guests who went by. Prada, however, in spite of his usual gallantry towards Lisbeth, frequently became absent-minded; at times he quite forgot her, being again mastered by his anguish, and, in spite of all his efforts, his eyes ever turned towards the neighbouring gallery whence the sound of music and dancing reached him.

"Why, what are you thinking of, /caro mio/?" Lisbeth asked in her pretty way, on seeing him at one moment so pale and lost. "Are you indisposed?"

He did not reply, however, but suddenly exclaimed, "Ah! look there, that's the real pair, there's real love and happiness for you!"

With a jerk of the hand he designated Dario's mother, the Marchioness Montefiori and her second husband, Jules Laporte—that ex-sergeant of the papal Swiss Guard, her junior by fifteen years, whom she had one day hooked at the Corso with her eyes of fire, which yet had remained superb, and whom she had afterwards triumphantly transformed into a Marquis Montefiori in order to have him entirely to herself. Such was her passion that she never relaxed her hold on him whether at ball or reception, but, despite all usages, kept him beside her, and even made him escort her to the buffet, so much did she delight in being able to exhibit him and say that this handsome man was her own exclusive property. And standing there side by side, the pair of them began to drink champagne and eat sandwiches, she yet a marvel of massive beauty although she was over fifty, and he with long wavy moustaches, and proud bearing, like a fortunate adventurer whose jovial impudence pleased the ladies.

"You know that she had to extricate him from a nasty affair," resumed the Count in a lower tone. "Yes, he travelled in relics; he picked up a living by supplying relics on commission to convents in France and Switzerland; and he had launched quite a business in false relics with the help of some Jews here who concocted little ancient reliquaries out of mutton bones, with everything sealed and signed by the most genuine authorities. The affair was hushed up, as three prelates were also compromised in it! Ah! the happy man! Do you see how she devours him with her eyes? And he, doesn't he look quite a /grand seigneur/ by the mere way in which he holds that plate for her whilst she eats the breast of a fowl out of it!"

Then, in a rough way and with biting irony, he went on to speak of the /amours/ of Rome. The Roman women, said he, were ignorant, obstinate, and jealous. When a woman had managed to win a man, she kept him for ever, he became her property, and she disposed of him as she pleased. By way of proof, he cited many interminable /liaisons/, such as that of Donna Serafina and Morano which, in time became virtual marriages; and he sneered at such a lack of fancy, such an excess of fidelity whose only ending, when it did end, was some very disagreeable unpleasantness.

At this, Lisbeth interrupted him. "But what is the matter with you this evening, my dear?" she asked with a laugh. "What you speak of is on the contrary very nice and pretty! When a man and a woman love one another they ought to do so for ever!"

She looked delightful as she spoke, with her fine wavy blonde hair and delicate fair complexion; and Narcisse with a languorous expression in his half-closed eyes compared her to a Botticelli which he had seen at Florence. However, the night was now far advanced, and Pierre had once more sunk into gloomy thoughtfulness when he heard a passing lady remark that they had already begun to dance the Cotillon in the gallery; and thereupon he suddenly remembered that Monsignor Nani had given him an appointment in the little Saloon of the Mirrors.

"Are you leaving?" hastily inquired Prada on seeing him rise and bow to Lisbeth.

"No, no, not yet," Pierre answered.

"Oh! all right. Don't go away without me. I want to walk a little, and I'll see you home. It's agreed, eh? You will find me here."

The young priest had to cross two rooms, one hung with yellow and the other with blue, before he at last reached the mirrored /salon/. This was really an exquisite example of the /rococo/ style, a rotunda as it were of pale mirrors framed with superb gilded carvings. Even the ceiling was covered with mirrors disposed slantwise so that on every side things multiplied, mingled, and appeared under all possible aspects. Discreetly enough no electric lights had been placed in the room, the only illumination being that of some pink tapers burning in a pair of candelabra. The hangings and upholstery were of soft blue silk, and the impression on entering was very sweet and charming, as if one had found oneself in the abode of some fairy queen of the rills, a palace of limpid water, illumined to its farthest depths by clusters of stars.

Pierre at once perceived Monsignor Nani, who was sitting on a low couch, and, as the prelate had hoped, he was quite alone, for the Cotillon had attracted almost everybody to the picture gallery. And the silence in the little /salon/ was nearly perfect, for at that distance the blare of the orchestra subsided into a faint, flute-like murmur. The young priest at once apologised to the prelate for having kept him waiting.

"No, no, my dear son," said Nani, with his inexhaustible amiability. "I was very comfortable in this retreat—when the press of the crowd became over-threatening I took refuge here." He did not speak of the King and Queen, but he allowed it to be understood that he had politely avoided their company. If he had come to the /fete/ it was on account of his sincere affection for Celia and also with a very delicate diplomatic object, for the Church wished to avoid any appearance of having entirely broken with the Buongiovanni family, that ancient house which was so famous in the annals of the papacy. Doubtless the Vatican was unable to subscribe to this marriage which seemed to unite old Rome with the young Kingdom of Italy, but on the other hand it did not desire people to think that it abandoned old and faithful supporters and took no interest in what befell them.

"But come, my dear son," the prelate resumed, "it is you who are now in question. I told you that although the Congregation of the Index had pronounced itself for the condemnation of your book, the sentence would only be submitted to the Holy Father and signed by him on the day after to-morrow. So you still have a whole day before you."

At this Pierre could not refrain from a dolorous and vivacious interruption.

"Alas! Monseigneur, what can I do?" said he; "I have thought it all over, and I see no means, no opportunity of defending myself. How could I even see his Holiness now that he is so ill?"

"Oh! ill, ill!" muttered Nani with his shrewd expression. "His Holiness is ever so much better, for this very day, like every other Wednesday, I had the honour to be received by him. When his Holiness is a little tired and people say that he is very ill, he often lets them do so, for it gives him a rest and enables him to judge certain ambitions and manifestations of impatience around him."

Pierre, however, was too upset to listen attentively. "No, it's all over," he continued, "I'm in despair. You spoke to me of the possibility of a miracle, but I am no great believer in miracles. Since I am defeated here at Rome, I shall go away, I shall return to Paris, and continue the struggle there. Oh! I cannot resign myself, my hope in salvation by the practice of love cannot die, and I shall answer my denouncers in a new book, in which I shall tell in what new soil the new religion will grow up!"

Silence fell. Nani looked at him with his clear eyes in which intelligence shone distinct and sharp like steel. And amidst the deep calm, the warm heavy atmosphere of the little /salon/, whose mirrors were

starred with countless reflections of candles, a more sonorous burst of music was suddenly wafted from the gallery, a rhythmical waltz melody, which slowly expanded, then died away.

"My dear son," said Nani, "anger is always harmful. You remember that on your arrival here I promised that if your own efforts to obtain an interview with the Holy Father should prove unavailing, I would myself endeavour to secure an audience for you." Then, seeing how agitated the young priest was getting, he went on: "Listen to me and don't excite yourself. His Holiness, unfortunately, is not always prudently advised. Around him are persons whose devotion, however great, is at times deficient in intelligence. I told you that, and warned you against inconsiderate applications. And this is why, already three weeks ago, I myself handed your book to his Holiness in the hope that he would deign to glance at it. I rightly suspected that it had not been allowed to reach him. And this is what I am instructed to tell you: his Holiness, who has had the great kindness to read your book, expressly desires to see you."

A cry of joy and gratitude died away in Pierre's throat: "Ah! Monseigneur. Ah! Monseigneur!"

But Nani quickly silenced him and glanced around with an expression of keen anxiety as if he feared that some one might hear them. "Hush! Hush!" said he, "it is a secret. His Holiness wishes to see you privately, without taking anybody else into his confidence. Listen attentively. It is now two o'clock in the morning. Well, this very day, at nine in the evening precisely, you must present yourself at the Vatican and at every door ask for Signor Squadra. You will invariably be allowed to pass. Signor Squadra will be waiting for you upstairs, and will introduce you. And not a word, mind; not a soul must have the faintest suspicion of these things."

Pierre's happiness and gratitude at last flowed forth. He had caught hold of the prelate's soft, plump hands, and stammered, "Ah! Monseigneur, how can I express my gratitude to you? If you only knew how full my soul was of night and rebellion since I realised that I had been a mere plaything in the hands of those powerful cardinals. But you have saved me, and again I feel sure that I shall win the victory, for I shall at last be able to fling myself at the feet of his Holiness the father of all truth and all justice. He can but absolve me, I who love him, I who admire him, I who have never battled for aught but his own policy and most cherished ideas. No, no, it is impossible; he will not sign that judgment; he will not condemn my book!"

Releasing his hands, Nani sought to calm him with a fatherly gesture, whilst retaining a faint smile of contempt for such a useless expenditure of enthusiasm. At last he succeeded, and begged him to retire. The orchestra was again playing more loudly in the distance. And when the young priest at last withdrew, thanking him once more, he said very simply, "Remember, my dear son, that only obedience is great."

Pierre, whose one desire now was to take himself off, found Prada almost immediately afterwards in the first reception-room. Their Majesties had just left the ball in grand ceremony, escorted to the threshold by the Buongiovannis and the Saccos. And before departing the Queen had maternally kissed Celia, whilst the King shook hands with Attilio—honours instinct with a charming good nature which made the members of both families quite radiant. However, a good many of the guests were following the example of the sovereigns and disappearing in small batches. And the Count, who seemed strangely nervous, and showed more sternness and bitterness than ever, was, on his side, also eager to be gone. "Ah! it's you at last. I was waiting for you," he said to Pierre. "Well, let's get off at once, eh? Your compatriot Monsieur Narcisse Habert asked me to tell you not to look for him. The fact is, he has gone to see my friend Lisbeth to her carriage. I myself want a breath of fresh air, a stroll, and so I'll go with you as far as the Via Giulia."

Then, as they took their things from the cloak-room, he could not help sneering and saying in his brutal way: "I saw your good friends go off, all four together. It's lucky that you prefer to go home on foot, for there was no room for you in the carriage. What superb impudence it was on the part of that Donna Serafina to drag herself here, at her age, with that Morano of hers, so as to triumph over the return of the fickle one! And the two others, the two young ones—ah! I confess that I can hardly speak calmly of /them/, for in parading here together as they did this evening, they have shown an impudence and a cruelty such as is rarely seen!" Prada's hands trembled, and he murmured: "A good journey, a good journey to the young man, since he is going to Naples. Yes, I heard Celia say that he was starting for Naples this evening at six o'clock. Well, my wishes go with him; a good journey!"

The two men found the change delightful when they at last emerged from the stifling heat of the reception-rooms into the lovely, cool, and limpid night. It was a night illumined by a superb full moon, one of those matchless Roman nights when the city slumbers in Elysian radiance, steeped in a dream of the Infinite, under the vast vault of heaven. And they took the most agreeable route, going down the Corso proper and then turning into the Corso Vittorio Emanuele.

Prada had grown somewhat calmer, but remained full of irony. To divert his mind, no doubt, he talked on in the most voluble manner, reverting to the women of Rome and to that /fete/ which he had at first found splendid, but at which he now began to rail.

"Oh! of course they have very fine gowns," said he, speaking of the women; "but gowns which don't fit them, gowns which are sent them from Paris, and which, of course, they can't try on. It's just the same with their jewels; they still have diamonds and pearls, in particular, which are very fine, but they are so wretchedly, so heavily mounted that they look frightful. And if you only knew how ignorant and frivolous these women are, despite all their conceit! Everything is on the surface with them, even religion: there's nothing beneath. I looked at them eating at the buffet. Oh! they at least have fine appetites. This evening some decorum was observed, there wasn't too much gorging. But at one of the Court balls you would see a general pillage, the buffets besieged, and everything swallowed up amidst a scramble of amazing voracity!"

To all this talk Pierre only returned monosyllabic responses. He was wrapp'd in overflowing delight at the thought of that audience with the Pope, which, unable as he was to confide in any one, he strove to arrange and picture in his own mind, even in its pettiest details. And meantime the footsteps of the two men rang out on the dry pavement of the clear, broad, deserted thoroughfare, whose black shadows were sharply outlined by the moonlight.

All at once Prada himself became silent. His loquacious /bravura/ was exhausted, the frightful struggle going on in his mind wholly possessed and paralysed him. Twice already he had dipped his hand into his coat pocket and felt the pencilled note whose four lines he mentally repeated: "A legend avers that the fig-tree of Judas now grows at Frascati, and that its fruit is deadly for him who may desire to become pope. Eat not the poisoned figs, nor give them either to your servants or your fowls." The note was there; he could feel it; and if he had desired to accompany Pierre, it was in order that he might drop it into the letter-box at the Palazzo Bocanera. And he continued to step out briskly, so that within another ten minutes that note would surely be in the box, for no power in the world could prevent it, since such was his express determination. Never would he commit such a crime as to allow people to be poisoned.

But he was suffering such abominable torture. That Benedetta and that Dario had raised such a tempest of jealous hatred within him! For them he forgot Lisbeth whom he loved, and even that flesh of his flesh, the child of whom he was so proud. All sex as he was, eager to conquer and subdue, he had never cared for facile loves. His passion was to overcome. And now there was a woman in the world who defied him, a woman forsooth whom he had bought, whom he had married, who had been handed over to him, but who would never, never be his. Ah! in the old days, to subdue her, he would if needful have fired Rome like a Nero; but now he asked himself what he could possibly do to prevent her from belonging to another. That galling thought made the blood gush from his gaping wound. How that woman and her lover must deride him! And to think that they had sought to turn him to ridicule by a baseless charge, an arrant lie which still and ever made him smart, all proof of its falsity to the contrary. He, on his side, had accused them in the past without much belief in what he said, but now the charges he had imputed to them must come true, for they were free, freed at all events of the religious bond, and that no doubt was their only care. And then visions of their happiness passed before his eyes, infuriating him. Ah! no, ah! no, it was impossible, he would rather destroy the world!

Then, as he and Pierre turned out of the Corso Vittorio Emanuele to thread the old narrow tortuous streets leading to the Via Giulia, he pictured himself dropping the note into the letter-box at the palazzo. And next he conjured up what would follow. The note would lie in the letter-box till morning. At an early hour Don Vigilio, the secretary, who by the Cardinal's express orders kept the key of the box, would come down, find the note, and hand it to his Eminence, who never allowed another to open any communication addressed to him. And then the figs would be thrown away, there would be no further possibility of crime, the black world would in all prudence keep silent. But if the note should not be in the letter-box, what would happen then? And admitting that supposition he pictured the figs placed on the table at the one o'clock meal, in their pretty little leaf-covered basket. Dario would be there as usual, alone with his uncle, since he was not to leave for Naples till the evening. And would both the uncle and the nephew eat the figs, or would only one of them partake of the fruit, and which of them would that be? At this point Prada's clearness of vision failed him; again he conjured up Destiny on the march, that Destiny which he had met on the road from Frascati, going on towards its unknown goal, athwart all obstacles without possibility of stoppage. Aye, the little basket of figs went ever on and on to accomplish its fateful purpose, which no hand in the world had power enough to prevent.

And at last, on either hand of Pierre and Prada, the Via Giulia stretched away in a long line white with moonlight, and the priest emerged as if from a dream at sight of the Palazzo Bocanera rising blackly under the silver sky. Three o'clock struck at a neighbouring church. And he felt himself quivering

slightly as once again he heard near him the dolorous moan of a lion wounded unto death, that low involuntary growl which the Count, amidst the frightful struggle of his feelings, had for the third time allowed to escape him. But immediately afterwards he burst into a sneering laugh, and pressing the priest's hands, exclaimed: "No, no, I am not going farther. If I were seen here at this hour, people would think that I had fallen in love with my wife again."

And thereupon he lighted a cigar, and retraced his steps in the clear night, without once looking round.

### XIII

WHEN Pierre awoke he was much surprised to hear eleven o'clock striking. Fatigued as he was by that ball where he had lingered so long, he had slept like a child in delightful peacefulness, and as soon as he opened his eyes the radiant sunshine filled him with hope. His first thought was that he would see the Pope that evening at nine o'clock. Ten more hours to wait! What would he be able to do with himself during that lovely day, whose radiant sky seemed to him of such happy augury? He rose and opened the windows to admit the warm air which, as he had noticed on the day of his arrival, had a savour of fruit and flowers, a blending, as it were, of the perfume of rose and orange. Could this possibly be December? What a delightful land, that the spring should seem to flower on the very threshold of winter! Then, having dressed, he was leaning out of the window to glance across the golden Tiber at the evergreen slopes of the Janiculum, when he espied Benedetta seated in the abandoned garden of the mansion. And thereupon, unable to keep still, full of a desire for life, gaiety, and beauty, he went down to join her.

With radiant visage and outstretched hands, she at once vented the cry he had expected: "Ah! my dear Abbe, how happy I am!"

They had often spent their mornings in that quiet, forsaken nook; but what sad mornings those had been, hopeless as they both were! To-day, however, the weed-grown paths, the box-plants growing in the old basin, the orange-trees which alone marked the outline of the beds—all seemed full of charm, instinct with a sweet and dreamy cosiness in which it was very pleasant to lull one's joy. And it was so warm, too, beside the big laurel-bush, in the corner where the streamlet of water ever fell with flute-like music from the gaping, tragic mask.

"Ah!" repeated Benedetta, "how happy I am! I was stifling upstairs, and my heart felt such a need of space, and air, and sunlight, that I came down here!"

She was seated on the fallen column beside the old marble sarcophagus, and desired the priest to place himself beside her. Never had he seen her looking so beautiful, with her black hair encompassing her pure face, which in the sunshine appeared pinky and delicate as a flower. Her large, fathomless eyes showed in the light like braziers rolling gold, and her childish mouth, all candour and good sense, laughed the laugh of one who was at last free to love as her heart listed, without offending either God or man. And, dreaming aloud, she built up plans for the future. "It's all simple enough," said she; "I have already obtained a separation, and shall easily get that changed into civil divorce now that the Church has annulled my marriage. And I shall marry Dario next spring, perhaps sooner, if the formalities can be hastened. He is going to Naples this evening about the sale of some property which we still possess there, but which must now be sold, for all this business has cost us a lot of money. Still, that doesn't matter since we now belong to one another. And when he comes back in a few days, what a happy time we shall have! I could not sleep when I got back from that splendid ball last night, for my head was so full of plans—oh! splendid plans, as you shall see, for I mean to keep you in Rome until our marriage."

Like herself, Pierre began to laugh, so gained upon by this explosion of youth and happiness that he had to make a great effort to refrain from speaking of his own delight, his hopefulness at the thought of his coming interview with the Pope. Of that, however, he had sworn to speak to nobody.

Every now and again, amidst the quivering silence of the sunlit garden, the cry of a bird persistently rang out; and Benedetta, raising her head and looking at a cage hanging beside one of the first-floor windows, jestingly exclaimed: "Yes, yes, Tata, make a good noise, show that you are pleased, my dear. Everybody in the house must be pleased now." Then, turning towards Pierre, she added gaily: "You know Tata, don't you? What! No? Why, Tata is my uncle's parrot. I gave her to him last spring; he's very fond of her, and lets her help herself out of his plate. And he himself attends to her, puts her out and takes her in, and keeps her in his dining-room, for fear lest she should take cold, as that is the only room of his which is at all warm."

Pierre in his turn looked up and saw the bird, one of those pretty little parrots with soft, silky, dull-green plumage. It was hanging by the beak from a bar of its cage, swinging itself and flapping its wings, all mirth in the bright sunshine.

"Does the bird talk?" he asked.

"No, she only screams," replied Benedetta, laughing. "Still my uncle pretends that he understands her." And then the young woman abruptly darted to another subject, as if this mention of her uncle the Cardinal had made her think of the uncle by marriage whom she had in Paris. "I suppose you have heard from Viscount de la Choue," said she. "I had a letter from him yesterday, in which he said how grieved he was that you were unable to see the Holy Father, as he had counted on you for the triumph of his ideas."

Pierre indeed frequently heard from the Viscount, who was greatly distressed by the importance which his adversary, Baron de Fouras, had acquired since his success with the International Pilgrimage of the Peter's Pence. The old, uncompromising Catholic party would awaken, said the Viscount, and all the conquests of Neo-Catholicism would be threatened, if one could not obtain the Holy Father's formal adhesion to the proposed system of free guilds, in order to overcome the demand for closed guilds which was brought forward by the Conservatives. And the Viscount overwhelmed Pierre with injunctions, and sent him all sorts of complicated plans in his eagerness to see him received at the Vatican. "Yes, yes," muttered the young priest in reply to Benedetta. "I had a letter on Sunday, and found another waiting for me on my return from Frascati yesterday. Ah! it would make me very happy to be able to send the Viscount some good news." Then again Pierre's joy overflowed at the thought that he would that evening see the Pope, and, on opening his loving heart to the Pontiff, receive the supreme encouragement which would strengthen him in his mission to work social salvation in the name of the lowly and the poor. And he could not restrain himself any longer, but let his secret escape him: "It's settled, you know," said he. "My audience is for this evening."

Benedetta did not understand at first. "What audience?" she asked.

"Oh! Monsignor Nani was good enough to tell me at the ball this morning, that the Holy Father has read my book and desires to see me. I shall be received this evening at nine o'clock."

At this the Contessina flushed with pleasure, participating in the delight of the young priest to whom she had grown much attached. And this success of his, coming in the midst of her own felicity, acquired extraordinary importance in her eyes as if it were an augury of complete success for one and all. Superstitious as she was, she raised a cry of rapture and excitement: "Ah! /Dio/, that will bring us good luck. How happy I am, my friend, to see happiness coming to you at the same time as to me! You cannot think how pleased I am! And all will go well now, it's certain, for a house where there is any one whom the Pope welcomes is blessed, the thunder of Heaven falls on it no more!"

She laughed yet more loudly as she spoke, and clapped her hands with such exuberant gaiety that Pierre became anxious. "Hush! hush!" said he, "it's a secret. Pray don't mention it to any one, either your aunt or even his Eminence. Monsignor Nani would be much annoyed."

She thereupon promised to say nothing, and in a kindly voice spoke of Nani as a benefactor, for was she not indebted to him for the dissolution of her marriage? Then, with a fresh explosion of gaiety, she went on: "But come, my friend, is not happiness the only good thing? You don't ask me to weep over the suffering poor to-day! Ah! the happiness of life, that's everything. People don't suffer or feel cold or hungry when they are happy."

He looked at her in stupefaction at the idea of that strange solution of the terrible question of human misery. And suddenly he realised that, with that daughter of the sun who had inherited so many centuries of sovereign aristocracy, all his endeavours at conversion were vain. He had wished to bring her to a Christian love for the lowly and the wretched, win her over to the new, enlightened, and compassionate Italy that he had dreamt of; but if she had been moved by the sufferings of the multitude at the time when she herself had suffered, when grievous wounds had made her own heart bleed, she was no sooner healed than she proclaimed the doctrine of universal felicity like a true daughter of a clime of burning summers, and winters as mild as spring. "But everybody is not happy!" said he.

"Yes, yes, they are!" she exclaimed. "You don't know the poor! Give a girl of the Trastevere the lad she loves, and she becomes as radiant as a queen, and finds her dry bread quite sweet. The mothers who save a child from sickness, the men who conquer in a battle, or who win at the lottery, one and all in fact are like that, people only ask for good fortune and pleasure. And despite all your striving to be just and to arrive at a more even distribution of fortune, the only satisfied ones will be those whose hearts sing—often without their knowing the cause—on a fine sunny day like this."



Pierre made a gesture of surrender, not wishing to sadden her by again pleading the cause of all the poor ones who at that very moment were somewhere agonising with physical or mental pain. But, all at once, through the luminous mild atmosphere a shadow seemed to fall, tingeing joy with sadness, the sunshine with despair. And the sight of the old sarcophagus, with its bacchanal of satyrs and nymphs, brought back the memory that death lurks even amidst the bliss of passion, the unsatiated kisses of love. For a moment the clear song of the water sounded in Pierre's ears like a long-drawn sob, and all seemed to crumble in the terrible shadow which had fallen from the invisible.

Benedetta, however, caught hold of his hands and roused him once more to the delight of being there beside her. "Your pupil is rebellious, is she not, my friend?" said she. "But what would you have? There are ideas which can't enter into our heads. No, you will never get those things into the head of a Roman girl. So be content with loving us as we are, beautiful with all our strength, as beautiful as we can be."

She herself, in her resplendent happiness, looked at that moment so beautiful that he trembled as in presence of a divinity whose all-powerfulness swayed the world. "Yes, yes," he stammered, "beauty, beauty, still and ever sovereign. Ah! why can it not suffice to satisfy the eternal longings of poor suffering men?"

"Never mind!" she gaily responded. "Do not distress yourself; it is pleasant to live. And now let us go upstairs, my aunt must be waiting."

The midday meal was served at one o'clock, and on the few occasions when Pierre did not eat at one or another restaurant a cover was laid for him at the ladies' table in the little dining-room of the second floor, overlooking the courtyard. At the same hour, in the sunlit dining-room of the first floor, whose windows faced the Tiber, the Cardinal likewise sat down to table, happy in the society of his nephew Dario, for his secretary, Don Vigilio, who also was usually present, never opened his mouth unless to reply to some question. And the two services were quite distinct, each having its own kitchen and servants, the only thing at all common to them both being a large room downstairs which served as a pantry and store-place.

Although the second-floor dining-room was so gloomy, saddened by the greeny half-light of the courtyard, the meal shared that day by the two ladies and the young priest proved a very gay one. Even Donna Serafina, usually so rigid, seemed to relax under the influence of great internal felicity. She was no doubt still enjoying her triumph of the previous evening, and it was she who first spoke of the ball and sung its praises, though the presence of the King and Queen had much embarrassed her, said she. According to her account, she had only avoided presentation by skilful strategy; however she hoped that her well-known affection for Celia, whose god-mother she was, would explain her presence in that neutral mansion where Vatican and Quirinal had met. At the same time she must have retained certain scruples, for she declared that directly after dinner she was going to the Vatican to see the Cardinal Secretary, to whom she desired to speak about an enterprise of which she was lady-patroness. This visit would compensate for her attendance at the Buongiovanni entertainment. And on the other hand never had Donna Serafina seemed so zealous and hopeful of her brother's speedy accession to the throne of St. Peter: therein lay a supreme triumph, an elevation of her race, which her pride deemed both needful and inevitable; and indeed during Leo XIII's last indisposition she had actually concerned herself about the trousseau which would be needed and which would require to be marked with the new Pontiff's arms.

On her side, Benedetta was all gaiety during the repast, laughing at everything, and speaking of Celia and Attilio with the passionate affection of a woman whose own happiness delights in that of her friends. Then, just as the dessert had been served, she turned to the servant with an air of surprise: "Well, and the figs, Giacomo?" she asked.

Giacomo, slow and sleepy of notion, looked at her without understanding. However, Victorine was crossing the room, and Benedetta's next question was for her: "Why are the figs not served, Victorine?" she inquired.

"What figs, Contessina?"

"Why the figs I saw in the pantry as I passed through it this morning on my way to the garden. They were in a little basket and looked superb. I was even astonished to see that there were still some fresh figs left at this season. I'm very fond of them, and felt quite pleased at the thought that I should eat some at dinner."

Victorine began to laugh: "Ah! yes, Contessina, I understand," she replied. "They were some figs which that priest of Frascati, whom you know very well, brought yesterday evening as a present for his Eminence. I was there, and I heard him repeat three or four times that they were a present, and were to be put on his Eminence's table without a leaf being touched. And so one did as he said."

"Well, that's nice," retorted Benedetta with comical indignation. "What /gourmands/ my uncle and Dario are to regale themselves without us! They might have given us a share!"

Donna Serafina thereupon intervened, and asked Victorine: "You are speaking, are you not, of that priest who used to come to the villa at Frascati?"

"Yes, yes, Abbe Santobono his name is, he officiates at the little church of St. Mary in the Fields. He always asks for Abbe Paparelli when he calls; I think they were at the seminary together. And it was Abbe Paparelli who brought him to the pantry with his basket last night. To tell the truth, the basket was forgotten there in spite of all the injunctions, so that nobody would have eaten the figs to-day if Abbe Paparelli hadn't run down just now and carried them upstairs as piously as if they were the Blessed Sacrament. It's true though that his Eminence is so fond of them."

"My brother won't do them much honour to-day," remarked the Princess. "He is slightly indisposed. He passed a bad night." The repeated mention of Abbe Paparelli had made the old lady somewhat thoughtful. She had regarded the train-bearer with displeasure ever since she had noticed the extraordinary influence he was gaining over the Cardinal, despite all his apparent humility and self-effacement. He was but a servant and apparently a very insignificant one, yet he governed, and she could feel that he combated her own influence, often undoing things which she had done to further her brother's interests. Twice already, moreover, she had suspected him of having urged the Cardinal to courses which she looked upon as absolute blunders. But perhaps she was wrong; she did the train-bearer the justice to admit that he had great merits and displayed exemplary piety.

However, Benedetta went on laughing and jesting, and as Victorine had now withdrawn, she called the man-servant: "Listen, Giacomo, I have a commission for you." Then she broke off to say to her aunt and Pierre: "Pray let us assert our rights. I can see them at table almost underneath us. Uncle is taking the leaves off the basket and serving himself with a smile; then he passes the basket to Dario, who passes it on to Don Vigilio. And all three of them eat and enjoy the figs. You can see them, can't you?" She herself could see them well. And it was her desire to be near Dario, the constant flight of her thoughts to him that now made her picture him at table with the others. Her heart was down below, and there was nothing there that she could not see, and hear, and smell, with such keenness of the senses did her love endow her. "Giacomo," she resumed, "you are to go down and tell his Eminence that we are longing to taste his figs, and that it will be very kind of him if he will send us such as he can spare."

Again, however, did Donna Serafina intervene, recalling her wonted severity of voice: "Giacomo, you will please stay here." And to her niece she added: "That's enough childishness! I dislike such silly freaks."

"Oh! aunt," Benedetta murmured. "But I'm so happy, it's so long since I laughed so good-heartedly."

Pierre had hitherto remained listening, enlivened by the sight of her gaiety. But now, as a little chill fell, he raised his voice to say that on the previous day he himself had been astonished to see the famous fig-tree of Frascati still bearing fruit so late in the year. This was doubtless due, however, to the tree's position and the protection of a high wall.

"Ah! so you saw the tree?" said Benedetta.

"Yes, and I even travelled with those figs which you would so much like to taste."

"Why, how was that?"

The young man already regretted the reply which had escaped him. However, having gone so far, he preferred to say everything. "I met somebody at Frascati who had come there in a carriage and who insisted on driving me back to Rome," said he. "On the way we picked up Abbe Santobono, who was bravely making the journey on foot with his basket in his hand. And afterwards we stopped at an /osteria/—" Then he went on to describe the drive and relate his impressions whilst crossing the Campagna amidst the falling twilight. But Benedetta gazed at him fixedly, aware as she was of Prada's frequent visits to the land and houses which he owned at Frascati; and suddenly she murmured: "Somebody, somebody, it was the Count, was it not?"

"Yes, madame, the Count," Pierre answered. "I saw him again last night; he was overcome, and really deserves to be pitied."

The two women took no offence at this charitable remark which fell from the young priest with such deep and natural emotion, full as he was of overflowing love and compassion for one and all. Donna Serafina remained motionless as if she had not even heard him, and Benedetta made a gesture which seemed to imply that she had neither pity nor hatred to express for a man who had become a perfect

stranger to her. However, she no longer laughed, but, thinking of the little basket which had travelled in Prada's carriage, she said: "Ah! I don't care for those figs at all now, I am even glad that I haven't eaten any of them."

Immediately after the coffee Donna Serafina withdrew, saying that she was at once going to the Vatican; and the others, being left to themselves, lingered at table, again full of gaiety, and chatting like friends. The priest, with his feverish impatience, once more referred to the audience which he was to have that evening. It was now barely two o'clock, and he had seven more hours to wait. How should he employ that endless afternoon? Thereupon Benedetta good-naturedly made him a proposal. "I'll tell you what," said she, "as we are all in such good spirits we mustn't leave one another. Dario has his victoria, you know. He must have finished lunch by now, and I'll ask him to take us for a long drive along the Tiber."

This fine project so delighted her that she began to clap her hands; but just then Don Vigilio appeared with a scared look on his face. "Isn't the Princess here?" he inquired.

"No, my aunt has gone out. What is the matter?"

"His Eminence sent me. The Prince has just felt unwell on rising from table. Oh! it's nothing—nothing serious, no doubt."

Benedetta raised a cry of surprise rather than anxiety: "What, Dario! Well, we'll all go down. Come with me, Monsieur l'Abbe. He mustn't get ill if he is to take us for a drive!" Then, meeting Victorine on the stairs, she bade her follow. "Dario isn't well," she said. "You may be wanted."

They all four entered the spacious, antiquated, and simply furnished bed-room where the young Prince had lately been laid up for a whole month. It was reached by way of a small /salon/, and from an adjoining dressing-room a passage conducted to the Cardinal's apartments, the relatively small dining-room, bed-room, and study, which had been devised by subdividing one of the huge galleries of former days. In addition, the passage gave access to his Eminence's private chapel, a bare, uncarpeted, chairless room, where there was nothing beyond the painted, wooden altar, and the hard, cold tiles on which to kneel and pray.

On entering, Benedetta hastened to the bed where Dario was lying, still fully dressed. Near him, in fatherly fashion, stood Cardinal Boccanera, who, amidst his dawning anxiety, retained his proud and lofty bearing—the calmness of a soul beyond reproach. "Why, what is the matter, Dario /mio/?" asked the young woman.

He smiled, eager to reassure her. One only noticed that he was very pale, with a look as of intoxication on his face.

"Oh! it's nothing, mere giddiness," he replied. "It's just as if I had drunk too much. All at once things swam before my eyes, and I thought I was going to fall. And then I only had time to come and fling myself on the bed."

Then he drew a long breath, as though talking exhausted him, and the Cardinal in his turn gave some details. "We had just finished our meal," said he, "I was giving Don Vigilio some orders for this afternoon, and was about to rise when I saw Dario get up and reel. He wouldn't sit down again, but came in here, staggering like a somnambulist, and fumbling at the doors to open them. We followed him without understanding. And I confess that I don't yet comprehend it."

So saying, the Cardinal punctuated his surprise by waving his arm towards the rooms, through which a gust of misfortune seemed to have suddenly swept. All the doors had remained wide open: the dressing-room could be seen, and then the passage, at the end of which appeared the dining-room, in a disorderly state, like an apartment suddenly vacated; the table still laid, the napkins flung here and there, and the chairs pushed back. As yet, however, there was no alarm.

Benedetta made the remark which is usually made in such cases: "I hope you haven't eaten anything which has disagreed with you."

The Cardinal, smiling, again waved his hand as if to attest the frugality of his table. "Oh!" said he, "there were only some eggs, some lamb cutlets, and a dish of sorrel—they couldn't have overloaded his stomach. I myself only drink water; he takes just a sip of white wine. No, no, the food has nothing to do with it."

"Besides, in that case his Eminence and I would also have felt indisposed," Don Vigilio made bold to remark.

Dario, after momentarily closing his eyes, opened them again, and once more drew a long breath, whilst endeavouring to laugh. "Oh, it will be nothing;" he said. "I feel more at ease already. I must get up and stir myself."

"In that case," said Benedetta, "this is what I had thought of. You will take Monsieur l'Abbe Froment and me for a long drive in the Campagna."

"Willingly. It's a nice idea. Victorine, help me."

Whilst speaking he had raised himself by means of one arm; but, before the servant could approach, a slight convulsion seized him, and he fell back again as if overcome by a fainting fit. It was the Cardinal, still standing by the bedside, who caught him in his arms, whilst the Contessina this time lost her head: "/Dio, Dio!/ It has come on him again. Quick, quick, a doctor!"

"Shall I run for one?" asked Pierre, whom the scene was also beginning to upset.

"No, no, not you; stay with me. Victorine will go at once. She knows the address. Doctor Giordano, Victorine."

The servant hurried away, and a heavy silence fell on the room where the anxiety became more pronounced every moment. Benedetta, now quite pale, had again approached the bed, whilst the Cardinal looked down at Dario, whom he still held in his arms. And a terrible suspicion, vague, indeterminate as yet, had just awoke in the old man's mind: Dario's face seemed to him to be ashen, to wear that mask of terrified anguish which he had already remarked on the countenance of his dearest friend, Monsignor Gallo, when he had held him in his arms, in like manner, two hours before his death. There was also the same swoon and the same sensation of clasping a cold form whose heart ceases to beat. And above everything else there was in Boccanera's mind the same growing thought of poison, poison coming one knew not whence or how, but mysteriously striking down those around him with the suddenness of lightning. And for a long time he remained with his head bent over the face of his nephew, that last scion of his race, seeking, studying, and recognising the signs of the mysterious, implacable disorder which once already had rent his heart atwain.

But Benedetta addressed him in a low, entreating voice: "You will tire yourself, uncle. Let me take him a little, I beg you. Have no fear, I'll hold him very gently, he will feel that it is I, and perhaps that will rouse him."

At last the Cardinal raised his head and looked at her, and allowed her to take his place after kissing her with distracted passion, his eyes the while full of tears—a sudden burst of emotion in which his great love for the young woman melted the stern frigidty which he usually affected. "Ah! my poor child, my poor child!" he stammered, trembling from head to foot like an oak-tree about to fall. Immediately afterwards, however, he mastered himself, and whilst Pierre and Don Vigilio, mute and motionless, regretted that they could be of no help, he walked slowly to and fro. Soon, moreover, that bed-chamber became too small for all the thoughts revolving in his mind, and he strayed first into the dressing-room and then down the passage as far as the dining-room. And again and again he went to and fro, grave and impassible, his head low, ever lost in the same gloomy reverie. What were the multitudinous thoughts stirring in the brain of that believer, that haughty Prince who had given himself to God and could do naught to stay inevitable Destiny? From time to time he returned to the bedside, observed the progress of the disorder, and then started off again at the same slow regular pace, disappearing and reappearing, carried along as it were by the monotonous alternations of forces which man cannot control. Possibly he was mistaken, possibly this was some mere indisposition at which the doctor would smile. One must hope and wait. And again he went off and again he came back; and amidst the heavy silence nothing more clearly bespoke the torture of anxious fear than the rhythmical footsteps of that tall old man who was thus awaiting Destiny.

The door opened, and Victorine came in breathless. "I found the doctor, here he is," she gasped.

With his little pink face and white curls, his discreet paternal bearing which gave him the air of an amiable prelate, Doctor Giordano came in smiling; but on seeing that room and all the anxious people waiting in it, he turned very grave, at once assuming the expression of profound respect for all ecclesiastical secrets which he had acquired by long practice among the clergy. And when he had glanced at the sufferer he let but a low murmur escape him: "What, again! Is it beginning again!"

He was probably alluding to the knife thrust for which he had recently tended Dario. Who could be thus relentlessly pursuing that poor and inoffensive young prince? However no one heard the doctor unless it were Benedetta, and she was so full of feverish impatience, so eager to be tranquillised, that she did not listen but burst into fresh entreaties: "Oh! doctor, pray look at him, examine him, tell us that it is nothing. It can't be anything serious, since he was so well and gay but a little while ago. It's

nothing serious, is it?"

"You are right no doubt, Contessina, it can be nothing dangerous. We will see."

However, on turning round, Doctor Giordano perceived the Cardinal, who with regular, thoughtful footsteps had come back from the dining-room to place himself at the foot of the bed. And while bowing, the doctor doubtless detected a gleam of mortal anxiety in the dark eyes fixed upon his own, for he added nothing but began to examine Dario like a man who realises that time is precious. And as his examination progressed the affable optimism which usually appeared upon his countenance gave place to ashen gravity, a covert terror which made his lips slightly tremble. It was he who had attended Monsignor Gallo when the latter had been carried off so mysteriously; it was he who for imperative reasons had then delivered a certificate stating the cause of death to be infectious fever; and doubtless he now found the same terrible symptoms as in that case, a leaden hue overspreading the sufferer's features, a stupor as of excessive intoxication; and, old Roman practitioner that he was, accustomed to sudden deaths, he realised that the /malaria/ which kills was passing, that /malaria/ which science does not yet fully understand, which may come from the putrescent exhalations of the Tiber unless it be but a name for the ancient poison of the legends.

As the doctor raised his head his glance again encountered the black eyes of the Cardinal, which never left him. "Signor Giordano," said his Eminence, "you are not over-anxious, I hope? It is only some case of indigestion, is it not?"

The doctor again bowed. By the slight quiver of the Cardinal's voice he understood how acute was the anxiety of that powerful man, who once more was stricken in his dearest affections.

"Your Eminence must be right," he said, "there's a bad digestion certainly. Such accidents sometimes become dangerous when fever supervenes. I need not tell your Eminence how thoroughly you may rely on my prudence and zeal." Then he broke off and added in a clear professional voice: "We must lose no time; the Prince must be undressed. I should prefer to remain alone with him for a moment."

Whilst speaking in this way, however, Doctor Giordano detained Victorine, who would be able to help him, said he; should he need any further assistance he would take Giacomo. His evident desire was to get rid of the members of the family in order that he might have more freedom of action. And the Cardinal, who understood him, gently led Benedetta into the dining-room, whither Pierre and Don Vigilio followed.

When the doors had been closed, the most mournful and oppressive silence reigned in that dining-room, which the bright sun of winter filled with such delightful warmth and radiance. The table was still laid, its cloth strewn here and there with bread-crumbs; and a coffee cup had remained half full. In the centre stood the basket of figs, whose covering of leaves had been removed. However, only two or three of the figs were missing. And in front of the window was Tata, the female parrot, who had flown out of her cage and perched herself on her stand, where she remained, dazzled and enraptured, amidst the dancing dust of a broad yellow sunray. In her astonishment however, at seeing so many people enter, she had ceased to scream and smooth her feathers, and had turned her head the better to examine the newcomers with her round and scrutinising eye.

The minutes went by slowly amidst all the feverish anxiety as to what might be occurring in the neighbouring room. Don Vigilio had taken a corner seat in silence, whilst Benedetta and Pierre, who had remained standing, preserved similar muteness, and immobility. But the Cardinal had reverted to that instinctive, lulling tramp by which he apparently hoped to quiet his impatience and arrive the sooner at the explanation for which he was groping through a tumultuous maze of ideas. And whilst his rhythmical footsteps resounded with mechanical regularity, dark fury was taking possession of his mind, exasperation at being unable to understand the why and wherefore of that sickness. As he passed the table he had twice glanced at the things lying on it in confusion, as if seeking some explanation from them. Perhaps the harm had been done by that unfinished coffee, or by that bread whose crumbs lay here and there, or by those cutlets, a bone of which remained? Then as for the third time he passed by, again glancing, his eyes fell upon the basket of figs, and at once he stopped, as if beneath the shock of a revelation. An idea seized upon him and mastered him, without any plan, however, occurring to him by which he might change his sudden suspicion into certainty. For a moment he remained puzzled with his eyes fixed upon the basket. Then he took a fig and examined it, but, noticing nothing strange, was about to put it back when Tata, the parrot, who was very fond of figs, raised a strident cry. And this was like a ray of light; the means of changing suspicion into certainty was found.

Slowly, with grave air and gloomy visage, the Cardinal carried the fig to the parrot and gave it to her without hesitation or regret. She was a very pretty bird, the only being of the lower order of creation to which he had ever really been attached. Stretching out her supple, delicate form, whose silken feathers of dull green here and there assumed a pinky tinge in the sunlight, she took hold of the fig with her

claws, then ripped it open with her beak. But when she had raked it she ate but little, and let all the rest fall upon the floor. Still grave and impassible, the Cardinal looked at her and waited. Quite three minutes went by, and then feeling reassured, he began to scratch the bird's poll, whilst she, taking pleasure in the caress, turned her neck and fixed her bright ruby eye upon her master. But all at once she sank back without even a flap of the wings, and fell like a bullet. She was dead, killed as by a thunderbolt.

Boccanera made but a gesture, raising both hands to heaven as if in horror at what he now knew. Great God! such a terrible crime, and such a fearful mistake, such an abominable trick of Destiny! No cry of grief came from him, but the gloom upon his face grew black and fierce. Yet there was a cry, a piercing cry from Benedetta, who like Pierre and Don Vigilio had watched the Cardinal with an astonishment which had changed into terror: "Poison! poison! Ah! Dario, my heart, my soul!"

But the Cardinal violently caught his niece by the wrist, whilst darting a suspicious glance at the two petty priests, the secretary and the foreigner, who were present: "Be quiet, be quiet!" said he.

She shook herself free, rebelling, frantic with rage and hatred: "Why should I be quiet!" she cried. "It is Prada's work, I shall denounce him, he shall die as well! I tell you it is Prada, I know it, for yesterday Abbe Froment came back with him from Frascati in his carriage with that priest Santobono and that basket of figs! Yes, yes, I have witnesses, it is Prada, Prada!"

"No, no, you are mad, be quiet!" said the Cardinal, who had again taken hold of the young woman's hands and sought to master her with all his sovereign authority. He, who knew the influence which Cardinal Sanguinetti exercised over Santobono's excitable mind, had just understood the whole affair; no direct complicity but covert propulsion, the animal excited and then let loose upon the troublesome rival at the moment when the pontifical throne seemed likely to be vacant. The probability, the certainty of all this flashed upon Boccanera who, though some points remained obscure, did not seek to penetrate them. It was not necessary indeed that he should know every particular: the thing was as he said, since it was bound to be so. "No, no, it was not Prada," he exclaimed, addressing Benedetta. "That man can bear me no personal grudge, and I alone was aimed at, it was to me that those figs were given. Come, think it out! Only an unforeseen indisposition prevented me from eating the greater part of the fruit, for it is known that I am very fond of figs, and while my poor Dario was tasting them, I jested and told him to leave the finer ones for me to-morrow. Yes, the abominable blow was meant for me, and it is on him that it has fallen by the most atrocious of chances, the most monstrous of the follies of fate. Ah! Lord God, Lord God, have you then forsaken us!"

Tears came into the old man's eyes, whilst she still quivered and seemed unconvinced: "But you have no enemies, uncle," she said. "Why should that Santobono try to take your life?"

For a moment he found no fitting reply. With supreme grandeur he had already resolved to keep the truth secret. Then a recollection came to him, and he resigned himself to the telling of a lie: "Santobono's mind has always been somewhat unhinged," said he, "and I know that he has hated me ever since I refused to help him to get a brother of his, one of our former gardeners, out of prison. Deadly spite often has no more serious cause. He must have thought that he had reason to be revenged on me."

Thereupon Benedetta, exhausted, unable to argue any further, sank upon a chair with a despairing gesture: "Ah! God, God! I no longer know—and what matters it now that my Dario is in such danger? There's only one thing to be done, he must be saved. How long they are over what they are doing in that room—why does not Victorine come for us!"

The silence again fell, full of terror. Without speaking the Cardinal took the basket of figs from the table and carried it to a cupboard in which he locked it. Then he put the key in his pocket. No doubt, when night had fallen, he himself would throw the proofs of the crime into the Tiber. However, on coming back from the cupboard he noticed the two priests, who naturally had watched him; and with mingled grandeur and simplicity he said to them: "Gentlemen, I need not ask you to be discreet. There are scandals which we must spare the Church, which is not, cannot be guilty. To deliver one of ourselves, even when he is a criminal, to the civil tribunals, often means a blow for the whole Church, for men of evil mind may lay hold of the affair and seek to impute the responsibility of the crime even to the Church itself. We therefore have but to commit the murderer to the hands of God, who will know more surely how to punish him. Ah! for my part, whether I be struck in my own person or whether the blow be directed against my family, my dearest affections, I declare in the name of the Christ who died upon the cross, that I feel neither anger, nor desire for vengeance, that I efface the murderer's name from my memory and bury his abominable act in the eternal silence of the grave."

Tall as he was, he seemed of yet loftier stature whilst with hand upraised he took that oath to leave his enemies to the justice of God alone; for he did not refer merely to Santobono, but to Cardinal

Sanguinetti, whose evil influence he had divined. And amidst all the heroism of his pride, he was rent by tragic dolour at thought of the dark battle which was waged around the tiara, all the evil hatred and voracious appetite which stirred in the depths of the gloom. Then, as Pierre and Don Vigilio bowed to him as a sign that they would preserve silence, he almost choked with invincible emotion, a sob of loving grief which he strove to keep down rising to his throat, whilst he stammered: "Ah! my poor child, my poor child, the only scion of our race, the only love and hope of my heart! Ah! to die, to die like this!"

But Benedetta, again all violence, sprang up: "Die! Who, Dario? I won't have it! We'll nurse him, we'll go back to him. We will take him in our arms and save him. Come, uncle, come at once! I won't, I won't, I won't have him die!"

She was going towards the door, and nothing would have prevented her from re-entering the bedroom, when, as it happened, Victorine appeared with a wild look on her face, for, despite her wonted serenity, all her courage was now exhausted. "The doctor begs madame and his Eminence to come at once, at once," said she.

Stupefied by all these things, Pierre did not follow the others, but lingered for a moment in the sunlit dining-room with Don Vigilio. What! poison? Poison as in the time of the Borgias, elegantly hidden away, served up with luscious fruit by a crafty traitor, whom one dared not even denounce! And he recalled the conversation on his way back from Frascati, and his Parisian scepticism with respect to those legendary drugs, which to his mind had no place save in the fifth acts of melodramas. Yet those abominable stories were true, those tales of poisoned knives and flowers, of prelates and even dilatory popes being suppressed by a drop or a grain of something administered to them in their morning chocolate. That passionate tragical Santobono was really a poisoner, Pierre could no longer doubt it, for a lurid light now illumined the whole of the previous day: there were the words of ambition and menace which had been spoken by Cardinal Sanguinetti, the eagerness to act in presence of the probable death of the reigning pope, the suggestion of a crime for the sake of the Church's salvation, then that priest with his little basket of figs encountered on the road, then that basket carried for hours so carefully, so devoutly, on the priest's knees, that basket which now haunted Pierre like a nightmare, and whose colour, and odour, and shape he would ever recall with a shudder. Aye, poison, poison, there was truth in it; it existed and still circulated in the depths of the black world, amidst all the ravenous, rival longings for conquest and sovereignty.

And all at once the figure of Prada likewise arose in Pierre's mind. A little while previously, when Benedetta had so violently accused the Count, he, Pierre, had stepped forward to defend him and cry aloud what he knew, whence the poison had come, and what hand had offered it. But a sudden thought had made him shiver: though Prada had not devised the crime, he had allowed it to be perpetrated. Another memory darted keen like steel through the young priest's mind—that of the little black hen lying lifeless beside the shed, amidst the dismal surroundings of the /osteria/, with a tiny streamlet of violet blood trickling from her beak. And here again, Tata, the parrot, lay still soft and warm at the foot of her stand, with her beak stained by oozing blood. Why had Prada told that lie about a battle between two fowls? All the dim intricacy of passion and contention bewildered Pierre, he could not thread his way through it; nor was he better able to follow the frightful combat which must have been waged in that man's mind during the night of the ball. At the same time he could not again picture him by his side during their nocturnal walk towards the Boccanera mansion without shuddering, dimly divining what a frightful decision had been taken before that mansion's door. Moreover, whatever the obscurities, whether Prada had expected that the Cardinal alone would be killed, or had hoped that some chance stroke of fate might avenge him on others, the terrible fact remained—he had known, he had been able to stay Destiny on the march, but had allowed it to go onward and blindly accomplish its work of death.

Turning his head Pierre perceived Don Vigilio still seated on the corner chair whence he had not stirred, and looking so pale and haggard that perhaps he also had swallowed some of the poison. "Do you feel unwell?" the young priest asked.

At first the secretary could not reply, for terror had gripped him at the throat. Then in a low voice he said: "No, no, I didn't eat any. Ah, Heaven, when I think that I so much wanted to taste them, and that merely deference kept me back on seeing that his Eminence did not take any!" Don Vigilio's whole body shivered at the thought that his humility alone had saved him; and on his face and his hands there remained the icy chill of death which had fallen so near and grazed him as it passed.

Then twice he heaved a sigh, and with a gesture of affright sought to brush the horrid thing away while murmuring: "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!"

Pierre, deeply stirred, and knowing what he thought of the train-bearer, tried to extract some information from him: "What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you accuse him too? Do you think they urged

him on, and that it was they at bottom?"

The word Jesuits was not even spoken, but a big black shadow passed athwart the gay sunlight of the dining-room, and for a moment seemed to fill it with darkness. "They! ah yes!" exclaimed Don Vigilio, "they are everywhere; it is always they! As soon as one weeps, as soon as one dies, they are mixed up in it. And this is intended for me too; I am quite surprised that I haven't been carried off." Then again he raised a dull moan of fear, hatred, and anger: "Ah! Paparelli, Paparelli!" And he refused to reply any further, but darted scared glances at the walls as if from one or another of them he expected to see the train-bearer emerge, with his wrinkled flabby face like that of an old maid, his furtive mouse-like trot, and his mysterious, invading hands which had gone expressly to bring the forgotten figs from the pantry and deposit them on the table.

At last the two priests decided to return to the bedroom, where perhaps they might be required; and Pierre on entering was overcome by the heart-rending scene which the chamber now presented. Doctor Giordano, suspecting poison, had for half an hour been trying the usual remedies, an emetic and then magnesia. Just then, too, he had made Victorine whip some whites of eggs in water. But the disorder was progressing with such lightning-like rapidity that all succour was becoming futile. Undressed and lying on his back, his bust propped up by pillows and his arms lying outstretched over the sheets, Dario looked quite frightful in the sort of painful intoxication which characterised that redoubtable and mysterious disorder to which already Monsignor Gallo and others had succumbed. The young man seemed to be stricken with a sort of dizzy stupor, his eyes receded farther and farther into the depth of their dark sockets, whilst his whole face became withered, aged as it were, and covered with an earthy pallor. A moment previously he had closed his eyes, and the only sign that he still lived was the heaving of his chest induced by painful respiration. And leaning over his poor dying face stood Benedetta, sharing his sufferings, and mastered by such impotent grief that she also was unrecognisable, so white, so distracted by anguish, that it seemed as if death were gradually taking her at the same time as it was taking him.

In the recess by the window whither Cardinal Boccanera had led Doctor Giordano, a few words were exchanged in low tones. "He is lost, is he not?"

The doctor made the despairing gesture of one who is vanquished: "Alas! yes. I must warn your Eminence that in an hour all will be over."

A short interval of silence followed. "And the same malady as Gallo, is it not?" asked the Cardinal; and as the doctor trembling and averting his eyes did not answer he added: "At all events of an infectious fever!"

Giordano well understood what the Cardinal thus asked of him: silence, the crime for ever hidden away for the sake of the good renown of his mother, the Church. And there could be no loftier, no more tragical grandeur than that of this old man of seventy, still so erect and sovereign, who would neither suffer a slur to be cast upon his spiritual family, nor consent to his human family being dragged into the inevitable mire of a sensational murder trial. No, no, there must be none of that, there must be silence, the eternal silence in which all becomes forgotten.

At last the doctor bowed with his gentle air of discretion. "Evidently, of an infectious fever as your Eminence so well says," he replied.

Two big tears then again appeared in Boccanera's eyes. Now that he had screened the Deity from attack in the person of the Church, his heart as a man again bled. He begged the doctor to make a supreme effort, to attempt the impossible; but, pointing to the dying man with trembling hands, Giordano shook his head. For his own father, his own mother he could have done nothing. Death was there. So why weary, why torture a dying man, whose sufferings he would only have increased? And then, as the Cardinal, finding the end so near at hand, thought of his sister Serafina, and lamented that she would not be able to kiss her nephew for the last time if she lingered at the Vatican, the doctor offered to fetch her in his carriage which was waiting below. It would not take him more than twenty minutes, said he, and he would be back in time for the end, should he then be needed.

Left to himself in the window recess the Cardinal remained there motionless for another moment. With eyes blurred by tears, he gazed towards heaven. And his quivering arms were suddenly raised in a gesture of ardent entreaty. O God, since the science of man was so limited and vain, since that doctor had gone off happy to escape the embarrassment of his impotence, O God, why not a miracle which should proclaim the splendour of Thy Almighty Power! A miracle, a miracle! that was what the Cardinal asked from the depths of his believing soul, with the insistence, the imperious entreaty of a Prince of the Earth, who deemed that he had rendered considerable services to Heaven by dedicating his whole life to the Church. And he asked for that miracle in order that his race might be perpetuated, in order that its last male scion might not thus miserably perish, but be able to marry that fondly loved cousin,



who now stood there all woe and tears. A miracle, a miracle for the sake of those two dear children! A miracle which would endow the family with fresh life: a miracle which would eternise the glorious name of Boccanera by enabling an innumerable posterity of valiant ones and faithful ones to spring from that young couple!

When the Cardinal returned to the centre of the room he seemed transfigured. Faith had dried his eyes, his soul had become strong and submissive, exempt from all human weakness. He had placed himself in the hands of God, and had resolved that he himself would administer extreme unction to Dario. With a gesture he summoned Don Vigilio and led him into the little room which served as a chapel, and the key of which he always carried. A cupboard had been contrived behind the altar of painted wood, and the Cardinal went to it to take both stole and surplice. The coffer containing the Holy Oils was likewise there, a very ancient silver coffer bearing the Boccanera arms. And on Don Vigilio following the Cardinal back into the bed-room they in turn pronounced the Latin words:

"/Pax huic domui/."

"/Et omnibus habitantibus in ea/."\*

\* "Peace unto this house and unto all who dwell in it."—Trans.

Death was coming so fast and threatening, that all the usual preparations were perforce dispensed with. Neither the two lighted tapers, nor the little table covered with white cloth had been provided. And, in the same way, Don Vigilio the assistant, having failed to bring the Holy Water basin and sprinkler, the Cardinal, as officiating priest, could merely make the gesture of blessing the room and the dying man, whilst pronouncing the words of the ritual: "/Asperges me, Domine, hyssopo, et mundabor; lavabis me, et super nivem dealbabor."\*

\* "Sprinkle me, Lord, with hyssop, and purify me; wash me, and make me whiter than snow."—Trans.

Benedetta on seeing the Cardinal appear carrying the Holy Oils, had with a long quiver fallen on her knees at the foot of the bed, whilst, somewhat farther away, Pierre and Victorine likewise knelt, overcome by the dolorous grandeur of the scene. And the dilated eyes of the Contessina, whose face was pale as snow, never quitted her Dario, whom she no longer recognised, so earthy was his face, its skin tanned and wrinkled like that of an old man. And it was not for their marriage which he so much desired that their uncle, the all-powerful Prince of the Church, was bringing the Sacrament, but for the supreme rupture, the end of all pride, Death which finishes off the haughtiest races, and sweeps them away, even as the wind sweeps the dust of the roads.

It was needful that there should be no delay, so the Cardinal promptly repeated the Credo in an undertone, "/Credo in unum Deum—/"

"/Amen/," responded Don Vigilio, who, after the prayers of the ritual, stammered the Litanies in order that Heaven might take pity on the wretched man who was about to appear before God, if God by a prodigy did not spare him.

Then, without taking time to wash his fingers, the Cardinal opened the case containing the Holy Oils, and limiting himself to one anointment, as is permissible in pressing cases, he deposited a single drop of the oil on Dario's parched mouth which was already withered by death. And in doing so he repeated the words of the formula, his heart all aglow with faith as he asked that the divine mercy might efface each and every sin that the young man had committed by either of his five senses, those five portals by which everlasting temptation assails the soul. And the Cardinal's fervour was also instinct with the hope that if God had smitten the poor sufferer for his offences, perhaps He would make His indulgence entire and even restore him to life as soon as He should have forgiven his sins. Life, O Lord, life in order that the ancient line of the Boccaneras might yet multiply and continue to serve Thee in battle and at the altar until the end of time!

For a moment the Cardinal remained with quivering hands, gazing at the mute face, the closed eyes of the dying man, and waiting for the miracle. But no sign appeared, not the faintest glimmer brightened that haggard countenance, nor did a sigh of relief come from the withered lips as Don Vigilio wiped them with a little cotton wool. And the last prayer was said, and whilst the frightful silence fell once more the Cardinal, followed by his assistant, returned to the chapel. There they both knelt, the Cardinal plunging into ardent prayer upon the bare tiles. With his eyes raised to the brass crucifix upon the altar he saw nothing, heard nothing, but gave himself wholly to his entreaties, supplicating God to take him in place of his nephew, if a sacrifice were necessary, and yet clinging to the hope that so long as Dario retained a breath of life and he himself thus remained on his knees addressing the Deity, he might succeed in pacifying the wrath of Heaven. He was both so humble and

so great. Would not accord surely be established between God and a Boccanera? The old palace might have fallen to the ground, he himself would not even have felt the toppling of its beams.

In the bed-room, however, nothing had yet stirred beneath the weight of tragic majesty which the ceremony had left there. It was only now that Dario raised his eyelids, and when on looking at his hands he saw them so aged and wasted the depths of his eyes kindled with an expression of immense regretfulness that life should be departing. Doubtless it was at this moment of lucidity amidst the kind of intoxication with which the poison overwhelmed him, that he for the first time realised his perilous condition. Ah! to die, amidst such pain, such physical degradation, what a revolting horror for that frivolous and egotistical man, that lover of beauty, joy, and light, who knew not how to suffer! In him ferocious fate chastised racial degeneracy with too heavy a hand. He became horrified with himself, seized with childish despair and terror, which lent him strength enough to sit up and gaze wildly about the room, in order to see if every one had not abandoned him. And when his eyes lighted on Benedetta still kneeling at the foot of the bed, a supreme impulse carried him towards her, he stretched forth both arms as passionately as his strength allowed and stammered her name: "O Benedetta, Benedetta!"

She, motionless in the stupor of her anxiety, had not taken her eyes from his face. The horrible disorder which was carrying off her lover, seemed also to possess and annihilate her more and more, even as he himself grew weaker and weaker. Her features were assuming an immaterial whiteness; and through the void of her clear eyeballs one began to espy her soul. However, when she perceived him thus resuscitating and calling her with arms outstretched, she in her turn arose and standing beside the bed made answer: "I am coming, my Dario, here I am."

And then Pierre and Victorine, still on their knees, beheld a sublime deed of such extraordinary grandeur that they remained rooted to the floor, spell-bound as in the presence of some supra-terrestrial spectacle in which human beings may not intervene. Benedetta herself spoke and acted like one freed from all social and conventional ties, already beyond life, only seeing and addressing beings and things from a great distance, from the depths of the unknown in which she was about to disappear.

"Ah! my Dario, so an attempt has been made to part us! It was in order that I might never belong to you—that we might never be happy, that your death was resolved upon, and it was known that with your life my own must cease! And it is that man who is killing you! Yes, he is your murderer, even if the actual blow has been dealt by another. He is the first cause—he who stole me from you when I was about to become yours, he who ravaged our lives, and who breathed around us the hateful poison which is killing us. Ah! how I hate him, how I hate him; how I should like to crush him with my hate before I die with you!"

She did not raise her voice, but spoke those terrible words in a deep murmur, simply and passionately. Prada was not even named, and she scarcely turned towards Pierre—who knelt, paralysed, behind her—to add with a commanding air: "You will see his father, I charge you to tell him that I cursed his son! That kind-hearted hero loved me well—I love him even now, and the words you will carry to him from me will rend his heart. But I desire that he should know—he must know, for the sake of truth and justice."

Distracted by terror, sobbing amidst a last convulsion, Dario again stretched forth his arms, feeling that she was no longer looking at him, that her clear eyes were no longer fixed upon his own: "Benedetta, Benedetta!"

"I am coming, I am coming, my Dario—I am here!" she responded, drawing yet nearer to the bedside and almost touching him. "Ah!" she went on, "that vow which I made to the Madonna to belong to none, not even you, until God should allow it by the blessing of one of his priests! Ah! I set a noble, a divine pride in remaining immaculate for him who should be the one master of my soul and body. And that chastity which I was so proud of, I defended it against the other as one defends oneself against a wolf, and I defended it against you with tears for fear of sacrilege. And if you only knew what terrible struggles I was forced to wage with myself, for I loved you and longed to be yours, like a woman who accepts the whole of love, the love that makes wife and mother! Ah! my vow to the Madonna—with what difficulty did I keep it when the old blood of our race arose in me like a tempest; and now what a disaster!" She drew yet nearer, and her low voice became more ardent: "You remember that evening when you came back with a knife-thrust in your shoulder. I thought you dead, and cried aloud with rage at the idea of losing you like that. I insulted the Madonna and regretted that I had not damned myself with you that we might die together, so tightly clasped that we must needs be buried together also. And to think that such a terrible warning was of no avail! I was blind and foolish; and now you are again stricken, again being taken from my love. Ah! my wretched pride, my idiotic dream!"

That which now rang out in her stifled voice was the anger of the practical woman that she had ever been, all superstition notwithstanding. Could the Madonna, who was so maternal, desire the woe of lovers? No, assuredly not. Nor did the angels make the mere absence of a priest a cause for weeping

over the transports of true and mutual love. Was not such love holy in itself, and did not the angels rather smile upon it and burst into gladsome song! And ah! how one cheated oneself by not loving to heart's content under the sun, when the blood of life coursed through one's veins!

"Benedetta! Benedetta!" repeated the dying man, full of child-like terror at thus going off all alone into the depths of the black and everlasting night.

"Here I am, my Dario, I am coming!"

Then, as she fancied that the servant, albeit motionless, had stirred, as if to rise and interfere, she added: "Leave me, leave me, Victorine, nothing in the world can henceforth prevent it. A moment ago, when I was on my knees, something roused me and urged me on. I know whither I am going. And besides, did I not swear on the night of the knife thrust? Did I not promise to belong to him alone, even in the earth if it were necessary? I must embrace him, and he will carry me away! We shall be dead, and we shall be wedded in spite of all, and for ever and for ever!"

She stepped back to the dying man, and touched him: "Here I am, my Dario, here I am!"

Then came the apogee. Amidst growing exaltation, buoyed up by a blaze of love, careless of glances, candid like a lily, she divested herself of her garments and stood forth so white, that neither marble statue, nor dove, nor snow itself was ever whiter. "Here I am, my Dario, here I am!"

Recoiling almost to the ground as at sight of an apparition, the glorious flash of a holy vision, Pierre and Victorine gazed at her with dazzled eyes. The servant had not stirred to prevent this extraordinary action, seized as she was with that shrinking reverential terror which comes upon one in presence of the wild, mad deeds of faith and passion. And the priest, whose limbs were paralysed, felt that something so sublime was passing that he could only quiver in distraction. And no thought of impurity came to him on beholding that lily, snowy whiteness. All candour and all nobility as she was, that virgin shocked him no more than some sculptured masterpiece of genius.

"Here I am, my Dario, here I am."

She had lain herself down beside the spouse whom she had chosen, she had clasped the dying man whose arms only had enough strength left to fold themselves around her. Death was stealing him from her, but she would go with him; and again she murmured: "My Dario, here I am."

And at that moment, against the wall at the head of the bed, Pierre perceived the escutcheon of the Boccaneras, embroidered in gold and coloured silks on a groundwork of violet velvet. There was the winged dragon belching flames, there was the fierce and glowing motto "/Bocca nera, Alma rossa/" (black mouth, red soul), the mouth darkened by a roar, the soul flaming like a brazier of faith and love. And behold! all that old race of passion and violence with its tragic legends had reappeared, its blood bubbling up afresh to urge that last and adorable daughter of the line to those terrifying and prodigious nuptials in death. And to Pierre that escutcheon recalled another memory, that of the portrait of Cassia Boccanera the /amorosa/ and avengeress who had flung herself into the Tiber with her brother Ercole and the corpse of her lover Flavio. Was there not here even with Benedetta the same despairing clasp seeking to vanquish death, the same savagery in hurling oneself into the abyss with the corpse of the one's only love? Benedetta and Cassia were as sisters, Cassia, who lived anew in the old painting in the /salon/ overhead, Benedetta who was here dying of her lover's death, as though she were but the other's spirit. Both had the same delicate childish features, the same mouth of passion, the same large dreamy eyes set in the same round, practical, and stubborn head.

"My Dario, here I am!"

For a second, which seemed an eternity, they clasped one another, she neither repelled nor terrified by the disorder which made him so unrecognisable, but displaying a delirious passion, a holy frenzy as if to pass beyond life, to penetrate with him into the black Unknown. And beneath the shock of the felicity at last offered to him he expired, with his arms yet convulsively wound around her as though indeed to carry her off. Then, whether from grief or from bliss amidst that embrace of death, there came such a rush of blood to her heart that the organ burst: she died on her lover's neck, both tightly and for ever clasped in one another's arms.

There was a faint sigh. Victorine understood and drew near, while Pierre, also erect, remained quivering with the tearful admiration of one who has beheld the sublime.

"Look, look!" whispered the servant, "she no longer moves, she no longer breathes. Ah! my poor child, my poor child, she is dead!"

Then the priest murmured: "Oh! God, how beautiful they are."

It was true, never had loftier and more resplendent beauty appeared on the faces of the dead. Dario's countenance, so lately aged and earthen, had assumed the pallor and nobility of marble, its features lengthened and simplified as by a transport of ineffable joy. Benedetta remained very grave, her lips curved by ardent determination, whilst her whole face was expressive of dolorous yet infinite beatitude in a setting of infinite whiteness. Their hair mingled, and their eyes, which had remained open, continued gazing as into one another's souls with eternal, caressing sweetness. They were for ever linked, soaring into immortality amidst the enchantment of their union, vanquishers of death, radiant with the rapturous beauty of love, the conqueror, the immortal.

But Victorine's sobs at last burst forth, mingled with such lamentations that great confusion followed. Pierre, now quite beside himself, in some measure failed to understand how it was that the room suddenly became invaded by terrified people. The Cardinal and Don Vigilio, however, must have hastened in from the chapel; and at the same moment, no doubt, Doctor Giordano must have returned with Donna Serafina, for both were now there, she stupefied by the blows which had thus fallen on the house in her absence, whilst he, the doctor, displayed the perturbation and astonishment which comes upon the oldest practitioners when facts seem to give the lie to their experience. However, he sought an explanation of Benedetta's death, and hesitatingly ascribed it to aneurism, or possibly embolism.

Thereupon Victorine, like a servant whose grief makes her the equal of her employers, boldly interrupted him: "Ah! Sir," said she, "they loved each other too fondly; did not that suffice for them to die together?"

Meantime Donna Serafina, after kissing the poor children on the brow, desired to close their eyes; but she could not succeed in doing so, for the lids lifted directly she removed her finger and once more the eyes began to smile at one another, to exchange in all fixity their loving and eternal glance. And then as she spoke of parting the bodies, Victorine again protested: "Oh! madame, oh! madame," she said, "you would have to break their arms. Cannot you see that their fingers are almost dug into one another's shoulders? No, they can never be parted!"

Thereupon Cardinal Boccanera intervened. God had not granted the miracle; and he, His minister, was livid, tearless, and full of icy despair. But he waved his arm with a sovereign gesture of absolution and sanctification, as if, Prince of the Church that he was, disposing of the will of Heaven, he consented that the lovers should appear in that embrace before the supreme tribunal. In presence of such wondrous love, indeed, profoundly stirred by the sufferings of their lives and the beauty of their death, he showed a broad and lofty contempt for mundane proprieties. "Leave them, leave me, my sister," said he, "do not disturb their slumber. Let their eyes remain open since they desire to gaze on one another till the end of time without ever wearying. And let them sleep in one another's arms since in their lives they did not sin, and only locked themselves in that embrace in order that they might be laid together in the ground."

And then, again becoming a Roman Prince whose proud blood was yet hot with old-time deeds of battle and passion, he added: "Two Boccaneras may well sleep like that; all Rome will admire them and weep for them. Leave them, leave them together, my sister. God knows them and awaits them!"

All knelt, and the Cardinal himself repeated the prayers for the dead. Night was coming, increasing gloom stole into the chamber, where two burning tapers soon shone out like stars.

And then, without knowing how, Pierre again found himself in the little deserted garden on the bank of the Tiber. Suffocating with fatigue and grief, he must have come thither for fresh air. Darkness shrouded the charming nook where the streamlet of water falling from the tragic mask into the ancient sarcophagus ever sang its shrill and flute-like song; and the laurel-bush which shaded it, and the bitter box-plants and the orange-trees skirting the paths now formed but vague masses under the blue-black sky. Ah! how gay and sweet had that melancholy garden been in the morning, and what a desolate echo it retained of Benedetta's winsome laughter, all that fine delight in coming happiness which now lay prone upstairs, steeped in the nothingness of things and beings! So dolorous was the pang which came to Pierre's heart that he burst into sobs, seated on the same broken column where she had sat, and encompassed by the same atmosphere that she had breathed, in which still lingered the perfume of her presence.

But all at once a distant clock struck six, and the young priest started on remembering that he was to be received by the Pope that very evening at nine. Yet three more hours! He had not thought of that interview during the terrifying catastrophe, and it seemed to him now as if months and months had gone by, as if the appointment were some very old one which a man is only able to keep after years of absence, when he has grown aged and had his heart and brain modified by innumerable experiences. However, he made an effort and rose to his feet. In three hours' time he would go to the Vatican and at last he would see the Pope.

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