

Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece, Second Series eBook

Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece, Second Series by John Addington Symonds

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Contents

Sketches and Studies in Italy and Greece, Second Series eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	11
Page 1.....	13
Page 2.....	14
Page 3.....	15
Page 4.....	16
Page 5.....	17
Page 6.....	18
Page 7.....	19
Page 8.....	20
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	23
Page 11.....	24
Page 12.....	25
Page 13.....	26
Page 14.....	27
Page 15.....	28
Page 16.....	29
Page 17.....	30
Page 18.....	31
Page 19.....	32
Page 20.....	33
Page 21.....	34
Page 22.....	35



[Page 23..... 36](#)

[Page 24..... 37](#)

[Page 25..... 38](#)

[Page 26..... 39](#)

[Page 27..... 41](#)

[Page 28..... 42](#)

[Page 29..... 43](#)

[Page 30..... 45](#)

[Page 31..... 47](#)

[Page 32..... 48](#)

[Page 33..... 49](#)

[Page 34..... 50](#)

[Page 35..... 51](#)

[Page 36..... 53](#)

[Page 37..... 54](#)

[Page 38..... 55](#)

[Page 39..... 56](#)

[Page 40..... 57](#)

[Page 41..... 58](#)

[Page 42..... 59](#)

[Page 43..... 60](#)

[Page 44..... 61](#)

[Page 45..... 62](#)

[Page 46..... 63](#)

[Page 47..... 65](#)

[Page 48..... 66](#)



[Page 49..... 68](#)

[Page 50..... 69](#)

[Page 51..... 71](#)

[Page 52..... 72](#)

[Page 53..... 73](#)

[Page 54..... 74](#)

[Page 55..... 75](#)

[Page 56..... 76](#)

[Page 57..... 77](#)

[Page 58..... 78](#)

[Page 59..... 79](#)

[Page 60..... 80](#)

[Page 61..... 81](#)

[Page 62..... 82](#)

[Page 63..... 83](#)

[Page 64..... 84](#)

[Page 65..... 85](#)

[Page 66..... 86](#)

[Page 67..... 87](#)

[Page 68..... 89](#)

[Page 69..... 90](#)

[Page 70..... 91](#)

[Page 71..... 93](#)

[Page 72..... 94](#)

[Page 73..... 96](#)

[Page 74..... 98](#)



[Page 75..... 100](#)

[Page 76..... 102](#)

[Page 77..... 104](#)

[Page 78..... 106](#)

[Page 79..... 107](#)

[Page 80..... 108](#)

[Page 81..... 109](#)

[Page 82..... 110](#)

[Page 83..... 111](#)

[Page 84..... 112](#)

[Page 85..... 113](#)

[Page 86..... 114](#)

[Page 87..... 115](#)

[Page 88..... 116](#)

[Page 89..... 118](#)

[Page 90..... 119](#)

[Page 91..... 120](#)

[Page 92..... 121](#)

[Page 93..... 122](#)

[Page 94..... 123](#)

[Page 95..... 124](#)

[Page 96..... 125](#)

[Page 97..... 126](#)

[Page 98..... 127](#)

[Page 99..... 128](#)

[Page 100..... 129](#)



[Page 101..... 130](#)

[Page 102..... 131](#)

[Page 103..... 132](#)

[Page 104..... 133](#)

[Page 105..... 134](#)

[Page 106..... 135](#)

[Page 107..... 136](#)

[Page 108..... 137](#)

[Page 109..... 138](#)

[Page 110..... 139](#)

[Page 111..... 140](#)

[Page 112..... 141](#)

[Page 113..... 142](#)

[Page 114..... 143](#)

[Page 115..... 144](#)

[Page 116..... 145](#)

[Page 117..... 146](#)

[Page 118..... 147](#)

[Page 119..... 148](#)

[Page 120..... 149](#)

[Page 121..... 150](#)

[Page 122..... 151](#)

[Page 123..... 153](#)

[Page 124..... 154](#)

[Page 125..... 155](#)

[Page 126..... 156](#)



[Page 127..... 157](#)
[Page 128..... 158](#)
[Page 129..... 159](#)
[Page 130..... 160](#)
[Page 131..... 161](#)
[Page 132..... 162](#)
[Page 133..... 163](#)
[Page 134..... 164](#)
[Page 135..... 165](#)
[Page 136..... 166](#)
[Page 137..... 167](#)
[Page 138..... 168](#)
[Page 139..... 170](#)
[Page 140..... 171](#)
[Page 141..... 172](#)
[Page 142..... 173](#)
[Page 143..... 174](#)
[Page 144..... 175](#)
[Page 145..... 176](#)
[Page 146..... 177](#)
[Page 147..... 178](#)
[Page 148..... 179](#)
[Page 149..... 180](#)
[Page 150..... 181](#)
[Page 151..... 182](#)
[Page 152..... 183](#)



[Page 153..... 184](#)

[Page 154..... 185](#)

[Page 155..... 186](#)

[Page 156..... 187](#)

[Page 157..... 188](#)

[Page 158..... 189](#)

[Page 159..... 190](#)

[Page 160..... 191](#)

[Page 161..... 192](#)

[Page 162..... 193](#)

[Page 163..... 194](#)

[Page 164..... 195](#)

[Page 165..... 196](#)

[Page 166..... 197](#)

[Page 167..... 198](#)

[Page 168..... 199](#)

[Page 169..... 201](#)

[Page 170..... 202](#)

[Page 171..... 203](#)

[Page 172..... 204](#)

[Page 173..... 206](#)

[Page 174..... 207](#)

[Page 175..... 209](#)

[Page 176..... 211](#)

[Page 177..... 213](#)

[Page 178..... 215](#)



[Page 179..... 217](#)

[Page 180..... 219](#)

[Page 181..... 221](#)

[Page 182..... 223](#)

[Page 183..... 225](#)

[Page 184..... 227](#)

[Page 185..... 228](#)

[Page 186..... 230](#)

[Page 187..... 232](#)

[Page 188..... 234](#)

[Page 189..... 236](#)

[Page 190..... 238](#)

[Page 191..... 240](#)

[Page 192..... 242](#)

[Page 193..... 244](#)

[Page 194..... 246](#)

[Page 195..... 248](#)

[Page 196..... 250](#)

[Page 197..... 252](#)

[Page 198..... 254](#)

[Page 199..... 256](#)

[Page 200..... 258](#)

[Page 201..... 260](#)

[Page 202..... 262](#)

[Page 203..... 264](#)

[Page 204..... 266](#)



[Page 205.....268](#)
[Page 206.....270](#)
[Page 207.....272](#)
[Page 208.....274](#)
[Page 209.....276](#)
[Page 210.....278](#)
[Page 211.....280](#)
[Page 212.....282](#)

[Page 213.....284](#)
[Page 214.....286](#)
[Page 215.....288](#)
[Page 216.....290](#)
[Page 217.....291](#)
[Page 218.....293](#)

[Page 219.....295](#)
[Page 220.....297](#)
[Page 221.....299](#)
[Page 222.....301](#)
[Page 223.....302](#)

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
SKETCHES AND STUDIES IN ITALY AND GREECE		1
SIGISMONDO PANDOLFO		9
MALATESTA AND LEO BATTISTA ALBERTI		
FROM ROME TO TERNI		20
THE CASCADES OF TERNI		21
MONTEFALCO		22
FOLIGNO		23
SPELLO		26
EASTER MORNING AT ASSISI		27
PERUSIA AUGUSTA		28
LA MAGIONE		29
CORTONA		30
CHIUSI		31
GUBBIO		32
FROM GUBBIO TO FANO		34
I		37
II		43
III		48
AND THE TRAGEDY OF WEBSTER		54
I		54
II		63
III		65
IV		68
I.—ITALIAM PETIMUS		77
II.—OVER THE APENNINES		80
III.—FOSDINOVO		82
IV.—LA SPEZZIA		83
V.—PORTO VENERE		85
VI.—LERICI		87
VII.—VIAREGGIO		88
I		122
II		123
III		124
IV		126
V		127
VI		130
VII		131



VIII	133
IX	134
X	135
XI	137
XII	138
XIII	139
XIV	140
XV	142
XVI	144
XVII	144
XVIII	145
XIX	146
XX	148
XXI	149
XXII	149
XXIII	151
XXIV	152
XXV	154
XXVI	155
XXVII	155
XXVIII	156
BOOK I. STANZAS 17-21.	202
STANZAS 99-107.	203
ON THE PAPAL COURT AT AVIGNON	217
WRITTEN FROM VAUCLUSE	218
ON LEAVING AVIGNON	218
THOUGHTS IN ABSENCE	218
IN MORTE DI MADONNA LAURA. XXIV	219
IN MORTE DI MADONNA LAURA. LXXIV	219
FOOTNOTES:	220



Page 1

SKETCHES AND STUDIES IN ITALY AND GREECE

RAVENNA

The Emperor Augustus chose Ravenna for one of his two naval stations, and in course of time a new city arose by the sea-shore, which received the name of Portus Classis. Between this harbour and the mother city a third town sprang up, and was called Caesarea. Time and neglect, the ravages of war, and the encroaching powers of Nature have destroyed these settlements, and nothing now remains of the three cities but Ravenna. It would seem that in classical times Ravenna stood, like modern Venice, in the centre of a huge lagune, the fresh waters of the Ronco and the Po mixing with the salt waves of the Adriatic round its very walls. The houses of the city were built on piles; canals instead of streets formed the means of communication, and these were always filled with water artificially conducted from the southern estuary of the Po. Round Ravenna extended a vast morass, for the most part under shallow water, but rising at intervals into low islands like the Lido or Murano or Torcello which surround Venice. These islands were celebrated for their fertility: the vines and fig-trees and pomegranates, springing from a fat and fruitful soil, watered with constant moisture, and fostered by a mild sea-wind and liberal sunshine, yielded crops that for luxuriance and quality surpassed the harvests of any orchards on the mainland. All the conditions of life in old Ravenna seem to have resembled those of modern Venice; the people went about in gondolas, and in the early morning barges laden with fresh fruit or meat and vegetables flocked from all quarters to the city of the sea.[1] Water also had to be procured from the neighbouring shore, for, as Martial says, a well at Ravenna was more valuable than a vineyard. Again, between the city and the mainland ran a long low causeway all across the lagune like that on which the trains now glide into Venice. Strange to say, the air of Ravenna was remarkably salubrious: this fact, and the ease of life that prevailed there, and the security afforded by the situation of the town, rendered it a most desirable retreat for the monarchs of Italy during those troublous times in which the empire nodded to its fall. Honorius retired to its lagunes for safety; Odoacer, who dethroned the last Caesar of the West, succeeded him; and was in turn, supplanted by Theodoric the Ostrogoth. Ravenna, as we see it now, recalls the peaceful and half-Roman rule of the great Gothic king. His palace, his churches, and the mausoleums in which his daughter Amalasantha laid the hero's bones, have survived the sieges of Belisarius and Astolphus, the conquest of Pepin, the bloody quarrels of Iconoclasts with the children of the Roman Church, the mediaeval wars of Italy, the victory of Gaston de Foix, and still stand gorgeous with marbles and mosaics in spite of time and the decay of all around them.



Page 2

As early as the sixth century, the sea had already retreated to such a distance from Ravenna that orchards and gardens were cultivated on the spot where once the galleys of the Caesars rode at anchor. Groves of pines sprang up along the shore, and in their lofty tops the music of the wind moved like the ghost of waves and breakers plunging upon distant sands. This Pinetum stretches along the shore of the Adriatic for about forty miles, forming a belt of variable width between the great marsh and the tumbling sea. From a distance the bare stems and velvet crowns of the pine-trees stand up like palms that cover an oasis on Arabian sands; but at a nearer view the trunks detach themselves from an inferior forest-growth of juniper and thorn and ash and oak, the tall roofs of the stately firs shooting their breadth of sheltering greenery above the lower and less sturdy brushwood. It is hardly possible to imagine a more beautiful and impressive scene than that presented by these long alleys of imperial pines. They grow so thickly one behind another, that we might compare them to the pipes of a great organ, or the pillars of a Gothic church, or the basaltic columns of the Giant's Causeway. Their tops are evergreen and laden with the heavy cones, from which Ravenna draws considerable wealth. Scores of peasants are quartered on the outskirts of the forest, whose business it is to scale the pines and rob them of their fruit at certain seasons of the year. Afterwards they dry the fir-cones in the sun, until the nuts which they contain fall out. The empty husks are sold for firewood, and the kernels in their stony shells reserved for exportation. You may see the peasants, men, women, and boys, sorting them by millions, drying and sifting them upon the open spaces of the wood, and packing them in sacks to send abroad through Italy. The *pinocchi* or kernels of the stone-pine are largely used in cookery, and those of Ravenna are prized for their good quality and aromatic flavour. When roasted or pounded, they taste like a softer and more mealy kind of almonds. The task of gathering this harvest is not a little dangerous. Men have to cut notches in the straight shafts, and having climbed, often to the height of eighty feet, to lean upon the branches, and detach the fir-cones with a pole—and this for every tree. Some lives, they say, are yearly lost in the business.

As may be imagined, the spaces of this great forest form the haunt of innumerable living creatures. Lizards run about by myriads in the grass. Doves coo among the branches of the pines, and nightingales pour their full-throated music all day and night from thickets of white-thorn and acacia. The air is sweet with aromatic scents: the resin of the pine and juniper, the mayflowers and acacia-blossoms, the violets that spring by thousands in the moss, the wild roses and faint honeysuckles which throw fragrant arms from bough to bough of ash or maple, join to make one most delicious perfume. And though



Page 3

the air upon the neighbouring marsh is poisonous, here it is dry, and spreads a genial health. The sea-wind murmuring through these thickets at nightfall or misty sunrise, conveys no fever to the peasants stretched among their flowers. They watch the red rays of sunset flaming through the columns of the leafy hall, and flaring on its fretted rafters of entangled boughs; they see the stars come out, and Hesper gleam, an eye of brightness, among dewy branches; the moon walks silver-footed on the velvet tree-tops, while they sleep beside the camp-fires; fresh morning wakes them to the sound of birds and scent of thyme and twinkling of dewdrops on the grass around. Meanwhile ague, fever, and death have been stalking all night long about the plain, within a few yards of their couch, and not one pestilential breath has reached the charmed precincts of the forest.

You may ride or drive for miles along green aisles between the pines in perfect solitude; and yet the creatures of the wood, the sunlight and the birds, the flowers and tall majestic columns at your side, prevent all sense of loneliness or fear. Huge oxen haunt the wilderness—grey creatures, with mild eyes and spreading horns and stealthy tread. Some are patriarchs of the forest, the fathers and the mothers of many generations who have been carried from their sides to serve in ploughs or waggons on the Lombard plain. Others are yearling calves, intractable and ignorant of labour. In order to subdue them to the yoke, it is requisite to take them very early from their native glades, or else they chafe and pine away with weariness. Then there is a sullen canal, which flows through the forest from the marshes to the sea; it is alive with frogs and newts and snakes. You may see these serpents basking on the surface among thickets of the flowering rush, or coiled about the lily leaves and flowers—lithe monsters, slippery and speckled, the tyrants of the fen.

It is said that when Dante was living at Ravenna he would spend whole days alone among the forest glades, thinking of Florence and her civil wars, and meditating cantos of his poem. Nor have the influences of the pine-wood failed to leave their trace upon his verse. The charm of its summer solitude seems to have sunk into his soul; for when he describes the whispering of winds and singing birds among the boughs of his terrestrial paradise, he says:—

Non pero dal lor esser dritto sparte
Tanto, che gli augelletti per le cime
Lasciasser d' operare ogni lor arte:
Ma con piena letizia l' aure prime,
Cantando, ricevano intra le foglie,
Che tenevan bordone alle sue rime
Tal, qual di ramo in ramo si raccoglie
Per la pineta in sul lito di Chiassi
Quand' Eolo Scirocco fuor discioglie.

Page 4

With these verses in our minds, while wandering down the grassy aisles, beside the waters of the solitary place, we seem to meet that lady singing as she went, and plucking flower by flower, 'like Proserpine when Ceres lost a daughter, and she lost her spring.' There, too, the vision of the griffin and the car, of singing maidens, and of Beatrice descending to the sound of Benedictus and of falling flowers, her flaming robe and mantle green as grass, and veil of white, and olive crown, all flashed upon the poet's inner eye, and he remembered how he bowed before her when a boy. There is yet another passage in which it is difficult to believe that Dante had not the pine-forest in his mind. When Virgil and the poet were waiting in anxiety before the gates of Dis, when the Furies on the wall were tearing their breasts and crying, 'Venga Medusa, e si 'l farem di smalto,' suddenly across the hideous river came a sound like that which whirlwinds make among the shattered branches and bruised stems of forest-trees; and Dante, looking out with fear upon the foam and spray and vapour of the flood, saw thousands of the damned flying before the face of one who forded Styx with feet unwet. 'Like frogs,' he says, 'they fled, who scurry through the water at the sight of their foe, the serpent, till each squats and hides himself close to the ground.' The picture of the storm among the trees might well have occurred to Dante's mind beneath the roof of pine-boughs. Nor is there any place in which the simile of the frogs and water-snake attains such dignity and grandeur. I must confess that till I saw the ponds and marshes of Ravenna, I used to fancy that the comparison was somewhat below the greatness of the subject; but there so grave a note of solemnity and desolation is struck, the scale of Nature is so large, and the serpents coiling in and out among the lily leaves and flowers are so much in their right place, that they suggest a scene by no means unworthy of Dante's conception.

Nor is Dante the only singer who has invested this wood with poetical associations. It is well known that Boccaccio laid his story of 'Honorio' in the pine-forest, and every student of English literature must be familiar with the noble tale in verse which Dryden has founded on this part of the 'Decameron.' We all of us have followed Theodore, and watched with him the tempest swelling in the grove, and seen the hapless ghost pursued by demon hounds and hunter down the glades. This story should be read while storms are gathering upon the distant sea, or thunderclouds descending from the Apennines, and when the pines begin to rock and surge beneath the stress of labouring winds. Then runs the sudden flash of lightning like a rapier through the boughs, the rain streams hissing down, and the thunder 'breaks like a whole sea overhead.'

Page 5

With the Pinetum the name of Byron will be for ever associated. During his two years' residence in Ravenna he used to haunt its wilderness, riding alone or in the company of friends. The inscription placed above the entrance to the house he occupied alludes to it as one of the objects which principally attracted the poet to the neighbourhood of Ravenna: 'Impaziente di visitare l' antica selva, che inspiro gia il Divino e Giovanni Boccaccio.' We know, however, that a more powerful attraction, in the person of the Countess Guiccioli, maintained his fidelity to 'that place of old renown, once in the Adrian Sea, Ravenna.'

Between the Bosco, as the people of Ravenna call this pine-wood, and the city, the marsh stretches for a distance of about three miles. It is a plain intersected by dykes and ditches, and mapped out into innumerable rice-fields. For more than half a year it lies under water, and during the other months exhales a pestilential vapour, which renders it as uninhabitable as the Roman Campagna; yet in springtime this dreary flat is even beautiful. The young blades of the rice shoot up above the water, delicately green and tender. The ditches are lined with flowering rush and golden flags, while white and yellow lilies sleep in myriads upon the silent pools. Tamarisks wave their pink and silver tresses by the road, and wherever a plot of mossy earth emerges from the marsh, it gleams with purple orchises and flaming marigolds; but the soil beneath is so treacherous and spongy, that these splendid blossoms grow like flowers in dreams or fairy stories. You try in vain to pick them; they elude your grasp, and flourish in security beyond the reach of arm or stick.

Such is the sight of the old town of Classis. Not a vestige of the Roman city remains, not a dwelling or a ruined tower, nothing but the ancient church of S. Apollinare in Classe. Of all desolate buildings this is the most desolate. Not even the deserted grandeur of S. Paolo beyond the walls of Rome can equal it. Its bare round campanile gazes at the sky, which here vaults only sea and plain—a perfect dome, star-spangled like the roof of Galla Placidia's tomb. Ravenna lies low to west, the pine-wood stretches away in long monotony to east. There is nothing else to be seen except the spreading marsh, bounded by dim snowy Alps and purple Apennines, so very far away that the level rack of summer clouds seem more attainable and real. What sunsets and sunrises that tower must see; what glaring lurid afterglows in August, when the red light scowls upon the pestilential fen; what sheets of sullen vapour rolling over it in autumn; what breathless heats, and rainclouds big with thunder; what silences; what unimpeded blasts of winter winds! One old monk tends this deserted spot. He has the huge church, with its echoing aisles and marble columns and giddy bell-tower and cloistered corridors, all to himself. At rare intervals, priests from Ravenna come to sing some special



Page 6

mass at these cold altars; pious folk make vows to pray upon their mouldy steps and kiss the relics which are shown on great occasions. But no one stays; they hurry, after muttering their prayers, from the fever-stricken spot, reserving their domestic pieties and customary devotions for the brighter and newer chapels of the fashionable churches in Ravenna. So the old monk is left alone to sweep the marsh water from his church floor, and to keep the green moss from growing too thickly on its monuments. A clammy conferva covers everything except the mosaics upon tribune, roof, and clerestory, which defy the course of age. Christ on His throne *sedet aeternumque sedebit*: the saints around him glitter with their pitiless uncompromising eyes and wooden gestures, as if twelve centuries had not passed over them, and they were nightmares only dreamed last night, and rooted in a sick man's memory. For those gaunt and solemn forms there is no change of life or end of days. No fever touches them; no dampness of the wind and rain loosens their firm cement. They stare with senseless faces in bitter mockery of men who live and die and moulder away beneath. Their poor old guardian told us it was a weary life. He has had the fever three times, and does not hope to survive many more Septembers. The very water that he drinks is brought him from Ravenna; for the vast fen, though it pours its overflow upon the church floor, and spreads like a lake around, is death to drink. The monk had a gentle woman's voice and mild brown eyes. What terrible crime had consigned him to this living tomb? For what past sorrow is he weary of his life? What anguish of remorse has driven him to such a solitude? Yet he looked simple and placid; his melancholy was subdued and calm, as if life were over for him, and he were waiting for death to come with a friend's greeting upon noiseless wings some summer night across the fen-lands in a cloud of soft destructive fever-mist.

Another monument upon the plain is worthy of a visit. It is the so-called Colonna dei Francesi, a *cinquecento* pillar of Ionic design, erected on the spot where Gaston de Foix expired victorious after one of the bloodiest battles ever fought. The Ronco, a straight sluggish stream, flows by the lonely spot; mason bees have covered with laborious stucco-work the scrolls and leafage of its ornaments, confounding epitaphs and trophies under their mud houses. A few cypress-trees stand round it, and the dogs and chickens of a neighbouring farmyard make it their rendezvous. Those mason bees are like posterity, which settles down upon the ruins of a Baalbec or a Luxor, setting up its tents, and filling the fair spaces of Hellenic or Egyptian temples with clay hovels. Nothing differs but the scale; and while the bees content themselves with filling up and covering, man destroys the silent places of the past which he appropriates.

Page 7

In Ravenna itself, perhaps what strikes us most is the abrupt transition everywhere discernible from monuments of vast antiquity to buildings of quite modern date. There seems to be no interval between the marbles and mosaics of Justinian or Theodoric and the insignificant frippery of the last century. The churches of Ravenna—S. Vitale, S. Apollinare, and the rest—are too well known, and have been too often described by enthusiastic antiquaries, to need a detailed notice in this place. Every one is aware that the ecclesiastical customs and architecture of the early Church can be studied in greater perfection here than elsewhere. Not even the basilicas and mosaics of Rome, nor those of Palermo and Monreale, are equal for historical interest to those of Ravenna. Yet there is not one single church which remains entirely unaltered and unspoiled. The imagination has to supply the atrium or outer portico from one building, the vaulted baptistery with its marble font from another, the pulpits and amboes from a third the tribune from a fourth, the round brick bell-tower from a fifth, and then to cover all the concave roofs and chapel walls with grave and glittering mosaics.

There is nothing more beautiful in decorative art than the mosaics of such tiny buildings as the tomb of Galla Placidia or the chapel of the Bishop's Palace. They are like jewelled and enamelled cases; not an inch of wall can be seen which is not covered with elaborate patterns of the brightest colours. Tall date-palms spring from the floor with fruit and birds among their branches, and between them stand the pillars and apostles of the Church. In the spandrels and lunettes above the arches and the windows angels fly with white extended wings. On every vacant place are scrolls and arabesques of foliage,—birds and beasts, doves drinking from the vase, and peacocks spreading gorgeous plumes—a maze of green and gold and blue. Overhead, the vault is powdered with stars gleaming upon the deepest azure, and in the midst is set an aureole embracing the majestic head of Christ, or else the symbol of the sacred fish, or the hand of the Creator pointing from a cloud. In Galla Placidia's tomb these storied vaults spring above the sarcophagi of empresses and emperors, each lying in the place where he was laid more than twelve centuries ago. The light which struggles through the narrow windows serves to harmonise the brilliant hues and make a gorgeous gloom.

Besides these more general and decorative subjects, many of the churches are adorned with historical mosaics, setting forth the Bible narrative or incidents from the life of Christian emperors and kings. In S. Apollinare Nuovo there is a most interesting treble series of such mosaics extending over both walls of the nave. On the left hand, as we enter, we see the town of Classis; on the right the palace of Theodoric, its doors and loggie rich with curtains, and its friezes blazing with coloured ornaments. From the city

Page 8

gate of Classis virgins issue, and proceed in a long line until they reach Madonna seated on a throne, with Christ upon her knees, and the three kings in adoration at her feet. From Theodoric's palace door a similar procession of saints and martyrs carry us to Christ surrounded by archangels. Above this double row of saints and virgins stand the fathers and prophets of the Church, and highest underneath the roof are pictures from the life of our Lord. It will be remembered in connection with these subjects that the women sat upon the left and the men upon the right side of the church. Above the tribune, at the east end of the church, it was customary to represent the Creative Hand, or the monogram of the Saviour, or the head of Christ with the letters A and [Greek O]. Moses and Elijah frequently stand on either side to symbolise the transfiguration, while the saints and bishops specially connected with the church appeared upon a lower row. Then on the side walls were depicted such subjects as Justinian and Theodora among their courtiers, or the grant of the privileges of the church to its first founder from imperial patrons, with symbols of the old Hebraic ritual—Abel's lamb, the sacrifice of Isaac, Melchisedec's offering of bread and wine,—which were regarded as the types of Christian ceremonies. The baptistery was adorned with appropriate mosaics representing Christ's baptism in Jordan.

Generally speaking, one is struck with the dignity of these designs, and especially with the combined majesty and sweetness of the face of Christ. The sense for harmony of hue displayed in their composition is marvellous. It would be curious to trace in detail the remnants of classical treatment which may be discerned—Jordan, for instance, pours his water from an urn like a river-god crowned with sedge—or to show what points of ecclesiastical tradition are established these ancient monuments. We find Mariolatry already imminent, the names of the three kings, Kaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, the four evangelists as we now recognise them, and many of the rites and vestments which Ritualists of all denominations regard with superstitious reverence.

There are two sepulchral monuments in Ravenna which cannot be passed over unnoticed. The one is that of Theodoric the Goth, crowned by its semisphere of solid stone, a mighty tomb, well worthy of the conqueror and king. It stands in a green field, surrounded by acacias, where the nightingales sing ceaselessly in May. The mason bees have covered it, and the water has invaded its sepulchral vaults. In spite of many trials, it seems that human art is unable to pump out the pond and clear the frogs and efts from the chamber where the great Goth was laid by Amalasantha.



Page 9

The other is Dante's temple, with its basrelief and withered garlands. The story of his burial, and of the discovery of his real tomb, is fresh in the memory of every one. But the 'little cupola, more neat than solemn,' of which Lord Byron speaks, will continue to be the goal of many a pilgrimage. For myself—though I remember Chateaubriand's bareheaded genuflection on its threshold, Alfieri's passionate prostration at the altar-tomb, and Byron's offering of poems on the poet's shrine—I confess that a single canto of the 'Inferno,' a single passage of the 'Vita Nuova,' seems more full of soul-stirring associations than the place where, centuries ago, the mighty dust was laid. It is the spirit that lives and makes alive. And Dante's spirit seems more present with us under the pine-branches of the Bosco than beside his real or fancied tomb. 'He is risen,'—'Lo, I am with you alway'—these are the words that ought to haunt us in a burying-ground. There is something affected and self-conscious in overpowering grief or enthusiasm or humiliation at a tomb.

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RIMINI

SIGISMONDO PANDOLFO MALATESTA AND LEO BATTISTA ALBERTI

Rimini is a city of about 18,000 souls, famous for its Stabilimento de' Bagni and its antiquities, seated upon the coast of the Adriatic, a little to the south-east of the world-historical Rubicon. It is our duty to mention the baths first among its claims to distinction, since the prosperity and cheerfulness of the little town depend on them in a great measure. But visitors from the north will fly from these, to marvel at the bridge which Augustus built and Tiberius completed, and which still spans the Marecchia with five gigantic arches of white Istrian limestone, as solidly as if it had not borne the tramlings of at least three conquests. The triumphal arch, too, erected in honour of Augustus, is a notable monument of Roman architecture. Broad, ponderous, substantial, tufted here and there with flowering weeds, and surmounted with mediaeval machicolations, proving it to have sometimes stood for city gate or fortress, it contrasts most favourably with the slight and somewhat gimcrack arch of Trajan in the sister city of Ancona. Yet these remains of the imperial pontifices, mighty and interesting as they are, sink into comparative insignificance beside the one great wonder of Rimini, the cathedral remodelled for Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta by Leo Battista Alberti in 1450. This strange church, one of the earliest extant buildings in which the Neopaganism of the Renaissance showed itself in full force, brings together before our memory two men who might be chosen as typical in their contrasted characters of the transitional age which gave them birth.

No one with any tincture of literary knowledge is ignorant of the fame at least of the great Malatesta family—the house of the Wrongheads, as they were rightly called by

some prevision of their future part in Lombard history. The readers of the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth cantos of the 'Inferno' have all heard of



Page 10

E il mastin vecchio e il nuovo da Verucchio
Che fecer di Montagna il mal governo,

while the story of Francesca da Polenta, who was wedded to the hunchback Giovanni Malatesta and murdered by him with her lover Paolo, is known not merely to students of Dante, but to readers of Byron and Leigh Hunt, to admirers of Flaxman, Ary Scheffer, Dore—to all, in fact, who have of art and letters any love.

The history of these Malatesti, from their first establishment under Otho III. as lieutenants for the Empire in the Marches of Ancona, down to their final subjugation by the Papacy in the age of the Renaissance, is made up of all the vicissitudes which could befall a mediaeval Italian despotism. Acquiring an unlawful right over the towns of Rimini, Cesena, Sogliano, Ghiacciuolo, they ruled their petty principalities like tyrants by the help of the Guelf and Ghibelline factions, inclining to the one or the other as it suited their humour or their interest, wrangling among themselves, transmitting the succession of their dynasty through bastards and by deeds of force, quarrelling with their neighbours the Counts of Urbino, alternately defying and submitting to the Papal legates in Romagna, serving as condottieri in the wars of the Visconti and the state of Venice, and by their restlessness and genius for military intrigues contributing in no slight measure to the general disturbance of Italy. The Malatesti were a race of strongly marked character: more, perhaps, than any other house of Italian tyrants, they combined for generations those qualities of the fox and the lion, which Machiavelli thought indispensable to a successful despot. Son after son, brother with brother, they continued to be fierce and valiant soldiers, cruel in peace, hardy in war, but treasonable and suspicious in all transactions that could not be settled by the sword. Want of union, with them as with the Baglioni and many other of the minor noble families in Italy, prevented their founding a substantial dynasty. Their power, based on force, was maintained by craft and crime, and transmitted through tortuous channels by intrigue. While false in their dealings with the world at large, they were diabolical in the perfidy with which they treated one another. No feudal custom, no standard of hereditary right, ruled the succession in their family. Therefore the ablest Malatesta for the moment clutched what he could of the domains that owned his house for masters. Partitions among sons or brothers, mutually hostile and suspicious, weakened the whole stock. Yet they were great enough to hold their own for centuries among the many tyrants who infested Lombardy. That the other princely families of Romagna, Emilia, and the March were in the same state of internal discord and dismemberment, was probably one reason why the Malatesti stood their ground so firmly as they did.



Page 11

So far as Rimini is concerned, the house of Malatesta culminated in Sigismondo Pandolfo, son of Gian Galeazzo Visconti's general, the perfidious Pandolfo. It was he who built the Rocca, or castle of the despots, which stands a little way outside the town, commanding a fair view of Apennine tossed hill-tops and broad Lombard plain, and who remodelled the Cathedral of S. Francis on a plan suggested by the greatest genius of the age. Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta was one of the strangest products of the earlier Renaissance. To enumerate the crimes which he committed within the sphere of his own family, mysterious and inhuman outrages which render the tale of the Cenci credible, would violate the decencies of literature. A thoroughly bestial nature gains thus much with posterity that its worst qualities must be passed by in silence. It is enough to mention that he murdered three wives in succession,[2] Bussoni di Carmagnuola, Guinipera d'Este, and Polissena Sforza, on various pretexts of infidelity, and carved horns upon his own tomb with this fantastic legend underneath:—

Porto le corna ch' ognuno le vede,
E tal le porta che non se lo crede.

He died in wedlock with the beautiful and learned Isotta degli Atti, who had for some time been his mistress. But, like most of the Malatesti, he left no legitimate offspring. Throughout his life he was distinguished for bravery and cunning, for endurance of fatigue and rapidity of action, for an almost fretful rashness in the execution of his schemes, and for a character terrible in its violence. He was acknowledged as a great general; yet nothing succeeded with him. The long warfare which he carried on against the Duke of Montefeltro ended in his discomfiture. Having begun by defying the Holy See, he was impeached at Rome for heresy, parricide, incest, adultery, rape, and sacrilege, burned in effigy by Pope Pius II., and finally restored to the bosom of the Church, after suffering the despoliation of almost all his territories, in 1463. The occasion on which this fierce and turbulent despiser of laws human and divine was forced to kneel as a penitent before the Papal legate in the gorgeous temple dedicated to his own pride, in order that the ban of excommunication might be removed from Rimini, was one of those petty triumphs, interesting chiefly for their picturesqueness, by which the Popes confirmed their questionable rights over the cities of Romagna. Sigismondo, shorn of his sovereignty, took the command of the Venetian troops against the Turks in the Morea, and returned in 1465, crowned with laurels, to die at Rimini in the scene of his old splendour.

Page 12

A very characteristic incident belongs to this last act of his life. Dissolute, treacherous, and inhuman as he was, the tyrant of Rimini had always encouraged literature, and delighted in the society of artists. He who could brook no contradiction from a prince or soldier, allowed the pedantic scholars of the sixteenth century to dictate to him in matters of taste, and sat with exemplary humility at the feet of Latinists like Porcellio, Basinio, and Trebanio. Valturio, the engineer, and Alberti, the architect, were his familiar friends; and the best hours of his life were spent in conversation with these men. Now that he found himself upon the sacred soil of Greece, he was determined not to return to Italy empty-handed. Should he bring manuscripts or marbles, precious vases or inscriptions in half-legible Greek character? These relics were greedily sought for by the potentates of Italian cities; and no doubt Sigismondo enriched his library with some such treasures. But he obtained a nobler prize—nothing less than the body of a saint of scholarship, the authentic bones of the great Platonist, Gemisthus Pletho.[3] These he exhumed from their Greek grave and caused them to be deposited in a stone sarcophagus outside the cathedral of his building in Rimini. The Venetians, when they stole the body of S. Mark from Alexandria, were scarcely more pleased than was Sigismondo with the acquisition of this Father of the Neopagan faith. Upon the tomb we still may read this legend: 'Jemisthii Bizantii philosophi sua temp principis reliquum Sig. Pan. Mal. Pan. F. belli Pelop adversus Turcor regem Imp ob ingentem eruditorum quo flagrat amorem huc afferendum introque mittendum curavit MCCCCLXVI.' Of the Latinity of the inscription much cannot be said; but it means that 'Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, having served as general against the Turks in the Morea, induced by the great love with which he burns for all learned men, brought and placed here the remains of Gemisthus of Byzantium, the prince of the philosophers of his day.'

Sigismondo's portrait, engraved on medals, and sculptured upon every frieze and point of vantage in the Cathedral of Rimini, well denotes the man. His face is seen in profile. The head, which is low and flat above the forehead, rising swiftly backward from the crown, carries a thick bushy shock of hair curling at the ends, such as the Italians call a *zazzera*. The eye is deeply sunk, with long venomous flat eyelids, like those which Leonardo gives to his most wicked faces. The nose is long and crooked, curved like a vulture's over a petulant mouth, with lips deliberately pressed together, as though it were necessary to control some nervous twitching. The cheek is broad, and its bone is strongly marked. Looking at these features in repose, we cannot but picture to our fancy what expression they might assume under a sudden fit of fury, when the sinews of the face were contracted with quivering spasms, and the lips writhed in sympathy with knit forehead and wrinkled eyelids.

Page 13

Allusion has been made to the Cathedral of S. Francis at Rimini, as the great ornament of the town, and the chief monument of Sigismondo's fame. It is here that all the Malatesti lie. Here too is the chapel consecrated to Isotta, 'Divae Isottae Sacrum;' and the tombs of the Malatesta ladies, 'Malatestorum domus heroidum sepulchrum;' and Sigismondo's own grave with the cuckold's horns and scornful epitaph. Nothing but the fact that the church is duly dedicated to S. Francis, and that its outer shell of classic marble encases an old Gothic edifice, remains to remind us that it is a Christian place of worship.[4] It has no sanctity, no spirit of piety. The pride of the tyrant whose legend—'Sigismundus Pandulphus Malatesta Pan. F. Fecit Anno Gratiae MCCCCL'—occupies every arch and stringcourse of the architecture, and whose coat-of-arms and portrait in medallion, with his cipher and his emblems of an elephant and a rose, are wrought in every piece of sculptured work throughout the building, seems so to fill this house of prayer that there is no room left for God. Yet the Cathedral of Rimini remains a monument of first-rate importance for all students who seek to penetrate the revived Paganism of the fifteenth century. It serves also to bring a far more interesting Italian of that period than the tyrant of Rimini himself, before our notice.

In the execution of his design, Sigismondo received the assistance of one of the most remarkable men of this or any other age. Leo Battista Alberti, a scion of the noble Florentine house of that name, born during the exile of his parents, and educated in the Venetian territory, was endowed by nature with aptitudes, faculties, and sensibilities so varied, as to deserve the name of universal genius. Italy in the Renaissance period was rich in natures of this sort, to whom nothing that is strange or beautiful seemed unfamiliar, and who, gifted with a kind of divination, penetrated the secrets of the world by sympathy. To Pico della Mirandola, Lionardo da Vinci, and Michel Agnolo Buonarroti may be added Leo Battista Alberti. That he achieved less than his great compeers, and that he now exists as the shadow of a mighty name, was the effect of circumstances. He came half a century too early into the world, and worked as a pioneer rather than a settler of the realm which Lionardo ruled as his demesne. Very early in his boyhood Alberti showed the versatility of his talents. The use of arms, the management of horses, music, painting, modelling for sculpture, mathematics, classical and modern literature, physical science as then comprehended, and all the bodily exercises proper to the estate of a young nobleman, were at his command. His biographer asserts that he was never idle, never subject to ennui or fatigue. He used to say that books at times gave him the same pleasure as brilliant jewels or perfumed flowers: hunger and sleep could not keep him from them then. At other times the letters on the page appeared to



Page 14

him like twining and contorted scorpions, so that he preferred to gaze on anything but written scrolls. He would then turn to music or painting, or to the physical sports in which he excelled. The language in which this alternation of passion and disgust for study is expressed, bears on it the stamp of Alberti's peculiar temperament, his fervid and imaginative genius, instinct with subtle sympathies and strange repugnances. Flying from his study, he would then betake himself to the open air. No one surpassed him in running, in wrestling, in the force with which he cast his javelin or discharged his arrows. So sure was his aim and so skilful his cast, that he could fling a farthing from the pavement of the square, and make it ring against a church roof far above. When he chose to jump, he put his feet together and bounded over the shoulders of men standing erect upon the ground. On horseback he maintained perfect equilibrium, and seemed incapable of fatigue. The most restive and vicious animals trembled under him and became like lambs. There was a kind of magnetism in the man. We read, besides these feats of strength and skill, that he took pleasure in climbing mountains, for no other purpose apparently than for the joy of being close to nature.

In this, as in many other of his instincts, Alberti was before his age. To care for the beauties of landscape unadorned by art, and to sympathise with sublime or rugged scenery, was not in the spirit of the Renaissance. Humanity occupied the attention of poets and painters; and the age was yet far distant when the pantheistic feeling for the world should produce the art of Wordsworth and of Turner. Yet a few great natures even then began to comprehend the charm and mystery which the Greeks had imaged in their Pan, the sense of an all-pervasive spirit in wild places, the feeling of a hidden want, the invisible tie which makes man a part of rocks and woods and streams around him. Petrarch had already ascended the summit of Mont Ventoux, to meditate, with an exaltation of the soul he scarcely understood, upon the scene spread at his feet and above his head. Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini delighted in wild places for no mere pleasure of the chase, but for the joy he took in communing with nature. How St. Francis found God in the sun and the air, the water and the stars, we know by his celebrated hymn; and of Dante's acute observation, every canto of the 'Divine Comedy' is witness.

Leo Alberti was touched in spirit by even a deeper and a stranger pathos than any of these men: 'In the early spring, when he beheld the meadows and hills covered with flowers, and saw the trees and plants of all kinds bearing promise of fruit, his heart became exceeding sorrowful; and when in autumn he looked on fields heavy with harvest and orchards apple-laden, he felt such grief that many even saw him weep for the sadness of his soul.' It would seem that he scarcely understood the source of this sweet trouble: for at such times he compared the sloth and inutility of men with the industry and fertility of nature; as though this were the secret of his melancholy. A poet of our century has noted the same stirring of the spirit, and has striven to account for it:

Page 15

Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Both Alberti and Tennyson have connected the *mal du pays* of the human soul for that ancient country of its birth, the mild Saturnian earth from which we sprang, with a sense of loss. It is the waste of human energy that affects Alberti; the waste of human life touches the modern poet. Yet both perhaps have scarcely interpreted their own spirit; for is not the true source of tears deeper and more secret? Man is a child of nature in the simplest sense; and the stirrings of the secular breasts that gave him suck, and on which he even now must hang, have potent influences over his emotions.

Of Alberti's extraordinary sensitiveness to all such impressions many curious tales are told. The sight of refulgent jewels, of flowers, and of fair landscapes, had the same effect upon his nerves as the sound of the Dorian mood upon the youths whom Pythagoras cured of passion by music. He found in them an anodyne for pain, a restoration from sickness. Like Walt Whitman, who adheres to nature by closer and more vital sympathy than any other poet of the modern world, Alberti felt the charm of excellent old age no less than that of florid youth. 'On old men gifted with a noble presence and hale and vigorous, he gazed again and again, and said that he revered in them the delights of nature (*naturae delicias*).' Beasts and birds and all living creatures moved him to admiration for the grace with which they had been gifted, each in his own kind. It is even said that he composed a funeral oration for a dog which he had loved and which died.

To this sensibility for all fair things in nature, Alberti added the charm of a singularly sweet temper and graceful conversation. The activity of his mind, which was always being exercised on subjects of grave speculation, removed him from the noise and bustle of commonplace society. He was somewhat silent, inclined to solitude, and of a pensive countenance; yet no man found him difficult of access: his courtesy was exquisite, and among familiar friends he was noted for the flashes of a delicate and subtle wit. Collections were made of his apophthegms by friends, and some are recorded by his anonymous biographer.[5] Their finer perfume, as almost always happens with good sayings which do not contain the full pith of a proverb, but owe their force, in part at least, to the personality of their author, and to the happy moment of their production, has evanesced. Here, however, is one which seems still to bear the impress of Alberti's genius: 'Gold is the soul of labour, and labour the slave of pleasure.' Of women he used to say that their inconstancy was an antidote to their falseness; for if a woman could but persevere in what she undertook, all the fair works of men would be ruined. One of his strongest



Page 16

moral sentences is aimed at envy, from which he suffered much in his own life, and against which he guarded with a curious amount of caution. His own family grudged the distinction which his talents gained for him, and a dark story is told of a secret attempt made by them to assassinate him through his servants. Alberti met these ignoble jealousies with a stately calm and a sweet dignity of demeanour, never condescending to accuse his relatives, never seeking to retaliate, but acting always for the honour of his illustrious house. In the same spirit of generosity he refused to enter into wordy warfare with detractors and calumniators, sparing the reputation even of his worst enemy when chance had placed him in his power. This moderation both of speech and conduct was especially distinguished in an age which tolerated the fierce invectives of Filelfo, and applauded the vindictive courage of Cellini. To money Alberti showed a calm indifference. He committed his property to his friends and shared with them in common. Nor was he less careless about vulgar fame, spending far more pains in the invention of machinery and the discovery of laws, than in their publication to the world. His service was to knowledge, not to glory. Self-control was another of his eminent qualities. With the natural impetuosity of a large heart, and the vivacity of a trained athlete, he yet never allowed himself to be subdued by anger or by sensual impulses, but took pains to preserve his character unstained and dignified before the eyes of men. A story is told of him which may remind us of Goethe's determination to overcome his giddiness. In his youth his head was singularly sensitive to changes of temperature; but by gradual habituation he brought himself at last to endure the extremes of heat and cold bareheaded. In like manner he had a constitutional disgust for onions and honey; so powerful, that the very sight of these things made him sick. Yet by constantly viewing and touching what was disagreeable, he conquered these dislikes; and proved that men have a complete mastery over what is merely instinctive in their nature. His courage corresponded to his splendid physical development. When a boy of fifteen, he severely wounded himself in the foot. The gash had to be probed and then sewn up. Alberti not only bore the pain of this operation without a groan, but helped the surgeon with his own hands; and effected a cure of the fever which succeeded by the solace of singing to his cithern. For music he had a genius of the rarest order; and in painting he is said to have achieved success. Nothing, however, remains of his work and from what Vasari says of it, we may fairly conclude that he gave less care to the execution of finished pictures, than to drawings subsidiary to architectural and mechanical designs. His biographer relates that when he had completed a painting, he called children and asked them what it meant. If they did not know, he reckoned it a failure. He was



Page 17

also in the habit of painting from memory. While at Venice, he put on canvas the faces of friends at Florence whom he had not seen for months. That the art of painting was subservient in his estimation to mechanics, is indicated by what we hear about the camera, in which he showed landscapes by day and the revolutions of the stars by night, so lively drawn that the spectators were affected with amazement. The semi-scientific impulse to extend man's mastery over nature, the magician's desire to penetrate secrets, which so powerfully influenced the development of Lionardo's genius, seems to have overcome the purely aesthetic instincts of Alberti, so that he became in the end neither a great artist like Raphael, nor a great discoverer like Galileo, but rather a clairvoyant to whom the miracles of nature and of art lie open.

After the first period of youth was over, Leo Battista Alberti devoted his great faculties and all his wealth of genius to the study of the law—then, as now, the quicksand of the noblest natures. The industry with which he applied himself to the civil and ecclesiastical codes broke his health. For recreation he composed a Latin comedy called 'Philodoxeos,' which imposed upon the judgment of scholars, and was ascribed as a genuine antique to Lepidus, the comic poet. Feeling stronger, Alberti returned at the age of twenty to his law studies, and pursued them in the teeth of disadvantages. His health was still uncertain, and the fortune of an exile reduced him to the utmost want. It was no wonder that under these untoward circumstances even his Herculean strength gave way. Emaciated and exhausted, he lost the clearness of his eyesight, and became subject to arterial disturbances, which filled his ears with painful sounds. This nervous illness is not dissimilar to that which Rousseau describes in the confessions of his youth. In vain, however, his physicians warned Alberti of impending peril. A man of so much stanchness, accustomed to control his nature with an iron will, is not ready to accept advice. Alberti persevered in his studies, until at last the very seat of intellect was invaded. His memory began to fail him for names, while he still retained with wonderful accuracy whatever he had seen with his eyes. It was now impossible to think of law as a profession. Yet since he could not live without severe mental exercise, he had recourse to studies which tax the verbal memory less than the intuitive faculties of the reason. Physics and mathematics became his chief resource; and he devoted his energies to literature. His 'Treatise on the Family' may be numbered among the best of those compositions on social and speculative subjects in which the Italians of the Renaissance sought to rival Cicero. His essays on the arts are mentioned by Vasari with sincere approbation. Comedies, interludes, orations, dialogues, and poems flowed with abundance from his facile pen. Some were written in Latin, which he commanded more than fairly; some in the Tuscan tongue, of which owing to the long exile of his family in Lombardy, he is said to have been less a master. It was owing to this youthful illness, from which apparently his constitution never wholly recovered, that Alberti's genius was directed to architecture.



Page 18

Through his friendship with Flavio Biondo, the famous Roman antiquary, Alberti received an introduction to Nicholas V. at the time when this, the first great Pope of the Renaissance, was engaged in rebuilding the palaces and fortifications of Rome. Nicholas discerned the genius of the man, and employed him as his chief counsellor in all matters of architecture. When the Pope died, he was able, while reciting his long Latin will upon his deathbed, to boast that he had restored the Holy See to its due dignity, and the Eternal City to the splendour worthy of the seat of Christendom. The accomplishment of the second part of his work he owed to the genius of Alberti. After doing thus much for Rome under Thomas of Sarzana, and before beginning to beautify Florence at the instance of the Rucellai family, Alberti entered the service of the Malatesta, and undertook to remodel the Cathedral of S. Francis at Rimini. He found it a plain Gothic structure with apse and side chapels. Such churches are common enough in Italy, where pointed architecture never developed its true character of complexity and richness, but was doomed to the vast vacuity exemplified in S. Petronio of Bologna. He left it a strange medley of mediaeval and Renaissance work, a symbol of that dissolving scene in the world's pantomime, when the spirit of classic art, as yet but little comprehended, was encroaching on the early Christian taste. Perhaps the mixture of styles so startling in S. Francesco ought not to be laid to the charge of Alberti, who had to execute the task of turning a Gothic into a classic building. All that he could do was to alter the whole exterior of the church, by affixing a screen-work of Roman arches and Corinthian pilasters, so as to hide the old design and yet to leave the main features of the fabric, the windows and doors especially, *in statu quo*. With the interior he dealt upon the same general principle, by not disturbing its structure, while he covered every available square inch of surface with decorations alien to the Gothic manner. Externally, S. Francesco is perhaps the most original and graceful of the many attempts made by Italian builders to fuse the mediaeval and the classic styles. For Alberti attempted nothing less. A century elapsed before Palladio, approaching the problem from a different point of view, restored the antique in its purity, and erected in the Palazzo della Ragione of Vicenza an almost unique specimen of resuscitated Roman art.

Internally, the beauty of the church is wholly due to its exquisite wall-ornaments. These consist for the most part of low reliefs in a soft white stone, many of them thrown out upon a blue ground in the style of Della Robbia. Allegorical figures designed with the purity of outline we admire in Botticelli, draperies that Burne-Jones might copy, troops of singing boys in the manner of Donatello, great angels traced upon the stone so delicately that they seem to be rather drawn than sculptured, statuettes in niches, personifications

Page 19

of all arts and sciences alternating with half-bestial shapes of satyrs and sea-children:—such are the forms which fill the spaces of the chapel walls, and climb the pilasters, and fret the arches, in such abundance that had the whole church been finished as it was designed, it would have presented one splendid though bizarre effect of incrustation. Heavy screens of Verona marble, emblazoned in open arabesques with the ciphers of Sigismondo and Isotta, with coats-of-arms, emblems, and medallion portraits, shut the chapels from the nave. Who produced all this sculpture it is difficult to say. Some of it is very good: much is indifferent. We may hazard the opinion that, besides Bernardo Ciuffagni, of whom Vasari speaks, some pupils of Donatello and Benedetto da Majano worked at it. The influence of the sculptors of Florence is everywhere perceptible.

Whatever be the merit of these reliefs, there is no doubt that they fairly represent one of the most interesting moments in the history of modern art. Gothic inspiration had failed; the early Tuscan style of the Pisani had been worked out; Michelangelo was yet far distant, and the abundance of classic models had not overwhelmed originality. The sculptors of the school of Ghiberti and Donatello, who are represented in this church, were essentially pictorial, preferring low to high relief, and relief in general to detached figures. Their style, like the style of Boiardo in poetry, of Botticelli in painting, is specific to Italy in the middle of the fifteenth century. Mediaeval standards of taste were giving way to classical, Christian sentiment to Pagan; yet the imitation of the antique had not been carried so far as to efface the spontaneity of the artist, and enough remained of Christian feeling to tinge the fancy with a grave and sweet romance. The sculptor had the skill and mastery to express his slightest shade of thought with freedom, spirit, and precision. Yet his work showed no sign of conventionality, no adherence to prescribed rules. Every outline, every fold of drapery, every attitude was pregnant, to the artist's own mind at any rate, with meaning. In spite of its symbolism, what he wrought was never mechanically figurative, but gifted with the independence of its own beauty, vital with an inbreathed spirit of life. It was a happy moment, when art had reached consciousness, and the artist had not yet become self-conscious. The hand and the brain then really worked together for the procreation of new forms of grace, not for the repetition of old models, or for the invention of the strange and startling. 'Delicate, sweet, and captivating,' are good adjectives to express the effect produced upon the mind by the contemplation even of the average work of this period.



Page 20

To study the flowing lines of the great angels traced upon the walls of the Chapel of S. Sigismund in the Cathedral of Rimini, to follow the undulations of their drapery that seems to float, to feel the dignified urbanity of all their gestures, is like listening to one of those clear early Italian compositions for the voice, which surpasses in suavity of tone and grace of movement all that Music in her full-grown vigour has produced. There is indeed something infinitely charming in the crepuscular moments of the human mind. Whether it be the rather loveliness of an art still immature, or the beauty of art upon the wane—whether, in fact, the twilight be of morning or of evening, we find in the masterpieces of such periods a placid calm and chastened pathos, as of a spirit self-withdrawn from vulgar cares, which in the full light of meridian splendour is lacking. In the Church of S. Francesco at Rimini the tempered clearness of the dawn is just about to broaden into day.

* * * * *

MAY IN UMBRIA

FROM ROME TO TERNI

We left Rome in clear sunset light. The Alban Hills defined themselves like a cameo of amethyst upon a pale blue distance; and over the Sabine Mountains soared immeasurable moulded domes of alabaster thunderclouds, casting deep shadows, purple and violet, across the slopes of Tivoli. To westward the whole sky was lucid, like some half-transparent topaz, flooded with slowly yellowing sunbeams. The Campagna has often been called a garden of wild-flowers. Just now poppy and aster, gladiolus and thistle, embroider it with patterns infinite and intricate beyond the power of art. They have already mown the hay in part; and the billowy tracts of greyish green, where no flowers are now in bloom, supply a restful groundwork to those brilliant patches of diapered *fioriture*. These are like praying-carpets spread for devotees upon the pavement of a mosque whose roof is heaven. In the level light the scythes of the mowers flash as we move past. From their bronzed foreheads the men toss masses of dark curls. Their muscular flanks and shoulders sway sideways from firm yet pliant reins. On one hill, fronting the sunset, there stands a herd of some thirty huge grey oxen, feeding and raising their heads to look at us, with just a flush of crimson on their horns and dewlaps. This is the scale of Mason's and of Costa's colouring. This is the breadth and magnitude of Rome.

Thus, through dells of ilex and oak, yielding now a glimpse of Tiber and S. Peter's, now opening on a purple section of the distant Sabine Hills, we came to Monte Rotondo. The sun sank; and from the flames where he had perished, Hesper and the thin moon, very white and keen, grew slowly into sight. Now we follow the Tiber, a swollen, hurrying, turbid river, in which the mellowing Western sky reflects itself. This changeful mirror of swift waters



Page 21

spreads a dazzling foreground to valley, hill, and lustrous heaven. There is orange on the far horizon, and a green ocean above, in which sea-monsters fashioned from the clouds are floating. Yonder swims an elf with luminous hair astride upon a sea-horse, and followed by a dolphin plunging through the fiery waves. The orange deepens into dying red. The green divides into daffodil and beryl. The blue above grows fainter, and the moon and stars shine stronger.

Through these celestial changes we glide into a landscape fit for Francia and the early Umbrian painters. Low hills to right and left; suavely modelled heights in the far distance; a very quiet width of plain, with slender trees ascending into the pellucid air; and down in the mystery of the middle distance a glimpse of heaven-reflecting water. The magic of the moon and stars lends enchantment to this scene. No painting could convey their influences. Sometimes both luminaries tremble, all dispersed and broken, on the swirling river. Sometimes they sleep above the calm cool reaches of a rush-grown mere. And here and there a ruined turret, with a broken window and a tuft of shrubs upon the rifted battlement, gives value to the fading pallor of the West. The last phase in the sunset is a change to blue-grey monochrome, faintly silvered with starlight; hills, Tiber, fields and woods, all floating in aerial twilight. There is no definition of outline now. The daffodil of the horizon has faded into scarcely perceptible pale greenish yellow.

We have passed Stimigliano. Through the mystery of darkness we hurry past the bridges of Augustus and the lights of Narni.

THE CASCADES OF TERNI

The Velino is a river of considerable volume which rises in the highest region of the Abruzzi, threads the upland valley of Rieti, and precipitates itself by an artificial channel over cliffs about seven hundred feet in height into the Nera. The water is densely charged with particles of lime. This calcareous matter not only tends continually to choke its bed, but clothes the precipices over which the torrent thunders with fantastic drapery of stalactite; and, carried on the wind in foam, incrusts the forests that surround the falls with fine white dust. These famous cascades are undoubtedly the most sublime and beautiful which Europe boasts; and their situation is worthy of so great a natural wonder. We reach them through a noble mid-Italian landscape, where the mountain forms are austere and boldly modelled, but the vegetation, both wild and cultivated, has something of the South-Italian richness. The hillsides are a labyrinth of box and arbutus, with coronilla in golden bloom. The turf is starred with cyclamens and orchises. Climbing the staircase paths beside the falls in morning sunlight, or stationed on the points of vantage that command their successive cataracts, we enjoyed a spectacle which might be compared in



Page 22

its effect upon the mind to the impression left by a symphony or a tumultuous lyric. The turbulence and splendour, the swiftness and resonance, the veiling of the scene in smoke of shattered water-masses, the withdrawal of these veils according as the volume of the river slightly shifted in its fall, the rainbows shimmering on the silver spray, the shivering of poplars hung above impendent precipices, the stationary grandeur of the mountains keeping watch around, the hurry and the incoherence of the cataracts, the immobility of force and changeful changelessness in nature, were all for me the elements of one stupendous poem. It was like an ode of Shelley translated into symbolism, more vivid through inarticulate appeal to primitive emotion than any words could be.

MONTEFALCO

The rich land of the Clitumnus is divided into meadows by transparent watercourses, gliding with a glassy current over swaying reeds. Through this we pass, and leave Bevagna to the right, and ascend one of those long gradual roads which climb the hills where all the cities of the Umbrians perch. The view expands, revealing Spello, Assisi, Perugia on its mountain buttress, and the far reaches northward of the Tiber valley. Then Trevi and Spoleto came into sight, and the severe hill-country above Gubbio in part disclosed itself. Over Spoleto the fierce witch-haunted heights of Norcia rose forbidding. This is the kind of panorama that dilates the soul. It is so large, so dignified, so beautiful in tranquil form. The opulent abundance of the plain contrasts with the severity of mountain ranges desolately grand; and the name of each of all those cities thrills the heart with memories.

The main object of a visit to Montefalco is to inspect its many excellent frescoes; painted histories of S. Francis and S. Jerome, by Benozzo Gozzoli; saints, angels, and Scripture episodes by the gentle Tiberio d'Assisi. Full justice had been done to these, when a little boy, seeing us lingering outside the church of S. Chiara, asked whether we should not like to view the body of the saint. This privilege could be purchased at the price of a small fee. It was only necessary to call the guardian of her shrine at the high altar. Indolent, and in compliant mood, with languid curiosity and half an hour to spare, we assented. A handsome young man appeared, who conducted us with decent gravity into a little darkened chamber behind the altar. There he lighted wax tapers, opened sliding doors in what looked like a long coffin, and drew curtains. Before us in the dim light there lay a woman covered with a black nun's dress. Only her hands, and the exquisitely beautiful pale contour of her face (forehead, nose, mouth, and chin, modelled in purest outline, as though the injury of death had never touched her) were visible. Her closed eyes seemed to sleep. She had the perfect peace of Luini's S. Catherine borne by the angels to her grave on Sinai. I have rarely



Page 23

seen anything which surprised and touched me more. The religious earnestness of the young custode, the hushed adoration of the country-folk who had silently assembled round us, intensified the sympathy-inspiring beauty of the slumbering girl. Could Julia, daughter of Claudius, have been fairer than this maiden, when the Lombard workmen found her in her Latin tomb, and brought her to be worshipped on the Capitol? S. Chiara's shrine was hung round with her relics; and among these the heart extracted from her body was suspended. Upon it, apparently wrought into the very substance of the mummied flesh, were impressed a figure of the crucified Christ, the scourge, and the five stigmata. The guardian's faith in this miraculous witness to her sainthood, the gentle piety of the men and women who knelt before it, checked all expressions of incredulity. We abandoned ourselves to the genius of the place; forgot even to ask what Santa Chiara was sleeping here; and withdrew, toned to a not unpleasing melancholy. The world-famous S. Clair, the spiritual sister of S. Francis, lies in Assisi. I have often asked myself, Who, then, was this nun? What history had she? And I think now of this girl as of a damsel of romance, a Sleeping Beauty in the wood of time, secluded from intrusive elements of fact, and folded in the love and faith of her own simple worshippers. Among the hollows of Arcadia, how many rustic shrines in ancient days held saints of Hellas, apocryphal, perhaps, like this, but hallowed by tradition and enduring homage![6]

FOLIGNO

In the landscape of Raphael's votive picture, known as the Madonna di Foligno, there is a town with a few towers, placed upon a broad plain at the edge of some blue hills. Allowing for that license as to details which imaginative masters permitted themselves in matters of subordinate importance, Raphael's sketch is still true to Foligno. The place has not materially changed since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Indeed, relatively to the state of Italy at large, it is still the same as in the days of ancient Rome. Foligno forms a station of commanding interest between Rome and the Adriatic upon the great Flaminian Way. At Foligno the passes of the Apennines debouch into the Umbrian plain, which slopes gradually toward the valley of the Tiber, and from it the valley of the Nera is reached by an easy ascent beneath the walls of Spoleto. An army advancing from the north by the Metaurus and the Furlo Pass must find itself at Foligno; and the level champaign round the city is well adapted to the maintenance and exercises of a garrison. In the days of the Republic and the Empire, the value of this position was well understood; but Foligno's importance, as the key to the Flaminian Way, was eclipsed by two flourishing cities in its immediate vicinity, Hispellum and Mevania, the modern Spello and Bevagna. We might hazard a conjecture that the Lombards, when they ruled the



Page 24

Duchy of Spoleto, following their usual policy of opposing new military centres to the ancient Roman municipia, encouraged Fulginium at the expense of her two neighbours. But of this there is no certainty to build upon. All that can be affirmed with accuracy is that in the Middle Ages, while Spello and Bevagna declined into the inferiority of dependent burghs, Foligno grew in power and became the chief commune of this part of Umbria. It was famous during the last centuries of struggle between the Italian burghers and their native despots, for peculiar ferocity in civil strife. Some of the bloodiest pages in mediaeval Italian history are those which relate the vicissitudes of the Trinci family, the exhaustion of Foligno by internal discord, and its final submission to the Papal power. Since railways have been carried from Rome through Narni and Spoleto to Ancona and Perugia, Foligno has gained considerably in commercial and military status. It is the point of intersection for three lines; the Italian government has made it a great cavalry depot, and there are signs of reviving traffic in its decayed streets. Whether the presence of a large garrison has already modified the population, or whether we may ascribe something to the absence of Roman municipal institutions in the far past, and to the savagery of the mediaeval period, it is difficult to say. Yet the impression left by Foligno upon the mind is different from that of Assisi, Spello, and Montefalco, which are distinguished for a certain grace and gentleness in their inhabitants.

My window in the city wall looks southward across the plain to Spoleto, with Montefalco perched aloft upon the right, and Trevi on its mountain-bracket to the left. From the topmost peaks of the Sabine Apennines, gradual tender sloping lines descend to find their quiet in the valley of Clitumnus. The space between me and that distance is infinitely rich with every sort of greenery, dotted here and there with towers and relics of baronial houses. The little town is in commotion; for the working men of Foligno and its neighbourhood have resolved to spend their earnings on a splendid festa—horse-races, and two nights of fireworks. The acacias and paulownias on the ramparts are in full bloom of creamy white and lilac. In the glare of Bengal lights these trees, with all their pendulous blossoms, surpassed the most fantastic of artificial decorations. The rockets sent aloft into the sky amid that solemn Umbrian landscape were nowise out of harmony with nature. I never sympathised with critics who resent the intrusion of fireworks upon scenes of natural beauty. The Giessbach, lighted up at so much per head on stated evenings, with a band playing and a crowd of cockneys staring, presents perhaps an incongruous spectacle. But where, as here at Foligno, a whole city has made itself a festival, where there are multitudes of citizens and soldiers and country-people slowly moving and gravely admiring, with the decency and order characteristic of an Italian crowd, I have nothing but a sense of satisfaction.



Page 25

It is sometimes the traveller's good fortune in some remote place to meet with an inhabitant who incarnates and interprets for him the *genius loci* as he has conceived it. Though his own subjectivity will assuredly play a considerable part in such an encounter, transferring to his chance acquaintance qualities he may not possess, and connecting this personality in some purely imaginative manner with thoughts derived from study, or impressions made by nature; yet the stranger will henceforth become the meeting-point of many memories, the central figure in a composition which derives from him its vividness. Unconsciously and innocently he has lent himself to the creation of a picture, and round him, as around the hero of a myth, have gathered thoughts and sentiments of which he had himself no knowledge. On one of these nights I had been threading the aisles of acacia-trees, now glaring red, now azure, as the Bengal lights kept changing. My mind instinctively went back to scenes of treachery and bloodshed in the olden time, when Gorrado Trinci paraded the mangled remnants of three hundred of his victims, heaped on mule-back, through Foligno, for a warning to the citizens. As the procession moved along the ramparts, I found myself in contest with a young man, who readily fell into conversation. He was very tall, with enormous breadth of shoulders, and long sinewy arms, like Michelangelo's favourite models. His head was small, curled over with crisp black hair. Low forehead, and thick level eyebrows absolutely meeting over intensely bright fierce eyes. The nose descending straight from the brows, as in a statue of Hadrian's age. The mouth full-lipped, petulant, and passionate above a firm round chin. He was dressed in the shirt, white trousers, and loose white jacket of a contadino; but he did not move with a peasant's slouch, rather with the elasticity and alertness of an untamed panther. He told me that he was just about to join a cavalry regiment; and I could well imagine, when military dignity was added to that gait, how grandly he would go. This young man, of whom I heard nothing more after our half-hour's conversation among the crackling fireworks and roaring cannon, left upon my mind an indescribable impression of dangerousness—of 'something fierce and terrible, eligible to burst forth.' Of men like this, then, were formed the Companies of Adventure who flooded Italy with villany, ambition, and lawlessness in the fifteenth century. Gattamelata, who began life as a baker's boy at Narni and ended it with a bronze statue by Donatello on the public square in Padua, was of this breed. Like this were the Trinci and their bands of murderers. Like this were the bravi who hunted Lorenzaccio to death at Venice. Like this was Pietro Paolo Baglioni, whose fault, in the eyes of Machiavelli, was that he could not succeed in being 'perfettamente tristo.' Beautiful, but inhuman; passionate, but cold; powerful, but rendered impotent for firm and lofty deeds by immorality and



Page 26

treason; how many centuries of men like this once wasted Italy and plunged her into servitude! Yet what material is here, under sterner discipline, and with a nobler national ideal, for the formation of heroic armies. Of such stuff, doubtless, were the Roman legionaries. When will the Italians learn to use these men as Fabius or as Caesar, not as the Vitelli and the Trinci used them? In such meditations, deeply stirred by the meeting of my own reflections with one who seemed to represent for me in life and blood the spirit of the place which had provoked them, I said farewell to Cavallucci, and returned to my bedroom on the city wall. The last rockets had whizzed and the last cannons had thundered ere I fell asleep.

SPELLO

Spello contains some not inconsiderable antiquities—the remains of a Roman theatre, a Roman gate with the heads of two men and a woman leaning over it, and some fragments of Roman sculpture scattered through its buildings. The churches, especially those of S.M. Maggiore and S. Francesco, are worth a visit for the sake of Pinturicchio. Nowhere, except in the Piccolomini Library at Siena, can that master's work in fresco be better studied than here. The satisfaction with which he executed the wall paintings in S. Maria Maggiore is testified by his own portrait introduced upon a panel in the decoration of the Virgin's chamber. The scrupulously rendered details of books, chairs, window seats, &c., which he here has copied, remind one of Carpaccio's study of S. Benedict at Venice. It is all sweet, tender, delicate, and carefully finished; but without depth, not even the depth of Perugino's feeling. In S. Francesco, Pinturicchio, with the same meticulous refinement, painted a letter addressed to him by Gentile Baglioni. It lies on a stool before Madonna and her court of saints. Nicety of execution, technical mastery of fresco as a medium for Dutch detail-painting, prettiness of composition, and cheerfulness of colouring, are noticeable throughout his work here rather than either thought or sentiment. S. Maria Maggiore can boast a fresco of Madonna between a young episcopal saint and Catherine of Alexandria from the hand of Perugino. The rich yellow harmony of its tones, and the graceful dignity of its emotion, conveyed no less by a certain Raphaellesque pose and outline than by suavity of facial expression, enable us to measure the distance between this painter and his quasi-pupil Pinturicchio.

We did not, however, drive to Spello to inspect either Roman antiquities or frescoes, but to see an inscription on the city walls about Orlando. It is a rude Latin elegiac couplet, saying that, 'from the sign below, men may conjecture the mighty members of Roland, nephew of Charles; his deeds are written in history.' Three agreeable old gentlemen of Spello, who attended us with much politeness, and were greatly interested in my researches, pointed out a mark waist-high upon the wall, where Orlando's knee is reported to have reached. But I could not learn anything about a phallic monolith, which is said by Guerin or Panizzi to have been identified with the Roland myth at Spello.

Such a column either never existed here, or had been removed before the memory of the present generation.



Page 27

EASTER MORNING AT ASSISI

We are in the lower church of S. Francesco. High mass is being sung, with orchestra and organ and a choir of many voices. Candles are lighted on the altar, over-canopied with Giotto's allegories. From the low southern windows slants the sun, in narrow bands, upon the many-coloured gloom and embrowned glory of these painted aisles. Women in bright kerchiefs kneel upon the stones, and shaggy men from the mountains stand or lean against the wooden benches. There is no moving from point to point. Where we have taken our station, at the north-western angle of the transept, there we stay till mass be over. The whole low-vaulted building glows duskily; the frescoed roof, the stained windows, the figure-crowded pavements blending their rich but subdued colours, like hues upon some marvellous moth's wings, or like a deep-toned rainbow mist discerned in twilight dreams, or like such tapestry as Eastern queens, in ancient days, wrought for the pavilion of an empress. Forth from this maze of mingling tints, indefinite in shade and sunbeams, lean earnest, saintly faces—ineffably pure—adoring, pitying, pleading; raising their eyes in ecstasy to heaven, or turning them in ruth toward earth. Men and women of whom the world was not worthy—at the hands of those old painters they have received the divine grace, the dovelike simplicity, whereof Italians in the fourteenth century possessed the irrecoverable secret. Each face is a poem; the counterpart in painting to a chapter from the Fioretti di San Francesco. Over the whole scene—in the architecture, in the frescoes, in the coloured windows, in the gloom, on the people, in the incense, from the chiming bells, through the music—broods one spirit: the spirit of him who was 'the co-espoused, co-transfocate with Christ;' the ardent, the radiant, the beautiful in soul; the suffering, the strong, the simple, the victorious over self and sin; the celestial who trampled upon earth and rose on wings of ecstasy to heaven; the Christ-inebriated saint of visions supersensual and life beyond the grave. Far down below the feet of those who worship God through him, S. Francis sleeps; but his soul, the incorruptible part of him, the message he gave the world, is in the spaces round us. This is his temple. He fills it like an unseen god. Not as Phoebus or Athene, from their marble pedestals; but as an abiding spirit, felt everywhere, nowhere seized, absorbing in itself all mysteries, all myths, all burning exaltations, all abasements, all love, self-sacrifice, pain, yearning, which the thought of Christ, sweeping the centuries, hath wrought for men. Let, therefore, choir and congregation raise their voices on the tide of prayers and praises; for this is Easter morning—Christ is risen! Our sister, Death of the Body, for whom S. Francis thanked God in his hymn, is reconciled to us this day, and takes us by the hand, and leads us to the gate whence floods of heavenly glory issue from the faces of a multitude of saints. Pray, ye poor people; chant and pray. If all be but a dream, to wake from this were loss for you indeed!



Page 28

PERUSIA AUGUSTA

The piazza in front of the Prefettura is my favourite resort on these nights of full moon. The evening twilight is made up partly of sunset fading over Thrasymene and Tuscany; partly of moonrise from the mountains of Gubbio and the passes toward Ancona. The hills are capped with snow, although the season is so forward. Below our parapets the bulk of S. Domenico, with its gaunt perforated tower, and the finer group of S. Pietro, flaunting the arrowy 'Pennacchio di Perugia,' jut out upon the spine of hill which dominates the valley of the Tiber. As the night gloom deepens, and the moon ascends the sky, these buildings seem to form the sombre foreground to some French etching. Beyond them spreads the misty moon-irradiated plain of Umbria. Over all rise shadowy Apennines, with dim suggestions of Assisi, Spello, Foligno, Montefalco, and Spoleto on their basements. Little thin whiffs of breezes, very slight and searching, flit across, and shiver as they pass from Apennine to plain. The slowly moving population—women in veils, men winter-mantled—pass to and fro between the buildings and the grey immensity of sky. Bells ring. The bugles of the soldiers blow retreat in convents turned to barracks. Young men roam the streets beneath, singing May songs. Far, far away upon the plain, red through the vitreous moonlight ringed with thundery gauze, fires of unnamed castelli smoulder. As we lean from ledges eighty feet in height, gas vies with moon in chequering illuminations on the ancient walls; Etruscan mouldings, Roman letters, high-piled hovels, suburban world-old dwellings plastered like martins' nests against the masonry.

Sunlight adds more of detail to this scene. To the right of Subasio, where the passes go from Foligno towards Urbino and Ancona, heavy masses of thundercloud hang every day; but the plain and hill-buttresses are clear in transparent blueness. First comes Assisi, with S.M. degli Angeli below; then Spello; then Foligno; then Trevi; and, far away, Spoleto; with, reared against those misty battlements, the village height of Montefalco—the 'ringhiera dell' Umbria,' as they call it in this country. By daylight, the snow on yonder peaks is clearly visible, where the Monti della Sibilla tower up above the sources of the Nera and Velino from frigid wastes of Norcia. The lower ranges seem as though painted, in films of airiest and palest azure, upon china; and then comes the broad green champaign, flecked with villages and farms. Just at the basement of Perugia winds Tiber, through shallows and grey poplar-trees, spanned by ancient arches of red brick, and guarded here and there by castellated towers. The mills beneath their dams and weirs are just as Raphael drew them; and the feeling of air and space reminds one, on each coign of vantage, of some Umbrian picture. Every hedgerow is hoary with May-bloom and honeysuckle. The oaks hang out their golden-dusted tassels. Wayside shrines



Page 29

are decked with laburnum boughs and iris blossoms plucked from the copse-woods, where spires of purple and pink orchis variegate the thin, fine grass. The land waves far and wide with young corn, emerald green beneath the olive-trees, which take upon their under-foliage tints reflected from this verdure or red tones from the naked earth. A fine race of *contadini*, with large, heroically graceful forms, and beautiful dark eyes and noble faces, move about this garden, intent on ancient, easy tillage of the kind Saturnian soil.

LA MAGIONE

On the road from Perugia to Cortona, the first stage ends at La Magione, a high hill-village commanding the passage from the Umbrian champaign to the lake of Thrasymene.

It has a grim square fortalice above it, now in ruins, and a stately castle to the south-east, built about the time of Braccio. Here took place that famous diet of Cesare Borgia's enemies, when the son of Alexander VI. was threatening Bologna with his arms, and bidding fair to make himself supreme tyrant of Italy in 1502. It was the policy of Cesare to fortify himself by reducing the fiefs of the Church to submission, and by rooting out the dynasties which had acquired a sort of tyranny in Papal cities. The Varani of Camerino and the Manfredi of Faenza had been already extirpated. There was only too good reason to believe that the turn of the Vitelli at Citta di Castello, of the Baglioni at Perugia, and of the Bentivogli at Bologna would come next. Pandolfo Petrucci at Siena, surrounded on all sides by Cesare's conquests, and specially menaced by the fortification of Piombino, felt himself in danger. The great house of the Orsini, who swayed a large part of the Patrimony of S. Peter's, and were closely allied to the Vitelli, had even graver cause for anxiety. But such was the system of Italian warfare, that nearly all these noble families lived by the profession of arms, and most of them were in the pay of Cesare. When, therefore, the conspirators met at La Magione, they were plotting against a man whose money they had taken, and whom they had hitherto aided in his career of fraud and spoliation.

The diet consisted of the Cardinal Orsini, an avowed antagonist of Alexander VI.; his brother Paolo, the chieftain of the clan; Vitellozzo Vitelli, lord of Citta di Castello; Gian-Paolo Baglioni, made undisputed master of Perugia by the recent failure of his cousin Grifonetto's treason; Oliverotto, who had just acquired the March of Fermo by the murder of his uncle Giovanni da Fogliani; Ermes Bentivoglio, the heir of Bologna; and Antonio da Venafro, the secretary of Pandolfo Petrucci. These men vowed hostility on the basis of common injuries and common fear against the Borgia. But they were for the most part stained themselves with crime, and dared not trust each other, and could

not gain the confidence of any respectable power in Italy except the exiled Duke of Urbino.



Page 30

Procrastination was the first weapon used by the wily Cesare, who trusted that time would sow among his rebel captains suspicion and dissension. He next made overtures to the leaders separately, and so far succeeded in his perfidious policy as to draw Vitellozzo Vitelli, Oliverotto da Fermo, Paolo Orsini, and Francesco Orsini, Duke of Gravina, into his nets at Sinigaglia. Under pretext of fair conference and equitable settlement of disputed claims, he possessed himself of their persons, and had them strangled—two upon December 31, and two upon January 18, 1503. Of all Cesare's actions, this was the most splendid for its successful combination of sagacity and policy in the hour of peril, of persuasive diplomacy, and of ruthless decision when the time to strike his blow arrived.

CORTONA

After leaving La Magione, the road descends upon the lake of Thrasymene through oak-woods full of nightingales. The lake lay basking, leaden-coloured, smooth and waveless, under a misty, rain-charged, sun-irradiated sky. At Passignano, close beside its shore, we stopped for mid-day. This is a little fishing village of very poor people, who live entirely by labour on the waters. They showed us huge eels coiled in tanks, and some fine specimens of the silver carp—Reina del Lago. It was off one of the eels that we made our lunch; and taken, as he was, alive from his cool lodging, he furnished a series of dishes fit for a king.

Climbing the hill of Cortona seemed a quite interminable business. It poured a deluge. Our horses were tired, and one lean donkey, who, after much trouble, was produced from a farmhouse and yoked in front of them, rendered but little assistance.

Next day we duly saw the Muse and Lamp in the Museo, the Fra Angelicos, and all the Signorellis. One cannot help thinking that too much fuss is made nowadays about works of art—running after them for their own sakes, exaggerating their importance, and detaching them as objects of study, instead of taking them with sympathy and carelessness as pleasant or instructive adjuncts to our actual life. Artists, historians of art, and critics are forced to isolate pictures; and it is of profit to their souls to do so. But simple folk, who have no aesthetic vocation, whether creative or critical, suffer more than is good for them by compliance with mere fashion. Sooner or later we shall return to the spirit of the ages which produced these pictures, and which regarded them with less of an industrious bewilderment than they evoke at present.

I am far indeed from wishing to decry art, the study of art, or the benefits to be derived from its intelligent enjoyment. I only mean to suggest that we go the wrong way to work at present in this matter. Picture and sculpture galleries accustom us to the separation of art from life. Our methods of studying art, making a beginning of art-study while

traveling, tend to perpetuate this separation. It is only on reflection, after long experience, that we come to perceive that the most fruitful moments in our art education have been casual and unsought, in quaint nooks and unexpected places, where nature, art, and life are happily blent.



Page 31

The Palace of the Commune at Cortona is interesting because of the shields of Florentine governors, sculptured on blocks of grey stone, and inserted in its outer walls—Peruzzi, Albizzi, Strozzi, Salviati, among the more ancient—de' Medici at a later epoch. The revolutions in the Republic of Florence may be read by a herald from these coats-of-arms and the dates beneath them.

The landscape of this Tuscan highland satisfies me more and more with sense of breadth and beauty. From S. Margherita above the town the prospect is immense and wonderful and wild—up into those brown, forbidding mountains; down to the vast plain; and over to the cities of Chiusi, Montepulciano, and Foiano. The jewel of the view is Trasimeno, a silvery shield encased with serried hills, and set upon one corner of the scene, like a precious thing apart and meant for separate contemplation. There is something in the singularity and circumscribed completeness of the mountain-girded lake, diminished by distance, which would have attracted Lionardo da Vinci's pencil, had he seen it.

Cortona seems desperately poor, and the beggars are intolerable. One little blind boy, led by his brother, both frightfully ugly and ragged urchins, pursued us all over the city, incessantly whining 'Signore Padrone!' It was only on the threshold of the inn that I ventured to give them a few coppers, for I knew well that any public beneficence would raise the whole swarm of the begging population round us. Sitting later in the day upon the piazza of S. Domenico, I saw the same blind boy taken by his brother to play. The game consists, in the little creature throwing his arms about the trunk of a big tree, and running round and round it, clasping it. This seemed to make him quite inexpressibly happy. His face lit up and beamed with that inner beatitude blind people show—a kind of rapture shining over it, as though nothing could be more altogether delightful. This little boy had the smallpox at eight months, and has never been able to see since. He looks sturdy, and may live to be of any age—doomed always, is that possible, to beg?

CHIUSI

What more enjoyable dinner can be imagined than a flask of excellent Montepulciano, a well-cooked steak, and a little goat's cheese in the inn of the Leone d'Oro at Chiusi? The windows are open, and the sun is setting. Monte Cetona bounds the view to the right, and the wooded hills of Citta della Pieve to the left. The deep green dimpled valley goes stretching away toward Orvieto; and at its end a purple mountain mass, distinct and solitary, which may peradventure be Soracte! The near country is broken into undulating hills, forested with fine olives and oaks; and the composition of the landscape, with its crowning villages, is worthy of a background to an Umbrian picture. The breadth and depth and quiet which those painters loved, the space of lucid sky, the suggestion of winding waters in verdant fields, all are here. The evening is beautiful—golden light streaming softly from behind us on this prospect, and gradually mellowing to violet and blue with stars above.



Page 32

At Chiusi we visited several Etruscan tombs, and saw their red and black scrawled pictures. One of the sepulchres was a well-jointed vault of stone with no wall-paintings. The rest had been scooped out of the living tufa. This was the excuse for some pleasant hours spent in walking and driving through the country. Chiusi means for me the mingling of grey olives and green oaks in limpid sunlight; deep leafy lanes; warm sandstone banks; copses with nightingales and cyclamens and cuckoos; glimpses of a silvery lake; blue shadowy distances; the bristling ridge of Monte Cetona; the conical towers, Becca di Questo and Becca di Quello, over against each other on the borders; ways winding among hedgerows like some bit of England in June, but not so full of flowers. It means all this, I fear, for me far more than theories about Lars Porsenna and Etruscan ethnology.

GUBBIO

Gubbio ranks among the most ancient of Italian hill-towns. With its back set firm against the spine of central Apennines, and piled, house over house, upon the rising slope, it commands a rich tract of upland champaign, bounded southward toward Perugia and Foligno by peaked and rolling ridges. This amphitheatre, which forms its source of wealth and independence, is admirably protected by a chain of natural defences; and Gubbio wears a singularly old-world aspect of antiquity and isolation. Houses climb right to the crests of gaunt bare peaks; and the brown mediaeval walls with square towers which protected them upon the mountain side, following the inequalities of the ground, are still a marked feature in the landscape. It is a town of steep streets and staircases, with quaintly framed prospects, and solemn vistas opening at every turn across the lowland. One of these views might be selected for especial notice. In front, irregular buildings losing themselves in country as they straggle by the roadside; then the open post-road with a cypress to the right; afterwards, the rich green fields, and on a bit of rising ground an ancient farmhouse with its brown dependencies; lastly, the blue hills above Fossato, and far away a wrack of tumbling clouds. All this enclosed by the heavy archway of the Porta Romana, where sunlight and shadow chequer the mellow tones of a dim fresco, indistinct with age, but beautiful.

Gubbio has not greatly altered since the middle ages. But poor people are now living in the palaces of noblemen and merchants. These new inhabitants have walled up the fair arched windows and slender portals of the ancient dwellers, spoiling the beauty of the streets without materially changing the architectural masses. In that witching hour when the Italian sunset has faded, and a solemn grey replaces the glowing tones of daffodil and rose, it is not difficult, here dreaming by oneself alone, to picture the old noble life—the ladies moving along those open loggias, the young men in plumed caps and curling hair with one foot



Page 33

on those doorsteps, the knights in armour and the sumpter mules and red-robed Cardinals defiling through those gates into the courts within. The modern bricks and mortar with which that picturesque scene has been overlaid, the ugly oblong windows and bright green shutters which now interrupt the flowing lines of arch and gallery; these disappear beneath the fine remembered touch of a sonnet sung by Folgore, when still the Parties had their day, and this deserted city was the centre of great aims and throbbing aspirations.

The names of the chief buildings in Gubbio are strongly suggestive of the middle ages. They abut upon a Piazza de' Signori. One of them, the Palazzo del Municipio, is a shapeless unfinished block of masonry. It is here that the Eugubine tables, plates of brass with Umbrian and Roman incised characters, are shown. The Palazzo de' Consoli has higher architectural qualities, and is indeed unique among Italian palaces for the combination of massiveness with lightness in a situation of unprecedented boldness. Rising from enormous substructures mortised into the solid hillside, it rears its vast rectangular bulk to a giddy height above the town; airy loggias imposed on great forbidding masses of brown stone, shooting aloft into a light aerial tower. The empty halls inside are of fair proportions and a noble size, and the views from the open colonnades in all directions fascinate. But the final impression made by the building is one of square, tranquil, massive strength—perpetuity embodied in masonry—force suggesting facility by daring and successful addition of elegance to hugeness. Vast as it is, this pile is not forbidding, as a similarly weighty structure in the North would be. The fine quality of the stone and the delicate though simple mouldings of the windows give it an Italian grace.

These public palaces belong to the age of the Communes, when Gubbio was a free town, with a policy of its own, and an important part to play in the internecine struggles of Pope and Empire, Guelf and Ghibelline. The ruined, deserted, degraded Palazzo Ducale reminds us of the advent of the despots. It has been stripped of all its tarsia-work and sculpture. Only here and there a Fe.D., with the cupping-glass of Federigo di Montefeltro, remains to show that Gubbio once became the fairest fief of the Urbino duchy. S. Ubaldo, who gave his name to this duke's son, was the patron of Gubbio, and to him the cathedral is dedicated—one low enormous vault, like a cellar or feudal banqueting hall, roofed with a succession of solid Gothic arches. This strange old church, and the House of Canons, buttressed on the hill beside it, have suffered less from modernisation than most buildings in Gubbio. The latter, in particular, helps one to understand what this city of grave palazzi must have been, and how the mere opening of old doors and windows would restore it to its primitive appearance. The House of the Canons has, in fact, not yet been given over to the use of middle-class and proletariat.



Page 34

At the end of a day in Gubbio, it is pleasant to take our ease in the primitive hostelry, at the back of which foams a mountain-torrent, rushing downward from the Apennines. The Gubbio wine is very fragrant, and of a rich ruby colour. Those to whom the tints of wine and jewels give a pleasure not entirely childish, will take delight in its specific blending of tawny hues with rose. They serve the table still, at Gubbio, after the antique Italian fashion, covering it with a cream-coloured linen cloth bordered with coarse lace—the creases of the press, the scent of old herbs from the wardrobe, are still upon it—and the board is set with shallow dishes of warm, white earthenware, basket-worked in open lattice at the edge, which contain little separate messes of meat, vegetables, cheese, and comfits. The wine stands in strange, slender phials of smooth glass, with stoppers; and the amber-coloured bread lies in fair round loaves upon the cloth. Dining thus is like sitting down to the supper at Emmaus, in some picture of Gian Bellini or of Masolino. The very bareness of the room—its open rafters, plastered walls, primitive settees, and red-brick floor, on which a dog sits waiting for a bone—enhances the impression of artistic delicacy in the table.

FROM GUBBIO TO FANO

The road from Gubbio, immediately after leaving the city, enters a narrow Alpine ravine, where a thin stream dashes over dark, red rocks, and pendent saxifrages wave to the winds. The carriage in which we travelled at the end of May, one morning, had two horses, which our driver soon supplemented with a couple of white oxen. Slowly and toilsomely we ascended between the flanks of barren hills—gaunt masses of crimson and grey crag, clothed at their summits with short turf and scanty pasture. The pass leads first to the little town of Scheggia, and is called the Monte Calvo, or bald mountain. At Scheggia, it joins the great Flaminian Way, or North road of the Roman armies. At the top there is a fine view over the conical hills that dominate Gubbio, and, far away, to noble mountains above the Furlo and the Foligno line of railway to Ancona. Range rises over range, crossing at unexpected angles, breaking into sudden precipices, and stretching out long, exquisitely modelled outlines, as only Apennines can do, in silvery sobriety of colours toned by clearest air. Every square piece of this austere, wild landscape forms a varied picture, whereof the composition is due to subtle arrangements of lines always delicate; and these lines seem somehow to have been determined in their beauty by the vast antiquity of the mountain system, as though they all had taken time to choose their place and wear down into harmony. The effect of tempered sadness was heightened for us by stormy lights and dun clouds, high in air, rolling vapours and flying shadows, over all the prospect, tinted in ethereal grisaille.



Page 35

After Scheggia, one enters a land of meadow and oak-trees. This is the sacred central tract of Jupiter Apenninus, whose fane—

Delubra Jovis saxoque minantes
Apenninigenis cultae pastoribus arae

—once rose behind us on the bald Iguvian summits. A second little pass leads from this region to the Adriatic side of the Italian watershed, and the road now follows the Barano downward toward the sea. The valley is fairly green with woods, where mistletoe may here and there be seen on boughs of oak, and rich with cornfields. Cagli is the chief town of the district, and here they show one of the best pictures left to us by Raphael's father, Giovanni Santi. It is a Madonna, attended by S. Peter, S. Francis, S. Dominic, S. John, and two angels. One of the angels is traditionally supposed to have been painted from the boy Raphael, and the face has something which reminds us of his portraits. The whole composition, excellent in modelling, harmonious in grouping, soberly but strongly coloured, with a peculiar blending of dignity and sweetness, grace and vigour, makes one wonder why Santi thought it necessary to send his son from his own workshop to study under Perugino. He was himself a master of his art, and this, perhaps the most agreeable of his paintings, has a masculine sincerity which is absent from at least the later works of Perugino.

Some miles beyond Cagli, the real pass of the Furlo begins. It owes its name to a narrow tunnel bored by Vespasian in the solid rock, where limestone crags descend on the Barano. The Romans called this gallery Petra Pertusa, or Intercisa, or more familiarly Forulus, whence comes the modern name. Indeed, the stations on the old Flaminian Way are still well marked by Latin designations; for Cagli is the ancient Calles, and Fossombrone is Forum Sempronii, and Fano the Fanum Fortunae. Vespasian commemorated this early achievement in engineering by an inscription carved on the living stone, which still remains; and Claudian, when he sang the journey of his Emperor Honorius from Rimini to Rome, speaks thus of what was even then an object of astonishment to travellers:—

Laetior hinc fano recipit fortuna vetusto,
Despiciturque vagus praerupta valle Metaurus,
Qua mons arte patens vivo se perforat arcu
Admittitque viam sectae per viscera rupis.

The Forulus itself may now be matched, on any Alpine pass, by several tunnels of far mightier dimensions; for it is narrow, and does not extend more than 126 feet in length. But it occupies a fine position at the end of a really imposing ravine. The whole Furlo Pass might, without too much exaggeration, be described as a kind of Cheddar on the scale of the Via Mala. The limestone rocks, which rise on either hand above the gorge to an enormous height, are noble in form and solemn, like a succession of gigantic

portals, with stupendous flanking obelisks and pyramids. Some of these crag-masses rival the fantastic cliffs



Page 36

of Capri, and all consist of that southern mountain limestone which changes from pale yellow to blue grey and dusky orange. A river roars precipitately through the pass, and the roadsides wave with many sorts of campanulas—a profusion of azure and purple bells upon the hard white stone. Of Roman remains there is still enough (in the way of Roman bridges and bits of broken masonry) to please an antiquary's eye. But the lover of nature will dwell chiefly on the picturesque qualities of this historic gorge, so alien to the general character of Italian scenery, and yet so remote from anything to which Swiss travelling accustoms one.

The Furlo breaks out into a richer land of mighty oaks and waving cornfields, a fat pastoral country, not unlike Devonshire in detail, with green uplands, and wild-rose tangled hedgerows, and much running water, and abundance of summer flowers. At a point above Fossombrone, the Barano joins the Metauro, and here one has a glimpse of faraway Urbino, high upon its mountain eyrie. It is so rare, in spite of immemorial belief, to find in Italy a wilderness of wild flowers, that I feel inclined to make a list of those I saw from our carriage windows as we rolled down lazily along the road to Fossombrone. Broom, and cytissus, and hawthorn mingled with roses, gladiolus, and sainfoin. There were orchises, and clematis, and privet, and wild-vine, vetches of all hues, red poppies, sky-blue cornflowers, and lilac pimpernel. In the rougher hedges, dogwood, honeysuckle, pyracanth, and acacia made a network of white bloom and blushes. Milk-worts of all bright and tender tints combined with borage, iris, hawkweeds, harebells, crimson clover, thyme, red snap-dragon, golden asters, and dreamy love-in-a-mist, to weave a marvellous carpet such as the looms of Shiraz or of Cashmere never spread. Rarely have I gazed on Flora in such riot, such luxuriance, such self-abandonment to joy. The air was filled with fragrances. Songs of cuckoos and nightingales echoed from the copses on the hillsides. The sun was out, and dancing over all the landscape.

After all this, Fano was very restful in the quiet sunset. It has a sandy stretch of shore, on which the long, green-yellow rollers of the Adriatic broke into creamy foam, beneath the waning saffron light over Pesaro and the rosy rising of a full moon. This Adriatic sea carries an English mind home to many a little watering-place upon our coast. In colour and the shape of waves it resembles our Channel.

The sea-shore is Fano's great attraction; but the town has many churches, and some creditable pictures, as well as Roman antiquities. Giovanni Santi may here be seen almost as well as at Cagli; and of Perugino there is one truly magnificent altar-piece—lunette, great centre panel, and predella—dusty in its present condition, but splendidly painted, and happily not yet restored or cleaned. It is worth journeying to Fano to see this. Still better would the journey be worth the traveller's while



Page 37

if he could be sure to witness such a game of *Pallone* as we chanced upon in the Via dell' Arco di Augusto—lads and grown-men, tightly girt, in shirt sleeves, driving the great ball aloft into the air with cunning bias and calculation of projecting house-eaves. I do not understand the game; but it was clearly played something after the manner of our football, that is to say; with sides, and front and back players so arranged as to cover the greatest number of angles of incidence on either wall.

Fano still remembers that it is the Fane of Fortune. On the fountain in the market-place stands a bronze Fortuna, slim and airy, offering her veil to catch the wind. May she long shower health and prosperity upon the modern watering-place of which she is the patron saint!

* * * * *

THE PALACE OF URBINO

I

At Rimini, one spring, the impulse came upon my wife and me to make our way across San Marino to Urbino. In the Piazza, called apocryphally after Julius Caesar, I found a proper *vetturino*, with a good carriage and two indefatigable horses. He was a splendid fellow, and bore a great historic name, as I discovered when our bargain was completed. 'What are you called?' I asked him. '*Filippo Visconti, per servirla!*' was the prompt reply. Brimming over with the darkest memories of the Italian Renaissance, I hesitated when I heard this answer. The associations seemed too ominous. And yet the man himself was so attractive—tall, stalwart, and well looking—no feature of his face or limb of his athletic form recalling the gross tyrant who concealed worse than Caligula's ugliness from sight in secret chambers—that I shook this preconception from my mind. As it turned out, Filippo Visconti had nothing in common with his infamous namesake but the name. On a long and trying journey, he showed neither sullen nor yet ferocious tempers; nor, at the end of it, did he attempt by any master-stroke of craft to wheedle from me more than his fair pay; but took the meerschaum pipe I gave him for a keepsake, with the frank goodwill of an accomplished gentleman. The only exhibition of his hot Italian blood which I remember did his humanity credit.

While we were ascending a steep hillside, he jumped from his box to thrash a ruffian by the roadside for brutal treatment to a little boy. He broke his whip, it is true, in this encounter; risked a dangerous quarrel; and left his carriage, with myself and wife inside it, to the mercy of his horses in a somewhat perilous position. But when he came back, hot and glowing, from this deed of justice, I could only applaud his zeal.



Page 38

An Italian of this type, handsome as an antique statue, with the refinement of a modern gentleman and that intelligence which is innate in a race of immemorial culture, is a fascinating being. He may be absolutely ignorant in all book-learning. He may be as ignorant as a Bersagliere from Montalcino with whom I once conversed at Rimini, who gravely said that he could walk in three months to North America, and thought of doing it when his term of service was accomplished. But he will display, as this young soldier did, a grace and ease of address which are rare in London drawing-rooms; and by his shrewd remarks upon the cities he has visited, will show that he possesses a fine natural taste for things of beauty. The speech of such men, drawn from the common stock of the Italian people, is seasoned with proverbial sayings, the wisdom of centuries condensed in a few nervous words. When emotion fires their brain, they break into spontaneous eloquence, or suggest the motive of a poem by phrases pregnant with imagery.

For the first stage of the journey out of Rimini, Filippo's two horses sufficed. The road led almost straight across the level between quickset hedges in white bloom. But when we reached the long steep hill which ascends to San Marino, the inevitable oxen were called out, and we toiled upwards leisurely through cornfields bright with red anemones and sweet narcissus. At this point pomegranate hedges replaced the May-thorns of the plain. In course of time our *bovi* brought us to the Borgo, or lower town, whence there is a further ascent of seven hundred feet to the topmost hawk's-nest or acropolis of the republic. These we climbed on foot, watching the view expand around us and beneath. Crags of limestone here break down abruptly to the rolling hills, which go to lose themselves in field and shore. Misty reaches of the Adriatic close the world to eastward. Cesena, Rimini, Verucchio, and countless hill-set villages, each isolated on its tract of verdure conquered from the stern grey soil, define the points where Montefeltri wrestled with Malatestas in long bygone years. Around are marly mountain-flanks in wrinkles and gnarled convolutions like some giant's brain, furrowed by rivers crawling through dry wasteful beds of shingle. Interminable ranges of gaunt Apennines stretch, tier by tier, beyond; and over all this landscape, a grey-green mist of rising crops and new-fledged oak-trees lies like a veil upon the nakedness of Nature's ruins.

Nothing in Europe conveys a more striking sense of geological antiquity than such a prospect. The denudation and abrasion of innumerable ages, wrought by slow persistent action of weather and water on an upheaved mountain mass, are here made visible. Every wave in that vast sea of hills, every furrow in their worn flanks, tells its tale of a continuous corrosion still in progress. The dominant impression is one of melancholy. We forget how Romans, countermarching Carthaginians, trod the land beneath us. The marvel of San Marino, retaining independence through the drums and tramlings of the last seven centuries, is swallowed in a deeper sense of wonder. We turn instinctively in thought to Leopardi's musings on man's destiny at war with unknown nature-forces and malignant rulers of the universe.



Page 39

Omai disprezza
Te, la natura, il brutto
Poter che, ascoso, a comun danno impera,
E l' infinita vanita del tutto.

And then, straining our eyes southward, we sweep the dim blue distance for Recanati, and remember that the poet of modern despair and discouragement was reared in even such a scene as this.

The town of San Marino is grey, narrow-streeted, simple; with a great, new, decent, Greek-porticoed cathedral, dedicated to the eponymous saint. A certain austerity defines it from more picturesque hill-cities with a less uniform history. There is a marble statue of S. Marino in the choir of his church; and in his cell is shown the stone bed and pillow on which he took austere repose. One narrow window near the saint's abode commands a proud but melancholy landscape of distant hills and seaboard. To this, the great absorbing charm of San Marino, our eyes instinctively, recurrently, take flight. It is a landscape which by variety and beauty thralls attention, but which by its interminable sameness might grow almost overpowering. There is no relief. The gladness shed upon far humbler Northern lands in May is ever absent here. The German word *Gemuethlichkeit*, the English phrase 'a home of ancient peace,' are here alike by art and nature untranslated into visibilities. And yet (as we who gaze upon it thus are fain to think) if peradventure the intolerable *ennui* of this panorama should drive a citizen of San Marino into out-lands, the same view would haunt him whithersoever he went—the swallows of his native eyrie would shrill through his sleep—he would yearn to breathe its fine keen air in winter, and to watch its iris-hedges deck themselves with blue in spring;—like Virgil's hero, dying, he would think of San Marino: *Aspicit, et dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos*. Even a passing stranger may feel the mingled fascination and oppression of this prospect—the monotony which maddens, the charm which at a distance grows upon the mind, environing it with memories.

Descending to the Borgo, we found that Filippo Visconti had ordered a luncheon of excellent white bread, pigeons, and omelette, with the best red muscat wine I ever drank, unless the sharp air of the hills deceived my appetite. An Italian history of San Marino, including its statutes, in three volumes, furnished intellectual food. But I confess to having learned from these pages little else than this: first, that the survival of the Commonwealth through all phases of European politics had been semi-miraculous; secondly, that the most eminent San Marinesi had been lawyers. It is possible on a hasty deduction from these two propositions (to which, however, I am far from wishing to commit myself), that the latter is a sufficient explanation of the former.



Page 40

From San Marino the road plunges at a break-neck pace. We are now in the true Feltrian highlands, whence the Counts of Montefeltro issued in the twelfth century. Yonder eyrie is San Leo, which formed the key of entrance to the duchy of Urbino in campaigns fought many hundred years ago. Perched on the crest of a precipitous rock, this fortress looks as though it might defy all enemies but famine. And yet San Leo was taken and re-taken by strategy and fraud, when Montefeltro, Borgia, Malatesta, Rovere, contended for dominion in these valleys. Yonder is Sta. Agata, the village to which Guidobaldo fled by night when Valentino drove him from his dukedom. A little farther towers Carpegna, where one branch of the Montefeltro house maintained a countship through seven centuries, and only sold their fief to Rome in 1815. Monte Coppiolo lies behind, Pietra Rubia in front: two other eagles' nests of the same brood. What a road it is!

It beats the tracks on Exmoor. The uphill and downhill of Devonshire scorns compromise or mitigation by *detour* and zigzag. But here geography is on a scale so far more vast, and the roadway is so far worse metalled than with us in England—knotty masses of talc and nodes of sandstone cropping up at dangerous turnings—that only Dante's words describe the journey:—

Vassi in Sanleo, e discendesi in Noli,
Montasi su Bismantova in cacume
Con esso i pie; ma qui convien ch' uom voli.

Of a truth, our horses seemed rather to fly than scramble up and down these rugged precipices; Visconti cheerily animating them with the brave spirit that was in him, and lending them his wary driver's help of hand and voice at need.

We were soon upon a cornice-road between the mountains and the Adriatic: following the curves of gulch and cleft ravine; winding round ruined castles set on points of vantage; the sea-line high above their grass-grown battlements, the shadow-dappled champaign girdling their bastions mortised on the naked rock. Except for the blue lights across the distance, and the ever-present sea, these earthy Apennines would be too grim. Infinite air and this spare veil of spring-tide greenery on field and forest soothe their sternness. Two rivers, swollen by late rains, had to be forded. Through one of these, the Foglia, bare-legged peasants led the way. The horses waded to their bellies in the tawny water. Then more hills and vales; green nooks with rippling corn-crops; secular oaks attired in golden leafage. The clear afternoon air rang with the voices of a thousand larks overhead. The whole world seemed quivering with light and delicate ethereal sound. And yet my mind turned irresistibly to thoughts of war, violence, and pillage. How often has this intermediate land been fought over by Montefeltro and Brancaleoni, by Borgia and Malatesta, by Medici and Della Rovere! Its *contadini* are robust men, almost statuesque in build, and beautiful of feature. No wonder



Page 41

that the Princes of Urbino, with such materials to draw from, sold their service and their troops to Florence, Rome, S. Mark, and Milan. The bearing of these peasants is still soldierly and proud. Yet they are not sullen or forbidding like the Sicilians, whose habits of life, for the rest, much resemble theirs. The villages, there as here, are few and far between, perched high on rocks, from which the folk descend to till the ground and reap the harvest. But the southern *brusquerie* and brutality are absent from this district. The men have something of the dignity and slow-eyed mildness of their own huge oxen. As evening fell, more solemn Apennines upreared themselves to southward. The Monte d'Asdrubale, Monte Nerone, and Monte Catria hove into sight. At last, when light was dim, a tower rose above the neighbouring ridge, a broken outline of some city barred the sky-line. Urbino stood before us. Our long day's march was at an end.

The sunset was almost spent, and a four days' moon hung above the western Apennines, when we took our first view of the palace. It is a fancy-thralling work of wonder seen in that dim twilight; like some castle reared by Atlante's magic for imprisonment of Ruggiero, or palace sought in fairyland by Astolf winding his enchanted horn. Where shall we find its like, combining, as it does, the buttressed battlemented bulk of mediaeval strongholds with the airy balconies, suspended gardens, and fantastic turrets of Italian pleasure-houses? This unique blending of the feudal past with the Renaissance spirit of the time when it was built, connects it with the art of Ariosto—or more exactly with Boiardo's epic. Duke Federigo planned his palace at Urbino just at the moment when the Count of Scandiano had begun to chaunt his lays of Roland in the Castle of Ferrara. Chivalry, transmuted by the Italian genius into something fanciful and quaint, survived as a frail work of art. The men-at-arms of the Condottieri still glittered in gilded hauberks. Their helmets waved with plumes and bizarre crests. Their surcoats blazed with heraldries; their velvet caps with medals bearing legendary emblems. The pomp and circumstance of feudal war had not yet yielded to the cannon of the Gascon or the Switzer's pike. The fatal age of foreign invasions had not begun for Italy. Within a few years Charles VIII.'s holiday excursion would reveal the internal rottenness and weakness of her rival states, and the peninsula for half a century to come would be drenched in the blood of Frenchmen, Germans, Spaniards, fighting for her cities as their prey. But now Lorenzo de' Medici was still alive. The famous policy which bears his name held Italy suspended for a golden time in false tranquillity and independence. The princes who shared his culture and his love of art were gradually passing into modern noblemen, abandoning the savage feuds and passions of more virile centuries, yielding to luxury and scholarly enjoyments. The castles were becoming courts, and despotisms won by force were settling into dynasties.

Page 42

It was just at this epoch that Duke Federigo built his castle at Urbino. One of the ablest and wealthiest Condottieri of his time, one of the best instructed and humanest of Italian princes, he combined in himself the qualities which mark that period of transition. And these he impressed upon his dwelling-house, which looks backward to the mediaeval fortalice and forward to the modern palace. This makes it the just embodiment in architecture of Italian romance, the perfect analogue of the 'Orlando Innamorato.' By comparing it with the castle of the Estes at Ferrara and the Palazzo del Te of the Gonzagas at Mantua, we place it in its right position between mediaeval and Renaissance Italy, between the age when principalities arose upon the ruins of commercial independence and the age when they became dynastic under Spain.

The exigencies of the ground at his disposal forced Federigo to give the building an irregular outline. The fine facade, with its embayed *loggie* and flanking turrets, is placed too close upon the city ramparts for its due effect. We are obliged to cross the deep ravine which separates it from a lower quarter of the town, and take our station near the Oratory of S. Giovanni Battista, before we can appreciate the beauty of its design, or the boldness of the group it forms with the cathedral dome and tower and the square masses of numerous out-buildings. Yet this peculiar position of the palace, though baffling to a close observer of its details, is one of singular advantage to the inhabitants. Set on the verge of Urbino's towering eminence, it fronts a wave-tossed sea of vales and mountain summits toward the rising and the setting sun. There is nothing but illimitable air between the terraces and loggias of the Duchess's apartments and the spreading pyramid of Monte Catria.

A nobler scene is nowhere swept from palace windows than this, which Castiglione touched in a memorable passage at the end of his 'Cortegiano.' To one who in our day visits Urbino, it is singular how the slight indications of this sketch, as in some silhouette, bring back the antique life, and link the present with the past—a hint, perhaps, for reticence in our descriptions. The gentlemen and ladies of the court had spent a summer night in long debate on love, rising to the height of mystical Platonic rapture on the lips of Bembo, when one of them exclaimed, 'The day has broken!' He pointed to the light which was beginning to enter by the fissures of the windows. Whereupon we flung the casements wide upon that side of the palace which looks toward the high peak of Monte Catria, and saw that a fair dawn of rosy hue was born already in the eastern skies, and all the stars had vanished except the sweet regent of the heaven of Venus, who holds the borderlands of day and night; and from her sphere it seemed as though a gentle wind were breathing, filling the air with eager freshness, and waking among the numerous woods upon the neighbouring hills the sweet-toned symphonies of joyous birds.'



Page 43

II

The House of Montefeltro rose into importance early in the twelfth century. Frederick Barbarossa erected their fief into a county in 1160. Supported by imperial favour, they began to exercise an undefined authority over the district, which they afterwards converted into a duchy. But, though Ghibelline for several generations, the Montefeltri were too near neighbours of the Papal power to free themselves from ecclesiastical vassalage. Therefore in 1216 they sought and obtained the title of Vicars of the Church. Urbino acknowledged them as semi-despots in their double capacity of Imperial and Papal deputies. Cagli and Gubbio followed in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth, Castel Durante was acquired from the Brancaloni by warfare, and Fossombrone from the Malatestas by purchase. Numerous fiefs and villages fell into their hands upon the borders of Rimini in the course of a continued struggle with the House of Malatesta: and when Fano and Pesaro were added at the opening of the sixteenth century, the domain over which they ruled was a compact territory, some forty miles square, between the Adriatic and the Apennines. From the close of the thirteenth century they bore the title of Counts of Urbino. The famous Conte Guido, whom Dante placed among the fraudulent in hell, supported the honours of the house and increased its power by his political action, at this epoch. But it was not until the year 1443 that the Montefeltri acquired their ducal title. This was conferred by Eugenius IV. upon Oddantonio, over whose alleged crimes and indubitable assassination a veil of mystery still hangs. He was the son of Count Guidantonio, and at his death the Montefeltri of Urbino were extinct in the legitimate line. A natural son of Guidantonio had been, however, recognised in his father's lifetime, and married to Gentile, heiress of Mercatello. This was Federigo, a youth of great promise, who succeeded his half-brother in 1444 as Count of Urbino. It was not until 1474 that the ducal title was revived for him.

Duke Frederick was a prince remarkable among Italian despots for private virtues and sober use of his hereditary power. He spent his youth at Mantua, in that famous school of Vittorino da Feltre, where the sons and daughters of the first Italian nobility received a model education in humanities, good manners, and gentle physical accomplishments. More than any of his fellow-students Frederick profited by this rare scholar's discipline. On leaving school he adopted the profession of arms, as it was then practised, and joined the troop of the Condottiere Niccolo Piccinino. Young men of his own rank, especially the younger sons and bastards of ruling families, sought military service under captains of adventure. If they succeeded they were sure to make money. The coffers of the Church and the republics lay open to their not too scrupulous hands; the wealth of Milan and Naples was squandered on them



Page 44

in retaining-fees and salaries for active service. There was always the further possibility of placing a coronet upon their brows before they died, if haply they should wrest a town from their employers, or obtain the cession of a province from a needy Pope. The neighbours of the Montefeltri in Umbria, Romagna, and the Marches of Ancona were all of them Condottieri. Malatestas of Rimini and Pesaro, Vitelli of Citta di Castello, Varani of Camerino, Baglioni of Perugia, to mention only a few of the most eminent nobles, enrolled themselves under the banners of plebeian adventurers like Piccinino and Sforza Attendolo. Though their family connections gave them a certain advantage, the system was essentially democratic. Gattamelata and Carmagnola sprang from obscurity by personal address and courage to the command of armies. Colleoni fought his way up from the grooms to princely station and the *baton* of S. Mark. Francesco Sforza, whose father had begun life as a tiller of the soil, seized the ducal crown of Milan, and founded a house which ranked among the first in Europe.

It is not needful to follow Duke Frederick in his military career. We may briefly remark that when he succeeded to Urbino by his brother's death in 1444, he undertook generalship on a grand scale. His own dominions supplied him with some of the best troops in Italy. He was careful to secure the goodwill of his subjects by attending personally to their interests, relieving them of imposts, and executing equal justice. He gained the then unique reputation of an honest prince, paternally disposed toward his dependents. Men flocked to his standards willingly, and he was able to bring an important contingent into any army. These advantages secured for him alliances with Francesco Sforza, and brought him successively into connection with Milan, Venice, Florence, the Church of Naples. As a tactician in the field he held high rank among the generals of the age, and so considerable were his engagements that he acquired great wealth in the exercise of his profession. We find him at one time receiving 8000 ducats a month as war-pay from Naples, with a peace pension of 6000. While Captain-General of the League, he drew for his own use in war 45,000 ducats of annual pay. Retaining-fees and pensions in the name of past services swelled his income, the exact extent of which has not, so far as I am aware, been estimated, but which must have made him one of the richest of Italian princes. All this wealth he spent upon his duchy, fortifying and beautifying its cities, drawing youths of promise to his court, maintaining a great train of life, and keeping his vassals in good-humour by the lightness of a rule which contrasted favourably with the exactions of needier despots.

Page 45

While fighting for the masters who offered him *condotta* in the complicated wars of Italy, Duke Frederick used his arms, when occasion served, in his own quarrels. Many years of his life were spent in a prolonged struggle with his neighbour Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, the bizarre and brilliant tyrant of Rimini, who committed the fatal error of embroiling himself beyond all hope of pardon with the Church, and who died discomfited in the duel with his warier antagonist. Urbino profited by each mistake of Sigismondo, and the history of this long desultory strife with Rimini is a history of gradual aggrandisement and consolidation for the Montefeltrian duchy.

In 1459 Duke Frederick married his second wife, Battista, daughter of Alessandro Sforza, Lord of Pesaro. Their portraits, painted by Piero della Francesca, are to be seen in the Uffizzi at Florence. Some years earlier, Frederick lost his right eye and had the bridge of his nose broken in a jousting match outside the town-gate of Urbino. After this accident, he preferred to be represented in profile—the profile so well known to students of Italian art on medals and bas-reliefs. It was not without medical aid and vows fulfilled by a mother's self-sacrifice to death, if we may trust the diarists of Urbino, that the ducal couple got an heir. In 1472, however, a son was born to them, whom they christened Guido Paolo Ubaldo. He proved a youth of excellent parts and noble nature—apt at study, perfect in all chivalrous accomplishments. But he inherited some fatal physical debility, and his life was marred with a constitutional disease, which then received the name of gout, and which deprived him of the free use of his limbs. After his father's death in 1482, Naples, Florence, and Milan continued Frederick's war engagements to Guidobaldo. The prince was but a boy of ten. Therefore these important *condotte* must be regarded as compliments and pledges for the future. They prove to what a pitch Duke Frederick had raised the credit of his state and war establishment. Seven years later, Guidobaldo married Elisabetta, daughter of Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. This union, though a happy one, was never blessed with children; and in the certainty of barrenness, the young Duke thought it prudent to adopt a nephew as heir to his dominions. He had several sisters, one of whom, Giovanna, had been married to a nephew of Sixtus IV., Giovanni della Rovere, Lord of Sinigaglia and Prefect of Rome. They had a son, Francesco Maria, who, after his adoption by Guidobaldo, spent his boyhood at Urbino.

The last years of the fifteenth century were marked by the sudden rise of Cesare Borgia to a power which threatened the liberties of Italy. Acting as General for the Church, he carried his arms against the petty tyrants of Romagna, whom he dispossessed and extirpated. His next move was upon Camerino and Urbino. He first acquired Camerino, having lulled Guidobaldo into false security by treacherous



Page 46

professions of goodwill. Suddenly the Duke received intelligence that the Borgia was marching on him over Cagli. This was in the middle of June 1502. It is difficult to comprehend the state of weakness in which Guidobaldo was surprised, or the panic which then seized him. He made no efforts to rouse his subjects to resistance, but fled by night with his nephew through rough mountain roads, leaving his capital and palace to the marauder. Cesare Borgia took possession without striking a blow, and removed the treasures of Urbino to the Vatican. His occupation of the duchy was not undisturbed, however; for the people rose in several places against him, proving that Guidobaldo had yielded too hastily to alarm. By this time the fugitive was safe in Mantua, whence he returned, and for a short time succeeded in establishing himself again at Urbino. But he could not hold his own against the Borgias, and in December, by a treaty, he resigned his claims and retired to Venice, where he lived upon the bounty of S. Mark. It must be said, in justice to the Duke, that his constitutional debility rendered him unfit for active operations in the field. Perhaps he could not have done better than thus to bend beneath the storm.

The sudden death of Alexander VI. and the election of a Della Rovere to the Papacy in 1503 changed Guidobaldo's prospects. Julius II. was the sworn foe of the Borgias and the close kinsman of Urbino's heir. It was therefore easy for the Duke to walk into his empty palace on the hill, and to reinstate himself in the domains from which he had so recently been ousted. The rest of his life was spent in the retirement of his court, surrounded with the finest scholars and the noblest gentlemen of Italy. The ill-health which debarred him from the active pleasures and employments of his station, was borne with uniform sweetness of temper and philosophy.

When he died, in 1508, his nephew, Francesco Maria della Rovere, succeeded to the duchy, and once more made the palace of Urbino the resort of men-at-arms and captains. He was a prince of very violent temper: of its extravagance history has recorded three remarkable examples. He murdered the Cardinal of Pavia with his own hand in the streets of Ravenna; stabbed a lover of his sister to death at Urbino; and in a council of war knocked Francesco Guicciardini down with a blow of his fist. When the history of Italy came to be written, Guicciardini was probably mindful of that insult, for he painted Francesco Maria's character and conduct in dark colours. At the same time this Duke of Urbino passed for one of the first generals of the age. The greatest stain upon his memory is his behaviour in the year 1527, when, by dilatory conduct of the campaign in Lombardy, he suffered the passage of Frundsberg's army unopposed, and afterwards hesitated to relieve Rome from the horrors of the sack. He was the last Italian Condottiere of the antique type; and the vices which Machiavelli exposed in that bad system of mercenary warfare were illustrated on these occasions. During his lifetime, the conditions of Italy were so changed by Charles V.'s imperial settlement in 1530, that the occupation of Condottiere ceased to have any meaning. Strozzi and

Farnesi, who afterwards followed this profession, enlisted in the ranks of France or Spain, and won their laurels in Northern Europe.



Page 47

While Leo X. held the Papal chair, the duchy of Urbino was for a while wrested from the house of Della Rovere, and conferred upon Lorenzo de' Medici. Francesco Maria made a better fight for his heritage than Guidobaldo had done. Yet he could not successfully resist the power of Rome. The Pope was ready to spend enormous sums of money on this petty war; the Duke's purse was shorter, and the mercenary troops he was obliged to use, proved worthless in the field. Spaniards, for the most part, pitted against Spaniards, they suffered the campaigns to degenerate into a guerilla warfare of pillage and reprisals. In 1517 the duchy was formally ceded to Lorenzo. But this Medici did not live long to enjoy it, and his only child Catherine, the future Queen of France, never exercised the rights which had devolved upon her by inheritance. The shifting scene of Italy beheld Francesco Maria reinstated in Urbino after Leo's death in 1522.

This Duke married Leonora Gonzaga, a princess of the House of Mantua. Their portraits, painted by Titian, adorn the Venetian room of the Uffizzi. Of their son, Guidobaldo II., little need be said. He was twice married, first to Giulia Varano, Duchess by inheritance of Camerino; secondly, to Vittoria Farnese, daughter of the Duke of Parma. Guidobaldo spent a lifetime in petty quarrels with his subjects, whom he treated badly, attempting to draw from their pockets the wealth which his father and the Montefeltri had won in military service. He intervened at an awkward period of Italian politics. The old Italy of despots, commonwealths, and Condottieri, in which his predecessors played substantial parts, was at an end. The new Italy of Popes and Austro-Spanish dynasties had hardly settled into shape. Between these epochs, Guidobaldo II., of whom we have a dim and hazy presentation on the page of history, seems somehow to have fallen flat. As a sign of altered circumstances, he removed his court to Pesaro, and built the great palace of the Della Roveres upon the public square.

Guidobaldaccio, as he was called, died in 1574, leaving an only son, Francesco Maria II., whose life and character illustrate the new age which had begun for Italy. He was educated in Spain at the court of Philip II., where he spent more than two years. When he returned, his Spanish haughtiness, punctilious attention to etiquette, and superstitious piety attracted observation. The violent temper of the Della Roveres, which Francesco Maria I. displayed in acts of homicide, and which had helped to win his bad name for Guidobaldaccio, took the form of sullenness in the last Duke. The finest episode in his life was the part he played in the battle of Lepanto, under his old comrade, Don John of Austria. His father forced him to an uncongenial marriage with Lucrezia d'Este, Princess of Ferrara. She left him, and took refuge in her native city, then honoured by the presence of Tasso and Guarini. He bore her departure with



Page 48

philosophical composure, recording the event in his diary as something to be dryly grateful for. Left alone, the Duke abandoned himself to solitude, religious exercises, hunting, and the economy of his impoverished dominions. He became that curious creature, a man of narrow nature and mediocre capacity, who, dedicated to the cult of self, is fain to pass for saint and sage in easy circumstances. He married, for the second time, a lady, Livia della Rovere, who belonged to his own family, but had been born in private station. She brought him one son, the Prince Federigo-Ubaldo. This youth might have sustained the ducal honours of Urbino, but for his sage-saint father's want of wisdom. The boy was a spoiled child in infancy. Inflated with Spanish vanity from the cradle, taught to regard his subjects as dependents on a despot's will, abandoned to the caprices of his own ungovernable temper, without substantial aid from the paternal piety or stoicism, he rapidly became a most intolerable princeling. His father married him, while yet a boy, to Claudia de' Medici, and virtually abdicated in his favour. Left to his own devices, Federigo chose companions from the troupes of players whom he drew from Venice. He filled his palaces with harlots, and degraded himself upon the stage in parts of mean buffoonery. The resources of the duchy were racked to support these parasites. Spanish rules of etiquette and ceremony were outraged by their orgies. His bride brought him one daughter, Vittoria, who afterwards became the wife of Ferdinand, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Then in the midst of his low dissipation and offences against ducal dignity, he died of apoplexy at the early age of eighteen—the victim, in the severe judgment of history, of his father's selfishness and want of practical ability.

This happened in 1623. Francesco Maria was stunned by the blow. His withdrawal from the duties of the sovereignty in favour of such a son had proved a constitutional unfitness for the duties of his station. The life he loved was one of seclusion in a round of pious exercises, petty studies, peddling economies, and mechanical amusements. A powerful and grasping Pope was on the throne of Rome. Urban at this juncture pressed Francesco Maria hard; and in 1624 the last Duke of Urbino devolved his lordships to the Holy See. He survived the formal act of abdication seven years; when he died, the Pontiff added his duchy to the Papal States, which thenceforth stretched from Naples to the bounds of Venice on the Po.

III

Duke Frederick began the palace at Urbino in 1454, when he was still only Count. The architect was Luziano of Lauranna, a Dalmatian; and the beautiful white limestone, hard as marble, used in the construction, was brought from the Dalmatian coast. This stone, like the Istrian stone of Venetian buildings, takes and retains the chisel mark with wonderful precision. It looks as though, when fresh, it must have had the pliancy of clay, so delicately are the finest curves in scroll or foliage scooped from its substance.

And yet it preserves each cusp and angle of the most elaborate pattern with the crispness and the sharpness of a crystal.



Page 49

When wrought by a clever craftsman, its surface has neither the waxiness of Parian, nor the brittle edge of Carrara marble; and it resists weather better than marble of the choicest quality. This may be observed in many monuments of Venice, where the stone has been long exposed to sea-air. These qualities of the Dalmatian limestone, no less than its agreeable creamy hue and smooth dull polish, adapt it to decoration in low relief. The most attractive details in the palace at Urbino are friezes carved of this material in choice designs of early Renaissance dignity and grace. One chimney-piece in the Sala degli Angeli deserves especial comment. A frieze of dancing Cupids, with gilt hair and wings, their naked bodies left white on a ground of ultramarine, is supported by broad flat pilasters. These are engraved with children holding pots of flowers; roses on one side, carnations on the other. Above the frieze another pair of angels, one at each end, hold lighted torches; and the pyramidal cap of the chimney is carved with two more, flying, and supporting the eagle of the Montefeltri on a raised medallion. Throughout the palace we notice emblems appropriate to the Houses of Montefeltro and Della Rovere: their arms, three golden bends upon a field of azure: the Imperial eagle, granted when Montefeltro was made a fief of the Empire: the Garter of England, worn by the Dukes Federigo and Guidobaldo: the ermine of Naples: the *ventosa*, or cupping-glass, adopted for a private badge by Frederick: the golden oak-tree on an azure field of Della Rovere: the palm-tree, bent beneath a block of stone, with its accompanying motto, *Inclinata Resurgam*: the cipher, FE DX. Profile medallions of Federigo and Guidobaldo, wrought in the lowest possible relief, adorn the staircases. Round the great courtyard runs a frieze of military engines and ensigns, trophies, machines, and implements of war, alluding to Duke Frederick's profession of Condottiere. The doorways are enriched with scrolls of heavy-headed flowers, acanthus foliage, honeysuckles, ivy-berries, birds and boys and sphinxes, in all the riot of Renaissance fancy.

This profusion of sculptured *rilievo* is nearly all that remains to show how rich the palace was in things of beauty. Castiglione, writing in the reign of Guidobaldo, says that 'in the opinion of many it is the fairest to be found in Italy; and the Duke filled it so well with all things fitting its magnificence, that it seemed less like a palace than a city. Not only did he collect articles of common use, vessels of silver, and trappings for chambers of rare cloths of gold and silk, and suchlike furniture, but he added multitudes of bronze and marble statues, exquisite pictures, and instruments of music of all sorts. There was nothing but was of the finest and most excellent quality to be seen there. Moreover, he gathered together at a vast cost a large number of the best and rarest books in Greek, Latin,

Page 50

and Hebrew, all of which he adorned with gold and silver, esteeming them the chiefest treasure of his spacious palace.' When Cesare Borgia entered Urbino as conqueror in 1502, he is said to have carried off loot to the value of 150,000 ducats, or perhaps about a quarter of a million sterling. Vespasiano, the Florentine bookseller, has left us a minute account of the formation of the famous library of manuscripts, which he valued at considerably over 30,000 ducats. Yet wandering now through these deserted halls, we seek in vain for furniture or tapestry or works of art. The books have been removed to Rome. The pictures are gone, no man knows whither. The plate has long been melted down. The instruments of music are broken. If frescoes adorned the corridors, they have been whitewashed; the ladies' chambers have been stripped of their rich arras. Only here and there we find a raftered ceiling, painted in fading colours, which, taken with the stonework of the chimney, and some fragments of inlaid panel-work on door or window, enables us to reconstruct the former richness of these princely rooms.

Exception must be made in favour of two apartments between the towers upon the southern facade. These were apparently the private rooms of the Duke and Duchess, and they are still approached by a great winding staircase in one of the *torricini*. Adorned in indestructible or irremovable materials, they retain some traces of their ancient splendour. On the first floor, opening on the vaulted loggia, we find a little chapel encrusted with lovely work in stucco and marble; friezes of bulls, sphinxes, sea-horses, and foliage; with a low relief of Madonna and Child in the manner of Mino da Fiesole. Close by is a small study with inscriptions to the Muses and Apollo. The cabinet connecting these two cells has a Latin legend, to say that Religion here dwells near the temple of the liberal arts:

Bina vides parvo discrimine juncta sacella,
Altera pars Musis altera sacra Deo est.

On the floor above, corresponding in position to this apartment, is a second, of even greater interest, since it was arranged by the Duke Frederick for his own retreat. The study is panelled in tarsia of beautiful design and execution. Three of the larger compartments show Faith, Hope, and Charity; figures not unworthy of a Botticelli or a Filippino Lippi. The occupations of the Duke are represented on a smaller scale by armour, *batons* of command, scientific instruments, lutes, viols, and books, some open and some shut. The Bible, Homer, Virgil, Seneca, Tacitus, and Cicero, are lettered; apparently to indicate his favourite authors. The Duke himself, arrayed in his state robes, occupies a fourth great panel; and the whole of this elaborate composition is harmonised by emblems, badges, and occasional devices of birds, articles of furniture, and so forth. The tarsia, or inlaid wood of different kinds and colours, is among the best in this kind of art to be found in Italy, though perhaps it hardly deserves to rank with the celebrated choir-stalls of Bergamo and Monte Oliveto. Hard by is a chapel, adorned, like the lower one, with excellent reliefs. The loggia to which these rooms have access



looks across the Apennines, and down on what was once a private garden. It is now enclosed and paved for the exercise of prisoners who are confined in one part of the desecrated palace!

Page 51

A portion of the pile is devoted to more worthy purposes; for the Academy of Raphael here holds its sittings, and preserves a collection of curiosities and books illustrative of the great painter's life and works. They have recently placed in a tiny oratory, scooped by Guidobaldo II. from the thickness of the wall, a cast of Raphael's skull, which will be studied with interest and veneration. It has the fineness of modelling combined with shapeliness of form and smallness of scale which is said to have characterised Mozart and Shelley.

The impression left upon the mind after traversing this palace in its length and breadth is one of weariness and disappointment. How shall we reconstruct the long-past life which filled its rooms with sound, the splendour of its pageants, the thrill of tragedies enacted here? It is not difficult to crowd its doors and vacant spaces with liveried servants, slim pages in tight hose, whose well-combed hair escapes from tiny caps upon their silken shoulders. We may even replace the tapestries of Troy which hung one hall, and build again the sideboards with their embossed gilded plate. But are these chambers really those where Emilia Pia held debate on love with Bembo and Castiglione; where Bibbiena's witticisms and Fra Serafino's pranks raised smiles on courtly lips; where Bernardo Accolti, 'the Unique,' declaimed his verses to applauding crowds? Is it possible that into yonder hall, where now the lion of S. Mark looks down alone on staring desolation, strode the Borgia in all his panoply of war, a gilded glittering dragon, and from the dais tore the Montefeltri's throne, and from the arras stripped their ensigns, replacing these with his own Bull and Valentinus Dux? Here Tasso tuned his lyre for Francesco Maria's wedding-feast, and read 'Aminta' to Lucrezia d'Este. Here Guidobaldo listened to the jests and whispered scandals of the Aretine. Here Titian set his easel up to paint; here the boy Raphael, cap in hand, took signed and sealed credentials from his Duchess to the Gonfalonier of Florence. Somewhere in these huge chambers, the courtiers sat before a torch-lit stage, when Bibbiena's 'Calandria' and Caetiglione's 'Tirsi,' with their miracles of masques and mummers, whiled the night away. Somewhere, we know not where, Giuliano de' Medici made love in these bare rooms to that mysterious mother of ill-fated Cardinal Ippolito; somewhere, in some darker nook, the bastard Alessandro sprang to his strange-fortuned life of tyranny and license, which Brutus-Lorenzino cut short with a traitor's poignard-thrust in Via Larga. How many men, illustrious for arts and letters, memorable by their virtues or their crimes, have trod these silent corridors, from the great Pope Julius down to James III., self-titled King of England, who tarried here with Clementina Sobieski through some twelve months of his ex-royal exile! The memories of all this folk, flown guests and masters of the still-abiding palace-chambers, haunt us as we hurry through. They are but filmy shadows. We cannot grasp them, localise them, people surrounding emptiness with more than withering cobweb forms.



Page 52

Death takes a stronger hold on us than bygone life. Therefore, returning to the vast Throne-room, we animate it with one scene it witnessed on an April night in 1508. Duke Guidobaldo had died at Fossombrone, repeating to his friends around his bed these lines of Virgil:

Me circum limus niger et deformis arundo Cocyti tarda que
palus inamabilis unda Alligat, et novies Styx interfusa
coercet.

His body had been carried on the shoulders of servants through those mountain ways at night, amid the lamentations of gathering multitudes and the baying of dogs from hill-set farms alarmed by flaring flambeaux. Now it is laid in state in the great hall. The dais and the throne are draped in black. The arms and *batons* of his father hang about the doorways. His own ensigns are displayed in groups and trophies, with the banners of S. Mark, the Montefeltrian eagle, and the cross keys of S. Peter. The hall itself is vacant, save for the high-reared catafalque of sable velvet and gold damask, surrounded with wax candles burning steadily. Round it passes a ceaseless stream of people, coming and going, gazing at their Duke. He is attired in crimson hose and doublet of black damask. Black velvet slippers are on his feet, and his ducal cap is of black velvet. The mantle of the Garter, made of dark-blue Alexandrine velvet, hooded with crimson, lined with white silk damask, and embroidered with the badge, drapes the stiff sleeping form.

It is easier to conjure up the past of this great palace, strolling round it in free air and twilight; perhaps because the landscape and the life still moving on the city streets bring its exterior into harmony with real existence. The southern facade, with its vaulted balconies and flanking towers, takes the fancy, fascinates the eye, and lends itself as a fit stage for puppets of the musing mind. Once more imagination plants trim orange-trees in giant jars of Gubbio ware upon the pavement where the garden of the Duchess lay—the pavement paced in these bad days by convicts in grey canvas jackets—that pavement where Monsignor Bombo courted ‘dear dead women’ with Platonic phrase, smothering the Menta of his natural man in lettuce culled from Academe and thyme of Mount Hymettus. In yonder loggia, lifted above the garden and the court, two lovers are in earnest converse. They lean beneath the coffered arch, against the marble of the balustrade, he fingering his dagger under the dark velvet doublet, she playing with a clove carnation, deep as her own shame. The man is Giannandrea, broad-shouldered bravo of Verona, Duke Guidobaldo’s favourite and carpet-count. The lady is Madonna Maria, daughter of Rome’s Prefect, widow of Venanzio Varano, whom the Borgia strangled. On their discourse a tale will hang of woman’s frailty and man’s boldness—Camerino’s Duchess yielding to a low-born suitor’s stalwart charms. And more will follow, when that lady’s brother, furious Francesco Maria della Rovere, shall stab the



Page 53

bravo in torch-litten palace rooms with twenty poignard strokes 'twixt waist and throat, and their Pandarus shall be sent down to his account by a varlet's *coltellata* through the midriff. Imagination shifts the scene, and shows in that same loggia Rome's warlike Pope, attended by his cardinals and all Urbino's chivalry. The snowy beard of Julius flows down upon his breast, where jewels clasp the crimson mantle, as in Raphael's picture. His eyes are bright with wine; for he has come to gaze on sunset from the banquet-chamber, and to watch the line of lamps which soon will leap along that palace cornice in his honour. Behind him lies Bologna humbled. The Pope returns, a conqueror, to Rome. Yet once again imagination is at work. A gaunt, bald man, close-habited in Spanish black, his spare, fine features carved in purest ivory, leans from that balcony. Gazing with hollow eyes, he tracks the swallows in their flight, and notes that winter is at hand. This is the last Duke of Urbino, Francesco Maria II., he whose young wife deserted him, who made for himself alone a hermit-pedant's round of petty cares and niggard avarice and mean-brained superstition. He drew a second consort from the convent, and raised up seed unto his line by forethought, but beheld his princeling fade untimely in the bloom of boyhood. Nothing is left but solitude. To the mortmain of the Church reverts Urbino's lordship, and even now he meditates the terms of devolution. Jesuits cluster in the rooms behind, with comfort for the ducal soul and calculations for the interests of Holy See.

A farewell to these memories of Urbino's dukedom should be taken in the crypt of the cathedral, where Francesco Maria II., the last Duke, buried his only son and all his temporal hopes. The place is scarcely solemn. Its dreary *barocco* emblems mar the dignity of death. A bulky *Pieta* by Gian Bologna, with Madonna's face unfinished, towers up and crowds the narrow cell. Religion has evanished from this late Renaissance art, nor has the afterglow of Guido Reni's hectic piety yet overflushed it. Chilled by the stifling humid sense of an extinct race here entombed in its last representative, we gladly emerge from the sepulchral vault into the air of day.

Filippo Visconti, with a smile on his handsome face, is waiting for us at the inn. His horses, sleek, well fed, and rested, toss their heads impatiently. We take our seats in the carriage, open wide beneath a sparkling sky, whirl past the palace and its ghost-like recollections, and are halfway on the road to Fossombrone in a cloud of dust and whirr of wheels before we think of looking back to greet Urbino. There is just time. The last decisive turning lies in front. We stand bareheaded to salute the grey mass of buildings ridged along the sky. Then the open road invites us with its varied scenery and movement. From the shadowy past we drive into the world of human things, for ever changefully unchanged, unrestfully the same. This interchange between dead memories and present life is the delight of travel.



Page 54

* * * * *

VITTORIA ACCORAMBONI

AND THE TRAGEDY OF WEBSTER

I

During the pontificate of Gregory XIII. (1572-85), Papal authority in Rome reached its lowest point of weakness, and the ancient splendour of the Papal court was well-nigh eclipsed. Art and learning had died out. The traditions of the days of Leo, Julius, and Paul III. were forgotten. It seemed as though the genius of the Renaissance had migrated across the Alps. All the powers of the Papacy were directed to the suppression of heresies and to the re-establishment of spiritual supremacy over the intellect of Europe. Meanwhile society in Rome returned to mediaeval barbarism. The veneer of classical refinement and humanistic urbanity, which for a time had hidden the natural savagery of the Roman nobles, wore away. The Holy City became a den of bandits; the territory of the Church supplied a battle-ground for senseless party strife, which the weak old man who wore the triple crown was quite unable to control. It is related how a robber chieftain, Marianazzo, refused the offer of a general pardon from the Pope, alleging that the profession of brigand was far more lucrative, and offered greater security of life, than any trade within the walls of Rome. The Campagna, the ruined citadels about the basements of the Sabine and Ciminian hills, the quarters of the aristocracy within the city, swarmed with bravos, who were protected by great nobles and fed by decent citizens for the advantages to be derived from the assistance of abandoned and courageous ruffians. Life, indeed, had become impossible without fixed compact with the powers of lawlessness. There was hardly a family in Rome which did not number some notorious criminal among the outlaws. Murder, sacrilege, the love of adventure, thirst for plunder, poverty, hostility to the ascendant faction of the moment, were common causes of voluntary or involuntary outlawry; nor did public opinion regard a bandit's calling as other than honourable.

It may readily be imagined that in such a state of society the grisliest tragedies were common enough in Rome. The history of some of these has been preserved to us in documents digested from public trials and personal observation by contemporary writers. That of the Cenci, in which a notorious act of parricide furnished the plot of a popular novella, is well known. And such a tragedy, even more rife in characteristic incidents, and more distinguished by the quality of its *dramatis personae*, is that of Vittoria Accoramboni.



Page 55

Vittoria was born in 1557, of a noble but impoverished family, at Gubbio, among the hills of Umbria. Her biographers are rapturous in their praises of her beauty, grace, and exceeding charm of manner. Not only was her person most lovely, but her mind shone at first with all the amiable lustre of a modest, innocent, and winning youth. Her father, Claudio Accoramboni, removed to Rome, where his numerous children were brought up under the care of their mother, Tarquinia, an ambitious and unscrupulous woman, bent on rehabilitating the decayed honours of their house. Here Vittoria in early girlhood soon became the fashion. She exercised an irresistible influence over all who saw her, and many were the offers of marriage she refused. At length a suitor appeared whose condition and connection with the Roman ecclesiastical nobility rendered him acceptable in the eyes of the Accoramboni. Francesco Peretti was welcomed as the successful candidate for Vittoria's hand. His mother, Camilla, was sister to Felice, Cardinal of Montalto; and her son, Francesco Mignucci, had changed his surname in compliment to this illustrious relative. The Peretti were of humble origin. The cardinal himself had tended swine in his native village; but, supported by an invincible belief in his own destinies, and gifted with a powerful intellect and determined character, he passed through all grades of the Franciscan Order to its generalship, received the bishoprics of Fermo and S. Agata, and lastly, in the year 1570, assumed the scarlet with the title of Cardinal Montalto. He was now upon the high way to the Papacy, amassing money by incessant care, studying the humours of surrounding factions, effacing his own personality, and by mixing but little in the intrigues of the court, winning the reputation of a prudent, inoffensive old man. These were his tactics for securing the Papal throne; nor were his expectations frustrated; for in 1585 he was chosen Pope, the parties of the Medici and the Farnesi agreeing to accept him as a compromise. When Sixtus V. was once firmly seated on S. Peter's chair, he showed himself in his true colours. An implacable administrator of severest justice, a rigorous economist, an iconoclastic foe to paganism, the first act of his reign was to declare a war of extirpation against the bandits who had reduced Rome in his predecessor's rule to anarchy.

It was the nephew, then, of this man, whom historians have judged the greatest personage of his own times, that Vittoria Accoramboni married on the 28th of June 1573. For a short while the young couple lived happily together. According to some accounts of their married life, the bride secured the favour of her powerful uncle-in-law, who indulged her costly fancies to the full. It is, however, more probable that the Cardinal Montalto treated her follies with a grudging parsimony; for we soon find the Peretti household hopelessly involved in debt. Discord, too, arose between Vittoria and her husband on the



Page 56

score of a certain levity in her behaviour; and it was rumoured that even during the brief space of their union she had proved a faithless wife. Yet she contrived to keep Francesco's confidence, and it is certain that her family profited by their connection with the Peretti. Of her six brothers, Mario, the eldest, was a favourite courtier of the great Cardinal d'Este. Ottavio was in orders, and through Montalto's influence obtained the See of Fossombrone. The same eminent protector placed Scipione in the service of the Cardinal Sforza. Camillo, famous for his beauty and his courage, followed the fortunes of Filibert of Savoy, and died in France. Flaminio was still a boy, dependent, as the sequel of this story shows, upon his sister's destiny. Of Marcello, the second in age and most important in the action of this tragedy, it is needful to speak with more particularity. He was young, and, like the rest of his breed, singularly handsome—so handsome, indeed, that he is said to have gained an infamous ascendancy over the great Duke of Bracciano, whose privy chamberlain he had become. Marcello was an outlaw for the murder of Matteo Pallavicino, the brother of the Cardinal of that name. This did not, however, prevent the chief of the Orsini house from making him his favourite and confidential friend. Marcello, who seems to have realised in actual life the worst vices of those Roman courtiers described for us by Aretino, very soon conceived the plan of exalting his own fortunes by trading on his sister's beauty. He worked upon the Duke of Bracciano's mind so cleverly, that he brought this haughty prince to the point of an insane passion for Peretti's young wife; and meanwhile so contrived to inflame the ambition of Vittoria and her mother, Tarquinia, that both were prepared to dare the worst of crimes in expectation of a dukedom. The game was a difficult one to play. Not only had Francesco Peretti first to be murdered, but the inequality of birth and wealth and station between Vittoria and the Duke of Bracciano rendered a marriage almost impossible. It was also an affair of delicacy to stimulate without satisfying the Duke's passion. Yet Marcello did not despair. The stakes were high enough to justify great risks; and all he put in peril was his sister's honour, the fame of the Accoramboni, and the favour of Montalto. Vittoria, for her part, trusted in her power to ensnare and secure the noble prey both had in view.

Paolo Giordano Orsini, born about the year 1537, was reigning Duke of Bracciano. Among Italian princes he ranked at least upon a par with the Dukes of Urbino, and his family, by its alliances, was more illustrious than any of that time in Italy. He was a man of gigantic stature, prodigious corpulence, and marked personal daring; agreeable in manners, but subject to uncontrollable fits of passion, and incapable of self-restraint when crossed in any whim or fancy. Upon the habit of his body it is needful to insist,



Page 57

in order that the part he played in this tragedy of intrigue, crime, and passion may be well defined. He found it difficult to procure a charger equal to his weight, and he was so fat that a special dispensation relieved him from the duty of genuflection in the Papal presence. Though lord of a large territory, yielding princely revenues, he laboured under heavy debts; for no great noble of the period lived more splendidly, with less regard for his finances. In the politics of that age and country, Paolo Giordano leaned toward France. Yet he was a grandee of Spain, and had played a distinguished part in the battle of Lepanto. Now the Duke of Bracciano was a widower. He had been married in 1553 to Isabella de' Medici, daughter of the Grand Duke Cosimo, sister of Francesco, Bianca Capello's lover, and of the Cardinal Ferdinando. Suspicion of adultery with Troilo Orsini had fallen on Isabella, and her husband, with the full concurrence of her brothers, removed her in 1576 from this world.[7] No one thought the worse of Bracciano for this murder of his wife. In those days of abandoned vice and intricate villany, certain points of honour were maintained with scrupulous fidelity. A wife's adultery was enough to justify the most savage and licentious husband in an act of semi-judicial vengeance; and the shame she brought upon his head was shared by the members of her own house, so that they stood by, consenting to her death. Isabella, it may be said, left one son, Virginio, who became in due time Duke of Bracciano.

It appears that in the year 1581, four years after Vittoria's marriage, the Duke of Bracciano had satisfied Marcello of his intention to make her his wife, and of his willingness to countenance Francesco Peretti's murder. Marcello, feeling sure of his game, introduced the Duke in private to his sister, and induced her to overcome any natural repugnance she may have felt for the unwieldy and gross lover. Having reached this point, it was imperative to push matters quickly on toward matrimony.

But how should the unfortunate Francesco be entrapped? They caught him in a snare of peculiar atrocity, by working on the kindly feelings which his love for Vittoria had caused him to extend to all the Acooramboni. Marcello, the outlaw, was her favourite brother, and Marcello at that time lay in hiding, under the suspicion of more than ordinary crime, beyond the walls of Rome. Late in the evening of the 18th of April, while the Peretti family were retiring to bed, a messenger from Marcello arrived, entreating Francesco to repair at once to Monte Cavallo. Marcello had affairs of the utmost importance to communicate, and begged his brother-in-law not to fail him at a grievous pinch. The letter containing this request was borne by one Domenico d'Aquaviva, *alias* Il Mancino, a confederate of Vittoria's waiting-maid. This fellow, like Marcello, was an outlaw; but when he ventured into Rome he frequented Peretti's house, and had made himself familiar with its master



Page 58

as a trusty bravo. Neither in the message, therefore, nor in the messenger was there much to rouse suspicion. The time, indeed, was oddly chosen, and Marcello had never made a similar appeal on any previous occasion. Yet his necessities might surely have obliged him to demand some more than ordinary favour from a brother. Francesco immediately made himself ready to set out, armed only with his sword and attended by a single servant. It was in vain that his wife and his mother reminded him of the dangers of the night, the loneliness of Monte Cavallo, its ruinous palaces and robber-haunted caves. He was resolved to undertake the adventure, and went forth, never to return. As he ascended the hill, he fell to earth, shot with three harquebuses. His body was afterwards found on Monte Cavallo, stabbed through and through, without a trace that could identify the murderers. Only, in the course of subsequent investigations, Il Mancino (on the 24th of February 1582) made the following statements:—That Vittoria's mother, assisted by the waiting woman, had planned the trap; that Marchionne of Gubbio and Paolo Barca of Bracciano, two of the Duke's men, had despatched the victim. Marcello himself, it seems, had come from Bracciano to conduct the whole affair. Suspicion fell immediately upon Vittoria and her kindred, together with the Duke of Bracciano; nor was this diminished when the Accoramboni, fearing the pursuit of justice, took refuge in a villa of the Duke's at Magnanapoli a few days after the murder.

A cardinal's nephew, even in those troublous times, was not killed without some noise being made about the matter. Accordingly Pope Gregory XIII. began to take measures for discovering the authors of the crime. Strange to say, however, the Cardinal Montalto, notwithstanding the great love he was known to bear his nephew, begged that the investigation might be dropped. The coolness with which he first received the news of Francesco Peretti's death, the dissimulation with which he met the Pope's expression of sympathy in a full consistory, his reserve in greeting friends on ceremonial visits of condolence, and, more than all, the self-restraint he showed in the presence of the Duke of Bracciano, impressed the society of Rome with the belief that he was of a singularly moderate and patient temper. It was thought that the man who could so tamely submit to his nephew's murder, and suspend the arm of justice when already raised for vengeance, must prove a mild and indulgent ruler. When, therefore, in the fifth year after this event, Montalto was elected Pope, men ascribed his elevation in no small measure to his conduct at the present crisis. Some, indeed, attributed his extraordinary moderation and self-control to the right cause. *'Veramente costui e un gran frate!'* was Gregory's remark at the close of the consistory when Montalto begged him to let the matter of Peretti's murder rest. *'Of a truth, that fellow is a consummate hypocrite!'*



Page 59

How accurate this judgment was, appeared when Sixtus V. assumed the reins of power. The same man who, as monk and cardinal, had smiled on Bracciano, though he knew him to be his nephew's assassin, now, as Pontiff and sovereign, bade the chief of the Orsini purge his palace and dominions of the scoundrels he was wont to harbour, adding significantly, that if Felice Peretti forgave what had been done against him in a private station, he would exact uttermost vengeance for disobedience to the will of Sixtus. The Duke of Bracciano judged it best, after that warning, to withdraw from Rome.

Francesco Peretti had been murdered on the 16th of April 1581. Sixtus V. was proclaimed on the 24th of April 1585. In this interval Vittoria underwent a series of extraordinary perils and adventures. First of all, she had been secretly married to the Duke in his gardens of Magnanapoli at the end of April 1581. That is to say, Marcello and she secured their prize, as well as they were able, the moment after Francesco had been removed by murder. But no sooner had the marriage become known, than the Pope, moved by the scandal it created, no less than by the urgent instance of the Orsini and Medici, declared it void. After some while spent in vain resistance, Bracciano submitted, and sent Vittoria back to her father's house. By an order issued under Gregory's own hand, she was next removed to the prison of Corte Savella, thence to the monastery of S. Cecilia in Trastevere, and finally to the Castle of S. Angelo. Here, at the end of December 1581, she was put on trial for the murder of her first husband. In prison she seems to have borne herself bravely, arraying her beautiful person in delicate attire, entertaining visitors, exacting from her friends the honours due to a duchess, and sustaining the frequent examinations to which she was submitted with a bold, proud front. In the middle of the month of July her constancy was sorely tried by the receipt of a letter in the Duke's own handwriting, formally renouncing his marriage. It was only by a lucky accident that she was prevented on this occasion from committing suicide. The Papal court meanwhile kept urging her either to retire to a monastery or to accept another husband. She firmly refused to embrace the religious life, and declared that she was already lawfully united to a living husband, the Duke of Bracciano. It seemed impossible to deal with her; and at last, on the 8th of November, she was released from prison under the condition of retirement to Gubbio. The Duke had lulled his enemies to rest by the pretence of yielding to their wishes. But Marcello was continually beside him at Bracciano, where we read of a mysterious Greek enchantress whom he hired to brew love-philters for the furtherance of his ambitious plots. Whether Bracciano was stimulated by the brother's arguments or by the witch's potions need not be too curiously questioned. But it seems in any case certain that absence inflamed his passion instead of cooling it.



Page 60

Accordingly, in September 1583, under the excuse of a pilgrimage to Loreto, he contrived to meet Vittoria at Trevi, whence he carried her in triumph to Bracciano. Here he openly acknowledged her as his wife, installing her with all the splendour due to a sovereign duchess. On the 10th of October following, he once more performed the marriage ceremony in the principal church of his fief; and in the January of 1584 he brought her openly to Rome. This act of contumacy to the Pope, both as feudal superior and as supreme Pontiff, roused all the former opposition to his marriage. Once more it was declared invalid. Once more the Duke pretended to give way. But at this juncture Gregory died; and while the conclave was sitting for the election of the new Pope, he resolved to take the law into his own hands, and to ratify his union with Vittoria by a third and public marriage in Rome. On the morning of the 24th of April 1585, their nuptials were accordingly once more solemnised in the Orsini palace. Just one hour after the ceremony, as appears from the marriage register, the news arrived of Cardinal Montalto's election to the Papacy, Vittoria lost no time in paying her respects to Camilla, sister of the new Pope, her former mother-in-law. The Duke visited Sixtus V. in state to compliment him on his elevation. But the reception which both received proved that Rome was no safe place for them to live in. They consequently made up their minds for flight.

A chronic illness from which Bracciano had lately suffered furnished a sufficient pretext. This seems to have been something of the nature of a cancerous ulcer, which had to be treated by the application of raw meat to open sores. Such details are only excusable in the present narrative on the ground that Bracciano's disease considerably affects our moral judgment of the woman who could marry a man thus physically tainted, and with her husband's blood upon his hands. At any rate, the Duke's *lupa* justified his trying what change of air, together with the sulphur waters of Abano, would do for him.

The Duke and Duchess arrived in safety at Venice, where they had engaged the Dandolo palace on the Zuecca. There they only stayed a few days, removing to Padua, where they had hired palaces of the Foscari in the Arena and a house called De' Cavalli. At Salo, also, on the Lake of Garda, they provided themselves with fit dwellings for their princely state and their large retinues, intending to divide their time between the pleasures which the capital of luxury afforded and the simpler enjoyments of the most beautiful of the Italian lakes. But *la gioia dei profani e un fumo passaggier*. Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, died suddenly at Salo on the 10th of November 1585, leaving the young and beautiful Vittoria helpless among enemies. What was the cause of his death? It is not possible to give a clear and certain answer. We have seen that he suffered from a horrible and voracious disease,



Page 61

which after his removal from Rome seems to have made progress. Yet though this malady may well have cut his life short, suspicion of poison was not, in the circumstances, quite unreasonable. The Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Pope, and the Orsini family were all interested in his death. Anyhow, he had time to make a will in Vittoria's favour, leaving her large sums of money, jewels, goods, and houses—enough, in fact, to support her ducal dignity with splendour. His hereditary fiefs and honours passed by right to his only son, Virginio.

Vittoria, accompanied by her brother, Marcello, and the whole court of Bracciano, repaired at once to Padua, where she was soon after joined by Flaminio, and by the Prince Lodovico Orsini. Lodovico Orsini assumed the duty of settling Vittoria's affairs under her dead husband's will. In life he had been the Duke's ally as well as relative. His family pride was deeply wounded by what seemed to him an ignoble, as it was certainly an unequal, marriage. He now showed himself the relentless enemy of the Duchess. Disputes arose between them as to certain details, which seem to have been legally decided in the widow's favour. On the night of the 22nd of December, however, forty men disguised in black and fantastically tricked out to elude detection, surrounded her palace. Through the long galleries and chambers hung with arras, eight of them went, bearing torches, in search of Vittoria and her brothers. Marcello escaped, having fled the house under suspicion of the murder of one of his own followers. Flaminio, the innocent and young, was playing on his lute and singing *Miserere* in the great hall of the palace. The murderers surprised him with a shot from one of their harquebuses. He ran, wounded in the shoulder, to his sister's room. She, it is said, was telling her beads before retiring for the night. When three of the assassins entered, she knelt before the crucifix, and there they stabbed her in the left breast, turning the poignard in the wound, and asking her with savage insults if her heart was pierced. Her last words were, 'Jesus, I pardon you.' Then they turned to Flaminio, and left him pierced with seventy-four stiletto wounds.

The authorities of Padua identified the bodies of Vittoria and Flaminio, and sent at once for further instructions to Venice. Meanwhile it appears that both corpses were laid out in one open coffin for the people to contemplate. The palace and the church of the Eremitani, to which they had been removed, were crowded all through the following day with a vast concourse of the Paduans. Vittoria's wonderful dead body, pale yet sweet to look upon, the golden hair flowing around her marble shoulders, the red wound in her breast uncovered, the stately limbs arrayed in satin as she died, maddened the populace with its surpassing loveliness. '*Dentibus fremebant,*' says the chronicler, when they beheld that gracious lady stiff in death. And of a truth, if her corpse was actually exposed in the



Page 62

chapel of the Eremitani, as we have some right to assume, the spectacle must have been impressive. Those grim gaunt frescoes of Mantegna looked down on her as she lay stretched upon her bier, solemn and calm, and, but for pallor, beautiful as though in life. No wonder that the folk forgot her first husband's murder, her less than comely marriage to the second. It was enough for them that this flower of surpassing loveliness had been cropped by villains in its bloom. Gathering in knots around the torches placed beside the corpse, they vowed vengeance against the Orsini; for suspicion, not unnaturally, fell on Prince Lodovico.

The Prince was arrested and interrogated before the court of Padua. He entered their hall attended by forty armed men, responded haughtily to their questions, and demanded free passage for his courier to Virginio Orsini, then at Florence. To this demand the court acceded; but the precaution of way-laying the courier and searching his person was very wisely taken. Besides some formal dispatches which announced Vittoria's assassination, they found in this man's boot a compromising letter, declaring Virginio a party to the crime, and asserting that Lodovico had with his own poignard killed their victim. Padua placed itself in a state of defence, and prepared to besiege the palace of Prince Lodovico, who also got himself in readiness for battle. Engines, culverins, and firebrands were directed against the barricades which he had raised. The militia was called out and the Brenta was strongly guarded. Meanwhile the Senate of S. Mark had dispatched the Avogadore, Aloisio Bragadin, with full power to the scene of action. Lodovico Orsini, it may be mentioned, was in their service; and had not this affair intervened, he would in a few weeks have entered on his duties as Governor for Venice of Corfu.

The bombardment of Orsini's palace began on Christmas Day. Three of the Prince's men were killed in the first assault; and since the artillery brought to bear upon him threatened speedy ruin to the house and its inhabitants, he made up his mind to surrender. 'The Prince Luigi,' writes one-chronicler of these events, 'walked attired in brown, his poignard at his side, and his cloak slung elegantly under his arm. The weapon being taken from him, he leaned upon a balustrade, and began to trim his nails with a little pair of scissors he happened to find there.' On the 27th he was strangled in prison by order of the Venetian Republic. His body was carried to be buried, according to his own will, in the church of S. Maria dell' Orto at Venice. Two of his followers were hung next day. Fifteen were executed on the following Monday; two of these were quartered alive; one of them, the Conte Paganello, who confessed to having slain Vittoria, had his left side probed with his own cruel dagger. Eight were condemned to the galleys, six to prison, and eleven were acquitted. Thus ended this terrible affair, which brought, it is said, good credit and renown to the lords of Venice through all nations of the civilised world. It only remains to be added that Marcello Accoramboni was surrendered to the Pope's vengeance and beheaded at Ancona, where also his mysterious accomplice, the Greek sorceress, perished.



Page 63

II

This story of Vittoria Accoramboni's life and tragic ending is drawn, in its main details, from a narrative published by Henri Beyle in his 'Chroniques et Nouvelles.' [8] He professes to have translated it literally from a manuscript communicated to him by a nobleman of Mantua; and there are strong internal evidences of the truth of this assertion. Such compositions are frequent in Italian libraries, nor is it rare for one of them to pass into the common market—as Mr. Browning's famous purchase of the tale on which he based his 'Ring and the Book' sufficiently proves. These pamphlets were produced, in the first instance, to gratify the curiosity of the educated public in an age which had no newspapers, and also to preserve the memory of famous trials. How far the strict truth was represented, or whether, as in the case of Beatrice Cenci, the pathetic aspect of the tragedy was unduly dwelt on, depended, of course, upon the mental bias of the scribe, upon his opportunities of obtaining exact information, and upon the taste of the audience for whom he wrote. Therefore, in treating such documents as historical data, we must be upon our guard. Professor Gnoli, who has recently investigated the whole of Vittoria's eventful story by the light of contemporary documents, informs us that several narratives exist in manuscript, all dealing more or less accurately with the details of the tragedy. One of these was published in Italian at Brescia in 1586. A Frenchman, De Rosset, printed the same story in its main outlines at Lyons in 1621. Our own dramatist, John Webster, made it the subject of a tragedy, which he gave to the press in 1612. What were his sources of information we do not know for certain. But it is clear that he was well acquainted with the history. He has changed some of the names and redistributed some of the chief parts. Vittoria's first husband, for example, becomes Camillo; her mother, named Cornelia instead of Tarquinia, is so far from abetting Peretti's murder and countenancing her daughter's shame, that she acts the *role* of a domestic Cassandra. Flaminio and not Marcello is made the main instrument of Vittoria's crime and elevation. The Cardinal Montalto is called Monticelso, and his papal title is Paul IV. instead of Sixtus V. These are details of comparative indifference, in which a playwright may fairly use his liberty of art. On the other hand, Webster shows a curious knowledge of the picturesque circumstances of the tale. The garden in which Vittoria meets Bracciano is the villa of Magnanapoli; Zanche, the Moorish slave, combines Vittoria's waiting-woman, Caterina, and the Greek sorceress who so mysteriously dogged Marcello's footsteps to the death. The suspicion of Bracciano's murder is used to introduce a quaint episode of Italian poisoning.



Page 64

Webster exercised the dramatist's privilege of connecting various threads of action in one plot, disregarding chronology, and hazarding an ethical solution of motives which mere fidelity to fact hardly warrants. He shows us Vittoria married to Camillo, a low-born and witless fool, whose only merit consists in being nephew to the Cardinal Monticelso, afterwards Pope Paul IV.[9] Paulo Giordano Ursini, Duke of Brachiano, loves Vittoria, and she suggests to him that, for the furtherance of their amours, his wife, the Duchess Isabella, sister to Francesco de' Medici, Grand Duke of Florence, should be murdered at the same time as her own husband, Camillo. Brachiano is struck by this plan, and with the help of Vittoria's brother, Flamineo, he puts it at once into execution. Flamineo hires a doctor who poisons Brachiano's portrait, so that Isabella dies after kissing it. He also with his own hands twists Camillo's neck during a vaulting-match, making it appear that he came by his death accidentally. Suspicion of the murder attaches, however, to Vittoria. She is tried for her life before Monticelso and De' Medici; acquitted, and relegated to a house of Convertites or female reformatory. Brachiano, on the accession of Monticelso to the Papal throne, resolves to leave Rome with Vittoria. They escape, together with her mother Cornelia, and her brothers Flamineo and Marcello, to Padua; and it is here that the last scenes of the tragedy are laid.

The use Webster made of Lodovico Orsini deserves particular attention. He introduces this personage in the very first scene as a spendthrift, who, having run through his fortune, has been outlawed. Count Lodovico, as he is always called, has no relationship with the Orsini, but is attached to the service of Francesco de' Medici, and is an old lover of the Duchess Isabella. When, therefore, the Grand Duke meditates vengeance on Brachiano, he finds a fitting instrument in the desperate Lodovico. Together, in disguise, they repair to Padua. Lodovico poisons the Duke of Brachiano's helmet, and has the satisfaction of ending his last struggles by the halter. Afterwards, with companions, habited as a masquer, he enters Vittoria's palace and puts her to death together with her brother Flamineo. Just when the deed of vengeance has been completed, young Giovanni Orsini, heir of Brachiano, enters and orders the summary execution of Lodovico for this deed of violence. Webster's invention in this plot is confined to the fantastic incidents attending on the deaths of Isabella, Camillo, and Brachiano, and to the murder of Marcello by his brother Flamineo, with the further consequence of Cornelia's madness and death. He has heightened our interest in Isabella, at the expense of Brachiano's character, by making her an innocent and loving wife instead of an adulteress. He has ascribed different motives from the real ones to Lodovico in order to bring this personage into rank with the chief actors, though

Page 65

this has been achieved with only moderate success. Vittoria is abandoned to the darkest interpretation. She is a woman who rises to eminence by crime, as an unfaithful wife, the murderess of her husband, and an impudent defier of justice. Her brother, Flamineo, becomes under Webster's treatment one of those worst human infamies—a court dependent; ruffian, buffoon, pimp, murderer by turns. Furthermore, and without any adequate object beyond that of completing this study of a type he loved, Webster makes him murder his own brother Marcello by treason. The part assigned to Marcello, it should be said, is a genial and happy one; and Cornelia, the mother of the Accoramboni, is a dignified character, pathetic in her suffering. Webster, it may be added, treats the Cardinal Monticelso as allied in some special way to the Medici. Yet certain traits in his character, especially his avoidance of bloodshed and the tameness of his temper after Camillo has been murdered, seem to have been studied from the historical Sixtus.

III

The character of the 'White Devil, or Vittoria Corombona,' is perhaps the most masterly creation of Webster's genius. Though her history is a true one in its leading incidents, the poet, while portraying a real personage, has conceived an original individuality. It is impossible to know for certain how far the actual Vittoria was guilty of her first husband's murder. Her personality fails to detach itself from the romance of her biography by any salient qualities. But Webster, with true playwright's instinct, casts aside historical doubts, and delineates in his heroine a woman of a very marked and terrible nature. Hard as adamant, uncompromising, ruthless, Vittoria follows ambition as the loadstar of her life. It is the ambition to reign as Duchess, far more than any passion for a paramour, which makes her plot Camillo's and Isabella's murders, and throws her before marriage into Brachiano's arms. Added to this ambition, she is possessed with the cold demon of her own imperial and victorious beauty. She has the courage of her criminality in the fullest sense; and much of the fascination with which Webster has invested her, depends upon her dreadful daring. Her portrait is drawn with full and firm touches. Although she appears but five times on the scene, she fills it from the first line of the drama to the last. Each appearance adds effectively to the total impression. We see her first during a criminal interview with Brachiano, contrived by her brother Flamineo. The plot of the tragedy is developed in this scene; Vittoria suggesting, under the metaphor of a dream, that her lover should compass the deaths of his duchess and her husband. The dream is told with deadly energy and ghastly picturesqueness. The cruel sneer at its conclusion, murmured by a voluptuous woman in the ears of an impassioned paramour, chills us with the sense of concentrated vice. Her next



Page 66

appearance is before the court, on trial for her husband's murder. The scene is celebrated, and has been much disputed by critics. Relying on her own dauntlessness, on her beauty, and on the protection of Brachiano, Vittoria hardly takes the trouble to plead innocence or to rebut charges. She stands defiant, arrogant, vigilant, on guard; flinging the lie in the teeth of her arraigners; quick to seize the slightest sign of feebleness in their attack; protesting her guiltlessness so loudly that she shouts truth down by brazen strength of lung; retiring at the close with taunts; blazing throughout with the intolerable lustre of some baleful planet. When she enters for the third time, it is to quarrel with her paramour. He has been stung to jealousy by a feigned love-letter. She knows that she has given him no cause; it is her game to lure him by fidelity to marriage. Therefore she resolves to make his mistake the instrument of her exaltation. Beginning with torrents of abuse, hurling reproaches at him for her own dishonour and the murder of his wife, working herself by studied degrees into a tempest of ungovernable rage, she flings herself upon the bed, refuses his caresses, spurns and tramples on him, till she has brought Brachiano, terrified, humbled, fascinated, to her feet. Then she gradually relents beneath his passionate protestations and repeated promises of marriage. At this point she speaks but little. We only feel her melting humour in the air, and long to see the scene played by such an actress as Madame Bernhardt. When Vittoria next appears, it is as Duchess by the deathbed of the Duke, her husband. Her attendance here is necessary, but it contributes little to the development of her character. We have learned to know her, and expect neither womanish tears nor signs of affection at a crisis which touches her heart less than her self-love. Webster, among his other excellent qualities, knew how to support character by reticence. Vittoria's silence in this act is significant; and when she retires exclaiming, 'O me! this place is hell!' we know that it is the outcry, not of a woman who has lost what made life dear, but of one who sees the fruits of crime imperilled by a fatal accident. The last scene of the play is devoted to Vittoria. It begins with a notable altercation between her and Flamineo. She calls him 'ruffian' and 'villain,' refusing him the reward of his vile service. This quarrel emerges in one of Webster's grotesque contrivances to prolong a poignant situation. Flamineo quits the stage and reappears with pistols. He affects a kind of madness; and after threatening Vittoria, who never flinches, he proposes they should end their lives by suicide. She humours him, but manages to get the first shot. Flamineo falls, wounded apparently to death. Then Vittoria turns and tramples on him with her feet and tongue, taunting him in his death agony with the enumeration of his crimes. Her malice and her energy are equally



Page 67

infernal. Soon, however, it appears that the whole device was but a trick of Flamineo's to test his sister. The pistol was not loaded. He now produces a pair which are properly charged, and proceeds in good earnest to the assassination of Vittoria. But at this critical moment Lodovico and his masquers appear; brother and sister both die unrepentant, defiant to the end. Vittoria's customary pride and her familiar sneers impress her speech in these last moments with a trenchant truth to nature:

You my death's-man!

Methinks thou dost not look horrid enough,
Thou hast too good a face to be a hangman:
If thou be, do thy office in right form;
Fall down upon thy knees, and ask forgiveness!

* * * * *

I will be waited on in death; my servant
Shall never go before me.

* * * * *

Yes, I shall welcome death
As princes do some great ambassadors:
I'll meet thy weapon half-way.

* * * * *

'Twas a manly blow!
The next thou giv'st, murder some sucking infant;
And then thou wilt be famous.

So firmly has Webster wrought the character of this white devil, that we seem to see her before us as in a picture. 'Beautiful as the leprosy, dazzling as the lightning,' to use a phrase of her enthusiastic admirer Hazlitt, she takes her station like a lady in some portrait by Paris Bordone, with gleaming golden hair twisted into snakelike braids about her temples, with skin white as cream, bright cheeks, dark dauntless eyes, and on her bosom, where it has been chafed by jewelled chains, a flush of rose. She is luxurious, but not so abandoned to the pleasures of the sense as to forget the purpose of her will and brain. Crime and peril add zest to her enjoyment. When arraigned in open court before the judgment-seat of deadly and unscrupulous foes, she conceals the consciousness of guilt, and stands erect, with fierce front, unabashed, relying on the splendour of her irresistible beauty and the subtlety of her piercing wit. Chafing with rage, the blood mounts and adds a lustre to her cheek. It is no flush of modesty, but of rebellious indignation. The Cardinal, who hates her, brands her emotion with the name



of shame. She rebukes him, hurling a jibe at his own mother. And when they point with spiteful eagerness to the jewels blazing on her breast, to the silks and satins that she rustles in, her husband lying murdered, she retorts:

Had I foreknown his death, as you suggest, I would have
bespoke my mourning.

She is condemned, but not vanquished, and leaves the court with a stinging sarcasm. They send her to a house of Convertites:

V.C. A house of Convertites! what's that?

M. A house of penitent whores.

V.C. Do the noblemen of Rome Erect it for their wives,
that I am sent To lodge there?



Page 68

Charles Lamb was certainly in error? when he described Vittoria's attitude as one of 'innocence-resembling boldness.' In the trial scene, no less than in the scenes of altercation with Brachiano and Flamineo, Webster clearly intended her to pass for a magnificent vixen, a beautiful and queenly termagant. Her boldness is the audacity of impudence, which does not condescend to entertain the thought of guilt. Her egotism is so hard and so profound that the very victims whom she sacrifices to ambition seem in her sight justly punished. Of Camillo and Isabella, her husband and his wife, she says to Brachiano:

And both were struck dead by that sacred yew, In that base shallow grave that was their due.

IV

It is tempting to pass from this analysis of Vittoria's life to a consideration of Webster's drama as a whole, especially in a book dedicated to Italian byways. For that mysterious man of genius had explored the dark and devious paths of Renaissance vice, and had penetrated the secrets of Italian wickedness with truly appalling lucidity. His tragedies, though worthless as historical documents, have singular value as commentaries upon history, as revelations to us of the spirit of the sixteenth century in its deepest gloom.

Webster's plays, owing to the condensation of their thought and the compression of their style, are not easy to read for the first time. He crowds so many fantastic incidents into one action, and burdens his discourse with so much profoundly studied matter, that we rise from the perusal of his works with a blurred impression of the fables, a deep sense of the poet's power and personality, and an ineffaceable recollection of one or two resplendent scenes. His Roman history-play of 'Appius and Virginia' proves that he understood the value of a simple plot, and that he was able, when he chose, to work one out with conscientious calmness. But the two Italian dramas upon which his fame is justly founded, by right of which he stands alone among the playwrights of all literatures, are marked by a peculiar and wayward mannerism. Each part is etched with equal effort after luminous effect upon a back-ground of lurid darkness; and the whole play is made up of these parts, without due concentration on a master-motive. The characters are definite in outline, but, taken together in the conduct of a single plot, they seem to stand apart, like figures in a *tableau vivant*; nor do they act and react each upon the other in the play of interpenetrative passions. That this mannerism was deliberately chosen, we have a right to believe. 'Willingly, and not ignorantly, in this kind have I faulted,' is the answer Webster gives to such as may object that he has not constructed his plays upon the classic model. He seems to have had a certain sombre richness of tone and intricacy of design in view, combining sensational effect and sententious pregnancy of diction in works of laboured art, which, when adequately represented to the ear and eye upon the stage, might at a touch obtain the animation they now lack for chamber-students.



Page 69

When familiarity has brought us acquainted with his style, when we have disentangled the main characters and circumstances from their adjuncts, we perceive that he treats poignant and tremendous situations with a concentrated vigour special to his genius; that he has studied each word and trait of character, and that he has prepared by gradual approaches and degrees of horror for the culmination of his tragedies. The sentences which seem at first sight copied from a commonplace book, are found to be appropriate. Brief lightning flashes of acute perception illuminate the midnight darkness of his all but unimaginably depraved characters. Sharp unexpected touches evoke humanity in the *fantoccini* of his wayward art. No dramatist has shown more consummate ability in heightening terrific effects, in laying bare the innermost mysteries of crime, remorse, and pain, combined to make men miserable. It has been said of Webster that, feeling himself deficient in the first poetic qualities, he concentrated his powers upon one point, and achieved success by sheer force of self-cultivation. There is perhaps some truth in this. At any rate, his genius was of a narrow and peculiar order, and he knew well how to make the most of its limitations. Yet we must not forget that he felt a natural bias toward the dreadful stuff with which he deals. The mystery of iniquity had an irresistible attraction for his mind. He was drawn to comprehend and reproduce abnormal elements of spiritual anguish. The materials with which he builds his tragedies are sought for in the ruined places of lost souls, in the agonies of madness and despair, in the sarcasms of criminal and reckless atheism, in slow tortures, griefs beyond endurance, the tempests of remorseful death, the spasms of fratricidal bloodshed. He is often melodramatic in the means employed to bring these psychological conditions home to us. He makes too free use of poisoned engines, daggers, pistols, disguised murderers, and so forth. Yet his firm grasp upon the essential qualities of diseased and guilty human nature saves him, even at his wildest, from the unrealities and extravagances into which less potent artists of the *drame sanglant*—Marston, for example—blundered.

With Webster, the tendency to brood on horrors was no result of calculation. It belonged to his idiosyncrasy. He seems to have been suckled from birth at the breast of that *Mater Tenebrarum*, our Lady of Darkness, whom De Quincey in one of his 'Suspiria de Profundis' describes among the Semnai Theai, the august goddesses, the mysterious foster-nurses of suffering humanity. He cannot say the simplest thing without giving it a ghastly or sinister turn. If one of his characters draws a metaphor from pie-crust, he must needs use language of the churchyard:

You speak as if a man
Should know what fowl is confined in a baked meat
Afore you cut it open.



Page 70

Hideous similes are heaped together in illustration of the commonest circumstances:

Places at court are but like beds in the hospital, where
this man's head lies at that man's foot, and so lower and
lower.

When knaves come to preferment, they rise as gallowses are
raised in the Low Countries, one upon another's shoulders.

I would sooner eat a dead pigeon taken from the soles of the
feet of one sick of the plague than kiss one of you fasting.

A soldier is twitted with serving his master:

As witches do their serviceable spirits,
Even with thy prodigal blood.

An adulterous couple get this curse:

Like mistletoe on sear elms spent by weather,
Let him cleave to her, and both rot together.

A bravo is asked:

Dost thou imagine thou canst slide on blood,
And not be tainted with a shameful fall?
Or, like the black and melancholic yew-tree,
Dost think to root thyself in dead men's graves,
And yet to prosper?

It is dangerous to extract philosophy of life from any dramatist. Yet Webster so often
returns to dark and doleful meditations, that we may fairly class him among
constitutional pessimists. Men, according to the grimness of his melancholy, are:

Only like dead walls or vaulted graves,
That, ruined, yield no echo.
O this gloomy world!
In what a shadow or deep pit of darkness
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!

* * * * *

We are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded
Which way please them.



* * * * *

Pleasure of life! what is't? only the good hours of an age.

A Duchess is 'brought to mortification,' before her strangling by the executioner, in this high fantastical oration:

Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best but a salvatory of green mummy. What's this flesh? A little crudded milk, fantastical puff-paste, &c. &c.

Man's life in its totality is summed up with monastic cynicism in these lyric verses:

Of what is't fools make such vain keeping?
Sin their conception, their birth weeping,
Their life a general mist of error,
Their death a hideous storm of terror.

The greatness of the world passes by with all its glory:

Vain the ambition of kings,
Who seek by trophies and dead things
To leave a living name behind,
And weave but nets to catch the wind.

It would be easy to surfeit criticism with similar examples; where Webster is writing in sarcastic, meditative, or deliberately terror-stirring moods. The same dark dye of his imagination shows itself even more significantly in circumstances where, in the work of any other artist, it would inevitably mar the harmony of the picture. A lady, to select one instance, encourages her lover to embrace her at the moment of his happiness. She cries:



Page 71

Sir, be confident!
What is't distracts you? This is flesh and blood, sir;
'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster,
Kneels at my husband's tomb.

Yet so sustained is Webster's symphony of sombre tints, that we do not feel this sepulchral language, this 'talk fit for a charnel' (to use one of his own phrases), to be out of keeping. It sounds like a presentiment of coming woes, which, as the drama grows to its conclusion, gather and darken on the wretched victims of his bloody plot.

It was with profound sagacity, or led by some deep-rooted instinct, that Webster sought the fables of his two great tragedies, 'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfi,' in Italian annals. Whether he had visited Italy in his youth, we cannot say; for next to nothing is known about Webster's life. But that he had gazed long and earnestly into the mirror held up by that enchantress of the nations in his age, is certain. Aghast and fascinated by the sins he saw there flaunting in the light of day—sins on whose pernicious glamour Ascham, Greene, and Howell have insisted with impressive vehemence—Webster discerned in them the stuff he needed for philosophy and art. Withdrawing from that contemplation, he was like a spirit 'loosed out of hell to speak of horrors.' Deeper than any poet of the time, deeper than any even of the Italians, he read the riddle of the sphinx of crime. He found there something akin to his own imaginative mood, something which he alone could fully comprehend and interpret. From the superficial narratives of writers like Bandello he extracted a spiritual essence which was, if not the literal, at least the ideal, truth involved in them.

The enormous and unnatural vices, the domestic crimes of cruelty, adultery, and bloodshed, the political scheming and the subtle arts of vengeance, the ecclesiastical tyranny and craft, the cynical scepticism and lustre of luxurious godlessness, which made Italy in the midst of her refinement blaze like 'a bright and ominous star' before the nations; these were the very elements in which the genius of Webster—salamander-like in flame—could live and flourish. Only the incidents of Italian history, or of French history in its Italianated epoch, were capable of supplying him with the proper type of plot. It was in Italy alone, or in an Italianated country, such as England for a brief space in the reign of the first Stuart threatened to become, that the well-nigh diabolical wickedness of his characters might have been realised. An audience familiar with Italian novels through Belleforest and Painter, inflamed by the long struggle of the Reformation against the scarlet abominations of the Papal See, outraged in their moral sense by the political paradoxes of Machiavelli, horror-stricken at the still recent misdoings of Borgias and Medici and Farnesi, alarmed by that Italian policy which had conceived the massacre of S. Bartholomew in France, and infuriated



Page 72

by that ecclesiastical hypocrisy which triumphed in the same; such an audience were at the right point of sympathy with a poet who undertook to lay the springs of Southern villany before them bare in a dramatic action. But, as the old proverb puts it, 'Inglese Italianato e un diavolo incarnato.' 'An Englishman assuming the Italian habit is a devil in the flesh.' The Italians were depraved, but spiritually feeble. The English playwright, when he brought them on the stage, arrayed with intellectual power and gleaming with the lurid splendour of a Northern fancy, made them tenfold darker and more terrible. To the subtlety and vices of the South he added the melancholy, meditation, and sinister insanity of his own climate. He deepened the complexion of crime and intensified lawlessness by robbing the Italian character of levity. Sin, in his conception of that character, was complicated with the sense of sin, as it never had been in a Florentine or a Neapolitan. He had not grasped the meaning of the Machiavellian conscience, in its cold serenity and disengagement from the dread of moral consequence. Not only are his villains stealthy, frigid, quick to evil, merciless, and void of honour; but they brood upon their crimes and analyse their motives. In the midst of their audacity they are dogged by dread of coming retribution. At the crisis of their destiny they look back upon their better days with intellectual remorse. In the execution of their bloodiest schemes they groan beneath the chains of guilt they wear, and quake before the phantoms of their haunted brains.

Thus passion and reflection, superstition and profanity, deliberate atrocity and fear of judgment, are united in the same nature; and to make the complex still more strange, the play-wright has gifted these tremendous personalities with his own wild humour and imaginative irony. The result is almost monstrous, such an ideal of character as makes earth hell. And yet it is not without justification. To the Italian text has been added the Teutonic commentary, and both are fused by a dramatic genius into one living whole.

One of these men is Flamineo, the brother of Vittoria Corombona, upon whose part the action of the 'White Devil' depends. He has been bred in arts and letters at the university of Padua; but being poor and of luxurious appetites, he chooses the path of crime in courts for his advancement. A duke adopts him for his minion, and Flamineo acts the pander to this great man's lust. He contrives the death of his brother-in-law, suborns a doctor to poison the Duke's wife, and arranges secret meetings between his sister and the paramour who is to make her fortune and his own. His mother appears like a warning Ate to prevent her daughter's crime. In his rage he cries:

What fury raised *thee* up? Away, away!

And when she pleads the honour of their house he answers:

Shall I,
Having a path so open and so free



To my preferment, still retain your milk
In my pale forehead?

Page 73

Later on, when it is necessary to remove another victim, he runs his own brother through the body and drives his mother to madness. Yet, in the midst of these crimes, we are unable to regard him as a simple cut-throat. His irony and reckless courting of damnation open-eyed to get his gust of life in this world, make him no common villain. He can be brave as well as fierce. When the Duke insults him he bandies taunt for taunt:

Brach. No, you pander?

Flam. What, me, my lord?
Am I your dog?

B. A bloodhound; do you brave, do you stand me?

F. Stand you! let those that have diseases run;
I need no plasters.

B. Would you be kicked?

F. Would you have your neck broke?
I tell you, duke, I am not in Russia;
My shins must be kept whole.

B. Do you know me?

F. Oh, my lord, methodically: As in this world there are degrees of evils, So in this world there are degrees of devils. You're a great duke, I your poor secretary.

When the Duke dies and his prey escapes him, the rage of disappointment breaks into this fierce apostrophe:

I cannot conjure; but if prayers or oaths. Will get the speech of him, though forty devils
Wait on him in his livery of flames, I'll speak to him and shake him by the hand, Though
I be blasted.

As crimes thicken round him, and he still despairs of the reward for which he sold himself, conscience awakes:

I have lived
Riotously ill, like some that live in court,
And sometimes when my face was full of smiles Have felt the
maze of conscience in my breast.

The scholar's scepticism, which lies at the root of his perversity, finds utterance in this meditation upon death:



Whither shall I go now? O Lucian, thy ridiculous purgatory!
to find Alexander the Great cobbling shoes, Pompey tagging
points, and Julius Caesar making hair-buttons!

Whether I resolve to fire, earth, water, air, or all the
elements by scruples, I know not, nor greatly care.

At the last moment he yet can say:

We cease to grieve, cease to be Fortune's slaves, Nay, cease
to die, by dying.

And again, with the very yielding of his spirit:

My life was a black charnel.

It will be seen that in no sense does Flamineo resemble Iago. He is not a traitor working by craft and calculating ability to well-considered ends. He is the desperado frantically clutching at an uncertain and impossible satisfaction. Webster conceives him as a self-abandoned atheist, who, maddened by poverty and tainted by vicious living, takes a fury to his heart, and, because the goodness of the world has been for ever lost to him, recklessly seeks the bad.



Page 74

Bosola, in the 'Duchess of Malfi,' is of the same stamp. He too has been a scholar. He is sent to the galleys 'for a notorious murder,' and on his release he enters the service of two brothers, the Duke of Calabria and the Cardinal of Aragon, who place him as their intelligencer at the court of their sister.

Bos. It seems you would create me
One of your familiars.

Ferd. Familiar! what's that?

Bos. Why, a very quaint invisible devil in flesh,
An intelligencer.

Ferd. Such a kind of thriving thing
I would wish thee; and ere long thou may'st arrive
At a higher place by it.

Lured by hope of preferment, Bosola undertakes the office of spy, tormentor, and at last of executioner. For:

Discontent and want
Is the best clay to mould a villain of.

But his true self, though subdued to be what he quaintly styles 'the devil's quilted anvil,' on which 'all sins are fashioned and the blows never heard,' continually rebels against this destiny. Compared with Flamineo, he is less unnaturally criminal. His melancholy is more fantastic, his despair more noble. Throughout the course of craft and cruelty on which he is goaded by a relentless taskmaster, his nature, hardened as it is, revolts.

At the end, when Bosola presents the body of the murdered Duchess to her brother, Webster has wrought a scene of tragic savagery that surpasses almost any other that the English stage can show. The sight, of his dead sister maddens Ferdinand, who, feeling the eclipse of reason gradually absorb his faculties, turns round with frenzied hatred on the accomplice of his fratricide. Bosola demands the price of guilt. Ferdinand spurns him with the concentrated eloquence of despair and the extravagance of approaching insanity. The murderer taunts his master coldly and laconically, like a man whose life is wrecked, who has waded through blood to his reward, and who at the last moment discovers the sacrifice of his conscience and masculine freedom to be fruitless. Remorse, frustrated hopes, and thirst for vengeance convert Bosola from this hour forward into an instrument of retribution. The Duke and his brother the Cardinal are both brought to bloody deaths by the hand which they had used to assassinate their sister.



It is fitting that something should be said about Webster's conception of the Italian despot. Brachiano and Ferdinand, the employers of Flamineo and Bosola, are tyrants such as Savonarola described, and as we read of in the chronicles of petty Southern cities. Nothing is suffered to stand between their lust and its accomplishment. They override the law by violence, or pervert its action to their own advantage:

The law to him
Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider;
He makes it his dwelling and a prison
To entangle those shall feed him.



Page 75

They are eaten up with parasites, accomplices, and all the creatures of their crimes:

He and his brother are like plum-trees that grow crooked over standing pools; they are rich and over-laden with fruit, but none but crows, pies, and caterpillars feed on them.

In their lives they are without a friend; for society in guilt brings nought of comfort, and honours are but emptiness:

Glories, like glow-worms, afar off shine bright;
But looked to near, have neither heat nor light.

Their plots and counterplots drive repose far from them:

There's but three furies found in spacious hell;
But in a great man's breast three thousand dwell.

Fearful shapes afflict their fancy; shadows of ancestral crime or ghosts of their own raising:

For these many years
None of our family dies, but there is seen
The shape of an old woman; which is given
By tradition to us to have been murdered
By her nephews for her riches.

Apparitions haunt them:

How tedious is a guilty conscience!

When I look into the fish-ponds in my garden,
Methinks I see a thing armed with a rake
That seems to strike at me.

Continually scheming against the objects of their avarice and hatred, preparing poisons or suborning bravoos, they know that these same arts will be employed against them. The wine-cup hides arsenic; the headpiece is smeared with antimony; there is a dagger behind every arras, and each shadow is a murderer's. When death comes, they meet it trembling. What irony Webster has condensed in Brachiano's outcry:

On pain of death, let no man name death to me;
It is a word infinitely horrible.

And how solemn are the following reflections on the death of princes:



O thou soft natural death, that art joint-twin
To sweetest slumber! no rough-bearded comet
Stares on thy mild departure; the dull owl
Beats not against thy casement, the hoarse wolf
Scents not thy carrion: pity winds thy corse,
Whilst horror waits on princes.

After their death, this is their epitaph:

These wretched eminent things
Leave no more fame behind'em than should one
Fall in a frost and leave his print in snow.

Of Webster's despots, the finest in conception and the firmest in execution is Ferdinand of Aragon. Jealousy of his sister and avarice take possession of him and torment him like furies. The flash of repentance over her strangled body is also the first flash of insanity. He survives to present the spectacle of a crazed lunatic, and to be run through the body by his paid assassin. In the Cardinal of Aragon, Webster paints a profligate Churchman, no less voluptuous, blood-guilty, and the rest of it, than his brother the Duke of Calabria. It seems to have been the poet's purpose in each of his Italian tragedies to unmask Rome as the Papal city really was. In the lawless desperado, the intemperate tyrant, and the godless ecclesiastic, he portrayed the three curses from which Italian society was actually suffering.



Page 76

It has been needful to dwell upon the gloomy and fantastic side of Webster's genius. But it must not be thought that he could touch no finer chord. Indeed, it might be said that in the domain of pathos he is even more powerful than in that of horror. His mastery in this region is displayed in the creation of that dignified and beautiful woman, the Duchess of Malfi, who, with nothing in her nature, had she but lived prosperously, to divide her from the sisterhood of gentle ladies, walks, shrined in love and purity and conscious rectitude, amid the snares and pitfalls of her persecutors, to die at last the victim of a brother's fevered avarice and a desperado's egotistical ambition. The apparatus of infernal cruelty, the dead man's hand, the semblances of murdered sons and husband, the masque of madmen, the dirge and doleful emblems of the tomb with which she is environed in her prison by the torturers who seek to goad her into lunacy, are insufficient to disturb the tranquillity and tenderness of her nature. When the rope is being fastened to her throat, she does not spend her breath in recriminations, but turns to the waiting-woman and says:

Farewell, Cariola!

I pray thee look thou givest my little boy
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl
Say her prayers ere she sleep.

In the preceding scenes we have had enough, nay, over-much, of madness, despair, and wrestling with doom. This is the calm that comes when death is present, when the tortured soul lays down its burden of the flesh with gladness. But Webster has not spared another touch of thrilling pathos.

The death-struggle is over; the fratricide has rushed away, a maddened man; the murderer is gazing with remorse upon the beautiful dead body of his lady, wishing he had the world wherewith to buy her back to life again; when suddenly she murmurs 'Mercy!' Our interest, already overstrained, revives with momentary hope. But the guardians of the grave will not be exorcised; and 'Mercy!' is the last groan of the injured Duchess.

Webster showed great skill in his delineation of the Duchess. He had to paint a woman in a hazardous situation: a sovereign stooping in her widowhood to wed a servant; a lady living with the mystery of this unequal marriage round her like a veil. He dowered her with no salient qualities of intellect or heart or will; but he sustained our sympathy with her, and made us comprehend her. To the last she is a Duchess; and when she has divested state and bowed her head to enter the low gate of heaven—too low for coronets—her poet shows us, in the lines already quoted, that the woman still survives.

The same pathos surrounds the melancholy portrait of Isabella in 'Vittoria Corombona.' But Isabella, in that play, serves chiefly to enhance the tyranny of her triumphant rival. The main difficulty under which these scenes of rarest pathos would labour, were they brought upon the stage, is their simplicity in contrast with the ghastly and contorted



horrors that envelop them. A dialogue abounding in the passages I have already quoted—a dialogue which bandies 'O you screech-owl!' and 'Thou foul black cloud!'—in which a sister's admonition to her brother to think twice of suicide assumes a form so weird as this:



Page 77

I prithee, yet remember,
Millions are now in graves, which at last day
Like mandrakes shall rise shrieking.—

such a dialogue could not be rendered save by actors strung up to a pitch of almost frenzied tension. To do full justice to what in Webster's style would be spasmodic were it not so weighty, and at the same time to maintain the purity of outline and melodious rhythm of such characters as Isabella, demands no common histrionic power.

In attempting to define Webster's touch upon Italian tragic story, I have been led perforce to concentrate attention on what is painful and shocking to our sense of harmony in art. He was a vigorous and profoundly imaginative playwright. But his most enthusiastic admirers will hardly contend that good taste or moderation determined the movement of his genius. Nor, though his insight into the essential dreadfulness of Italian tragedy was so deep, is it possible to maintain that his portraiture of Italian life was true to its more superficial aspects. What place would there be for a Correggio or a Raphael in such a world as Webster's? Yet we know that the art of Raphael and Correggio is in exact harmony with the Italian temperament of the same epoch which gave birth to Cesare Borgia and Bianca Capello. The comparatively slighter sketch of Iachimo in 'Cymbeline' represents the Italian as he felt and lived, better than the laboured portrait of Flamineo. Webster's Italian tragedies are consequently true, not so much to the actual conditions of Italy, as to the moral impression made by those conditions on a Northern imagination.

* * * * *

AUTUMN WANDERINGS

I.—ITALIAM PETIMUS

Italiam Petimus! We left our upland home before daybreak on a clear October morning. There had been a hard frost, spangling the meadows with rime-crystals, which twinkled where the sun's rays touched them. Men and women were mowing the frozen grass with thin short Alpine scythes; and as the swathes fell, they gave a crisp, an almost tinkling sound. Down into the gorge, surnamed of Avalanche, our horses plunged; and there we lost the sunshine till we reached the Bear's Walk, opening upon the vales of Albula, and Julier, and Schyn. But up above, shone morning light upon fresh snow, and steep torrent-cloven slopes reddening with a hundred fading plants; now and then it caught the grey-green icicles that hung from cliffs where summer streams had dripped. There is no colour lovelier than the blue of an autumn sky in the high Alps, defining ridges powdered with light snow, and melting imperceptibly downward into the warm yellow of the larches and the crimson of the bilberry. Wiesen was radiantly beautiful: those aerial ranges of the hills that separate Albula from Julier soared crystal-clear



above their forests; and for a foreground, on the green fields starred with lilac crocuses, careered a group of children on their sledges. Then came the row of giant peaks—Pitz d’Aela, Tinzenhorn, and Michelhorn, above the deep ravine of Albula—all seen across wide undulating golden swards, close-shaven and awaiting winter. Carnations hung from cottage windows in full bloom, casting sharp angular black shadows on white walls.



Page 78

Italiam petimus! We have climbed the valley of the Julier, following its green, transparent torrent. A night has come and gone at Muehlen. The stream still leads us up, diminishing in volume as we rise, up through the fleecy mists that roll asunder for the sun, disclosing far-off snowy ridges and blocks of granite mountains. The lifeless, soundless waste of rock, where only thin winds whistle out of silence and fade suddenly into still air, is passed. Then comes the descent, with its forests of larch and cembra, golden and dark green upon a ground of grey, and in front the serried shafts of the Bernina, and here and there a glimpse of emerald lake at turnings of the road. Autumn is the season for this landscape. Through the fading of innumerable leaflets, the yellowing of larches, and something vaporous in the low sun, it gains a colour not unlike that of the lands we seek. By the side of the lake at Silvaplana the light was strong and warm, but mellow. Pearly clouds hung over the Maloja, and floating overhead cast shadows on the opaque water, which may literally be compared to chrysoprase. The breadth of golden, brown, and russet tints upon the valley at this moment adds softness to its lines of level strength. Devotees of the Engadine contend that it possesses an austere charm beyond the common beauty of Swiss landscape; but this charm is only perfected in autumn. The fresh snow on the heights that guard it helps. And then there are the forests of dark pines upon those many knolls and undulating mountain-flanks beside the lakes. Sitting and dreaming there in noonday sun, I kept repeating to myself *Italiam petimus!*

A hurricane blew upward from the pass as we left Silvaplana, ruffling the lake with gusts of the Italian wind. By Silz Maria we came in sight of a dozen Italian workmen, arm linked in arm in two rows, tramping in rhythmic stride, and singing as they went. Two of them were such nobly built young men, that for a moment the beauty of the landscape faded from my sight, and I was saddened. They moved to their singing, like some of Mason's or Frederick Walker's figures, with the free grace of living statues, and laughed as we drove by. And yet, with all their beauty, industry, sobriety, intelligence, these Italians of the northern valleys serve the sterner people of the Grisons like negroes, doing their roughest work at scanty wages.

So we came to the vast Alpine wall, and stood on a bare granite slab, and looked over into Italy, as men might lean from the battlements of a fortress. Behind lies the Alpine valley, grim, declining slowly northward, with wind-lashed lakes and glaciers sprawling from storm-broken pyramids of gneiss. Below spread the unfathomable depths that lead to Lombardy, flooded with sunlight, filled with swirling vapour, but never wholly hidden from our sight. For the blast kept shifting the cloud-masses, and the sun streamed through in spears and bands of sheeny rays. Over the



Page 79

parapet our horses dropped, down through sable spruce and amber larch, down between tangles of rowan and autumnal underwood. Ever as we sank, the mountains rose—those sharp embattled precipices, toppling spires, impendent chasms blurred with mist, that make the entrance into Italy sublime. Nowhere do the Alps exhibit their full stature, their commanding puissance, with such majesty as in the gates of Italy; and of all those gates I think there is none to compare with Maloja, none certainly to rival it in abruptness of initiation into the Italian secret. Below Vico Soprano we pass already into the violets and blues of Titian's landscape. Then come the purple boulders among chestnut trees; then the double dolomite-like peak of Pitz Badin and Promontogno.

It is sad that words can do even less than painting could to bring this window-scene at Promontogno before another eye. The casement just frames it. In the foreground are meadow slopes, thinly, capriciously planted with chestnut trees and walnuts, each standing with its shadow cast upon the sward. A little farther falls the torrent, foaming down between black jaws of rain-stained granite, with the wooden buildings of a rustic mill set on a ledge of rock. Suddenly above this landscape soars the valley, clothing its steep sides on either hand with pines; and there are emerald isles of pasture on the wooded flanks; and then cliffs, where the red-stemmed larches glow; and at the summit, shooting into ether with a swathe of mist around their basement, soar the double peaks, the one a pyramid, the other a bold broken crystal not unlike the Finsteraarhorn seen from Furka. These are connected by a snowy saddle, and snow is lying on their inaccessible crags in powdery drifts. Sunlight pours between them into the ravine. The green and golden forests now join from either side, and now recede, according as the sinuous valley brings their lines together or disparts them. There is a sound of cow-bells on the meadows; and the roar of the stream is dulled or quickened as the gusts of this October wind sweep by or slacken. *Italiam petimus!*

Tangimus Italiam! Chiavenna is a worthy key to this great gate Italian. We walked at night in the open galleries of the cathedral cloister—white, smoothly curving, well-proportioned loggie, enclosing a green space, whence soars the campanile to the stars. The moon had sunk, but her light still silvered the mountains that stand at watch round Chiavenna; and the castle rock was flat and black against that dreamy background. Jupiter, who walked so lately for us on the long ridge of the Jacobshorn above our pines, had now an ample space of sky over Lombardy to light his lamp in. Why is it, we asked each other, as we smoked our pipes and strolled, my friend and I;—why is it that Italian beauty does not leave the spirit so untroubled as an Alpine scene? Why do we here desire the flower of some emergent feeling to grow from the air, or from the soil, or from humanity to greet us? This sense of want evoked by Southern beauty is perhaps the antique mythopoeic yearning. But in our perplexed life it takes another form, and seems the longing for emotion, ever fleeting, ever new, unrealised, unreal, insatiable.



Page 80

II.—OVER THE APENNINES

At Parma we slept in the Albergo della Croce Bianca, which is more a bric-a-brac shop than an inn; and slept but badly, for the good folk of Parma twanged guitars and exercised their hoarse male voices all night in the street below. We were glad when Christian called us, at 5 A.M., for an early start across the Apennines. This was the day of a right Roman journey. In thirteen and a half hours, leaving Parma at 6, and arriving in Sarzana at 7.30, we flung ourselves across the spine of Italy, from the plains of Eridanus to the seashore of Etruscan Luna. I had secured a carriage and extra post-horses the night before; therefore we found no obstacles upon the road, but eager drivers, quick relays, obsequious postmasters, change, speed, perpetual movement. The road itself is a noble one, and nobly entertained in all things but accommodation for travellers. At Berceto, near the summit of the pass, we stopped just half an hour, to lunch off a mouldy hen and six eggs; but that was all the halt we made.

As we drove out of Parma, striking across the plain to the *ghiara* of the Taro, the sun rose over the austere autumnal landscape, with its withered vines and crimson haws. Christian, the mountaineer, who at home had never seen the sun rise from a flat horizon, stooped from the box to call attention to this daily recurring miracle, which on the plain of Lombardy is no less wonderful than on a rolling sea. From the village of Fornovo, where the Italian League was camped awaiting Charles VIII. upon that memorable July morn in 1495, the road strikes suddenly aside, gains a spur of the descending Apennines, and keeps this vantage till the pass of La Cisa is reached. Many windings are occasioned by thus adhering to aretes, but the total result is a gradual ascent with free prospect over plain and mountain. The Apennines, built up upon a smaller scale than the Alps, perplexed in detail and entangled with cross sections and convergent systems, lend themselves to this plan of carrying highroads along their ridges instead of following the valley.

What is beautiful in the landscape of that northern watershed is the subtlety, delicacy, variety, and intricacy of the mountain outlines. There is drawing wherever the eye falls. Each section of the vast expanse is a picture of tossed crests and complicated undulations. And over the whole sea of stationary billows, light is shed like an ethereal raiment, with spare colour—blue and grey, and parsimonious green—in the near foreground. The detail is somewhat dry and monotonous; for these so finely moulded hills are made up of washed earth, the immemorial wrecks of earlier mountain ranges. Brown villages, not unlike those of Midland England, low houses built of stone and tiled with stone, and square-towered churches, occur at rare intervals in cultivated hollows, where there are fields and fruit trees. Water is nowhere visible except in the



Page 81

wasteful river-beds. As we rise, we break into a wilder country, forested with oak, where oxen and goats are browsing. The turf is starred with lilac gentian and crocus bells, but sparsely. Then comes the highest village, Berceto, with keen Alpine air. After that, broad rolling downs of yellowing grass and russet beech-scrub lead onward to the pass La Cisa. The sense of breadth in composition is continually satisfied through this ascent by the fine-drawn lines, faint tints, and immense air-spaces of Italian landscape. Each little piece reminds one of England; but the geographical scale is enormously more grandiose, and the effect of majesty proportionately greater.

From La Cisa the road descends suddenly; for the southern escarpment of the Apennine, as of the Alpine, barrier is pitched at a far steeper angle than the northern. Yet there is no view of the sea. That is excluded by the lower hills which hem the Magra. The upper valley is beautiful, with verdant lawns and purple hillsides breaking down into thick chestnut woods, through which we wound at a rapid pace for nearly an hour. The leaves were still green, mellowing to golden; but the fruit was ripe and heavy, ready at all points to fall. In the still October air the husks above our heads would loosen, and the brown nuts rustle through the foliage, and with a dull short thud, like drops of thunder-rain, break down upon the sod. At the foot of this rich forest, wedged in between huge buttresses, we found Pontremoli, and changed our horses here for the last time. It was Sunday, and the little town was alive with country-folk; tall stalwart fellows wearing peacock's feathers in their black slouched hats, and nut-brown maids.

From this point the valley of the Magra is exceeding rich with fruit trees, vines, and olives. The tendrils of the vine are yellow now, and in some places hued like generous wine; through their thick leaves the sun shot crimson. In one cool garden, as the day grew dusk, I noticed quince trees laden with pale fruit entangled with pomegranates—green spheres and ruddy amid burnished leaves. By the roadside too were many berries of bright hues; the glowing red of haws and hips, the amber of the pyracanthus, the rose tints of the spindle-wood. These make autumn even lovelier than spring. And then there was a wood of chestnuts carpeted with pale pinkling, a place to dream of in the twilight. But the main motive of this landscape was the indescribable Carrara range, an island of pure form and shooting peaks, solid marble, crystalline in shape and texture, faintly blue against the blue sky, from which they were but scarce divided. These mountains close the valley to south-east, and seem as though they belonged to another and more celestial region.

Soon the sunlight was gone, and moonrise came to close the day, as we rolled onward to Sarzana, through arundo donax and vine-girdled olive trees and villages, where contadini lounged upon the bridges. There was a stream of sound in our ears, and in my brain a rhythmic dance of beauties caught through the long-drawn glorious golden autumn-day.



Page 82

III.—FOSDINOVO

The hamlet and the castle of Fosdinovo stand upon a mountain-spur above Sarzana, commanding the valley of the Magra and the plains of Luni. This is an ancient fief of the Malaspina House, and is still in the possession of the Marquis of that name.

The road to Fosdinovo strikes across the level through an avenue of plane trees, shedding their discoloured leaves. It then takes to the open fields, bordered with tall reeds waving from the foss on either hand, where grapes are hanging to the vines. The country-folk allow their vines to climb into the olives, and these golden festoons are a great ornament to the grey branches. The berries on the trees are still quite green, and it is a good olive season. Leaving the main road, we pass a villa of the Malaspini, shrouded in immense thickets of sweet bay and ilex, forming a grove for the Nymphs or Pan. Here may you see just such clean stems and lucid foliage as Gian Bellini painted, inch by inch, in his Peter Martyr picture. The place is neglected now; the semicircular seats of white Carrara marble are stained with green mosses, the altars chipped, the fountains choked with bay leaves; and the rose trees, escaped from what were once trim garden alleys, have gone wandering a-riot into country hedges. There is no demarcation between the great man's villa and the neighbouring farms. From this point the path rises, and the barren hillside is a-bloom with late-flowering myrtles. Why did the Greeks consecrate these myrtle-rods to Death as well as Love? Electra complained that her father's tomb had not received the honour of the myrtle branch; and the Athenians wreathed their swords with myrtle in memory of Harmodius. Thinking of these matters, I cannot but remember lines of Greek, which have themselves the rectitude and elasticity of myrtle wands:

(Greek:)

kai prospeson eklous' eremias tuchon
spondas te lusas askon hon phero xenois
espeisa tumbo d'amphetheka mursinas.

As we approach Fosdinovo, the hills above us gain sublimity; the prospect over plain and sea—the fields where Luna was, the widening bay of Spezzia—grows ever grander. The castle is a ruin, still capable of partial habitation, and now undergoing repair—the state in which a ruin looks most sordid and forlorn. How strange it is, too, that, to enforce this sense of desolation, sad dishevelled weeds cling ever to such antique masonry! Here are the henbane, the sow-thistle, the wild cucumber. At Avignon, at Orvieto, at Dolce Acqua, at Les Baux, we never missed them. And they have the dusty courtyards, the massive portals, where portcullises still threaten, of Fosdinovo to themselves. Over the gate, and here and there on corbels, are carved the arms of Malaspina—a barren thorn-tree, gnarled with the geometrical precision of heraldic irony.



Page 83

Leaning from the narrow windows of this castle, with the spacious view to westward, I thought of Dante. For Dante in this castle was the guest of Moroello Malaspina, what time he was yet finishing the 'Inferno.' There is a little old neglected garden, full to south, enclosed upon a rampart which commands the Borgo, where we found frail canker-roses and yellow amaryllis. Here, perhaps, he may have sat with ladies—for this was the Marchesa's pleasaunce; or may have watched through a short summer's night, until he saw that *tremolar della marina*, portending dawn, which afterwards he painted in the 'Purgatory.'

From Fosdinovo one can trace the Magra work its way out seaward, not into the plain where once the *candentia moenia Lunae* flashed sunrise from their battlements, but close beside the little hills which back the southern arm of the Spezzian gulf. At the extreme end of that promontory, called Del Corvo, stood the Benedictine convent of S. Croce; and it was here in 1309, if we may trust to tradition, that Dante, before his projected journey into France, appeared and left the first part of his poem with the Prior. Fra Ilario, such was the good father's name, received commission to transmit the 'Inferno' to Uguccone della Faggiuola; and he subsequently recorded the fact of Dante's visit in a letter which, though its genuineness has been called in question, is far too interesting to be left without allusion. The writer says that on occasion of a journey into lands beyond the Riviera, Dante visited this convent, appearing silent and unknown among the monks. To the Prior's question what he wanted, he gazed upon the brotherhood, and only answered, 'Peace!' Afterwards, in private conversation, he communicated his name and spoke about his poem. A portion of the 'Divine Comedy' composed in the Italian tongue aroused Ilario's wonder, and led him to inquire why his guest had not followed the usual course of learned poets by committing his thoughts to Latin. Dante replied that he had first intended to write in that language, and that he had gone so far as to begin the poem in Virgilian hexameters. Reflection upon the altered conditions of society in that age led him, however, to reconsider the matter; and he was resolved to tune another lyre, 'suited to the sense of modern men.' 'For,' said he, 'it is idle to set solid food before the lips of sucklings.'

If we can trust Fra Ilario's letter as a genuine record, which is unhappily a matter of some doubt, we have in this narration not only a picturesque, almost a melodramatically picturesque glimpse of the poet's apparition to those quiet monks in their seagirt house of peace, but also an interesting record of the destiny which presided over the first great work of literary art in a distinctly modern language.

IV.—LA SPEZZIA

Page 84

While we were at Fosdinovo the sky filmed over, and there came a halo round the sun. This portended change; and by evening, after we had reached La Spezzia, earth, sea, and air were conscious of a coming tempest. At night I went down to the shore, and paced the sea-wall they have lately built along the Rada. The moon was up, but overdriven with dry smoky clouds, now thickening to blackness over the whole bay, now leaving intervals through which the light poured fitfully and fretfully upon the wrinkled waves; and ever and anon they shuddered with electric gleams which were not actual lightning. Heaven seemed to be descending on the sea; one might have fancied that some powerful charms were drawing down the moon with influence malign upon those still resisting billows. For not as yet the gulf was troubled to its depth, and not as yet the breakers dashed in foam against the moonlight-smitten promontories. There was but an uneasy murmuring of wave to wave; a whispering of wind, that stooped its wing and hissed along the surface, and withdrew into the mystery of clouds again; a momentary chafing of churned water round the harbour piers, subsiding into silence petulant and sullen. I leaned against an iron stanchion and longed for the sea's message. But nothing came to me, and the drowned secret of Shelley's death those waves which were his grave revealed not.

Howler and scooper of storms! capricious and dainty sea!

Meanwhile the incantation swelled in shrillness, the electric shudders deepened. Alone in this elemental overture to tempest I took no note of time, but felt, through self-abandonment to the symphonic influence, how sea and air, and clouds akin to both, were dealing with each other complainingly, and in compliance to some maker of unrest within them. A touch upon my shoulder broke this trance; I turned and saw a boy beside me in a coastguard's uniform. Francesco was on patrol that night; but my English accent soon assured him that I was no *contrabbandiere*, and he too leaned against the stanchion and told me his short story. He was in his nineteenth year, and came from Florence, where his people live in the Borgo Ognissanti. He had all the brightness of the Tuscan folk, a sort of innocent malice mixed with *espieglerie*. It was diverting to see the airs he gave himself on the strength of his new military dignity, his gun, and uniform, and night duty on the shore. I could not help humming to myself *Non piu andrai*; for Francesco was a sort of Tuscan Cherubino. We talked about picture galleries and libraries in Florence, and I had to hear his favourite passages from the Italian poets. And then there came the plots of Jules Verne's stories and marvellous narrations about *l' uomo cavallo*, *l' uomo volante*, *l' uomo pesce*. The last of these personages turned out to be Paolo Boynton (so pronounced), who had swam the Arno in his diving dress, passing the several bridges, and when he came to the great weir 'allora tutti



Page 85

stare con bocca aperta.’ Meanwhile the storm grew serious, and our conversation changed. Francesco told me about the terrible sun-stricken sand shores of the Riviera, burning in summer noon, over which the coast-guard has to tramp, their perils from falling stones in storm, and the trains that come rushing from those narrow tunnels on the midnight line of march. It is a hard life; and the thirst for adventure which drove this boy—’il piu matto di tutta la famiglia’—to adopt it, seems well-nigh quenched. And still, with a return to Giulio Verne, he talked enthusiastically of deserting, of getting on board a merchant ship, and working his way to southern islands where wonders are.

A furious blast swept the whole sky for a moment almost clear. The moonlight fell, with racing cloud-shadows, upon sea and hills, the lights of Lerici, the great *fanali* at the entrance of the gulf, and Francesco’s upturned handsome face. Then all again was whirled in mist and foam; one breaker smote the sea wall in a surge of froth, another plunged upon its heels; with inconceivable swiftness came rain; lightning deluged the expanse of surf, and showed the windy trees bent landward by the squall. It was long past midnight now, and the storm was on us for the space of three days.

V.—PORTO VENERE

For the next three days the wind went worrying on, and a line of surf leapt on the sea-wall always to the same height. The hills all around were inky black and weary.

At night the wild libeccio still rose, with floods of rain and lightning poured upon the waste. I thought of the Florentine patrol. Is he out in it, and where?

At last there came a lull. When we rose on the fourth morning, the sky was sulky, spent and sleepy after storm—the air as soft and tepid as boiled milk or steaming flannel. We drove along the shore to Porto Venere, passing the arsenals and dockyards, which have changed the face of Spezzia since Shelley knew it. This side of the gulf is not so rich in vegetation as the other, probably because it lies open to the winds from the Carrara mountains. The chestnuts come down to the shore in many places, bringing with them the wild mountain-side. To make up for this lack of luxuriance, the coast is furrowed with a succession of tiny harbours, where the fishing-boats rest at anchor. There are many villages upon the spurs of hills, and on the headlands naval stations, hospitals, lazaretti, and prisons. A prickly bindweed (the *Smilax Sarsaparilla*) forms a feature in the near landscape, with its creamy odoriferous blossoms, coral berries, and glossy thorned leaves.

Page 86

A turn of the road brought Porto Venere in sight, and on its grey walls flashed a gleam of watery sunlight. The village consists of one long narrow street, the houses on the left side hanging sheer above the sea. Their doors at the back open on to cliffs which drop about fifty feet upon the water. A line of ancient walls, with mediaeval battlements and shells of chambers suspended midway between earth and sky, runs up the rock behind the town; and this wall is pierced with a deep gateway above which the inn is piled. We had our lunch in a room opening upon the town-gate, adorned with a deep-cut Pisan arch enclosing images and frescoes—a curious episode in a place devoted to the jollity of smugglers and seafaring folk. The whole house was such as Tintoretto loved to paint—huge wooden rafters; open chimneys with pent-house canopies of stone, where the cauldrons hung above logs of chestnut; rude low tables spread with coarse linen embroidered at the edges, and laden with plates of fishes, fruit, quaint glass, big-bellied jugs of earthenware, and flasks of yellow wine. The people of the place were lounging round in lazy attitudes. There were odd nooks and corners everywhere; unexpected staircases with windows slanting through the thickness of the town-wall; pictures of saints; high-zoned serving women, on whose broad shoulders lay big coral beads; smoke-blackened roofs, and balconies that opened on the sea. The house was inexhaustible in motives for pictures.

We walked up the street, attended by a rabble rout of boys—*diavoli scatenati*—clean, grinning, white-teethed, who kept incessantly shouting, ‘Soldo, soldo!’ I do not know why these sea-urchins are so far more irrepressible than their land brethren. But it is always thus in Italy. They take an imperturbable delight in noise and mere annoyance. I shall never forget the sea-roar of Porto Venere, with that shrill obligate, ‘Soldo, soldo, soldo!’ rattling like a dropping fire from lungs of brass.

At the end of Porto Venere is a withered and abandoned city, climbing the cliffs of S. Pietro; and on the headland stands the ruined church, built by Pisans with alternate rows of white and black marble, upon the site of an old temple of Venus. This is a modest and pure piece of Gothic architecture, fair in desolation, refined and dignified, and not unworthy in its grace of the dead Cyprian goddess. Through its broken lancets the sea-wind whistles and the vast reaches of the Tyrrhene gulf are seen. Samphire sprouts between the blocks of marble, and in sheltered nooks the caper hangs her beautiful purpureal snowy bloom.

The headland is a bold block of white limestone stained with red. It has the pitch of Exmoor stooping to the sea near Lynton. To north, as one looks along the coast, the line is broken by Porto Fino’s amethystine promontory; and in the vaporous distance we could trace the Riviera mountains, shadowy and blue. The sea came roaring, rolling in with tawny breakers; but, far out, it sparkled in pure azure, and the cloud-shadows over it were violet. Where Corsica should have been seen, soared banks of fleecy, broad-domed alabaster clouds.



Page 87

This point, once dedicated to Venus, now to Peter—both, be it remembered, fishers of men—is one of the most singular in Europe. The island of Palmaria, rich in veined marbles, shelters the port; so that outside the sea rages, while underneath the town, reached by a narrow strait, there is a windless calm. It was not without reason that our Lady of Beauty took this fair gulf to herself; and now that she has long been dispossessed, her memory lingers yet in names. For Porto Venere remembers her, and Lerici is only Eryx. There is a grotto here, where an inscription tells us that Byron once 'tempted the Ligurian waves.' It is just such a natural sea-cave as might have inspired Euripides when he described the refuge of Orestes in 'Iphigenia.'

VI.—LERICI

Libeccio at last had swept the sky clear. The gulf was ridged with foam-fleeced breakers, and the water churned into green, tawny wastes. But overhead there flew the softest clouds, all silvery, dispersed in flocks. It is the day for pilgrimage to what was Shelley's home.

After following the shore a little way, the road to Lerici breaks into the low hills which part La Spezzia from Sarzana. The soil is red, and overgrown with arbutus and pinaster, like the country around Cannes. Through the scattered trees it winds gently upwards, with frequent views across the gulf, and then descends into a land rich with olives—a genuine Riviera landscape, where the mountain-slopes are hoary, and spikelets of innumerable light-flashing leaves twinkle against a blue sea, misty-deep. The walls here are not unfrequently adorned with basreliefs of Carrara marble—saints and madonnas very delicately wrought, as though they were love-labours of sculptors who had passed a summer on this shore. San Terenzio is soon discovered low upon the sands to the right, nestling under little cliffs; and then the high-built castle of Lerici comes in sight, looking across, the bay to Porto Venere—one Aphrodite calling to the other, with the foam between. The village is piled around its cove with tall and picturesquely coloured houses; the molo and the fishing-boats lie just beneath the castle. There is one point of the descending carriage road where all this gracefulness is seen, framed by the boughs of olive branches, swaying, wind-ruffled, laughing the many-twinkling smiles of ocean back from their grey leaves. Here *Erycina ridens* is at home. And, as we stayed to dwell upon the beauty of the scene, came women from the bay below—barefooted, straight as willow wands, with burnished copper bowls upon their heads. These women have the port of goddesses, deep-bosomed, with the length of thigh and springing ankles that betoken strength no less than elasticity and grace. The hair of some of them was golden, rippling in little curls around brown brows and glowing eyes. Pale lilac blent with orange on their dress, and coral beads hung from their ears.



Page 88

At Lerici we took a boat and pushed into the rolling breakers. Christian now felt the movement of the sea for the first time. This was rather a rude trial, for the grey-maned monsters played, as it seemed, at will with our cockle-shell, tumbling in dolphin curves to reach the shore. Our boatmen knew all about Shelley and the Casa Magni. It is not at Lerici, but close to San Terenzio, upon the south side of the village. Looking across the bay from the molo, one could clearly see its square white mass, tiled roof, and terrace built on rude arcades with a broad orange awning. Trelawny's description hardly prepares one for so considerable a place. I think the English exiles of that period must have been exacting if the Casa Magni seemed to them no better than a bathing-house.

We left our boat at the jetty, and walked through some gardens to the villa. There we were kindly entertained by the present occupiers, who, when I asked them whether such visits as ours were not a great annoyance, gently but feelingly replied: 'It is not so bad now as it used to be.' The English gentleman who rents the Casa Magni has known it uninterruptedly since Shelley's death, and has used it for *villeggiatura* during the last thirty years. We found him in the central sitting-room, which readers of Trelawny's 'Recollections' have so often pictured to themselves. The large oval table, the settees round the walls, and some of the pictures are still unchanged. As we sat talking, I laughed to think of that luncheon party, when Shelley lost his clothes, and came naked, dripping with sea-water, into the room, protected by the skirts of the sympathising waiting-maid. And then I wondered where they found him on the night when he stood screaming in his sleep, after the vision of his veiled self, with its question, '*Siete soddisfatto?*'

There were great ilexes behind the house in Shelley's time, which have been cut down, and near these he is said to have sat and written the 'Triumph of Life.' Some new houses, too, have been built between the villa and the town; otherwise the place is unaltered. Only an awning has been added to protect the terrace from the sun. I walked out on this terrace, where Shelley used to listen to Jane's singing. The sea was fretting at its base, just as Mrs. Shelley says it did when the Don Juan disappeared.

From San Terenzio we walked back to Lerici through olive woods, attended by a memory which toned the almost overpowering beauty of the place to sadness.

VII.—VIAREGGIO

The same memory drew us, a few days later, to the spot where Shelley's body was burned. Viareggio is fast becoming a fashionable watering-place for the people of Florence and Lucca, who seek fresher air and simpler living than Livorno offers. It has the usual new inns and improvised lodging-houses of such places, built on the outskirts of a little fishing village, with a boundless stretch of noble sands. There is a wooden pier on which we walked, watching the long roll of waves, foam-flaked, and quivering with moonlight. The Apennines faded into the grey sky beyond, and the sea-wind was

good to breathe. There is a feeling of 'immensity, liberty, action' here, which is not common in Italy. It reminds us of England; and to-night the Mediterranean had the rough force of a tidal sea.



Page 89

Morning revealed beauty enough in Viareggio to surprise even one who expects from Italy all forms of loveliness. The sand-dunes stretch for miles between the sea and a low wood of stone pines, with the Carrara hills descending from their glittering pinnacles by long lines to the headlands of the Spezzian Gulf. The immeasurable distance was all painted in sky-blue and amethyst; then came the golden green of the dwarf firs; and then dry yellow in the grasses of the dunes; and then the many-tinted sea, with surf tossed up against the furthest cliffs. It is a wonderful and tragic view, to which no painter but the Roman Costa has done justice; and he, it may be said, has made this landscape of the Carrarese his own. The space between sand and pine-wood was covered with faint, yellow, evening primroses. They flickered like little harmless flames in sun and shadow, and the spires of the Carrara range were giant flames transformed to marble. The memory of that day described by Trelawny in a passage of immortal English prose, when he and Byron and Leigh Hunt stood beside the funeral pyre, and libations were poured, and the 'Cor Cordium' was found inviolate among the ashes, turned all my thoughts to flame beneath the gentle autumn sky.

Still haunted by these memories, we took the carriage road to Pisa, over which Shelley's friends had hurried to and fro through those last days. It passes an immense forest of stone-pines—aisles and avenues; undergrowth of ilex, laurustinus, gorse, and myrtle; the crowded cyclamens, the solemn silence of the trees; the winds hushed in their velvet roof and stationary domes of verdure.

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PARMA

Parma is perhaps the brightest *Residenzstadt* of the second class in Italy. Built on a sunny and fertile tract of the Lombard plain, within view of the Alps, and close beneath the shelter of the Apennines, it shines like a well-set gem with stately towers and cheerful squares in the midst of verdure. The cities of Lombardy are all like large country houses: walking out of their gates, you seem to be stepping from a door or window that opens on a trim and beautiful garden, where mulberry-tree is married to mulberry by festoons of vines, and where the maize and sunflower stand together in rows between patches of flax and hemp. But it is not in order to survey the union of well-ordered husbandry with the civilities of ancient city-life that we break the journey at Parma between Milan and Bologna. We are attracted rather by the fame of one great painter, whose work, though it may be studied piecemeal in many galleries of Europe, in Parma has a fulness, largeness, and mastery that can nowhere else be found. In Parma alone Correggio challenges comparison with Raphael, with Tintoret, with all the supreme decorative painters who have deigned to make their art the handmaid of architecture. Yet even in the cathedral and the church of S. Giovanni, where Correggio's



Page 90

frescoes cover cupola and chapel wall, we could scarcely comprehend his greatness now—so cruelly have time and neglect dealt with those delicate dream-shadows of celestial fairyland—were it not for an interpreter, who consecrated a lifetime to the task of translating his master's poetry of fresco into the prose of engraving. That man was Paolo Toschi—a name to be ever venerated by all lovers of the arts; since without his guidance we should hardly know what to seek for in the ruined splendours of the domes of Parma, or even seeking, how to find the object of our search. Toschi's labour was more effectual than that of a restorer however skilful, more loving than that of a follower however faithful. He respected Correggio's handiwork with religious scrupulousness, adding not a line or tone or touch of colour to the fading frescoes; but he lived among them, aloft on scaffoldings, and face to face with the originals which he designed to reproduce. By long and close familiarity, by obstinate and patient interrogation, he divined Correggio's secret, and was able at last to see clearly through the mist of cobweb and mildew and altar smoke, and through the still more cruel travesty of so-called restoration. What he discovered, he faithfully committed first to paper in water colours, and then to copperplate with the burin, so that we enjoy the privilege of seeing Correggio's masterpieces as Toschi saw them, with the eyes of genius and of love and of long scientific study. It is not too much to say that some of Correggio's most charming compositions—for example, the dispute of S. Augustine and S. John—have been resuscitated from the grave by Toschi's skill. The original offers nothing but a mouldering surface from which the painter's work has dropped in scales. The engraving presents a design which we doubt not was Correggio's, for it corresponds in all particulars to the style and spirit of the master. To be critical in dealing with so successful an achievement of restoration and translation is difficult. Yet it may be admitted once and for all that Toschi has not unfrequently enfeebled his original. Under his touch Correggio loses somewhat of his sensuous audacity, his dithyrambic ecstasy, and approaches the ordinary standard of prettiness and graceful beauty. The Diana of the Camera di S. Paolo, for instance, has the strong calm splendour of a goddess: the same Diana in Toschi's engraving seems about to smile with girlish joy. In a word, the engraver was a man of a more common stamp—more timid and more conventional than the painter. But this is after all a trifling deduction from the value of his work.

Page 91

Our debt to Paolo Toschi is such that it would be ungrateful not to seek some details of his life. The few that can be gathered even at Parma are brief and bald enough. The newspaper articles and funeral panegyrics which refer to him are as barren as all such occasional notices in Italy have always been; the panegyrist seeming more anxious about his own style than eager to communicate information. Yet a bare outline of Toschi's biography may be supplied. He was born at Parma in 1788. His father was cashier of the post-office, and his mother's name was Anna Maria Brest. Early in his youth he studied painting at Parma under Biagio Martini; and in 1809 he went to Paris, where he learned the art of engraving from Bervic and of etching from Oortman. In Paris he contracted an intimate friendship with the painter Gerard. But after ten years he returned to Parma, where he established a company and school of engravers in concert with his friend Antonio Isac. Maria Louisa, the then Duchess, under whose patronage the arts flourished at Parma (witness Bodoni's exquisite typography), soon recognised his merit, and appointed him Director of the Ducal Academy. He then formed the project of engraving a series of the whole of Correggio's frescoes. The undertaking was a vast one. Both the cupolas of S. John and the cathedral, together with the vault of the apse of S. Giovanni^[10] and various portions of the side aisles, and the so-called Camera di S. Paolo, are covered by frescoes of Correggio and his pupil Parmegiano. These frescoes have suffered so much from neglect and time, and from unintelligent restoration, that it is difficult in many cases to determine their true character. Yet Toschi did not content himself with selections, or shrink from the task of deciphering and engraving the whole. He formed a school of disciples, among whom were Carlo Raimondi of Milan, Antonio Costa of Venice, Edward Eichens of Berlin, Aloisio Juvara of Naples, Antonio Dalco, Giuseppe Magnani, and Lodovico Bisola of Parma, and employed them as assistants in his work. Death overtook him in 1854, before it was finished, and now the water-colour drawings which are exhibited in the Gallery of Parma prove to what extent the achievement fell short of his design. Enough, however, was accomplished to place the chief masterpieces of Correggio beyond the possibility of utter oblivion.

To the piety of his pupil Carlo Raimondi, the bearer of a name illustrious in the annals of engraving, we owe a striking portrait of Toschi. The master is represented on his seat upon the scaffold in the dizzy half-light of the dome. The shadowy forms of saints and angels are around him. He has raised his eyes from his cartoon to study one of these. In his right hand is the opera-glass with which he scrutinises the details of distant groups. The upturned face, with its expression of contemplative intelligence, is like that of an astronomer accustomed to commerce with things above the sphere of common

Page 92

life, and ready to give account of all that he has gathered from his observation of a world not ours. In truth the world created by Correggio and interpreted by Toschi is very far removed from that of actual existence. No painter has infused a more distinct individuality into his work, realising by imaginative force and powerful projection an order of beauty peculiar to himself, before which it is impossible to remain quite indifferent. We must either admire the manner of Correggio, or else shrink from it with the distaste which sensual art is apt to stir in natures of a severe or simple type.

What, then, is the Correggiosity of Correggio? In other words, what is the characteristic which, proceeding from the personality of the artist, is impressed on all his work? The answer to this question, though by no means simple, may perhaps be won by a process of gradual analysis. The first thing that strikes us in the art of Correggio is, that he has aimed at the realistic representation of pure unrealities. His saints and angels are beings the like of whom we have hardly seen upon the earth. Yet they are displayed before us with all the movement and the vivid truth of nature. Next we feel that what constitutes the superhuman, visionary quality of these creatures, is their uniform beauty of a merely sensuous type. They are all created for pleasure, not for thought or passion or activity or heroism. The uses of their brains, their limbs, their every feature, end in enjoyment; innocent and radiant wantonness is the condition of their whole existence. Correggio conceived the universe under the one mood of sensuous joy: his world was bathed in luxurious light; its inhabitants were capable of little beyond a soft voluptuousness. Over the domain of tragedy he had no sway, and very rarely did he attempt to enter on it: nothing, for example, can be feebler than his endeavour to express anguish in the distorted features of Madonna, S. John, and the Magdalen, who are bending over the dead body of a Christ extended in the attitude of languid repose. In like manner he could not deal with subjects which demand a pregnancy of intellectual meaning. He paints the three Fates like young and joyous Bacchantes, places rose-garlands and thyrsi in their hands instead of the distaff and the thread of human destinies, and they might figure appropriately upon the panels of a banquet-chamber in Pompeii. In this respect Correggio might be termed the Rossini of painting. The melodies of the 'Stabat Mater'—*Fac ut portem* or *Quis est homo*—are the exact analogues in music of Correggio's voluptuous renderings of grave or mysterious motives. Nor, again, did he possess that severe and lofty art of composition which subordinates the fancy to the reason, and which seeks for the highest intellectual beauty in a kind of architectural harmony supreme above the melodies of gracefulness in detail. The Florentines and those who shared their spirit—Michelangelo



Page 93

and Lionardo and Raphael—deriving this principle of design from the geometrical art of the Middle Ages, converted it to the noblest uses in their vast well-ordered compositions. But Correggio ignored the laws of scientific construction. It was enough for him to produce a splendid and brilliant effect by the life and movement of his figures, and by the intoxicating beauty of his forms. His type of beauty, too, is by no means elevated. Lionardo painted souls whereof the features and the limbs are but an index. The charm of Michelangelo's ideal is like a flower upon a tree of rugged strength. Raphael aims at the loveliness which cannot be disjoined from goodness. But Correggio is contented with bodies 'delicate and desirable.' His angels are genii disimprisoned from the perfumed chalices of flowers, houris of an erotic paradise, elemental spirits of nature wantoning in Eden in her prime. To accuse the painter of conscious immorality or of what is stigmatised as sensuality, would be as ridiculous as to class his seraphic beings among the products of the Christian imagination. They belong to the generation of the fauns; like fauns, they combine a certain savage wildness, a dithyrambic ecstasy of inspiration, a delight in rapid movement as they revel amid clouds or flowers, with the permanent and all-pervading sweetness of the master's style. When infantine or childlike, these celestial sylphs are scarcely to be distinguished for any noble quality of beauty from Murillo's cherubs, and are far less divine than the choir of children who attend Madonna in Titian's 'Assumption.' But in their boyhood and their prime of youth, they acquire a fulness of sensuous vitality and a radiance that are peculiar to Correggio. The lily-bearer who helps to support S. Thomas beneath the dome of the cathedral at Parma, the groups of seraphs who crowd behind the Incoronata of S. Giovanni, and the two wild-eyed open-mouthed S. Johns stationed at each side of the celestial throne, are among the most splendid instances of the adolescent loveliness conceived by Correggio. Where the painter found their models may be questioned but not answered; for he has made them of a different fashion from the race of mortals: no court of Roman emperor or Turkish sultan, though stocked with the flowers of Bithynian and Circassian youth, have seen their like. Mozart's Cherubino seems to have sat for all of them. At any rate they incarnate the very spirit of the songs he sings.

As a consequence of this predilection for sensuous and voluptuous forms, Correggio had no power of imagining grandly or severely. Satisfied with material realism in his treatment even of sublime mysteries, he converts the hosts of heaven into a 'fricassee of frogs,' according to the old epigram. His apostles, gazing after the Virgin who has left the earth, are thrown into attitudes so violent and so dramatically foreshortened, that seen from below upon the pavement of the cathedral, little of their



Page 94

form is distinguishable except legs and arms in vehement commotion. Very different is Titian's conception of this scene. To express the spiritual meaning, the emotion of Madonna's transit, with all the pomp which colour and splendid composition can convey, is Titian's sole care; whereas Correggio appears to have been satisfied with realising the tumult of heaven rushing to meet earth, and earth straining upwards to ascend to heaven in violent commotion—a very orgasm of frenetic rapture. The essence of the event is forgotten: its external manifestation alone is presented to the eye; and only the accessories of beardless angels and cloud-encumbered cherubs are really beautiful amid a surge of limbs in restless movement. More dignified, because designed with more repose, is the Apocalypse of S. John painted upon the cupola of S. Giovanni. The apostles throned on clouds, with which the dome is filled, gaze upward to one point. Their attitudes are noble; their form is heroic; in their eyes there is the strange ecstatic look by which Correggio interpreted his sense of supernatural vision: it is a gaze not of contemplation or deep thought, but of wild half-savage joy, as if these saints also had become the elemental genii of cloud and air, spirits emergent from ether, the salamanders of an empyrean intolerable to mortal sense. The point on which their eyes converge, the culmination of their vision, is the figure of Christ. Here all the weakness of Correggio's method is revealed. He had undertaken to realise by no ideal allegorical suggestion, by no symbolism of architectural grouping, but by actual prosaic measurement, by corporeal form in subjection to the laws of perspective and foreshortening, things which in their very essence admit of only a figurative revelation. Therefore his Christ, the centre of all those earnest eyes, is contracted to a shape in which humanity itself is mean, a sprawling figure which irresistibly reminds one of a frog. The clouds on which the saints repose are opaque and solid; cherubs in countless multitudes, a swarm of merry children, crawl about upon these feather-beds of vapour, creep between the legs of the apostles, and play at bopeep behind their shoulders. There is no propriety in their appearance there. They take no interest in the beatific vision. They play no part in the celestial symphony; nor are they capable of more than merely infantine enjoyment. Correggio has sprinkled them lavishly like living flowers about his cloudland, because he could not sustain a grave and solemn strain of music, but was forced by his temperament to overlay the melody with roulades. Gazing at these frescoes, the thought came to me that Correggio was like a man listening to sweetest flute-playing, and translating phrase after phrase as they passed through his fancy into laughing faces, breezy tresses, and rolling mists. Sometimes a grander cadence reached his ear; and then S. Peter with the keys, or S. Augustine of the mighty brow,

Page 95

or the inspired eyes of S. John, took form beneath his pencil. But the light airs returned, and rose and lily faces bloomed again for him among the clouds. It is not therefore in dignity or sublimity that Correggio excels, but in artless grace and melodious tenderness. The Madonna della Scala clasping her baby with a caress which the little child returns, S. Catherine leaning in a rapture of ecstatic love to wed the infant Christ, S. Sebastian in the bloom of almost boyish beauty, are the so-called sacred subjects to which the painter was adequate, and which he has treated with the voluptuous tenderness we find in his pictures of Leda and Danae and Io. Could these saints and martyrs descend from Correggio's canvas, and take flesh, and breathe, and begin to live; of what high action, of what grave passion, of what exemplary conduct in any walk of life would they be capable? That is the question which they irresistibly suggest; and we are forced to answer, None! The moral and religious world did not exist for Correggio. His art was but a way of seeing carnal beauty in a dream that had no true relation to reality.

Correggio's sensibility to light and colour was exactly on a par with his feeling for form. He belongs to the poets of chiaroscuro and the poets of colouring; but in both regions he maintains the individuality so strongly expressed in his choice of purely sensuous beauty. Tintoretto makes use of light and shade for investing his great compositions with dramatic intensity. Rembrandt interprets sombre and fantastic moods of the mind by golden gloom and silvery irradiation, translating thought into the language of penumbral mystery. Lionardo studies the laws of light scientifically, so that the proper roundness and effect of distance should be accurately rendered, and all the subtleties of nature's smiles be mimicked. Correggio is content with fixing on his canvas the [Greek: anerithmon gelasma], the many-twinkling laughter of light in motion, rained down through fleecy clouds or trembling foliage, melting into half-shadows, bathing and illuminating every object with a soft caress. There are no tragic contrasts of splendour sharply defined on blackness, no mysteries of half-felt and pervasive twilight, no studied accuracies of noonday clearness in his work. Light and shadow are woven together on his figures like an impalpable Coan gauze, aerial and transparent, enhancing the palpitations of voluptuous movement which he loved. His colouring, in like manner, has none of the superb and mundane pomp which the Venetians affected; it does not glow or burn or beat the fire of gems into our brain; joyous and wanton, it seems to be exactly such a beauty-bloom as sense requires for its satiety. There is nothing in his hues to provoke deep passion or to stimulate the yearnings of the soul: the pure blushes of the dawn and the crimson pyres of sunset are nowhere in the world that he has painted. But that chord of jocund colour which may fitly be married to the smiles of



Page 96

light, the blues which are found in laughing eyes, the pinks that tinge the cheeks of early youth, and the warm yet silvery tones of healthy flesh, mingle as in a marvellous pearl-shell on his pictures. Both chiaroscuro and colouring have this supreme purpose in art, to effect the sense like music, and like music to create a mood in the soul of the spectator. Now the mood which Correggio stimulates is one of natural and thoughtless pleasure. To feel his influence, and at the same moment to be the subject of strong passion, or fierce lust, or heroic resolve, or profound contemplation, or pensive melancholy, is impossible. Wantonness, innocent because unconscious of sin, immoral because incapable of any serious purpose, is the quality which prevails in all that he has painted. The pantomimes of a Mohammedan paradise might be put upon the stage after patterns supplied by this least spiritual of painters.

It follows from this analysis that the Correggiosity of Correggio, that which sharply distinguished him from all previous artists, was the faculty of painting a purely voluptuous dream of beautiful beings in perpetual movement, beneath the laughter of morning light, in a world of never-failing April hues. When he attempts to depart from the fairyland of which he was the Prospero, and to match himself with the masters of sublime thought or earnest passion, he proves his weakness. But within his own magic circle he reigns supreme, no other artist having blended the witcheries of colouring, chiaroscuro, and faunlike loveliness of form into a harmony so perfect in its sensuous charm. Bewitched by the strains of the siren, we pardon affectations of expression, emptiness of meaning, feebleness of composition, exaggerated and melodramatic attitudes. There is what Goethe called a demonic influence in the art of Correggio: 'In poetry,' said Goethe to Eckermann, 'especially in that which is unconscious, before which reason and understanding fall short, and which therefore produces effects so far surpassing all conception, there is always something demonic.' It is not to be wondered that Correggio, possessed of this demonic power in the highest degree, and working to a purely sensuous end, should have exercised a fatal influence over art. His successors, attracted by an intoxicating loveliness which they could not analyse, which had nothing in common with the reason or the understanding, but was like a glamour cast upon the soul in its most secret sensibilities, threw themselves blindly into the imitation of Correggio's faults. His affectation, his want of earnest thought, his neglect of composition, his sensuous realism, his all-pervading sweetness, his infantine prettiness, his substitution of thaumaturgical effects for conscientious labour, admitted only too easy imitation, and were but too congenial with the spirit of the late Renaissance. Cupolas through the length and breadth of Italy began to be covered with clouds and simpering cherubs in

Page 97

the convulsions of artificial ecstasy. The attenuated elegance of Parmigiano, the attitudinising of Anselmi's saints and angels, and a general sacrifice of what is solid and enduring to sentimental gewgaws on the part of all painters who had submitted to the magic of Correggio, proved how easy it was to go astray with the great master. Meanwhile no one could approach him in that which was truly his own—the delineation of a transient moment in the life of sensuous beauty, the painting of a smile on Nature's face, when light and colour tremble in harmony with the movement of joyous living creatures. Another demonic nature of a far more powerful type contributed his share to the ruin of art in Italy. Michelangelo's constrained attitudes and muscular anatomy were imitated by painters and sculptors, who thought that the grand style lay in the presentation of theatrical athletes, but who could not seize the secret whereby the great master made even the bodies of men and women—colossal trunks and writhen limbs—interpret the meanings of his deep and melancholy soul.

It is a sad law of progress in art, that when the aesthetic impulse is on the wane, artists should perforce select to follow the weakness rather than the vigour, of their predecessors. While painting was in the ascendant, Raphael could take the best of Perugino and discard the worst; in its decadence Parmigiano reproduces the affectations of Correggio, and Bernini carries the exaggerations of Michelangelo to absurdity. All arts describe a parabola. The force which produces them causes them to rise throughout their growth up to a certain point, and then to descend more gradually in a long and slanting line of regular declension. There is no real break of continuity. The end is the result of simple exhaustion. Thus the last of our Elizabethan dramatists, Shirley and Crowne and Killigrew, pushed to its ultimate conclusion the principle inherent in Marlowe, not attempting to break new ground, nor imitating the excellences so much as the defects of their forerunners. Thus too the Pointed style of architecture in England gave birth first to what is called the Decorated, next to the Perpendicular, and finally expired in the Tudor. Each step was a step of progress—at first for the better—at last for the worse—but logical, continuous, necessitated.[11]

It is difficult to leave Correggio without at least posing the question of the difference between moralised and merely sensual art. Is all art excellent in itself and good in its effect that is beautiful and earnest? There is no doubt that Correggio's work is in a way most beautiful; and it bears unmistakable signs of the master having given himself with single-hearted devotion to the expression of that phase of loveliness which he could apprehend. In so far we must admit that his art is both excellent and solid. Yet we are unable to conceive that any human being could be made better—stronger for endurance,



Page 98

more fitted for the uses of the world, more sensitive to what is noble in nature—by its contemplation. At the best Correggio does but please us in our lighter moments, and we are apt to feel that the pleasure he has given is of an enervating kind. To expect obvious morality of any artist is confessedly absurd. It is not the artist's province to preach, or even to teach, except by remote suggestion. Yet the mind of the artist may be highly moralised, and then he takes rank not merely with the ministers to refined pleasure, but also with the educators of the world. He may, for example, be penetrated with a just sense of humanity like Shakspeare, or with a sublime temperance like Sophocles, instinct with prophetic intuition like Michelangelo, or with passionate experience like Beethoven. The mere sight of the work of Pheidias is like breathing pure health-giving air. Milton and Dante were steeped in religious patriotism; Goethe was pervaded with philosophy, and Balzac with scientific curiosity. Ariosto, Cervantes, and even Boccaccio are masters in the mysteries of common life. In all these cases the tone of the artist's mind is felt throughout his work: what he paints, or sings, or writes, conveys a lesson while it pleases. On the other hand, depravity in an artist or a poet percolates through work which has in it nothing positive of evil, and a very miasma of poisonous influence may rise from the apparently innocuous creations of a tainted soul. Now Correggio is moralised in neither way—neither as a good nor as a bad man, neither as an acute thinker nor as a deliberate voluptuary. He is simply sensuous. On his own ground he is even very fresh and healthy: his delineation of youthful maternity, for example, is as true as it is beautiful; and his sympathy with the gleefulness of children is devoid of affectation. We have then only to ask ourselves whether the defect in him of all thought and feeling which is not at once capable of graceful fleshly incarnation, be sufficient to lower him in the scale of artists. This question must of course be answered according to our definition of the purposes of art. There is no doubt that the most highly organised art—that which absorbs the most numerous human qualities and effects a harmony between the most complex elements—is the noblest. Therefore the artist who combines moral elevation and power of thought with a due appreciation of sensual beauty, is more elevated and more beneficial than one whose domain is simply that of carnal loveliness. Correggio, if this be so, must take a comparatively low rank. Just as we welcome the beautiful athlete for the radiant life that is in him, but bow before the personality of Sophocles, whose perfect form enshrined a noble and highly educated soul, so we gratefully accept Correggio for his grace, while we approach the consummate art of Michelangelo with reverent awe. It is necessary in aesthetics as elsewhere to recognise a hierarchy of excellence, the grades of which are



Page 99

determined by the greater or less comprehensiveness of the artist's nature expressed in his work. At the same time, the calibre of the artist's genius must be estimated; for eminent greatness even of a narrow kind will always command our admiration: and the amount of his originality has also to be taken into account. What is unique has, for that reason alone, a claim on our consideration. Judged in this way, Correggio deserves a place, say, in the sweet planet Venus, above the moon and above Mercury, among the artists who have not advanced beyond the contemplations which find their proper outcome in love. Yet, even thus, he aids the culture of humanity. 'We should take care,' said Goethe, apropos of Byron, to Eckermann, 'not to be always looking for culture in the decidedly pure and moral. Everything that is great promotes cultivation as soon as we are aware of it.'

* * * * *

CANOSSA

Italy is less the land of what is venerable in antiquity, than of beauty, by divine right young eternally in spite of age. This is due partly to her history and art and literature, partly to the temper of the races who have made her what she is, and partly to her natural advantages. Her oldest architectural remains, the temples of Paestum and Girgenti, or the gates of Perugia and Volterra, are so adapted to Italian landscape and so graceful in their massive strength, that we forget the centuries which have passed over them. We leap as by a single bound from the times of Roman greatness to the new birth of humanity in the fourteenth century, forgetting the many years during which Italy, like the rest of Europe, was buried in what our ancestors called Gothic barbarism. The illumination cast upon the classic period by the literature of Rome and by the memory of her great men is so vivid, that we feel the days of the Republic and the Empire to be near us; while the Italian Renaissance is so truly a revival of that former splendour, a resumption of the music interrupted for a season, that it is extremely difficult to form any conception of the five long centuries which elapsed between the Lombard invasion in 568 and the accession of Hildebrand to the Pontificate in 1073. So true is it that nothing lives and has reality for us but what is spiritual, intellectual, self-possessed in personality and consciousness. When the Egyptian priest said to Solon, 'You Greeks are always children,' he intended a gentle sarcasm, but he implied a compliment; for the quality of imperishable youth belonged to the Hellenic spirit, and has become the heritage of every race which partook of it. And this spirit in no common degree has been shared by the Italians of the earlier and the later classic epoch. The land is full of monuments pertaining to those two brilliant periods; and whenever the voice of poet has spoken or the hand of artist has been at work, that spirit, as distinguished from the spirit of mediaevalism, has found expression.



Page 100

Yet it must be remembered that during the five centuries above mentioned Italy was given over to Lombards, Franks, and Germans. Feudal institutions, alien to the social and political ideals of the classic world, took a tolerably firm hold on the country. The Latin element remained silent, passive, in abeyance, undergoing an important transformation. It was in the course of those five hundred years that the Italians as a modern people, separable from their Roman ancestors, were formed. At the close of this obscure passage in Italian history, their communes, the foundation of Italy's future independence, and the source of her peculiar national development, appeared in all the vigour and audacity of youth. At its close the Italian genius presented Europe with its greatest triumph of constructive ability, the Papacy. At its close again the series of supreme artistic achievements, starting with the architecture of churches and public palaces, passing on to sculpture and painting, and culminating in music, which only ended with the temporary extinction of national vitality in the seventeenth century, was simultaneously begun in all the provinces of the peninsula.

So important were these five centuries of incubation for Italy, and so little is there left of them to arrest the attention of the student, dazzled as he is by the ever-living glories of Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance, that a visit to the ruins of Canossa is almost a duty. There, in spite of himself, by the very isolation and forlorn abandonment of what was once so formidable a seat of feudal despotism and ecclesiastical tyranny, he is forced to confront the obscure but mighty spirit of the middle ages. There, if anywhere, the men of those iron-hearted times anterior to the Crusades will acquire distinctness for his imagination, when he recalls the three main actors in the drama enacted on the summit of Canossa's rock in the bitter winter of 1077.

Canossa lies almost due south of Reggio d'Emilia, upon the slopes of the Apennines. Starting from Reggio, the carriage-road keeps to the plain for some while in a westerly direction, and then bends away towards the mountains. As we approach their spurs, the ground begins to rise. The rich Lombard tilth of maize and vine gives place to English-looking hedgerows, lined with oaks, and studded with handsome dark tufts of green hellebore. The hills descend in melancholy earth-heaps on the plain, crowned here and there with ruined castles. Four of these mediaeval strongholds, called Bianello, Montevetro, Monteluzzo, and Montezano, give the name of Quattro Castelli to the commune. The most important of them, Bianello, which, next to Canossa, was the strongest fortress possessed by the Countess Matilda and her ancestors, still presents a considerable mass of masonry, roofed and habitable. The group formed a kind of advance-guard for Canossa against attack from Lombardy. After passing Quattro Castelli we enter the hills, climbing gently upwards



Page 101

between barren slopes of ashy grey earth—the *debris* of most ancient Apennines—crested at favourable points with lonely towers. In truth the whole country bristles with ruined forts, making it clear that during the middle ages Canossa was but the centre of a great military system, the core and kernel of a fortified position which covered an area to be measured by scores of square miles, reaching far into the mountains, and buttressed on the plain. As yet, however, after nearly two hours' driving, Canossa has not come in sight. At last a turn in the road discloses an opening in the valley of the Enza to the left: up this lateral gorge we see first the Castle of Rossena on its knoll of solid red rock, flaming in the sunlight; and then, further withdrawn, detached from all surrounding objects, and reared aloft as though to sweep the sea of waved and broken hills around it, a sharp horn of hard white stone. That is Canossa—the *alba Canossa*, the *candida petra* of its rhyming chronicler. There is no mistaking the commanding value of its situation. At the same time the brilliant whiteness of Canossa's rocky hill, contrasted with the red gleam of Rossena, and outlined against the prevailing dulness of these earthy Apennines, secures a picturesque individuality concordant with its unique history and unrivalled strength.

There is still a journey of two hours before the castle can be reached: and this may be performed on foot or horseback. The path winds upward over broken ground; following the *arete* of curiously jumbled and thwarted hill-slopes; passing beneath the battlements of Rossena, whence the unfortunate Everelina threw herself in order to escape the savage love of her lord and jailor; and then skirting those horrid earthen *balze* which are so common and so unattractive a feature of Apennine scenery. The most hideous *balze* to be found in the length and breadth of Italy are probably those of Volterra, from which the citizens themselves recoil with a kind of terror, and which lure melancholy men by intolerable fascination on to suicide. For ever crumbling, altering with frost and rain, discharging gloomy glaciers of slow-crawling mud, and scarring the hillside with tracts of barrenness, these earth-precipices are among the most ruinous and uncomfortable failures of nature. They have not even so much of wildness or grandeur as forms, the saving merit of nearly all wasteful things in the world, and can only be classed with the desolate *ghiare* of Italian river-beds.

Such as they are, these *balze* form an appropriate preface to the gloomy and repellent isolation of Canossa. The rock towers from a narrow platform to the height of rather more than 160 feet from its base. The top is fairly level, forming an irregular triangle, of which the greatest length is about 260 feet, and the width about 100 feet. Scarcely a vestige of any building can be traced either upon the platform



Page 102

or the summit, with the exception of a broken wall and windows supposed to belong to the end of the sixteenth century. The ancient castle, with its triple circuit of walls, enclosing barracks for the garrison, lodgings for the lord and his retainers, a stately church, a sumptuous monastery, storehouses, stables, workshops, and all the various buildings of a fortified stronghold, have utterly disappeared. The very passage of approach cannot be ascertained; for it is doubtful whether the present irregular path that scales the western face of the rock be really the remains of some old staircase, corresponding to that by which Mont S. Michel in Normandy is ascended. One thing is tolerably certain—that the three walls of which we hear so much from the chroniclers, and which played so picturesque a part in the drama of Henry IV.'s penance, surrounded the cliff at its base, and embraced a large acreage of ground. The citadel itself must have been but the acropolis or keep of an extensive fortress.

There has been plenty of time since the year 1255, when the people of Reggio sacked and destroyed Canossa, for Nature to resume her undisputed sway by obliterating the handiwork of men; and at present Nature forms the chief charm of Canossa. Lying one afternoon of May on the crisp short grass at the edge of a precipice purple with iris in full blossom, I surveyed, from what were once the battlements of Matilda's castle, a prospect than which there is none more spirit-stirring by reason of its beauty and its manifold associations in Europe. The lower castle-crowded hills have sunk. Reggio lies at our feet, shut in between the crests of Monte Carboniano and Monte delle Celle. Beyond Reggio stretches Lombardy—the fairest and most memorable battlefield of nations, the richest and most highly cultivated garden of civilised industry. Nearly all the Lombard cities may be seen, some of them faint like bluish films of vapour, some clear with dome and spire. There is Modena and her Ghirlandina. Carpi, Parma, Mirandola, Verona, Mantua, lie well defined and russet on the flat green map; and there flashes a bend of lordly Po; and there the Euganeans rise like islands, telling us where Padua and Ferrara nestle in the amethystine haze. Beyond and above all to the northward sweep the Alps, tossing their silvery crests up into the cloudless sky from the violet mist that girds their flanks and drowns their basements. Monte Adamello and the Ortler, the cleft of the Brenner, and the sharp peaks of the Venetian Alps are all distinctly visible. An eagle flying straight from our eyrie might traverse Lombardy and light among the snow-fields of the Valtelline between sunrise and sundown. Nor is the prospect tame to southward. Here the Apennines roll, billow above billow, in majestic desolation, soaring to snow summits in the Pellegrino region. As our eye attempts to thread that labyrinth of hill and vale, we tell ourselves that those roads wind to Tuscany, and yonder stretches Garfagnana, where Ariosto lived and mused in honourable exile from the world he loved.



Page 103

It was by one of the mountain passes that lead from Lucca northward that the first founder of Canossa is said to have travelled early in the tenth century. Sigifredo, if the tradition may be trusted, was very wealthy; and with his money he bought lands and signorial rights at Reggio, bequeathing to his children, when he died about 945, a patrimony which they developed into a petty kingdom. Azzo, his second son, fortified Canossa, and made it his principal place of residence. When Lothair, King of Italy, died in 950, leaving his beautiful widow to the ill-treatment of his successor, Berenger, Adelaide found a protector in this Azzo. She had been imprisoned on the Lake of Garda; but managing to escape in man's clothes to Mantua, she thence sent news of her misfortunes to Canossa. Azzo lost no time in riding with his knights to her relief, and brought her back in safety to his mountain fastness. It is related that Azzo was afterwards instrumental in calling Otho into Italy and procuring his marriage with Adelaide, in consequence of which events Italy became a fief of the Empire. Owing to the part he played at this time, the Lord of Canossa was recognised as one of the most powerful vassals of the German Emperor in Lombardy. Honours were heaped upon him; and he grew so rich and formidable that Berenger, the titular King of Italy, laid siege to his fortress of Canossa. The memory of this siege, which lasted for three years and a half, is said still to linger in the popular traditions of the place. When Azzo died at the end of the tenth century, he left to his son Tedaldo the title of Count of Reggio and Modena; and this title was soon after raised to that of Marquis. The Marches governed as Vicar of the Empire by Tedaldo included Reggio, Modena, Ferrara, Brescia, and probably Mantua. They stretched, in fact, across the north of Italy, forming a quadrilateral between the Alps and Apennines. Like his father, Tedaldo adhered consistently to the Imperial party; and when he died and was buried at Canossa, he in his turn bequeathed to his son Bonifazio a power and jurisdiction increased by his own abilities. Bonifazio held the state of a sovereign at Canossa, adding the duchy of Tuscany to his father's fiefs, and meeting the allied forces of the Lombard barons in the field of Coviolo like an independent potentate. His power and splendour were great enough to rouse the jealousy of the Emperor; but Henry III. seems to have thought it more prudent to propitiate this proud vassal, and to secure his kindness, than to attempt his humiliation. Bonifazio married Beatrice, daughter of Frederick, Duke of Lorraine—her whose marble sarcophagus in the Campo Santo at Pisa is said to have inspired Niccola Pisano with his new style of sculpture. Their only child, Matilda, was born, probably at Lucca, in 1046; and six years after her birth, Bonifazio, who had swayed his subjects like an iron-handed tyrant, was murdered. To the great House of Canossa, the rulers of one-third of



Page 104

Italy, there now remained only two women, Bonifazio's widow Beatrice, and his daughter Matilda. Beatrice married Godfrey, Duke of Lorraine, who was recognised by Henry IV. as her husband and as feudatory of the Empire in the full place of Boniface. He died about 1070; and in this year Matilda was married by proxy to his son, Godfrey the Hunchback, whom, however, she did not see till the year 1072. The marriage was not a happy one; and the question has even been disputed among Matilda's biographers whether it was ever consummated. At any rate it did not last long; for Godfrey was killed at Antwerp in 1076. In this year Matilda also lost her mother, Beatrice, who died at Pisa, and was buried in the cathedral.

By this rapid enumeration of events it will be seen how the power and honours of the House of Canossa, including Tuscany, Spoleto, and the fairest portions of Lombardy, had devolved upon a single woman of the age of thirty at the moment when the fierce quarrel between Pope and Emperor began in the year 1076. Matilda was destined to play a great, a striking, and a tragic part in the opening drama of Italian history. Her decided character and uncompromising course of action have won for her the name of 'la gran donna d'Italia,' and have caused her memory to be blessed or execrated, according as the temporal pretensions and spiritual tyranny of the Papacy may have found supporters or opponents in posterity. She was reared from childhood in habits of austerity and unquestioning piety. Submission to the Church became for her not merely a rule of conduct, but a passionate enthusiasm. She identified herself with the cause of four successive Popes, protected her idol, the terrible and iron-hearted Hildebrand, in the time of his adversity; remained faithful to his principles after his death; and having served the Holy See with all her force and all that she possessed through all her lifetime, she bequeathed her vast dominions to it on her deathbed. Like some of the greatest mediaeval characters—like Hildebrand himself—Matilda was so thoroughly of one piece, that she towers above the mists of ages with the massive grandeur of an incarnated idea. She is for us the living statue of a single thought, an undivided impulse, the more than woman born to represent her age. Nor was it without reason that Dante symbolised in her the love of Holy Church; though students of the 'Purgatory' will hardly recognise the lovely maiden, singing and plucking flowers beside the stream of Lethe, in the stern and warlike chatelaine of Canossa. Unfortunately we know but little of Matilda's personal appearance. Her health was not strong; and it is said to have been weakened, especially in her last illness, by ascetic observances. Yet she headed her own troops, armed with sword and cuirass, avoiding neither peril nor fatigue in the quarrels of her master Gregory. Up to the year 1622 two strong suits of mail were preserved at Quattro Castelli, which were said to have been worn by her in battle, and which were afterwards sold on the market-place at Reggio. This habit of donning armour does not, however, prove that Matilda was exceptionally vigorous; for in those savage times she could hardly have played the part of heroine without participating personally in the dangers of warfare.



Page 105

No less monumental in the plastic unity of his character was the monk Hildebrand, who for twenty years before his elevation to the Papacy had been the maker of Popes and the creator of the policy of Rome. When he was himself elected in the year 1073, and had assumed the name of Gregory VII., he immediately began to put in practice the plans for Church aggrandisement he had slowly matured during the previous quarter of a century. To free the Church from its subservience to the Empire, to assert the Pope's right to ratify the election of the Emperor and to exercise the right of jurisdiction over him, to place ecclesiastical appointments in the sole power of the Roman See, and to render the celibacy of the clergy obligatory, were the points he had resolved to carry. Taken singly and together, these chief aims of Hildebrand's policy had but one object—the magnification of the Church at the expense both of the people and of secular authorities, and the further separation of the Church from the ties and sympathies of common life that bound it to humanity. To accuse Hildebrand of personal ambition would be but shallow criticism, though it is clear that his inflexible and puissant nature found a savage selfish pleasure in trampling upon power and humbling pride at warfare with his own. Yet his was in no sense an egotistic purpose like that which moved the Popes of the Renaissance to dismember Italy for their bastards. Hildebrand, like Matilda, was himself the creature of a great idea. These two potent personalities completely understood each other, and worked towards a single end. Tho mythopoeic fancy might conceive of them as the male and female manifestations of one dominant faculty, the spirit of ecclesiastical dominion incarnate in a man and woman of almost super-human mould.

Opposed to them, as the third actor in the drama of Canossa, was a man of feebler mould. Henry IV., King of Italy, but not yet crowned Emperor, had none of his opponents' unity of purpose or monumental dignity of character. At war with his German feudatories, browbeaten by rebellious sons, unfaithful and cruel to his wife, vacillating in the measures he adopted to meet his divers difficulties, at one time tormented by his conscience into cowardly submission, and at another treasonably neglectful of the most solemn obligations, Henry was no match for the stern wills against which he was destined to break in unavailing passion. Early disagreements with Gregory had culminated in his excommunication. The German nobles abandoned his cause; and Henry found it expedient to summon a council in Augsburg for the settlement of matters in dispute between the Empire and the Papacy. Gregory expressed his willingness to attend this council, and set forth from Rome accompanied by the Countess Matilda in December 1076. He did not, however, travel further than Vercelli, for news here reached him that Henry was about to enter Italy at the head of a powerful army. Matilda hereupon persuaded



Page 106

the Holy Father to place himself in safety among her strongholds of Canossa. Thither accordingly Gregory retired before the ending of that year; and bitter were the sarcasms uttered by the imperial partisans in Italy upon this protection offered by a fair countess to the monk who had been made a Pope. The foul calumnies of that bygone age would be unworthy of even so much as this notice, if we did not trace in them the ineradicable Italian tendency to cynical insinuation—a tendency which has involved the history of the Renaissance Popes in an almost impenetrable mist of lies and exaggerations. Henry was in truth upon his road to Italy, but with a very different attendance from that which Gregory expected. Accompanied by Bertha, his wife, and his boy son Conrad, the Emperor elect left Spire in the condition of a fugitive, crossed Burgundy, spent Christmas at Besancon, and journeyed to the foot of Mont Cenis. It is said that he was followed by a single male servant of mean birth; and if the tale of his adventures during the passage of the Alps can be credited, history presents fewer spectacles more picturesque than the straits to which this representative of the Caesars, this supreme chief of feudal civility, this ruler destined still to be the leader of mighty armies and the father of a line of monarchs, was exposed. Concealing his real name and state, he induced some shepherds to lead him and his escort through the thick snows to the summit of Mont Cenis; and by the help of these men the imperial party were afterwards let down the snow-slopes on the further side by means of ropes. Bertha and her women were sewn up in hides and dragged across the frozen surface of the winter drifts. It was a year memorable for its severity. Heavy snow had fallen in October, which continued ice-bound and unyielding till the following April.

No sooner had Henry reached Turin, than he set forward again in the direction of Canossa. The fame of his arrival had preceded him, and he found that his party was far stronger in Italy than he had ventured to expect. Proximity to the Church of Rome divests its fulminations of half their terrors. The Italian bishops and barons, less superstitious than the Germans, and with greater reason to resent the domineering graspingness of Gregory, were ready to espouse the Emperor's cause. Henry gathered a formidable force as he marched onward across Lombardy; and some of the most illustrious prelates and nobles of the South were in his suite. A more determined leader than Henry proved himself to be, might possibly have forced Gregory to some accommodation, in spite of the strength of Canossa and the Pope's invincible obstinacy, by proper use of these supporters. Meanwhile the adherents of the Church were mustered in Matilda's fortress; among whom may be mentioned Azzo, the progenitor of Este and Brunswick; Hugh, Abbot of Clugny; and the princely family of Piedmont. 'I am become a second Rome,' exclaims Canossa, in the language of Matilda's rhyming



Page 107

chronicler; 'all honours are mine; I hold at once both Pope and King, the princes of Italy and those of Gaul, those of Rome, and those from far beyond the Alps.' The stage was ready; the audience had assembled; and now the three great actors were about to meet. Immediately upon his arrival at Canossa, Henry sent for his cousin, the Countess Matilda, and besought her to intercede for him with Gregory. He was prepared to make any concessions or to undergo any humiliations, if only the ban of excommunication might be removed; nor, cowed as he was by his own superstitious conscience, and by the memory of the opposition he had met with from his German vassals, does he seem to have once thought of meeting force with force, and of returning to his northern kingdom triumphant in the overthrow of Gregory's pride. Matilda undertook to plead his cause before the Pontiff. But Gregory was not to be moved so soon to mercy. 'If Henry has in truth repented,' he replied, 'let him lay down crown and sceptre, and declare himself unworthy of the name of king.' The only point conceded to the suppliant was that he should be admitted in the garb of a penitent within the precincts of the castle. Leaving his retinue outside the walls, Henry entered the first series of outworks, and was thence conducted to the second, so that between him and the citadel itself there still remained the third of the surrounding bastions. Here he was bidden to wait the Pope's pleasure; and here, in the midst of that bitter winter weather, while the fierce winds of the Apennines were sweeping sleet upon him in their passage from Monte Pellegrino to the plain, he knelt barefoot, clothed in sackcloth, fasting from dawn till eve, for three whole days. On the morning of the fourth day, judging that Gregory was inexorable, and that his suit would not be granted, Henry retired to the Chapel of S. Nicholas, which stood within this second precinct. There he called to his aid the Abbot of Clugny and the Countess, both of whom were his relations, and who, much as they might sympathise with Gregory, could hardly be supposed to look with satisfaction on their royal kinsman's outrage. The Abbot told Henry that nothing in the world could move the Pope; but Matilda, when in turn he fell before her knees and wept, engaged to do for him the utmost. She probably knew that the moment for unbending had arrived, and that her imperious guest could not with either decency or prudence prolong the outrage offered to the civil chief of Christendom. It was the 25th of January when the Emperor elect was brought, half dead with cold and misery, into the Pope's presence. There he prostrated himself in the dust, crying aloud for pardon. It is said that Gregory first placed his foot upon Henry's neck, uttering these words of Scripture: 'Super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis, et conculcabis leonem et draconem,' and that then he raised him from the earth and formally pronounced his pardon. The prelates and nobles who took part in this scene were compelled to guarantee with their own oaths the vows of obedience pronounced by Henry; so that in the very act of reconciliation a new insult was offered to him. After this Gregory said mass, and permitted Henry to communicate; and at the close of the day a banquet was served, at which the King sat down to meat with the Pope and the Countess.



Page 108

It is probable that, while Henry's penance was performed in the castle courts beneath the rock, his reception by the Pope, and all that subsequently happened, took place in the citadel itself. But of this we have no positive information. Indeed the silence of the chronicles as to the topography of Canossa is peculiarly unfortunate for lovers of the picturesque in historic detail, now that there is no possibility of tracing the outlines of the ancient building. Had the author of the 'Vita Mathildis' (Muratori, vol. v.) foreseen that his beloved Canossa would one day be nothing but a mass of native rock, he would undoubtedly have been more explicit on these points; and much that is vague about an event only paralleled by our Henry II.'s penance before Becket's shrine at Canterbury, might now be clear.

Very little remains to be told about Canossa. During the same year, 1077, Matilda made the celebrated donation of her fiefs to Holy Church. This was accepted by Gregory in the name of S. Peter, and it was confirmed by a second deed during the pontificate of Urban IV. in 1102. Though Matilda subsequently married Guelfo d'Este, son of the Duke of Bavaria, she was speedily divorced from him; nor was there any heir to a marriage ridiculous by reason of disparity of age, the bridegroom being but eighteen, while the bride was forty-three in the year of her second nuptials. During one of Henry's descents into Italy, he made an unsuccessful attack upon Canossa, assailing it at the head of a considerable force one October morning in 1092. Matilda's biographer informs us that the mists of autumn veiled his beloved fortress from the eyes of the beleaguers. They had not even the satisfaction of beholding the unvanquished citadel; and, what was more, the banner of the Emperor was seized and dedicated as a trophy in the Church of S. Apollonio. In the following year the Countess opened her gates of Canossa to an illustrious fugitive, Adelaide, the wife of her old foeman, Henry, who had escaped with difficulty from the insults and the cruelty of her husband. After Henry's death, his son, the Emperor Henry V., paid Matilda a visit in her castle of Bianello, addressed her by the name of mother, and conferred upon her the vice-regency of Liguria. At the age of sixty-nine she died, in 1115, at Bondeno de' Roncori, and was buried, not among her kinsmen at Canossa, but in an abbey of S. Benedict near Mantua. With her expired the main line of the noble house she represented; though Canossa, now made a fief of the Empire in spite of Matilda's donation, was given to a family which claimed descent from Bonifazio's brother Conrad—a young man killed in the battle of Coviolo. This family, in its turn, was extinguished in the year 1570; but a junior branch still exists at Verona. It will be remembered that Michelangelo Buonarroti claimed kinship with the Count of Canossa; and a letter from the Count is extant acknowledging the validity of his pretension.



Page 109

As far back as 1255 the people of Reggio destroyed the castle; nor did the nobles of Canossa distinguish themselves in subsequent history among those families who based their despotisms on the *debris* of the Imperial power in Lombardy. It seemed destined that Canossa and all belonging to it should remain as a mere name and memory of the outgrown middle ages. Estensi, Carraresi, Visconti, Bentivogli, and Gonzaghi belong to a later period of Lombard history, and mark the dawn of the Renaissance.

As I lay and mused that afternoon of May upon the short grass, cropped by two grey goats, whom a little boy was tending, it occurred to me to ask the woman who had served me as guide, whether any legend remained in the country concerning the Countess Matilda. She had often, probably, been asked this question by other travellers. Therefore she was more than usually ready with an answer, which, as far as I could understand her dialect, was this. Matilda was a great and potent witch, whose summons the devil was bound to obey. One day she aspired, alone of all her sex, to say mass; but when the moment came for sacrificing the elements, a thunderbolt fell from the clear sky, and reduced her to ashes.[12] That the most single-hearted handmaid of the Holy Church, whose life was one long devotion to its ordinances, should survive in this grotesque myth, might serve to point a satire upon the vanity of earthly fame. The legend in its very extravagance is a fanciful distortion of the truth.

* * * * *

FORNOVO

In the town of Parma there is one surpassingly strange relic of the past. The palace of the Farnesi, like many a haunt of upstart tyranny and beggared pride on these Italian plains, rises misshapen and disconsolate above the stream that bears the city's name. The squalor of this grey-brown edifice of formless brick, left naked like the palace of the same Farnesi at Piacenza, has something even horrid in it now that only vague memory survives of its former uses. The princely *sprezzatura* of its ancient occupants, careless of these unfinished courts and unroofed galleries amid the splendour of their purpled silks and the glitter of their torchlight pageantry, has yielded to sullen cynicism—the cynicism of arrested ruin and unreverend age. All that was satisfying to the senses and distracting to the eyesight in their transitory pomp has passed away, leaving a sinister and naked shell. Remembrance can but summon up the crimes, the madness, the trivialities of those dead palace-builders. An atmosphere of evil clings to the dilapidated walls, as though the tainted spirit of the infamous Pier Luigi still possessed the spot, on which his toadstool brood of princelings sprouted in the mud of their misdeeds. Enclosed in this huge labyrinth of brickwork is the relic of which I spoke. It is the once world-famous Teatro Farnese, raised in the year 1618 by Ranunzio Farnese for the marriage of Odoardo Farnese with Margaret



Page 110

of Austria. Giambattista Aleotti, a native of pageant-loving Ferrara, traced the stately curves and noble orders of the galleries, designed the columns that support the raftered roof, marked out the orchestra, arranged the stage, and breathed into the whole the spirit of Palladio's most heroic neo-Latin style. Vast, built of wood, dishevelled, with broken statues and blurred coats of arms, with its empty scene, its uncurling frescoes, its hangings all in rags, its cobwebs of two centuries, its dust and mildew and discoloured gold—this theatre, a sham in its best days, and now that ugliest of things, a sham unmasked and naked to the light of day, is yet sublime, because of its proportioned harmony, because of its grand Roman manner. The sight and feeling of it fasten upon the mind and abide in the memory like a nightmare,—like one of Piranesi's weirdest and most passion-haunted etchings for the *Carceri*. Idling there at noon in the twilight of the dust-bedarkened windows, we fill the tiers of those high galleries with ladies, the space below with grooms and pages; the stage is ablaze with torches, and an Italian Masque, such as our Marlowe dreamed of, fills the scene. But it is impossible to dower these fancies with even such life as in healthier, happier ruins phantasy may lend to imagination's figments. This theatre is like a maniac's skull, empty of all but unrealities and mockeries of things that are. The ghosts we raise here could never have been living men and women: *questi sciaurati non fur mai vivi*. So clinging is the sense of instability that appertains to every fragment of that dry-rot tyranny which seized by evil fortune in the sunset of her golden day on Italy.

In this theatre I mused one morning after visiting Fornovo; and the thoughts suggested by the battlefield found their proper atmosphere in the dilapidated place. What, indeed, is the Teatro Farnese but a symbol of those hollow principalities which the despot and the stranger built in Italy after the fatal date of 1494, when national enthusiasm and political energy were expiring in a blaze of art, and when the Italians as a people had ceased to be; but when the phantom of their former life, surviving in high works of beauty, was still superb by reason of imperishable style! How much in Italy of the Renaissance was, like this plank-built plastered theatre, a glorious sham! The sham was seen through then; and now it stands unmasked: and yet, strange to say, so perfect is its form that we respect the sham and yield our spirits to the incantation of its music.

The battle of Fornovo, as modern battles go, was a paltry affair; and even at the time it seemed sufficiently without result. Yet the trumpets which rang on July 6, 1495, for the onset, sounded the *reveil* of the modern world; and in the inconclusive termination of the struggle of that day, the Italians were already judged and sentenced as a nation. The armies who met that morning represented Italy and France,—Italy, the Sibyl of Renaissance; France, the Sibyl of Revolution. At the fall of evening Europe was already looking northward; and the last years of the fifteenth century were opening an act which closed in blood at Paris on the ending of the eighteenth.



Page 111

If it were not for thoughts like these, no one, I suppose, would take the trouble to drive for two hours out of Parma to the little village of Fornovo—a score of bare grey hovels on the margin of a pebbly river-bed beneath the Apennines. The fields on either side, as far as eye can see, are beautiful indeed in May sunlight, painted here with flax, like shallow sheets of water reflecting a pale sky, and there with clover red as blood. Scarce unfolded leaves sparkle like flamelets of bright green upon the knotted vines, and the young corn is bending all one way beneath a western breeze. But not less beautiful than this is the whole broad plain of Lombardy; nor are the nightingales louder here than in the acacia trees around Pavia. As we drive, the fields become less fertile, and the hills encroach upon the level, sending down their spurs upon that waveless plain like blunt rocks jutting out into a tranquil sea. When we reach the bed of the Taro, these hills begin to narrow on either hand, and the road rises. Soon they open out again with gradual curving lines, forming a kind of amphitheatre filled up from flank to flank with the *ghiara* or pebbly bottom of the Taro. The Taro is not less wasteful than any other of the brotherhood of streams that pour from Alp or Apennine to swell the Po. It wanders, an impatient rivulet, through a wilderness of boulders, uncertain of its aim, shifting its course with the season of the year, unless the jaws of some deep-cloven gully hold it tight and show how insignificant it is. As we advance, the hills approach again; between their skirts there is nothing but the river-bed; and now on rising ground above the stream, at the point of juncture between the Ceno and the Taro, we find Fornovo. Beyond the village the valley broadens out once more, disclosing Apennines capped with winter snow. To the right descends the Ceno. To the left foams the Taro, following whose rocky channel we should come at last to Pontremoli and the Tyrrhenian sea beside Sarzana. On a May-day of sunshine like the present, the Taro is a gentle stream. A waggon drawn by two white oxen has just entered its channel, guided by a contadino with goat-skin leggings, wielding a long goad. The patient creatures stem the water, which rises to the peasant's thighs and ripples round the creaking wheels. Swaying to and fro, as the shingles shift upon the river-bed, they make their way across; and now they have emerged upon the stones; and now we lose them in a flood of sunlight.

It was by this pass that Charles VIII. in 1495 returned from Tuscany, when the army of the League was drawn up waiting to intercept and crush him in the mousetrap of Fornovo. No road remained for Charles and his troops but the rocky bed of the Taro, running, as I have described it, between the spurs of steep hills. It is true that the valley of the Baganza leads, from a little higher up among the mountains, into Lombardy. But this pass runs straight to



Page 112

Parma; and to follow it would have brought the French upon the walls of a strong city. Charles could not do otherwise than descend upon the village of Fornovo, and cut his way thence in the teeth of the Italian army over stream and boulder between the gorges of throttling mountain. The failure of the Italians to achieve what here upon the ground appears so simple, delivered Italy hand-bound to strangers. Had they but succeeded in arresting Charles and destroying his forces at Fornovo, it is just possible that then—even then, at the eleventh hour—Italy might have gained the sense of national coherence, or at least have proved herself capable of holding by her leagues the foreigner at bay. As it was, the battle of Fornovo, in spite of Venetian bonfires and Mantuan Madonnas of Victory, made her conscious of incompetence and convicted her of cowardice. After Fornovo, her sons scarcely dared to hold their heads up in the field against invaders; and the battles fought upon her soil were duels among aliens for the prize of Italy.

In order to comprehend the battle of Fornovo in its bearings on Italian history, we must go back to the year 1492, and understand the conditions of the various States of Italy at that date. On April 8 in that year, Lorenzo de' Medici, who had succeeded in maintaining a political equilibrium in the peninsula, expired, and was succeeded by his son Piero, a vain and foolhardy young man, from whom no guidance could be expected. On July 25, Innocent VIII. died, and was succeeded by the very worst Pope who has ever occupied S. Peter's chair, Roderigo Borgia, Alexander VI. It was felt at once that the old order of things had somehow ended, and that a new era, the destinies of which as yet remained incalculable, was opening for Italy. The chief Italian powers, hitherto kept in equipoise by the diplomacy of Lorenzo de' Medici, were these—the Duchy of Milan, the Republic of Venice, the Republic of Florence, the Papacy, and the kingdom of Naples. Minor States, such as the Republics of Genoa and Siena, the Duchies of Urbino and Ferrara, the Marquisate of Mantua, the petty tyrannies of Romagna, and the wealthy city of Bologna, were sufficiently important to affect the balance of power, and to produce new combinations. For the present purpose it is, however, enough to consider the five great Powers.

After the peace of Constance, which freed the Lombard Communes from Imperial interference in the year 1183, Milan, by her geographical position, rose rapidly to be the first city of North Italy. Without narrating the changes by which she lost her freedom as a Commune, it is enough to state that, earliest of all Italian cities, Milan passed into the hands of a single family. The Visconti managed to convert this flourishing commonwealth, with all its dependencies, into their private property, ruling it exclusively for their own profit, using its municipal institutions as the machinery of administration, and employing



Page 113

the taxes which they raised upon its wealth for purely selfish ends. When the line of the Visconti ended in the year 1447, their tyranny was continued by Francesco Sforza, the son of a poor soldier of adventure, who had raised himself by his military genius, and had married Bianca, the illegitimate daughter of the last Visconti. On the death of Francesco Sforza in 1466, he left two sons, Galeazzo Maria and Lodovico, surnamed Il Moro, both of whom were destined to play a prominent part in history. Galeazzo Maria, dissolute, vicious, and cruel to the core, was murdered by his injured subjects in the year 1476. His son, Giovanni Galeazzo, aged eight, would in course of time have succeeded to the Duchy, had it not been for the ambition of his uncle Lodovico. Lodovico contrived to name himself as Regent for his nephew, whom he kept, long after he had come of age, in a kind of honourable prison. Virtual master in Milan, but without a legal title to the throne, unrecognised in his authority by the Italian powers, and holding it from day to day by craft and fraud, Lodovico at last found his situation untenable; and it was this difficulty of an usurper to maintain himself in his despotism which, as we shall see, brought the French into Italy.

Venice, the neighbour and constant foe of Milan, had become a close oligarchy by a process of gradual constitutional development, which threw her government into the hands of a few nobles. She was practically ruled by the hereditary members of the Grand Council. Ever since the year 1453, when Constantinople fell beneath the Turk, the Venetians had been more and more straitened in their Oriental commerce, and were thrown back upon the policy of territorial aggrandisement in Italy, from which they had hitherto refrained as alien to the temperament of the Republic. At the end of the fifteenth century Venice therefore became an object of envy and terror to the Italian States. They envied her because she alone was tranquil, wealthy, powerful, and free. They feared her because they had good reason to suspect her of encroachment; and it was foreseen that if she got the upper hand in Italy, all Italy would be the property of the families inscribed upon the Golden Book. It was thus alone that the Italians comprehended government. The principle of representation being utterly unknown, and the privileged burghers in each city being regarded as absolute and lawful owners of the city and of everything belonging to it, the conquest of a town by a republic implied the political extinction of that town and the disfranchisement of its inhabitants in favour of the conquerors.



Page 114

Florence at this epoch still called itself a Republic; and of all Italian commonwealths it was by far the most democratic. Its history, unlike that of Venice, had been the history of continual and brusque changes, resulting in the destruction of the old nobility, in the equalisation of the burghers, and in the formation of a new aristocracy of wealth. From this class of *bourgeois* nobles sprang the Medici, who, by careful manipulation of the State machinery, by the creation of a powerful party devoted to their interests, by flattery of the people, by corruption, by taxation, and by constant scheming, raised themselves to the first place in the commonwealth, and became its virtual masters. In the year 1492 Lorenzo de' Medici, the most remarkable chief of this despotic family, died, bequeathing his supremacy in the Republic to a son of marked incompetence.

Since the Pontificate of Nicholas V. the See of Rome had entered upon a new period of existence. The Popes no longer dreaded to reside in Rome, but were bent upon making the metropolis of Christendom both splendid as a seat of art and learning, and also potent as the capital of a secular kingdom. Though their fiefs in Romagna and the March were still held but loosely, though their provinces swarmed with petty despots who defied the Papal authority, and though the princely Roman houses of Colonna and Orsini were still strong enough to terrorise the Holy Father in the Vatican, it was now clear that the Papal See must in the end get the better of its adversaries, and consolidate itself into a first-rate Power. The internal spirit of the Papacy at this time corresponded to its external policy. It was thoroughly secularised by a series of worldly and vicious pontiffs, who had clean forgotten what their title, Vicar of Christ, implied. They consistently used their religious prestige to enforce their secular authority, while by their temporal power they caused their religious claims to be respected. Corrupt and shameless, they indulged themselves in every vice, openly acknowledged their children, and turned Italy upside down in order to establish favourites and bastards in the principalities they seized as spoils of war.

The kingdom of Naples differed from any other state of Italy. Subject continually to foreign rulers since the decay of the Greek Empire, governed in succession by the Normans, the Hohenstauffens, and the House of Anjou, it had never enjoyed the real independence, or the free institutions, of the northern provinces; nor had it been Italianised in the same sense as the rest of the peninsula. Despotism, which assumed so many forms in Italy, was here neither the tyranny of a noble house, nor the masked autocracy of a burgher, nor yet the forceful sway of a condottiere. It had a dynastic character, resembling the monarchy of one of the great European nations, but modified by the peculiar conditions of Italian statecraft. Owing to this dynastic and monarchical complexion



Page 115

of the Neapolitan kingdom, semi-feudal customs flourished in the south far more than in the north of Italy. The barons were more powerful; and the destinies of the Regno often turned upon their feuds and quarrels with the Crown. At the same time the Neapolitan despots shared the uneasy circumstances of all Italian potentates, owing to the uncertainty of their tenure, both as conquerors and aliens, and also as the nominal vassals of the Holy See. The rights of suzerainty which the Normans had yielded to the Papacy over their southern conquests, and which the Popes had arbitrarily exercised in favour of the Angevine princes, proved a constant source of peril to the rest of Italy by rendering the succession to the crown of Naples doubtful. On the extinction of the Angevine line, however, the throne was occupied by a prince who had no valid title but that of the sword to its possession. Alfonso of Aragon conquered Naples in 1442, and neglecting his hereditary dominion, settled in his Italian capital. Possessed with the enthusiasm for literature which was then the ruling passion of the Italians, and very liberal to men of learning, Alfonso won for himself the surname of Magnanimous. On his death, in 1458, he bequeathed his Spanish kingdom, together with Sicily and Sardinia, to his brother, and left the fruits of his Italian conquest to his bastard, Ferdinand. This Ferdinand, whose birth was buried in profound obscurity, was the reigning sovereign in the year 1492. Of a cruel and sombre temperament, traitorous and tyrannical, Ferdinand was hated by his subjects as much as Alfonso had been loved. He possessed, however, to a remarkable degree, the qualities which at that epoch constituted a consummate statesman; and though the history of his reign is the history of plots and conspiracies, of judicial murders and forcible assassinations, of famines produced by iniquitous taxation, and of every kind of diabolical tyranny, Ferdinand contrived to hold his own, in the teeth of a rebellious baronage or a maddened population. His political sagacity amounted almost to a prophetic instinct in the last years of his life, when he became aware that the old order was breaking up in Italy, and had cause to dread that Charles VIII. of France would prove his title to the kingdom of Naples by force of arms.[13]

Such were the component parts of the Italian body politic, with the addition of numerous petty principalities and powers, adhering more or less consistently to one or other of the greater States. The whole complex machine was bound together by no sense of common interest, animated by no common purpose, amenable to no central authority. Even such community of feeling as one spoken language gives, was lacking. And yet Italy distinguished herself clearly from the rest of Europe, not merely as a geographical fact, but also as a people intellectually and spiritually one. The rapid rise of humanism had aided in producing this national self-consciousness. Every State



Page 116

and every city was absorbed in the recovery of culture and in the development of art and literature. Far in advance of the other European nations, the Italians regarded the rest of the world as barbarous, priding themselves the while, in spite of mutual jealousies and hatreds, on their Italic civilisation. They were enormously wealthy. The resources of the Papal treasury, the private fortunes of the Florentine bankers, the riches of the Venetian merchants might have purchased all that France or Germany possessed of value. The single Duchy of Milan yielded to its masters 700,000 golden florins of revenue, according to the computation of De Comines. In default of a confederative system, the several States were held in equilibrium by diplomacy. By far the most important people, next to the despots and the captains of adventure, were ambassadors and orators. War itself had become a matter of arrangement, bargain, and diplomacy. The game of stratagem was played by generals who had been friends yesterday and might be friends again to-morrow, with troops who felt no loyalty whatever for the standards under which they listed. To avoid slaughter and to achieve the ends of warfare by parade and demonstration was the interest of every one concerned. Looking back upon Italy of the fifteenth century, taking account of her religious deadness and moral corruption, estimating the absence of political vigour in the republics and the noxious tyranny of the despots, analysing her lack of national spirit, and comparing her splendid life of cultivated ease with the want of martial energy, we can see but too plainly that contact with a simpler and stronger people could not but produce a terrible catastrophe. The Italians themselves, however, were far from comprehending this. Centuries of undisturbed internal intrigue had accustomed them to play the game of forfeits with each other, and nothing warned them that the time was come at which diplomacy, finesse, and craft would stand them in ill stead against rapacious conquerors.

The storm which began to gather over Italy in the year 1492 had its first beginning in the North. Lodovico Sforza's position in the Duchy of Milan was becoming every day more difficult, when a slight and to all appearances insignificant incident converted his apprehension of danger into panic. It was customary for the States of Italy to congratulate a new Pope on his election by their ambassadors; and this ceremony had now to be performed for Roderigo Borgia. Lodovico proposed that his envoys should go to Rome together with those of Venice, Naples, and Florence; but Piero de' Medici, whose vanity made him wish to send an embassy in his own name, contrived that Lodovico's proposal should be rejected both by Florence and the King of Naples. So strained was the situation of Italian affairs that Lodovico saw in this repulse a menace to his own usurped authority. Feeling himself isolated among the princes of his country, rebuffed by the Medici, and



Page 117

coldly treated by the King of Naples, he turned in his anxiety to France, and advised the young king, Charles VIII., to make good his claim upon the Regno. It was a bold move to bring the foreigner thus into Italy; and even Lodovico, who prided himself upon his sagacity, could not see how things would end. He thought his situation so hazardous, however, that any change must be for the better. Moreover, a French invasion of Naples would tie the hands of his natural foe, King Ferdinand, whose granddaughter, Isabella of Aragon, had married Giovanni Galeazzo Sforza, and was now the rightful Duchess of Milan. When the Florentine ambassador at Milan asked him how he had the courage to expose Italy to such peril, his reply betrayed the egotism of his policy: 'You talk to me of Italy; but when have I looked Italy in the face? No one ever gave a thought to my affairs. I have, therefore, had to give them such security as I could.'

Charles VIII. was young, light-brained, romantic, and ruled by *parvenus*, who had an interest in disturbing the old order of the monarchy. He lent a willing ear to Lodovico's invitation, backed as this was by the eloquence and passion of numerous Italian refugees and exiles. Against the advice of his more prudent counsellors, he taxed all the resources of his kingdom, and concluded treaties on disadvantageous terms with England, Germany, and Spain, in order that he might be able to concentrate all his attention upon the Italian expedition. At the end of the year 1493, it was known that the invasion was resolved upon. Gentile Becchi, the Florentine envoy at the Court of France, wrote to Piero de' Medici: 'If the King succeeds, it is all over with Italy—*tutta a bordello*.' The extraordinary selfishness of the several Italian States at this critical moment deserves to be noticed. The Venetians, as Paolo Antonio Soderini described them to Piero de' Medici, 'are of opinion that to keep quiet, and to see other potentates of Italy spending and suffering, cannot but be to their advantage. They trust no one, and feel sure they have enough money to be able at any moment to raise sufficient troops, and so to guide events according to their inclinations.' As the invasion was directed against Naples, Ferdinand of Aragon displayed the acutest sense of the situation. 'Frenchmen,' he exclaimed, in what appears like a prophetic passion when contrasted with the cold indifference of others no less really menaced, 'have never come into Italy without inflicting ruin; and this invasion, if rightly considered, cannot but bring universal ruin, although it seems to menace us alone.' In his agony Ferdinand applied to Alexander VI. But the Pope looked coldly upon him, because the King of Naples, with rare perspicacity, had predicted that his elevation to the Papacy would prove disastrous to Christendom. Alexander preferred to ally himself with Venice and Milan. Upon this Ferdinand wrote as follows: 'It seems fated that the Popes



Page 118

should leave no peace in Italy. We are compelled to fight; but the Duke of Bari (*i.e.* Lodovico Sforza) should think what may ensue from the tumult he is stirring up. He who raises this wind will not be able to lay the tempest when he likes. Let him look to the past, and he will see how every time that our internal quarrels have brought Powers from beyond the Alps into Italy, these have oppressed and lorded over her.'

Terribly verified as these words were destined to be,—and they were no less prophetic in their political sagacity than Savonarola's prediction of the Sword and bloody Scourge,—it was now too late to avert the coming ruin. On March 1, 1494, Charles was with his army at Lyons. Early in September he had crossed the pass of Mont Genevre and taken up his quarters in the town of Asti. There is no need to describe in detail the holiday march of the French troops through Lombardy, Tuscany, and Rome, until, without having struck a blow of consequence, the gates of Naples opened to receive the conqueror upon February 22, 1495. Philippe de Comines, who parted from the King at Asti and passed the winter as his envoy at Venice, has more than once recorded his belief that nothing but the direct interposition of Providence could have brought so mad an expedition to so successful a conclusion. 'Dieu monstroit conduire l'entreprise,' No sooner, however, was Charles installed in Naples than the States of Italy began to combine against him. Lodovico Sforza had availed himself of the general confusion consequent upon the first appearance of the French, to poison his nephew. He was, therefore, now the titular, as well as virtual, Lord of Milan. So far, he had achieved what he desired, and had no further need of Charles. The overtures he now made to the Venetians and the Pope terminated in a League between these Powers for the expulsion of the French from Italy. Germany and Spain entered into the same alliance; and De Comines, finding himself treated with marked coldness by the Signory of Venice, despatched a courier to warn Charles in Naples of the coming danger. After a stay of only fifty days in his new capital, the French King hurried northward. Moving quickly through the Papal States and Tuscany, he engaged his troops in the passes of the Apennines near Pontremoli, and on July 5, 1495, took up his quarters in the village of Fornovo. De Comines reckons that his whole fighting force at this time did not exceed 9,000 men, with fourteen pieces of artillery. Against him at the opening of the valley was the army of the League, numbering some 35,000 men, of whom three-fourths were supplied by Venice, the rest by Lodovico Sforza and the German Emperor. Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, was the general of the Venetian forces; and on him, therefore, fell the real responsibility of the battle.



Page 119

De Comines remarks on the imprudence of the allies, who allowed Charles to advance as far as Fornovo, when it was their obvious policy to have established themselves in the village and so have caught the French troops in a trap. It was a Sunday when the French marched down upon Fornovo. Before them spread the plain of Lombardy, and beyond it the white crests of the Alps. 'We were,' says De Comines, 'in a valley between two little mountain flanks, and in that valley ran a river which could easily be forded on foot, except when it is swelled with sudden rains. The whole valley was a bed of gravel and big stones, very difficult for horses, about a quarter of a league in breadth, and on the right bank lodged our enemies.' Any one who has visited Fornovo can understand the situation of the two armies. Charles occupied the village on the right bank of the Taro. On the same bank, extending downward toward the plain, lay the host of the allies; and in order that Charles should escape them, it was necessary that he should cross the Taro, just below its junction with the Ceno, and reach Lombardy by marching in a parallel line with his foes.

All through the night of Sunday it thundered and rained incessantly; so that on the Monday morning the Taro was considerably swollen. At seven o'clock the King sent for De Comines, who found him already armed and mounted on the finest horse he had ever seen. The name of this charger was Savoy. He was black, one-eyed, and of middling height; and to his great courage, as we shall see, Charles owed life upon that day. The French army, ready for the march, now took to the gravelly bed of the Taro, passing the river at a distance of about a quarter of a league from the allies. As the French left Fornovo, the light cavalry of their enemies entered the village and began to attack the baggage. At the same time the Marquis of Mantua, with the flower of his men-at-arms, crossed the Taro and harassed the rear of the French host; while raids from the right bank to the left were constantly being made by sharpshooters and flying squadrons. 'At this moment,' says De Comines, 'not a single man of us could have escaped if our ranks had once been broken.' The French army was divided into three main bodies. The vanguard consisted of some 350 men-at-arms, 3000 Switzers, 300 archers of the Guard, a few mounted crossbow-men, and the artillery. Next came the Battle, and after this the rearguard. At the time when the Marquis of Mantua made his attack, the French rearguard had not yet crossed the river. Charles quitted the van, put himself at the head of his chivalry, and charged the Italian horsemen, driving them back, some to the village and others to their camp. De Comines observes, that had the Italian knights been supported in this passage of arms by the light cavalry of the Venetian force, called Stradiots, the French must have been outnumbered, thrown into confusion, and defeated. As it was, these Stradiots were engaged



Page 120

in plundering the baggage of the French; and the Italians, accustomed to bloodless encounters, did not venture, in spite of their immense superiority of numbers, to renew the charge. In the pursuit of Gonzaga's horsemen Charles outstripped his staff, and was left almost alone to grapple with a little band of mounted foemen. It was here that his noble horse, Savoy, saved his person by plunging and charging till assistance came up from the French, and enabled the King to regain his van.

It is incredible, considering the nature of the ground and the number of the troops engaged, that the allies should not have returned to the attack and have made the passage of the French into the plain impossible. De Comines, however, assures us that the actual engagement only lasted a quarter of an hour, and the pursuit of the Italians three quarters of an hour. After they had once resolved to fly, they threw away their lances and betook themselves to Reggio and Parma. So complete was their discomfiture, that De Comines gravely blames the want of military genius and adventure in the French host. If, instead of advancing along the left bank of the Taro and there taking up his quarters for the night, Charles had recrossed the stream and pursued the army of the allies, he would have had the whole of Lombardy at his discretion. As it was, the French army encamped not far from the scene of the action in great discomfort and anxiety. De Comines had to bivouac in a vineyard, without even a mantle to wrap round him, having lent his cloak to the King in the morning; and as it had been pouring all day, the ground could not have afforded very luxurious quarters. The same extraordinary luck which had attended the French in their whole expedition, now favoured their retreat; and the same pusillanimity which the allies had shown at Fornovo, prevented them from re-forming and engaging with the army of Charles upon the plain. One hour before daybreak on Tuesday morning, the French broke up their camp and succeeded in clearing the valley. That night they lodged at Fiorenzuola, the next at Piacenza, and so on; till on the eighth day they arrived at Asti without having been so much as incommoded by the army of the allies in their rear.

Although the field of Fornovo was in reality so disgraceful to the Italians, they reckoned it a victory upon the technical pretence that the camp and baggage of the French had been seized. Illuminations and rejoicings made the piazza of S. Mark in Venice gay, and Francesco da Gonzaga had the glorious Madonna della Vittoria painted for him by Mantegna, in commemoration of what ought only to have been remembered with shame.



Page 121

A fitting conclusion to this sketch, connecting its close with the commencement, may be found in some remarks upon the manner of warfare to which the Italians of the Renaissance had become accustomed, and which proved so futile on the field of Fornovo. During the middle ages, and in the days of the Communes, the whole male population of Italy had fought light-armed on foot. Merchant and artisan left the counting-house and the workshop, took shield and pike, and sallied forth to attack the barons in their castles, or to meet the Emperor's troops upon the field. It was with this national militia that the citizens of Florence freed their *Contado* of the nobles, and the burghers of Lombardy gained the battle of Legnano. In course of time, by a process of change which it is not very easy to trace, heavily armed cavalry began to take the place of infantry in mediaeval warfare. Men-at-arms, as they were called, encased from head to foot in iron, and mounted upon chargers no less solidly caparisoned, drove the foot-soldiers before them at the points of their long lances. Nowhere in Italy do they seem to have met with the fierce resistance which the bears of the Swiss Oberland and the bulls of Uri offered to the knights of Burgundy. No Tuscan Arnold von Winkelried clasped a dozen lances to his bosom that the foeman's ranks might thus be broken at the cost of his own life; nor did it occur to the Italian burghers to meet the charge of the horsemen with squares protected by bristling spears. They seem, on the contrary, to have abandoned military service with the readiness of men whose energies were already absorbed in the affairs of peace. To become a practised and efficient man-at-arms required long training and a life's devotion. So much time the burghers of the free towns could not spare to military service, while the petty nobles were only too glad to devote themselves to so honourable a calling. Thus it came to pass that a class of professional fighting-men was gradually formed in Italy, whose services the burghers and the princes bought, and by whom the wars of the peninsula were regularly farmed by contract. Wealth and luxury in the great cities continued to increase; and as the burghers grew more comfortable, they were less inclined to take the field in their own persons, and more disposed to vote large sums of money for the purchase of necessary aid. At the same time this system suited the despots, since it spared them the peril of arming their own subjects, while they taxed them to pay the services of foreign captains. War thus became a commerce. Romagna, the Marches of Ancona, and other parts of the Papal dominions, supplied a number of petty nobles whose whole business in life it was to form companies of trained horsemen, and with these bands to hire themselves out to the republics and the despots. Gain was the sole purpose of these captains. They sold their service to the highest bidder, fighting irrespectively of principle or patriotism, and passing



Page 122

with the coldest equanimity from the camp of one master to that of his worst foe. It was impossible that true military spirit should survive this prostitution of the art of war. A species of mock warfare prevailed in Italy. Battles were fought with a view to booty more than victory; prisoners were taken for the sake of ransom; bloodshed was carefully avoided, for the men who fought on either side in any pitched field had been comrades with their present foemen in the last encounter, and who could tell how soon the general of the one host might not need his rival's troops to recruit his own ranks? Like every genuine institution of the Italian Renaissance, warfare was thus a work of fine art, a masterpiece of intellectual subtlety; and like the Renaissance itself, this peculiar form of warfare was essentially transitional. The cannon and the musket were already in use; and it only required one blast of gunpowder to turn the sham-fight of courtly, traitorous, finessing captains of adventure into something terribly more real. To men like the Marquis of Mantua war had been a highly profitable game of skill; to men like the Marechal de Gie it was a murderous horseplay; and this difference the Italians were not slow to perceive. When they cast away their lances at Fornovo, and fled—in spite of their superior numbers—never to return, one fair-seeming sham of the fifteenth century became a vision of the past.

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FLORENCE AND THE MEDICI

Di Firenze in prima si dividono intra loro i nobili, dipoi i nobili e il popolo, e in ultimo il popolo e la plebe; e molte volte occorse che una di queste parti rimasa superiore, si divide in due.—MACHIAVELLI.

I

Florence, like all Italian cities, owed her independence to the duel of the Papacy and Empire. The transference of the imperial authority beyond the Alps had enabled the burghs of Lombardy and Tuscany to establish a form of self-government. This government was based upon the old municipal organisation of duumvirs and decemvirs. It was, in fact, nothing more or less than a survival from the ancient Roman system. The proof of this was, that while vindicating their rights as towns, the free cities never questioned the validity of the imperial title. Even after the peace of Constance in 1183, when Frederick Barbarossa acknowledged their autonomy, they received within their walls a supreme magistrate, with power of life and death and ultimate appeal in all decisive questions, whose title of Potesta indicated that he represented the imperial power—Potestas. It was not by the assertion of any right, so much as by the growth of custom, and by the weakness of the Emperors, that in course of time each city became a sovereign State. The theoretical supremacy of the Empire prevented any other



authority from taking the first place in Italy. On the other hand, the practical inefficiency of the Emperors to play their part encouraged the establishment of numerous minor powers amenable to no controlling discipline.



Page 123

The free cities derived their strength from industry, and had nothing in common with the nobles of the surrounding country. Broadly speaking, the population of the towns included what remained in Italy of the old Roman people. This Roman stock was nowhere stronger than in Florence and Venice—Florence defended from barbarian incursions by her mountains and marshes, Venice by the isolation of her lagoons. The nobles, on the contrary, were mostly of foreign origin—Germans, Franks, and Lombards, who had established themselves as feudal lords in castles apart from the cities. The force which the burghs acquired as industrial communities was soon turned against these nobles. The larger cities, like Milan and Florence, began to make war upon the lords of castles, and to absorb into their own territory the small towns and villages around them. Thus in the social economy of the Italians there were two antagonistic elements ready to range themselves beneath any banners that should give the form of legitimate warfare to their mutual hostility. It was the policy of the Church in the twelfth century to support the cause of the cities, using them as a weapon against the Empire, and stimulating the growing ambition of the burghers. In this way Italy came to be divided into the two world-famous factions known as Guelf and Ghibelline. The struggle between Guelf and Ghibelline was the struggle of the Papacy for the depression of the Empire, the struggle of the great burghs face to face with feudalism, the struggle of the old Italian stock enclosed in cities with the foreign nobles established in fortresses. When the Church had finally triumphed by the extirpation of the House of Hohenstaufen, this conflict of Guelf and Ghibelline was really ended. Until the reign of Charles V. no Emperor interfered to any purpose in Italian affairs. At the same time the Popes ceased to wield a formidable power. Having won the battle by calling in the French, they suffered the consequences of this policy by losing their hold on Italy during the long period of their exile at Avignon. The Italians, left without either Pope or Emperor, were free to pursue their course of internal development, and to prosecute their quarrels among themselves. But though the names of Guelf and Ghibelline lost their old significance after the year 1266 (the date of King Manfred's death), these two factions had so divided Italy that they continued to play a prominent part in her annals. Guelf still meant constitutional autonomy, meant the burgher as against the noble, meant industry as opposed to feudal lordship. Ghibelline meant the rule of the few over the many, meant tyranny, meant the interest of the noble as against the merchant and the citizen. These broad distinctions must be borne in mind, if we seek to understand how it was that a city like Florence continued to be governed by parties, the European force of which had passed away.

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Page 124

Florence first rose into importance during the papacy of Innocent III. Up to this date she had been a town of second-rate distinction even in Tuscany. Pisa was more powerful by arms and commerce. Lucca was the old seat of the dukes and marquises of Tuscany. But between the years 1200 and 1250 Florence assumed the place she was to hold thenceforward, by heading the league of Tuscan cities formed to support the Guef party against the Ghibellines. Formally adopting the Guef cause, the Florentines made themselves the champions of municipal liberty in Central Italy; and while they declared war against the Ghibelline cities, they endeavoured to stamp out the very name of noble in their State. It is not needful to describe the varying fortunes of the Guefs and Ghibellines, the burghers and the nobles, during the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth centuries. Suffice it to say that through all the vicissitudes of that stormy period the name Guef became more and more associated with republican freedom in Florence. At last, after the final triumph of that party in 1253, the Guefs remained victors in the city. Associating the glory of their independence with Guef principles, the citizens of Florence perpetuated within their State a faction that, in its turn, was destined to prove perilous to liberty.

When it became clear that the republic was to rule itself henceforth untrammelled by imperial interference, the people divided themselves into six districts, and chose for each district two Ancients, who administered the government in concert with the Potesta and the Captain of the People. The Ancients were a relic of the old Roman municipal organisation. The Potesta who was invariably a noble foreigner selected by the people, represented the extinct imperial right, and exercised the power of life and death within the city. The Captain of the People, who was also a foreigner, headed the burghers in their military capacity, for at that period the troops were levied from the citizens themselves in twenty companies. The body of the citizens, or the *popolo*, were ultimately sovereigns in the State. Assembled under the banners of their several companies, they formed a *parlamento* for delegating their own power to each successive government. Their representatives, again, arranged in two councils, called the Council of the People and the Council of the Commune, under the presidency of the Captain of the People and the Potesta, ratified the measures which had previously been proposed and carried by the executive authority or Signoria. Under this simple State system the Florentines placed themselves at the head of the Tuscan League, fought the battles of the Church, asserted their sovereignty by issuing the golden florin of the republic, and flourished until 1266.

III



Page 125

In that year an important change was effected in the Constitution. The whole population of Florence consisted, on the one hand, of nobles or Grandi, as they were called in Tuscany, and on the other hand of working people. The latter, divided into traders and handicraftsmen, were distributed in guilds called Arti; and at that time there were seven Greater and five Lesser Arti, the most influential of all being the Guild of the Wool Merchants. These guilds had their halls for meeting, their colleges of chief officers, their heads, called Consoli or Priors, and their flags. In 1266 it was decided that the administration of the commonwealth should be placed simply and wholly in the hands of the Arti, and the Priors of these industrial companies became the lords or Signory of Florence. No inhabitant of the city who had not enrolled himself as a craftsman in one of the guilds could exercise any function of burghership. To be *scioperato*, or without industry, was to be without power, without rank or place of honour in the State. The revolution which placed the Arts at the head of the republic had the practical effect of excluding the Grandi altogether from the government. Violent efforts were made by these noble families, potent through their territorial possessions and foreign connections, and trained from boyhood in the use of arms, to recover the place from which the new laws thrust them: but their menacing attitude, instead of intimidating the burghers, roused their anger and drove them to the passing of still more stringent laws. In 1293, after the Ghibellines had been defeated in the great battle of Campaldino, a series of severe enactments, called the Ordinances of Justice, were decreed against the unruly Grandi. All civic rights were taken from them; the severest penalties were attached to their slightest infringement of municipal law; their titles to land were limited; the privilege of living within the city walls was allowed them only under galling restrictions; and, last not least, a supreme magistrate, named the Gonfalonier of Justice, was created for the special purpose of watching them and carrying out the penal code against them. Henceforward Florence was governed exclusively by merchants and artisans. The Grandi hastened to enrol themselves in the guilds, exchanging their former titles and dignities for the solid privilege of burghership. The exact parallel to this industrial constitution for a commonwealth, carrying on wars with emperors and princes, holding haughty captains in its pay, and dictating laws to subject cities, cannot, I think, be elsewhere found in history. It is as unique as the Florence of Dante and Giotto is unique. While the people was guarding itself thus stringently against the Grandi, a separate body was created for the special purpose of extirpating the Ghibellines. A permanent committee of vigilance, called the College or the Captains of the Guelf Party, was established. It was their function to administer



Page 126

the forfeited possessions of Ghibelline rebels, to hunt out suspected citizens, to prosecute them for Ghibellinism, to judge them, and to punish them as traitors to the commonwealth. This body, like a little State within the State, proved formidable to the republic itself through the unlimited and undefined sway it exercised over burghers whom it chose to tax with treason. In course of time it became the oligarchical element within the Florentine democracy, and threatened to change the free constitution of the city into a government conducted by a few powerful families.

There is no need to dwell in detail on the internal difficulties of Florence during the first half of the fourteenth century. Two main circumstances, however, require to be briefly noticed. These are (i) the contest of the Blacks and Whites, so famous through the part played in it by Dante; and (ii) the tyranny of the Duke^[1] of Athens, Walter de Brienne. The feuds of the Blacks and Whites broke up the city into factions, and produced such anarchy that at last it was found necessary to place the republic under the protection of foreign potentates. Charles of Valois was first chosen, and after him the Duke of Athens, who took up his residence in the city. Entrusted with dictatorial authority, he used his power to form a military despotism. Though his reign of violence lasted rather less than a year, it bore important fruits; for the tyrant, seeking to support himself upon the favour of the common people, gave political power to the Lesser Arts at the expense of the Greater, and confused the old State-system by enlarging the democracy. The net result of these events for Florence was, first, that the city became habituated to rancorous party-strife, involving exiles and proscriptions; and, secondly, that it lost its primitive social hierarchy of classes.

IV

After the Guelfs had conquered the Ghibellines, and the people had absorbed the Grandi in their guilds, the next chapter in the troubled history of Florence was the division of the Popolo against itself. Civil strife now declared itself as a conflict between labour and capital. The members of the Lesser Arts, craftsmen who plied trades subordinate to those of the Greater Arts, rose up against their social and political superiors, demanding a larger share in the government, a more equal distribution of profits, higher wages, and privileges that should place them on an absolute equality with the wealthy merchants. It was in the year 1378 that the proletariat broke out into rebellion. Previous events had prepared the way for this revolt. First of all, the republic had been democratized through the destruction of the Grandi and through the popular policy pursued to gain his own ends by the Duke of Athens. Secondly, society had been shaken to its very foundation by the great plague of 1348. Both Boccaccio and Matteo Villani draw lively pictures of the relaxed morality



Page 127

and loss of order consequent upon this terrible disaster; nor had thirty years sufficed to restore their relative position to grades and ranks confounded by an overwhelming calamity. We may therefore reckon the great plague of 1348 among the causes which produced the anarchy of 1378. Rising in a mass to claim their privileges, the artisans ejected the Signory from the Public Palace, and for awhile Florence was at the mercy of the mob. It is worthy of notice that the Medici, whose name is scarcely known before this epoch, now came for one moment to the front. Salvestro de' Medici was Gonfalonier of Justice at the time when the tumult first broke out. He followed the faction of the handicraftsmen, and became the hero of the day. I cannot discover that he did more than extend a sort of passive protection to their cause. Yet there is no doubt that the attachment of the working classes to the House of Medici dates from this period. The rebellion of 1378 is known in Florentine history as the Tumult of the Ciompi. The name Ciompi strictly means the Wool-Carders. One set of operatives in the city, and that the largest, gave its title to the whole body of the labourers. For some months these craftsmen governed the republic, appointing their own Signory and passing laws in their own interest; but, as is usual, the proletariat found itself incapable of sustained government. The ambition and discontent of the Ciompi foamed themselves away, and industrious working men began to see that trade was languishing and credit on the wane. By their own act at last they restored the government to the Priors of the Greater Arti. Still the movement had not been without grave consequences. It completed the levelling of classes, which had been steadily advancing from the first in Florence. After the Ciompi riot there was no longer not only any distinction between noble and burgher, but the distinction between greater and lesser guilds was practically swept away. The classes, parties, and degrees in the republic were so broken up, ground down, and mingled, that thenceforth the true source of power in the State was wealth combined with personal ability. In other words, the proper political conditions had been formed for unscrupulous adventurers. Florence had become a democracy without social organisation, which might fall a prey to oligarchs or despots. What remained of deeply rooted feuds or factions—animosities against the Grandi, hatred for the Ghibellines, jealousy of labour and capital—offered so many points of leverage for stirring the passions of the people and for covering personal ambition with a cloak of public zeal. The time was come for the Albizzi to attempt an oligarchy, and for the Medici to begin the enslavement of the State.

V



Page 128

The Constitution of Florence offered many points of weakness to the attacks of such intriguers. In the first place it was in its origin not a political but an industrial organisation—a simple group of guilds invested with the sovereign authority. Its two most powerful engines, the Gonfalonier of Justice and the Guelf College, had been formed, not with a view to the preservation of the government, but with the purpose of quelling the nobles and excluding a detested faction. It had no permanent head, like the Doge of Venice; no fixed senate like the Venetian Grand Council; its chief magistrates, the Signory, were elected for short periods of two months, and their mode of election was open to the gravest criticism. Supposed to be chosen by lot, they were really selected from lists drawn up by the factions in power from time to time. These factions contrived to exclude the names of all but their adherents from the bags, or *borse*, in which the burghers eligible for election had to be inscribed. Furthermore, it was not possible for this shifting Signory to conduct affairs requiring sustained effort and secret deliberation; therefore recourse was being continually had to dictatorial Commissions. The people, summoned in parliament upon the Great Square, were asked to confer plenipotentiary authority upon a committee called *Balia*, who proceeded to do what they chose in the State, and who retained power after the emergency for which they were created passed away. The same instability in the supreme magistracy led to the appointment of special commissioners for war, and special councils, or *Pratiche*, for the management of each department. Such supplementary commissions not only proved the weakness of the central authority, but they were always liable to be made the instruments of party warfare. The Guelf College was another and a different source of danger to the State. Not acting under the control of the Signory, but using its own initiative, this powerful body could proscribe and punish burghers on the mere suspicion of Ghibellinism. Though the Ghibelline faction had become an empty name, the Guelf College excluded from the franchise all and every whom they chose on any pretext to admonish. Under this mild phrase, *to admonish*, was concealed a cruel exercise of tyranny—it meant to warn a man that he was suspected of treason, and that he had better relinquish the exercise of his burghership. By free use of this engine of Admonition, the Guelf College rendered their enemies voiceless in the State, and were able to pack the Signory and the councils with their own creatures. Another important defect in the Florentine Constitution was the method of imposing taxes. This was done by no regular system. The party in power made what estimate it chose of a man's capacity to bear taxation, and called upon him for extraordinary loans. In this way citizens were frequently driven into bankruptcy and exile; and since to be a debtor to the State deprived a burgher of his civic rights, severe taxation was one of the best ways of silencing and neutralising a dissident.



Page 129

I have enumerated these several causes of weakness in the Florentine State-system, partly because they show how irregularly the Constitution had been formed by the patching and extension of a simple industrial machine to suit the needs of a great commonwealth; partly because it was through these defects that the democracy merged gradually into a despotism. The art of the Medici consisted in a scientific comprehension of these very imperfections, a methodic use of them for their own purposes, and a steady opposition to any attempts made to substitute a stricter system. The Florentines had determined to be an industrial community, governing themselves on the co-operative principle, dividing profits, sharing losses, and exposing their magistrates to rigid scrutiny. All this in theory was excellent. Had they remained an unambitious and peaceful commonwealth, engaged in the wool and silk trade, it might have answered. Modern Europe might have admired the model of a communistic and commercial democracy. But when they engaged in aggressive wars, and sought to enslave sister-cities like Pisa and Lucca, it was soon found that their simple trading constitution would not serve. They had to piece it out with subordinate machinery, cumbrous, difficult to manage, ill-adapted to the original structure. Each limb of this subordinate machinery, moreover, was a *point d'appui* for insidious and self-seeking party leaders.

Florence, in the middle of the fourteenth century, was a vast beehive of industry. Distinctions of rank among burghers, qualified to vote and hold office, were theoretically unknown. Highly educated men, of more than princely wealth, spent their time in shops and counting-houses, and trained their sons to follow trades. Military service at this period was abandoned by the citizens; they preferred to pay mercenary troops for the conduct of their wars. Nor was there, as in Venice, any outlet for their energies upon the seas. Florence had no navy, no great port—she only kept a small fleet for the protection of her commerce. Thus the vigour of the commonwealth was concentrated on itself; while the influence of the citizens, through their affiliated trading-houses, correspondents, and agents, extended like a network over Europe. In a community of this kind it was natural that wealth—rank and titles being absent—should alone confer distinction. Accordingly we find that out of the very bosom of the people a new plutocratic aristocracy begins to rise. The Grandi are no more; but certain families achieve distinction by their riches, their numbers, their high spirit, and their ancient place of honour in the State. These nobles of the purse obtained the name of *Popolani Nobili*; and it was they who now began to play at high stakes for the supreme power. In all the subsequent vicissitudes of Florence every change takes place by intrigue and by clever manipulation of the political machine. Recourse is rarely had to violence of any kind, and the leaders of revolutions are men of the yard-measure, never of the sword. The despotism to which the republic eventually succumbed was no less commercial than the democracy had been. Florence in the days of her slavery remained a *Popolo*.



Page 130

VI

The opening of the second half of the fourteenth century had been signalled by the feuds of two great houses, both risen from the people. These were the Albizzi and the Ricci. At this epoch there had been a formal closing of the lists of burghers;—henceforth no new families who might settle in the city could claim the franchise, vote in the assemblies, or hold magistracies. The Guelf College used their old engine of admonition to persecute *novi homines*, whom they dreaded as opponents. At the head of this formidable organisation the Albizzi placed themselves, and worked it with such skill that they succeeded in driving the Ricci out of all participation in the government. The tumult of the Ciompi formed but an episode in their career toward oligarchy; indeed, that revolution only rendered the political material of the Florentine republic more plastic in the hands of intriguers, by removing the last vestiges of class distinctions and by confusing the old parties of the State.

When the Florentines in 1387 engaged in their long duel with Gian Galeazzo Visconti, the difficulty of conducting this war without some permanent central authority still further confirmed the power of the rising oligarchs. The Albizzi became daily more autocratic, until in 1393 their chief, Maso degli Albizzi, a man of strong will and prudent policy, was chosen Gonfalonier of Justice. Assuming the sway of a dictator he revised the list of burghers capable of holding office, struck out the private opponents of his house, and excluded all names but those of powerful families who were well affected towards an aristocratic government. The great house of the Alberti were exiled in a body, declared rebels, and deprived of their possessions, for no reason except that they seemed dangerous to the Albizzi. It was in vain that the people murmured against these arbitrary acts. The new rulers were omnipotent in the Signory, which they packed with their own men, in the great guilds, and in the Guelf College. All the machinery invented by the industrial community for its self-management and self-defence was controlled and manipulated by a close body of aristocrats, with the Albizzi at their head. It seemed as though Florence, without any visible alteration in her forms of government, was rapidly becoming an oligarchy even less open than the Venetian republic. Meanwhile the affairs of the State were most flourishing. The strong-handed masters of the city not only held the Duke of Milan in check, and prevented him from turning Italy into a kingdom; they furthermore acquired the cities of Pisa, Livorno, Arezzo, Montepulciano, and Cortona, for Florence, making her the mistress of all Tuscany, with the exception of Siena, Lucca, and Volterra. Maso degli Albizzi was the ruling spirit of the commonwealth, spending the enormous sum of 11,500,000 golden florins on war, raising sumptuous edifices, protecting the arts, and acting in general like a powerful and irresponsible prince.



Page 131

In spite of public prosperity there were signs, however, that this rule of a few families could not last. Their government was only maintained by continual revision of the lists of burghers, by elimination of the disaffected, and by unremitting personal industry. They introduced no new machinery into the Constitution whereby the people might be deprived of its titular sovereignty, or their own dictatorship might be continued with a semblance of legality. Again, they neglected to win over the new nobles (*nobili popolari*) in a body to their cause; and thus they were surrounded by rivals ready to spring upon them when a false step should be made. The Albizzi oligarchy was a masterpiece of art, without any force to sustain it but the craft and energy of its constructors. It had not grown up, like the Venetian oligarchy, by the gradual assimilation to itself of all the vigour in the State. It was bound, sooner or later, to yield to the nascent impulse of democracy inherent in Florentine institutions.

VII

Maso degli Albizzi died in 1417. He was succeeded in the government by his old friend, Niccolo da Uzzano, a man of great eloquence and wisdom, whose single word swayed the councils of the people as he listed. Together with him acted Maso's son, Rinaldo, a youth of even more brilliant talents than his father, frank, noble, and high-spirited, but far less cautious.

The oligarchy, which these two men undertook to manage, had accumulated against itself the discontent of overtaxed, disfranchised, jealous burghers. The times, too, were bad. Pursuing the policy of Maso, the Albizzi engaged the city in a tedious and unsuccessful war with Filippo Maria Visconti, which cost 350,000 golden florins, and brought no credit. In order to meet extraordinary expenses they raised new public loans, thereby depreciating the value of the old Florentine funds. "What was worse, they imposed forced subsidies with grievous inequality upon the burghers, passing over their friends and adherents, and burdening their opponents with more than could be borne. This imprudent financial policy began the ruin of the Albizzi. It caused a clamour in the city for a new system of more just taxation, which was too powerful to be resisted. The voice of the people made itself loudly heard; and with the people on this occasion sided Giovanni de' Medici. This was in 1427.

It is here that the Medici appear upon that memorable scene where in the future they are to play the first part. Giovanni de' Medici did not belong to the same branch of his family as the Salvestro who favoured the people at the time of the Ciompi Tumult. But he adopted the same popular policy. To his sons Cosimo and Lorenzo he bequeathed on his deathbed the rule that they should invariably adhere to the cause of the multitude, found their influence on that, and avoid the arts of factious and ambitious leaders.



Page 132

In his own life he had pursued this course of conduct, acquiring a reputation for civic moderation and impartiality that endeared him to the people and stood his children in good stead. Early in his youth Giovanni found himself almost destitute by reason of the imposts charged upon him by the oligarchs. He possessed, however, the genius for money-making to a rare degree, and passed his manhood as a banker, amassing the largest fortune of any private citizen in Italy. In his old age he devoted himself to the organisation of his colossal trading business, and abstained, as far as possible, from political intrigues. Men observed that they rarely met him in the Public Palace or on the Great Square.

Cosimo de' Medici was thirty years old when his father Giovanni died, in 1429. During his youth he had devoted all his time and energy to business, mastering the complicated affairs of Giovanni's banking-house, and travelling far and wide through Europe to extend its connections. This education made him a consummate financier; and those who knew him best were convinced that his ambition was set on great things. However quietly he might begin, it was clear that he intended to match himself, as a leader of the plebeians, against the Albizzi. The foundations he prepared for future action were equally characteristic of the man, of Florence, and of the age. Commanding the enormous capital of the Medicean bank he contrived, at any sacrifice of temporary convenience, to lend money to the State for war expenses, engrossing in his own hands a large portion of the public debt of Florence. At the same time his agencies in various European capitals enabled him to keep his own wealth floating far beyond the reach of foes within the city. A few years of this system ended in so complete a confusion between Cosimo's trade and the finances of Florence that the bankruptcy of the Medici, however caused, would have compromised the credit of the State and the fortunes of the fund-holders. Cosimo, in a word, made himself necessary to Florence by the wise use of his riches. Furthermore, he kept his eye upon the list of burghers, lending money to needy citizens, putting good things in the way of struggling traders, building up the fortunes of men who were disposed to favour his party in the State, ruining his opponents by the legitimate process of commercial competition, and, when occasion offered, introducing new voters into the Florentine Council by paying off the debts of those who were disqualified by poverty from using the franchise. While his capital was continually increasing he lived frugally, and employed his wealth solely for the consolidation of his political influence. By these arts Cosimo became formidable to the oligarchs and beloved by the people. His supporters were numerous, and held together by the bonds of immediate necessity or personal cupidity. The plebeians and the merchants were all on his side. The Grandi and the Ammoniti, excluded from the State by the practices of the Albizzi, had more to hope from the Medicean party than from the few families who still contrived to hold the reins of government. It was clear that a conflict to the death must soon commence between the oligarchy and this new faction.



Page 133

VIII

At last, in 1433, war was declared. The first blow was struck by Rinaldo degli Albizzi, who put himself in the wrong by attacking a citizen indispensable to the people at large, and guilty of no unconstitutional act. On September 7th of that year, a year decisive for the future destinies of Florence, he summoned Cosimo to the Public Palace, which he had previously occupied with troops at his command. There he declared him a rebel to the State, and had him imprisoned in a little square room in the central tower. The tocsin was sounded; the people were assembled in parliament upon the piazza. The Albizzi held the main streets with armed men, and forced the Florentines to place plenipotentiary power for the administration of the commonwealth at this crisis in the hands of a Balìa, or committee selected by themselves. It was always thus that acts of high tyranny were effected in Florence. A show of legality was secured by gaining the compulsory sanction of the people, driven by soldiery into the public square, and hastily ordered to recognise the authority of their oppressors.

The bill of indictment against the Medici accused them of sedition in the year 1378—that is, in the year of the Ciompi Tumult—and of treasonable practice during the whole course of the Albizzi administration. It also strove to fix upon them the odium of the unsuccessful war against the town of Lucca. As soon as the Albizzi had unmasked their batteries, Lorenzo de' Medici managed to escape from the city, and took with him his brother Cosimo's children to Venice. Cosimo remained shut up within the little room called Barberia in Arnolfo's tower. From that high eagle's nest the sight can range Valdarno far and wide. Florence with her towers and domes lies below; and the blue peaks of Carrara close a prospect westward than which, with its villa-jewelled slopes and fertile gardens, there is nought more beautiful upon the face of earth. The prisoner can have paid but little heed to this fair landscape. He heard the frequent ringing of the great bell that called the Florentines to council, the tramp of armed men on the piazza, the coming and going of the burghers in the palace halls beneath. On all sides lurked anxiety and fear of death. Each mouthful he tasted might be poisoned. For many days he partook of only bread and water, till his gaoler restored his confidence by sharing all his meals. In this peril he abode twenty-four days. The Albizzi, in concert with the Balìa they had formed, were consulting what they might venture to do with him. Some voted for his execution. Others feared the popular favour, and thought that if they killed Cosimo this act would ruin their own power. The nobler natures among them determined to proceed by constitutional measures. At last, upon September 29th, it was settled that Cosimo should be exiled to Padua for ten years. The Medici were declared Grandi, by way of excluding them from political rights. But their property remained untouched; and on October 3rd, Cosimo was released.



Page 134

On the same day Cosimo took his departure. His journey northward resembled a triumphant progress. He left Florence a simple burgher; he entered Venice a powerful prince. Though the Albizzi seemed to have gained the day, they had really cut away the ground beneath their feet. They committed the fatal mistake of doing both too much and too little—too much because they declared war against an innocent man, and roused the sympathies of the whole people in his behalf; too little, because they had not the nerve to complete their act by killing him outright and extirpating his party. Machiavelli, in one of his profoundest and most cynical critiques, remarks that few men know how to be thoroughly bad with honour to themselves. Their will is evil; but the grain of good in them—some fear of public opinion, some repugnance to committing a signal crime—paralyses their arm at the moment when it ought to have been raised to strike. He instances Gian Paolo Baglioni's omission to murder Julius II., when that Pope placed himself within his clutches at Perugia. He might also have instanced Rinaldo degli Albizzi's refusal to push things to extremities by murdering Cosimo. It was the combination of despotic violence in the exile of Cosimo with constitutional moderation in the preservation of his life, that betrayed the weakness of the oligarchs and restored confidence to the Medicean party.

IX

In the course of the year 1434 this party began to hold up its head. Powerful as the Albizzi were, they only retained the government by artifice; and now they had done a deed which put at nought their former arts and intrigues. A Signory favourable to the Medici came into office, and on September 26th, 1434, Rinaldo in his turn was summoned to the palace and declared a rebel. He strove to raise the forces of his party, and entered the piazza at the head of eight hundred men. The menacing attitude of the people, however, made resistance perilous. Rinaldo disbanded his troops, and placed himself under the protection of Pope Eugenius IV., who was then resident in Florence. This act of submission proved that Rinaldo had not the courage or the cruelty to try the chance of civil war. Whatever his motives may have been, he lost his hold upon the State beyond recovery. On September 29th, a new parliament was summoned; on October 2nd, Cosimo was recalled from exile and the Albizzi were banished. The intercession of the Pope procured for them nothing but the liberty to leave Florence unmolested. Rinaldo turned his back upon the city he had governed, never to set foot in it again. On October 6th, Cosimo, having passed through Padua, Ferrara, and Modena like a conqueror, reentered the town amid the plaudits of the people, and took up his dwelling as an honoured guest in the Palace of the Republic. The subsequent history of Florence is the history of his family. In after years the Medici loved to remember this return of Cosimo. His triumphal reception was painted in fresco on the walls of their villa at Cajano under the transparent allegory of Cicero's entrance into Rome.



Page 135

X

By their brief exile the Medici had gained the credit of injured innocence, the fame of martyrdom in the popular cause. Their foes had struck the first blow, and in striking at them had seemed to aim against the liberties of the republic. The mere failure of their adversaries to hold the power they had acquired, handed over this power to the Medici; and the reprisals which the Medici began to take had the show of justice, not of personal hatred, or petty vengeance. Cosimo was a true Florentine. He disliked violence, because he knew that blood spilt cries for blood. His passions, too, were cool and temperate. No gust of anger, no intoxication of success, destroyed his balance. His one object, the consolidation of power for his family on the basis of popular favour, was kept steadily in view; and he would do nothing that might compromise that end. Yet he was neither generous nor merciful. We therefore find that from the first moment of his return to Florence he instituted a system of pitiless and unforgiving persecution against his old opponents. The Albizzi were banished, root and branch, with all their followers, consigned to lonely and often to unwholesome stations through the length and breadth of Italy. If they broke the bonds assigned them, they were forthwith declared traitors and their property was confiscated. After a long series of years, by merely keeping in force the first sentence pronounced upon them, Cosimo had the cruel satisfaction of seeing the whole of that proud oligarchy die out by slow degrees in the insufferable tedium of solitude and exile. Even the high-souled Palla degli Strozzi, who had striven to remain neutral, and whose wealth and talents were devoted to the revival of classical studies, was proscribed because to Cosimo he seemed too powerful. Separated from his children, he died in banishment at Padua. In this way the return of the Medici involved the loss to Florence of some noble citizens, who might perchance have checked the Medicean tyranny if they had stayed to guide the State. The plebeians, raised to wealth and influence by Cosimo before his exile, now took the lead in the republic. He used these men as catspaws, rarely putting himself forward or allowing his own name to appear, but pulling the wires of government in privacy by means of intermediate agents. The Medicean party was called at first *Puccini* from a certain Puccio, whose name was better known in caucus or committee than that of his real master.

To rule through these creatures of his own making taxed all the ingenuity of Cosimo; but his profound and subtle intellect was suited to the task, and he found unlimited pleasure in the exercise of his consummate craft. We have already seen to what extent he used his riches for the acquisition of political influence. Now that he had come to power, he continued the same method, packing the Signory and the Councils with



Page 136

men whom he could hold by debt between his thumb and finger. His command of the public moneys enabled him to wink at peculation in State offices; it was part of his system to bind magistrates and secretaries to his interest by their consciousness of guilt condoned but not forgotten. Not a few, moreover, owed their living to the appointments he procured for them. While he thus controlled the wheel-work of the commonwealth by means of organised corruption, he borrowed the arts of his old enemies to oppress dissentient citizens. If a man took an independent line in voting, and refused allegiance to the Medicean party, he was marked out for persecution. No violence was used; but he found himself hampered in his commerce—money, plentiful for others, became scarce for him; his competitors in trade were subsidised to undersell him. And while the avenues of industry were closed, his fortune was taxed above its value, until he had to sell at a loss in order to discharge his public obligations. In the first twenty years of the Medicean rule, seventy families had to pay 4,875,000 golden florins of extraordinary imposts, fixed by arbitrary assessment.

The more patriotic members of his party looked with dread and loathing on this system of corruption and exclusion. To their remonstrances Cosimo replied in four memorable sayings: 'Better the State spoiled than the State not ours.' 'Governments cannot be carried on with paternosters.' 'An ell of scarlet makes a burgher.' 'I aim at finite ends.' These maxims represent the whole man,—first, in his egotism, eager to gain Florence for his family, at any risk of her ruin; secondly, in his cynical acceptance of base means to selfish ends; thirdly, in his bourgeois belief that money makes a man, and fine clothes suffice for a citizen; fourthly, in his worldly ambition bent on positive success. It was, in fact, his policy to reduce Florence to the condition of a rotten borough: nor did this policy fail. One notable sign of the influence he exercised was the change which now came over the foreign relations of the republic. Up to the date of his dictatorship Florence had uniformly fought the battle of freedom in Italy. It was the chief merit of the Albizzi oligarchy that they continued the traditions of the mediaeval State, and by their vigorous action checked the growth of the Visconti. Though they engrossed the government they never forgot that they were first of all things Florentines, and only in the second place men who owed their power and influence to office. In a word, they acted like patriotic Tories, like republican patricians. Therefore they would not ally themselves with tyrants or countenance the enslavement of free cities by armed despots. Their subjugation of the Tuscan burghs to Florence was itself part of a grand republican policy. Cosimo changed all this. When the Visconti dynasty ended by the death of Filippo Maria in 1447, there was a chance of restoring the independence of Lombardy. Milan in effect declared



Page 137

herself a republic, and by the aid of Florence she might at this moment have maintained her liberty. Cosimo, however, entered into treaty with Francesco Sforza, supplied him with money, guaranteed him against Florentine interference, and saw with satisfaction how he reduced the duchy to his military tyranny. The Medici were conscious that they, selfishly, had most to gain by supporting despots who in time of need might help them to confirm their own authority. With the same end in view, when the legitimate line of the Bentivogli was extinguished, Cosimo hunted out a bastard pretender of that family, presented him to the chiefs of the Bentivogli faction, and had him placed upon the seat of his supposed ancestors at Bologna. This young man, a certain Santi da Cascese, presumed to be the son of Ercole de' Bentivogli, was an artisan in a wool factory when Cosimo set eyes upon him. At first Santi refused the dangerous honour of governing a proud republic; but the intrigues of Cosimo prevailed, and the obscure craftsman ended his days a powerful prince.

By the arts I have attempted to describe, Cosimo in the course of his long life absorbed the forces of the republic into himself. While he shunned the external signs of despotic power he made himself the master of the State. His complexion was of a pale olive; his stature short; abstemious and simple in his habits, affable in conversation, sparing of speech, he knew how to combine that burgher-like civility for which the Romans praised Augustus, with the reality of a despotism all the more difficult to combat because it seemed nowhere and was everywhere. When he died, at the age of seventy-five, in 1464, the people whom he had enslaved, but whom he had neither injured nor insulted, honoured him with the title of *Pater Patriae*. This was inscribed upon his tomb in S. Lorenzo. He left to posterity the fame of a great and generous patron,[14] the infamy of a cynical, self-seeking, bourgeois tyrant. Such combinations of contradictory qualities were common enough at the time of the Renaissance. Did not Machiavelli spend his days in tavern-brawls and low amours, his nights among the mighty spirits of the dead, with whom, when he had changed his country suit of homespun for the habit of the Court, he found himself an honoured equal?

XI

Cosimo had shown consummate skill by governing Florence through a party created and raised to influence by himself. The jealousy of these adherents formed the chief difficulty with which his son Piero had to contend. Unless the Medici could manage to kick down the ladder whereby they had risen, they ran the risk of losing all. As on a former occasion, so now they profited by the mistakes of their antagonists. Three chief men of their own party, Diotalvi Neroni, Agnolo Acciaiuoli, and Luca Pitti, determined to shake off the yoke of their masters, and to repay the Medici for what they owed by leading them to ruin. Niccolo



Page 138

Soderini, a patriot, indignant at the slow enslavement of his country, joined them. At first they strove to undermine the credit of the Medici with the Florentines by inducing Piero to call in the moneys placed at interest by his father in the hands of private citizens. This act was unpopular; but it did not suffice to move a revolution. To proceed by constitutional measures against the Medici was judged impolitic. Therefore the conspirators decided to take, if possible, Piero's life. The plot failed, chiefly owing to the coolness and the cunning of the young Lorenzo, Piero's eldest son. Public sympathy was strongly excited against the aggressors. Neroni, Acciaiuoli, and Soderini were exiled. Pitti was allowed to stay, dishonoured, powerless, and penniless, in Florence. Meanwhile, the failure of their foes had only served to strengthen the position of the Medici. The ladder had saved them the trouble of kicking it down.

The congratulations addressed on this occasion to Piero and Lorenzo by the ruling powers of Italy show that the Medici were already regarded as princes outside Florence. Lorenzo and Giuliano, the two sons of Piero, travelled abroad to the Courts of Milan and Ferrara with the style and state of more than simple citizens. At home they occupied the first place on all occasions of public ceremony, receiving royal visitors on terms of equality, and performing the hospitalities of the republic like men who had been born to represent its dignities. Lorenzo's marriage to Clarice Orsini, of the noble Roman house, was another sign that the Medici were advancing on the way toward despotism. Cosimo had avoided foreign alliances for his children. His descendants now judged themselves firmly planted enough to risk the odium of a princely match for the sake of the support outside the city they might win.

XII

Piero de' Medici died in December 1469. His son Lorenzo was then barely twenty-two years of age. The chiefs of the Medicean party, all-powerful in the State, held a council, in which they resolved to place him in the same position as his father and grandfather. This resolve seems to have been formed after mature deliberation, on the ground that the existing conditions of Italian politics rendered it impossible to conduct the government without a presidential head. Florence, though still a democracy, required a permanent chief to treat on an equality with the princes of the leading cities. Here we may note the prudence of Cosimo's foreign policy. When he helped to establish despots in Milan and Bologna he was rendering the presidency of his own family in Florence necessary.

Lorenzo, having received this invitation, called attention to his youth and inexperience. Yet he did not refuse it; and, after a graceful display of diffidence, he accepted the charge, entering thus upon that famous political career, in the course of which he not only established and maintained a balance of power in Italy, with Florence for the

central city, but also contrived to remodel the government of the republic in the interest of his own family and to strengthen the Medici by relations with the Papal See.



Page 139

The extraordinary versatility of this man's intellectual and social gifts, his participation in all the literary and philosophical interests of his century, his large and liberal patronage of art, and the gaiety with which he joined the people of Florence in their pastimes—Mayday games and Carnival festivities—strengthened his hold upon the city in an age devoted to culture and refined pleasure. Whatever was most brilliant in the spirit of the Italian Renaissance seemed to be incarnate in Lorenzo. Not merely as a patron and a dilettante, but as a poet and a critic, a philosopher and scholar, he proved himself adequate to the varied intellectual ambitions of his country. Penetrated with the passion for erudition which distinguished Florence in the fifteenth century, familiar with her painters and her sculptors, deeply read in the works of her great poets, he conceived the ideal of infusing the spirit of antique civility into modern life, and of effecting for society what the artists were performing in their own sphere. To preserve the native character of the Florentine genius, while he added the grace of classic form, was the aim to which his tastes and instincts led him. At the same time, while he made himself the master of Florentine revels and the Augustus of Renaissance literature, he took care that beneath his carnival masks and ball-dress should be concealed the chains which he was forging for the republic.

What he lacked, with so much mental brilliancy, was moral greatness. The age he lived in was an age of selfish despots, treacherous generals, godless priests. It was an age of intellectual vigour and artistic creativeness; but it was also an age of mean ambition, sordid policy, and vitiated principles. Lorenzo remained true in all respects to the genius of this age: true to its enthusiasm for antique culture, true to its passion for art, true to its refined love of pleasure; but true also to its petty political intrigues, to its cynical selfishness, to its lack of heroism. For Florence he looked no higher and saw no further than Cosimo had done. If culture was his pastime, the enslavement of the city by bribery and corruption was the hard work of his manhood. As is the case with much Renaissance art, his life was worth more for its decorative detail than for its constructive design. In richness, versatility, variety, and exquisiteness of execution, it left little to be desired; yet, viewed at a distance, and as a whole, it does not inspire us with a sense of architectonic majesty.

XIII

Lorenzo's chief difficulties arose from the necessity under which, like Cosimo, he laboured of governing the city through its old institutions by means of a party. To keep the members of this party in good temper, and to gain their approval for the alterations he effected in the State machinery of Florence, was the problem of his life. The successful solution of this problem was easier now,



Page 140

after two generations of the Medicean ascendancy, than it had been at first. Meanwhile the people were maintained in good humour by public shows, ease, plenty, and a general laxity of discipline. The splendour of Lorenzo's foreign alliances and the consideration he received from all the Courts of Italy contributed in no small measure to his popularity and security at home. By using his authority over Florence to inspire respect abroad, and by using his foreign credit to impose upon the burghers, Lorenzo displayed the tact of a true Italian diplomatist. His genius for statecraft, as then understood, was indeed of a rare order, equally adapted to the conduct of a complicated foreign policy and to the control of a suspicious and variable Commonwealth. In one point alone he was inferior to his grandfather. He neglected commerce, and allowed his banking business to fall into disorder so hopeless that in course of time he ceased to be solvent. Meanwhile his personal expenses, both as a prince in his own palace, and as the representative of majesty in Florence, continually increased. The bankruptcy of the Medici, it had long been foreseen, would involve the public finances in serious confusion. And now, in order to retrieve his fortunes, Lorenzo was not only obliged to repudiate his debts to the exchequer, but had also to gain complete disposal of the State purse. It was this necessity that drove him to effect the constitutional revolution of 1480, by which he substituted a Privy Council of seventy members for the old Councils of the State, absorbing the chief functions of the commonwealth into this single body, whom he practically nominated at pleasure. The same want of money led to the great scandal of his reign—the plundering of the Monte delle Doti, or State Insurance Office Fund for securing dowers to the children of its creditors.

XIV

While tracing the salient points of Lorenzo de' Medici's administration I have omitted to mention the important events which followed shortly after his accession to power in 1469. What happened between that date and 1480 was not only decisive for the future fortunes of the Casa Medici, but it was also eminently characteristic of the perils and the difficulties which beset Italian despots. The year 1471 was signalised by a visit by the Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan, and his wife Bona of Savoy, to the Medici in Florence. They came attended by their whole Court—body guards on horse and foot, ushers, pages, falconers, grooms, kennel-varlets, and huntsmen. Omitting the mere baggage service, their train counted two thousand horses. To mention this incident would be superfluous, had not so acute an observer as Machiavelli marked it out as a turning-point in Florentine history. Now, for the first time, the democratic commonwealth saw its streets filled with a mob of courtiers. Masques, balls, and tournaments succeeded each other with magnificent variety;



Page 141

and all the arts of Florence were pressed into the service of these festivals. Machiavelli says that the burghers lost the last remnant of their old austerity of manners, and became, like the degenerate Romans, ready to obey the masters who provided them with brilliant spectacles. They gazed with admiration on the pomp of Italian princes, their dissolute and godless living, their luxury and prodigal expenditure; and when the Medici affected similar habits in the next generation, the people had no courage to resist the invasion of their pleasant vices.

In the same year, 1471, Volterra was reconquered for the Florentines by Frederick of Urbino. The honours of this victory, disgraced by a brutal sack of the conquered city, in violation of its articles of capitulation, were reserved for Lorenzo, who returned in triumph to Florence. More than ever he assumed the prince, and in his person undertook to represent the State.

In the same year, 1471, Francesco della Rovere was raised to the Papacy with the memorable name of Sixtus IV. Sixtus was a man of violent temper and fierce passions, restless and impatiently ambitious, bent on the aggrandisement of the beautiful and wanton youths, his nephews. Of these the most aspiring was Girolamo Riario, for whom Sixtus bought the town of Imola from Taddeo Manfredi, in order that he might possess the title of count and the nucleus of a tyranny in the Romagna. This purchase thwarted the plans of Lorenzo, who wished to secure the same advantages for Florence. Smarting with the sense of disappointment, he forbade the Roman banker, Francesco Pazzi, to guarantee the purchase-money. By this act Lorenzo made two mortal foes—the Pope and Francesco Pazzi. Francesco was a thin, pale, atrabilious fanatic, all nerve and passion, with a monomaniac intensity of purpose, and a will inflamed and guided by imagination—a man formed by nature for conspiracy, such a man, in fact, as Shakspeare drew in Cassius. Maddened by Lorenzo's prohibition, he conceived the notion of overthrowing the Medici in Florence by a violent blow. Girolamo Riario entered into his views. So did Francesco Salviati, Archbishop of Pisa, who had private reasons for hostility. These men found no difficulty in winning over Sixtus to their plot; nor is it possible to purge the Pope of participation in what followed. I need not describe by what means Francesco drew the other members of his family into the scheme, and how he secured the assistance of armed cut-throats. Suffice it to say that the chief conspirators, with the exception of the Count Girolamo, betook themselves to Florence, and there, after the failure of other attempts, decided to murder Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano in the cathedral on Sunday, April 26th, 1478. The moment when the priest at the high altar finished the mass, was fixed for the assassination. Everything was ready. The conspirators, by Judas kisses and embracements, had discovered that the young men wore



Page 142

no protective armour under their silken doublets. Pacing the aisle behind the choir, they feared no treason. And now the lives of both might easily have been secured, if at the last moment the courage of the hired assassins had not failed them. Murder, they said, was well enough; but they could not bring themselves to stab men before the newly consecrated body of Christ. In this extremity a priest was found who, 'being accustomed to churches,' had no scruples. He and another reprobate were told off to Lorenzo. Francesco de' Pazzi himself undertook Giuliano. The moment for attack arrived. Francesco plunged his dagger into the heart of Giuliano. Then, not satisfied with this death-blow, he struck again, and in his heat of passion wounded his own thigh. Lorenzo escaped with a flesh-wound from the poniard of the priest, and rushed into the sacristy, where his friend Poliziano shut and held the brazen door. The plot had failed; for Giuliano, of the two brothers, was the one whom the conspirators would the more willingly have spared. The whole church was in an uproar. The city rose in tumult. Rage and horror took possession of the people. They flew to the Palazzo Pubblico and to the houses of the Pazzi, hunted the conspirators from place to place, hung the archbishop by the neck from the palace windows, and, as they found fresh victims for their fury, strung them one by one in a ghastly row at his side above the Square. About one hundred in all were killed. None who had joined in the plot escaped; for Lorenzo had long arms, and one man, who fled to Constantinople, was delivered over to his agents by the Sultan. Out of the whole Pazzi family only Guglielmo, the husband of Bianca de' Medici, was spared. When the tumult was over, Andrea del Castagno painted the portraits of the traitors head-downwards upon the walls of the Bargello Palace, in order that all men might know what fate awaited the foes of the Medici and of the State of Florence.[15] Meanwhile a bastard son of Giuliano's was received into the Medicean household, to perpetuate his lineage. This child, named Giulio, was destined to be famous in the annals of Italy and Florence under the title of Pope Clement VII.

XV

As is usual when such plots miss their mark, the passions excited redounded to the profit of the injured party. The commonwealth felt that the blow struck at Lorenzo had been aimed at their majesty. Sixtus, on the other hand, could not contain his rage at the failure of so ably planned a *coup de main*. Ignoring that he had sanctioned the treason, that a priest had put his hand to the dagger, that the impious deed had been attempted in a church before the very Sacrament of Christ, whose vicar on earth he was, the Pope now excommunicated the republic. The reason he alleged was, that the Florentines had dared to hang an archbishop.



Page 143

Thus began a war to the death between Sixtus and Florence. The Pope inflamed the whole of Italy, and carried on a ruinous campaign in Tuscany. It seemed as though the republic might lose her subject cities, always ready to revolt when danger threatened the sovereign State. Lorenzo's position became critical. Sixtus made no secret of the hatred he bore him personally, declaring that he fought less with Florence than with the Medici. To support the odium of this long war and this heavy interdict alone, was more than he could do. His allies forsook him. Naples was enlisted on the Pope's side. Milan and the other States of Lombardy were occupied with their own affairs, and held aloof. In this extremity he saw that nothing but a bold step could save him. The league formed by Sixtus must be broken up at any risk, and, if possible, by his own ability. On December 6th, 1479, Lorenzo left Florence, unarmed and unattended, took ship at Leghorn, and proceeded to the court of the enemy, King Ferdinand, at Naples. Ferdinand was a cruel and treacherous sovereign, who had murdered his guest, Jacopo Piccinino, at a banquet given in his honour. But Ferdinand was the son of Alfonso, who, by address and eloquence, had gained a kingdom from his foe and jailor, Filippo Maria Visconti. Lorenzo calculated that he too, following Alfonso's policy, might prove to Ferdinand how little there was to gain from an alliance with Rome, how much Naples and Florence, firmly united together for offence and defence, might effect in Italy.

Only a student of those perilous times can appreciate the courage and the genius, the audacity combined with diplomatic penetration, displayed by Lorenzo at this crisis. He calmly walked into the lion's den, trusting he could tame the lion and teach it, and all in a few days. Nor did his expectation fail. Though Lorenzo was rather ugly than handsome, with a dark skin, heavy brows, powerful jaws, and nose sharp in the bridge and broad at the nostrils, without grace of carriage or melody of voice, he possessed what makes up for personal defects—the winning charm of eloquence in conversation, a subtle wit, profound knowledge of men, and tact allied to sympathy, which placed him always at the centre of the situation. Ferdinand received him kindly. The Neapolitan nobles admired his courage and were fascinated by his social talents. On March 1st, 1480, he left Naples again, having won over the King by his arguments. When he reached Florence he was able to declare that he brought home a treaty of peace and alliance signed by the most powerful foe of the republic. The success of this bold enterprise endeared Lorenzo more than ever to his countrymen. In the same year they concluded a treaty with Sixtus, who was forced against his will to lay down arms by the capture of Otranto and the extreme peril of Turkish invasion. After the year 1480 Lorenzo remained sole master in Florence, the arbiter and peacemaker of the rest of Italy.



Page 144

XVI

The conjuration of the Pazzi was only one in a long series of similar conspiracies. Italian despots gained their power by violence and wielded it with craft. Violence and craft were therefore used against them. When the study of the classics had penetrated the nation with antique ideas of heroism, tyrannicide became a virtue. Princes were murdered with frightful frequency. Thus Gian Maria Visconti was put to death at Milan in 1412; Galeazzo Maria Sforza in 1484; the Chiarelli of Fabriano were massacred in 1435; the Baglioni of Perugia in 1500; Girolamo Gentile planned the assassination of Galeazzo Sforza at Genoa in 1476; Niccolo d'Este conspired against his uncle Ercole in 1476; Stefano Porcari attempted the life of Nicholas V. at Rome in 1453; Lodovico Sforza narrowly escaped a violent death in 1453. I might multiply these instances beyond satiety. As it is, I have selected but a few examples falling, all but one, within the second half of the fifteenth century. Nearly all these attempts upon the lives of princes were made in church during the celebration of sacred offices. There was no superfluity of naughtiness, no wilful sacrilege, in this choice of an occasion. It only testified to the continual suspicion and guarded watchfulness maintained by tyrants. To strike at them except in church was almost impossible. Meanwhile the fate of the tyrannicides was uniform. Successful or not, they perished. Yet so grievous was the pressure of Italian despotism, so glorious was the ideal of Greek and Roman heroism, so passionate the temper of the people, that to kill a prince at any cost to self appeared the crown of manliness. This bloodshed exercised a delirious fascination: pure and base, personal and patriotic motives combined to add intensity of fixed and fiery purpose to the murderous impulse. Those then who, like the Medici, aspired to tyranny and sought to found a dynasty of princes, entered the arena against a host of unknown and unseen gladiators.

XVII

On his deathbed, in 1492, Lorenzo lay between two men—Angelo Poliziano and Girolamo Savonarola. Poliziano incarnated the genial, radiant, godless spirit of fifteenth-century humanism. Savonarola represented the conscience of Italy, self-convicted, amid all her greatness, of crimes that called for punishment. It is said that when Lorenzo asked the monk for absolution, Savonarola bade him first restore freedom to Florence. Lorenzo, turned his face to the wall and was silent. How indeed could he make this city in a moment free, after sixty years of slow and systematic corruption? Savonarola left him, and he died unshriven. This legend is doubtful, though it rests on excellent if somewhat partial authority. It has, at any rate, the value of a mythus, since it epitomises the attitude assumed by the great preacher to the prince. Florence enslaved, the soul of Lorenzo cannot lay its burden down, but must go with all its sins upon it to the throne of God.



Page 145

The year 1492 was a memorable year for Italy. In this year Lorenzo's death removed the keystone of the arch that had sustained the fabric of Italian federation. In this year Roderigo Borgia was elected Pope. In this year Columbus discovered America; Vasco de Gama soon after opened a new way to the Indies, and thus the commerce of the world passed from Italy to other nations. In this year the conquest of Granada gave unity to the Spanish nation. In this year France, through the lifelong craft of Louis XI., was for the first time united under a young hot-headed sovereign. On every side of the political horizon storms threatened. It was clear that a new chapter of European history had been opened. Then Savonarola raised his voice, and cried that the crimes of Italy, the abominations of the Church, would speedily be punished. Events led rapidly to the fulfilment of this prophecy. Lorenzo's successor, Piero de' Medici, was a vain, irresolute, and hasty princeling, fond of display, proud of his skill in fencing and football-playing, with too much of the Orsini blood in his hot veins, with too little of the Medicean craft in his weak head. The Italian despots felt they could not trust Piero, and this want of confidence was probably the first motive that impelled Lodovico Sforza to call Charles VIII. into Italy in 1494.

It will not be necessary to dwell upon this invasion of the French, except in so far as it affected Florence. Charles passed rapidly through Lombardy, engaged his army in the passes of the Apennines, and debouched upon the coast where the Magra divided Tuscany from Liguria. Here the fortresses of Sarzana and Pietra Santa, between the marble bulwark of Carrara and the Tuscan sea, stopped his further progress. The keys were held by the Florentines. To force these strong positions and to pass beyond them seemed impossible. It might have been impossible if Piero de' Medici had possessed a firmer will. As it was, he rode off to the French camp, delivered up the forts to Charles, bound the King by no engagements, and returned not otherwise than proud of his folly to Florence. A terrible reception awaited him. The Florentines, in their fury, had risen and sacked the Medicean palace. It was as much as Piero, with his brothers, could do to escape beyond the hills to Venice. The despotism of the Medici, so carefully built up, so artfully sustained and strengthened, was overthrown in a single day.

XVIII

Before considering what happened in Florence after the expulsion of the Medici, it will be well to pause a moment and review the state in which Lorenzo had left his family. Piero, his eldest son, recognised as chief of the republic after his father's death, was married to Alfonsina Orsini, and was in his twenty-second year. Giovanni, his second son, a youth of seventeen, had just been made cardinal. This honour, of vast importance for the Casa Medici in the future,



Page 146

he owed to his sister Maddalena's marriage to Franceschetto Cybo, son of Innocent VIII. The third of Lorenzo's sons, named Giuliano, was a boy of thirteen. Giulio, the bastard son of the elder Giuliano, was fourteen. These four princes formed the efficient strength of the Medici, the hope of the house; and for each of them, with the exception of Piero, who died in exile, and of whom no more notice need be taken, a brilliant destiny was still in store. In the year 1495, however, they now wandered, homeless and helpless, through the cities of Italy, each of which was shaken to its foundations by the French invasion.

XIX

Florence, left without the Medici, deprived of Pisa and other subject cities by the passage of the French army, with no leader but the monk Savonarola, now sought to reconstitute her liberties. During the domination of the Albizzi and the Medici the old order of the commonwealth had been completely broken up. The Arti had lost their primitive importance. The distinctions between the Grandi and the Popolani had practically passed away. In a democracy that has submitted to a lengthened course of tyranny, such extinction of its old life is inevitable. Yet the passion for liberty was still powerful; and the busy brains of the Florentines were stored with experience gained from their previous vicissitudes, from the study of antique history, and from the observation of existing constitutions in the towns of Italy. They now determined to reorganise the State upon the model of the Venetian republic. The Signory was to remain, with its old institution of Priors, Gonfalonier, and College, elected for brief periods. These magistrates were to take the initiative in debate, to propose measures, and to consider plans of action. The real power of the State, for voting supplies and ratifying the measures of the Signory, was vested in a senate of one thousand members, called the Grand Council, from whom a smaller body of forty, acting as intermediates between the Council and the Signory, were elected. It is said that the plan of this constitution originated with Savonarola; nor is there any doubt that he used all his influence in the pulpit of the Duomo to render it acceptable to the people. Whoever may have been responsible for its formation, the new government was carried in 1495, and a large hall for the assembly of the Grand Council was opened in the Public Palace.

Savonarola, meanwhile, had become the ruling spirit of Florence. He gained his great power as a preacher: he used it like a monk. The motive principle of his action was the passion for reform. To bring the Church back to its pristine state of purity, without altering its doctrine or suggesting any new form of creed; to purge Italy of ungodly customs; to overthrow the tyrants who encouraged evil living, and to place the power of the State in the hands of sober citizens: these were his objects. Though he set himself



Page 147

in bold opposition to the reigning Pope, he had no desire to destroy the spiritual supremacy of S. Peter's see. Though he burned with an enthusiastic zeal for liberty, and displayed rare genius for administration, he had no ambition to rule Florence like a dictator. Savonarola was neither a reformer in the northern sense of the word, nor yet a political demagogue. His sole wish was to see purity of manners and freedom of self-government re-established. With this end in view he bade the Florentines elect Christ as their supreme chief; and they did so. For the same end he abstained from appearing in the State Councils, and left the Constitution to work by its own laws. His personal influence he reserved for the pulpit; and here he was omnipotent. The people believed in him as a prophet. They turned to him as the man who knew what he wanted—as the voice of liberty, the soul of the new regime, the genius who could breathe into the commonwealth a breath of fresh vitality. When, therefore, Savonarola preached a reform of manners, he was at once obeyed. Strict laws were passed enforcing sobriety, condemning trades of pleasure, reducing the gay customs of Florence to puritanical austerity.

Great stress has been laid upon this reaction of the monk-led populace against the vices of the past. Yet the historian is bound to pronounce that the reform effected by Savonarola was rather picturesque than vital. Like all violent revivals of pietism, it produced a no less violent reaction. The parties within the city who resented the interference of a preaching friar, joined with the Pope in Rome, who hated a contumacious schismatic in Savonarola. Assailed by these two forces at the same moment, and driven upon perilous ground by his own febrile enthusiasm, Savonarola succumbed. He was imprisoned, tortured, and burned upon the public square in 1498.

What Savonarola really achieved for Florence was not a permanent reform of morality, but a resuscitation of the spirit of freedom. His followers, called in contempt *I Piagnoni*, or the Weepers, formed the path of the commonwealth in future; and the memory of their martyr served as a common bond of sympathy to unite them in times of trial. It was a necessary consequence of the peculiar part he played that the city was henceforth divided into factions representing mutually antagonistic principles. These factions were not created by Savonarola; but his extraordinary influence accentuated, as it were, the humours that lay dormant in the State. Families favourable to the Medici took the name of *Palleschi*. Men who chafed against puritanical reform, and who were eager for any government that should secure them their old licence, were known as *Compagnacci*. Meanwhile the oligarchs, who disliked a democratic Constitution, and thought it possible to found an aristocracy without the intervention of the Medici, came to be known as *Gli Ottimati*. Florence held within itself, from this epoch forward to the



Page 148

final extinction of liberty, four great parties: the *Piagnoni*, passionate for political freedom and austerity of life; the *Palleschi*, favourable to the Medicean cause, and regretful of Lorenzo's pleasant rule; the *Compagnacci*, intolerant of the reformed republic, neither hostile nor loyal to the Medici, but desirous of personal licence; the *Ottimati*, astute and selfish, watching their own advantage, ever-mindful to form a narrow government of privileged families, disinclined to the Medici, except when they thought the Medici might be employed as instruments in their intrigues.

XX

During the short period of Savonarola's ascendancy, Florence was in form at least a Theocracy, without any titular head but Christ; and as long as the enthusiasm inspired by the monk lasted, as long as his personal influence endured, the Constitution of the Grand Council worked well. After his death it was found that the machinery was too cumbrous. While adopting the Venetian form of government, the Florentines had omitted one essential element—the Doge. By referring measures of immediate necessity to the Grand Council, the republic lost precious time. Dangerous publicity, moreover, was incurred; and so large a body often came to no firm resolution. There was no permanent authority in the State; no security that what had been deliberated would be carried out with energy; no titular chief, who could transact affairs with foreign potentates and their ambassadors. Accordingly, in 1502, it was decreed that the Gonfalonier should hold office for life—should be in fact a Doge. To this important post of permanent president Piero Soderini was appointed; and in his hands were placed the chief affairs of the republic.

At this point Florence, after all her vicissitudes, had won her way to something really similar to the Venetian Constitution. Yet the similarity existed more in form than in fact. The government of burghers in a Grand Council, with a Senate of forty, and a Gonfalonier for life, had not grown up gradually and absorbed into itself the vital forces of the commonwealth. It was a creation of inventive intelligence, not of national development, in Florence. It had against it the jealousy of the *Ottimati*, who felt themselves overshadowed by the Gonfalonier; the hatred of the *Palleschi*, who yearned for the Medici; the discontent of the working classes, who thought the presence of a Court in Florence would improve trade; last, but not least, the disaffection of the *Compagnacci*, who felt they could not flourish to their heart's content in a free commonwealth. Moreover, though the name of liberty was on every lip, though the Florentines talked, wrote, and speculated more about constitutional independence than they had ever done, the true energy of free institutions had passed from the city. The corrupt government of Cosimo and Lorenzo bore its natural fruit now. Egotistic ambition and avarice supplanted patriotism and industry. It is necessary to comprehend these circumstances, in order that the next revolution may be clearly understood.



Page 149

XXI

During the ten years which elapsed between 1502 and 1512, Piero Soderini administered Florence with an outward show of great prosperity. He regained Pisa, and maintained an honourable foreign policy in the midst of the wars stirred up by the League of Cambray. Meanwhile the young princes of the House of Medici had grown to manhood in exile. The Cardinal Giovanni was thirty-seven in 1512. His brother Giuliano was thirty-three. Both of these men were better fitted than their brother Piero to fight the battles of the family. Giovanni, in particular, had inherited no small portion of the Medicean craft. During the troubled reign of Julius II. he kept very quiet, cementing his connections with powerful men in Rome, but making no effort to regain his hold on Florence. Now the moment for striking a decisive blow had come. After the battle of Ravenna in 1512, the French were driven out of Italy, and the Sforzas returned to Milan; the Spanish troops, under the Viceroy Cardona, remained masters of the country. Following the camp of these Spaniards, Giovanni de' Medici entered Tuscany in August, and caused the restoration of the Medici to be announced in Florence. The people, assembled by Soderini, resolved to resist to the uttermost. No foreign army should force them to receive the masters whom they had expelled. Yet their courage failed on August 29th, when news reached them of the capture and the sack of Prato. Prato is a sunny little city a few miles distant from the walls of Florence, famous for the beauty of its women, the richness of its gardens, and the grace of its buildings. Into this gem of cities the savage soldiery of Spain marched in the bright autumnal weather, and turned the paradise into a hell. It is even now impossible to read of what they did in Prato without shuddering.[16] Cruelty and lust, sordid greed for gold, and cold delight in bloodshed, could go no further. Giovanni de' Medici, by nature mild and voluptuous, averse to violence of all kinds, had to smile approval, while the Spanish Viceroy knocked thus with mailed hand for him at the door of Florence. The Florentines were paralysed with terror. They deposed Soderini and received the Medici. Giovanni and Giuliano entered their devastated palace in the Via Larga, abolished the Grand Council, and dealt with the republic as they listed.

XXII

There was no longer any medium in Florence possible between either tyranny or some such government as the Medici had now destroyed. The State was too rotten to recover even the modified despotism of Lorenzo's days. Each transformation had impaired some portion of its framework, broken down some of its traditions, and sowed new seeds of egotism in citizens who saw all things round them change but self-advantage. Therefore Giovanni and Giuliano felt themselves secure in flattering the popular vanity by an empty parade



Page 150

of the old institutions. They restored the Signory and the Gonfalonier, elected for intervals of two months by officers appointed for this purpose by the Medici. Florence had the show of a free government. But the Medici managed all things; and soldiers, commanded by their creature, Paolo Vettori, held the Palace and the Public Square. The tyranny thus established was less secure, inasmuch as it openly rested upon violence, than Lorenzo's power had been; nor were there signs wanting that the burghers could ill brook their servitude. The conspiracy of Pietro Paolo Boscoli and Agostino Capponi proved that the Medicean brothers ran daily risk of life. Indeed, it is not likely that they would have succeeded in maintaining their authority—for they were poor and ill-supported by friends outside the city—except for one most lucky circumstance: that was the election of Giovanni de' Medici to the Papacy in 1513.

The creation of Leo X. spread satisfaction throughout Italy. Politicians trusted that he would display some portion of his father's ability, and restore peace to the nation. Men of arts and letters expected everything from a Medicean Pope, who had already acquired the reputation of polite culture and open-handed generosity. They at any rate were not deceived. Leo's first words on taking his place in the Vatican were addressed to his brother Giuliano: 'Let us enjoy the Papacy, now that God has given it to us;' and his notion of enjoyment was to surround himself with court-poets, jesters, and musicians, to adorn his Roman palaces with frescoes, to collect statues and inscriptions, to listen to Latin speeches, and to pass judgment upon scholarly compositions. Any one and every one who gave him sensual or intellectual pleasure, found his purse always open. He lived in the utmost magnificence, and made Rome the Paris of the Renaissance for brilliance, immorality, and self-indulgent ease. The politicians had less reason to be satisfied. Instead of uniting the Italians and keeping the great Powers of Europe in check, Leo carried on a series of disastrous petty wars, chiefly with the purpose of establishing the Medici as princes. He squandered the revenues of the Church, and left enormous debts behind him—an exchequer ruined and a foreign policy so confused that peace for Italy could only be obtained by servitude.

Florence shared in the general rejoicing which greeted Leo's accession to the Papacy. He was the first Florentine citizen who had received the tiara, and the popular vanity was flattered by this honour to the republic. Political theorists, meanwhile, began to speculate what greatness Florence, in combination with Rome, might rise to. The Pope was young; he ruled a large territory, reduced to order by his warlike predecessors. It seemed as though the republic, swayed by him, might make herself the first city in Italy, and restore the glories of her Guelf ascendancy upon the platform of Renaissance statecraft.



Page 151

There was now no overt opposition to the Medici in Florence. How to govern the city from Rome, and how to advance the fortunes of his brother Giuliano and his nephew Lorenzo (Piero's son, a young man of twenty-one), occupied the Pope's most serious attention. For Lorenzo Leo obtained the Duchy of Urbino and the hand of a French princess. Giuliano was named Gonfalonier of the Church. He also received the French title of Duke of Nemours and the hand of Filiberta, Princess of Savoy. Leo entertained a further project of acquiring the crown of Southern Italy for his brother, and thus of uniting Rome, Florence, and Naples under the headship of his house. Nor were the Medicean interests neglected in the Church. Giulio, the Pope's bastard cousin, was made cardinal. He remained in Rome, acting as vice-chancellor and doing the hard work of the Papal Government for the pleasure-loving pontiff.

To Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, the titular head of the family, was committed the government of Florence. During their exile, wandering from court to court in Italy, the Medici had forgotten what it was to be burghers, and had acquired the manners of princes. Leo alone retained enough of caution to warn his nephew that the Florentines must still be treated as free people. He confirmed the constitution of the Signory and the Privy Council of seventy established by his father, bidding Lorenzo, while he ruled this sham republic, to avoid the outer signs of tyranny. The young duke at first behaved with moderation, but he could not cast aside his habits of a great lord. Florence now for the first time saw a regular court established in her midst, with a prince, who, though he bore a foreign title, was in fact her master. The joyous days of Lorenzo the Magnificent returned. Masquerades and triumphs filled the public squares. Two clubs of pleasure, called the Diamond and the Branch—badges adopted by the Medici to signify their firmness in disaster and their power of self-recovery—were formed to lead the revels. The best sculptors and painters devoted their genius to the invention of costumes and cars. The city affected to believe that the age of gold had come again.

XXIII

Fortune had been very favourable to the Medici. They had returned as princes to Florence. Giovanni was Pope. Giuliano was Gonfalonier of the Church. Giulio was Cardinal and Archbishop of Florence. Lorenzo ruled the city like a sovereign. But this prosperity was no less brief than it was brilliant. A few years sufficed to sweep off all the chiefs of the great house. Giuliano died in 1516, leaving only a bastard son Ippolito. Lorenzo died in 1519, leaving a bastard son Alessandro, and a daughter, six days old, who lived to be the Queen of France. Leo died in 1521. There remained now no legitimate male descendants from the stock of Cosimo. The honours and pretensions of the Medici devolved upon three bastards—on the Cardinal Giulio, and



Page 152

the two boys, Alessandro and Ippolito. Of these, Alessandro was a mulatto, his mother having been a Moorish slave in the Palace of Urbino; and whether his father was Giulio, or Giuliano, or a base groom, was not known for certain. To such extremities were the Medici reduced. In order to keep their house alive, they were obliged to adopt this foundling. It is true that the younger branch of the family, descended from Lorenzo, the brother of Cosimo, still flourished. At this epoch it was represented by Giovanni, the great general known as the Invincible, whose bust so strikingly resembles that of Napoleon. But between this line of the Medici and the elder branch there had never been true cordiality. The Cardinal mistrusted Giovanni. It may, moreover, be added, that Giovanni was himself doomed to death in the year 1526.

Giulio de' Medici was left in 1521 to administer the State of Florence single-handed. He was archbishop, and he resided in the city, holding it with the grasp of an absolute ruler. Yet he felt his position insecure. The republic had no longer any forms of self-government; nor was there a magistracy to whom the despot could delegate his power in his absence. Giulio's ambition was fixed upon the Papal crown. The bastards he was rearing were but children. Florence had therefore to be furnished with some political machinery that should work of itself. The Cardinal did not wish to give freedom to the city, but clockwork. He was in the perilous situation of having to rule a commonwealth without life, without elasticity, without capacity of self-movement, yet full of such material as, left alone, might ferment, and breed a revolution. In this perplexity, he had recourse to advisers. The most experienced politicians, philosophical theorists, practical diplomatists, and students of antique history were requested to furnish him with plans for a new constitution, just as you ask an architect to give you the plan of a new house. This was the field-day of the doctrinaires. Now was seen how much political sagacity the Florentines had gained while they were losing liberty. We possess these several drafts of constitutions. Some recommend tyranny; some incline to aristocracy, or what Italians called *Governo Stretto*; some to democracy, or *Governo Largo*; some to an eclectic compound of the other forms, or *Governo Misto*. More consummate masterpieces of constructive ingenuity can hardly be imagined. What is omitted in all, is just what no doctrinaire, no nostrum can communicate—the breath of life, the principle of organic growth. Things had come, indeed, to a melancholy pass for Florence when her tyrant, in order to confirm his hold upon her, had to devise these springs and irons to support her tottering limbs.

XXIV



Page 153

While the archbishop and the doctors were debating, a plot was hatching in the Rucellai Gardens. It was here that the Florentine Academy now held their meetings. For this society Machiavelli wrote his 'Treatise on the Art of War,' and his 'Discourses upon Livy.' The former was an exposition of Machiavelli's scheme for creating a national militia, as the only safeguard for Italy, exposed at this period to the invasions of great foreign armies. The latter is one of the three or four masterpieces produced by the Florentine school of critical historians. Stimulated by the daring speculations of Machiavelli, and fired to enthusiasm by their study of antiquity, the younger academicians formed a conspiracy for murdering Giulio de' Medici, and restoring the republic on a Roman model. An intercepted letter betrayed their plans. Two of the conspirators were taken and beheaded. Others escaped. But the discovery of this conjuration put a stop to Giulio's scheme of reforming the State. Henceforth he ruled Florence like a despot, mild in manners, cautious in the exercise of arbitrary power, but firm in his autocracy. The Condottiere. Alessandro Vitelli, with a company of soldiers, was taken into service for the protection of his person and the intimidation of the citizens.

In 1523, the Pope, Adrian VI., expired after a short papacy, from which he gained no honour and Italy no profit. Giulio hurried to Rome, and, by the clever use of his large influence, caused himself to be elected with the title of Clement VII. In Florence he left Silvio Passerini, Cardinal of Cortona, as his vicegerent and the guardian of the two boys Alessandro and Ippolito. The discipline of many years had accustomed the Florentines to a government of priests. Still the burghers, mindful of their ancient liberties, were galled by the yoke of a Cortonese, sprung up from one of their subject cities; nor could they bear the bastards who were being reared to rule them. Foreigners threw it in their teeth that Florence, the city glorious of art and freedom, was become a stable for mules —*stalla da muli*, in the expressive language of popular sarcasm. Bastardy, it may be said in passing, carried with it small dishonour among the Italians. The Estensi were all illegitimate; the Aragonese house in Naples sprang from Alfonso's natural son; and children of Popes ranked among the princes. Yet the uncertainty of Alessandro's birth and the base condition of his mother made the prospect of this tyrant peculiarly odious; while the primacy of a foreign cardinal in the midst of citizens whose spirit was still unbroken, embittered the cup of humiliation. The Casa Medici held its authority by a slender thread, and depended more upon the disunion of the burghers than on any power of its own. It could always reckon on the favour of the lower populace, who gained profit and amusement from the presence of a court. The Ottimati again hoped more from a weak despotism than from a



Page 154

commonwealth, where their privileges would have been merged in the mass of the Grand Council. Thus the sympathies of the plebeians and the selfishness of the rich patricians prevented the republic from asserting itself. On this meagre basis of personal cupidity the Medici sustained themselves. What made the situation still more delicate, and at the same time protracted the feeble rule of Clement, was that neither the Florentines nor the Medici had any army. Face to face with a potentate so considerable as the Pope, a free State could not be established without military force. On the other hand, the Medici, supported by a mere handful of mercenaries, had no power to resist a popular rising if any external event should inspire the middle classes with a hope of liberty.

XXV

Clement assumed the tiara at a moment of great difficulty. Leo had ruined the finance of Rome. France and Spain were still contending for the possession of Italy. While acting as Vice-Chancellor, Giulio de' Medici had seemed to hold the reins with a firm grasp, and men expected that he would prove a powerful Pope; but in those days he had Leo to help him; and Leo, though indolent, was an abler man than his cousin. He planned, and Giulio executed. Obligated to act now for himself, Clement revealed the weakness of his nature. That weakness was irresolution, craft without wisdom, diplomacy without knowledge of men. He raised the storm, and showed himself incapable of guiding it. This is not the place to tell by what a series of crooked schemes and cross purposes he brought upon himself the ruin of the Church and Rome, to relate his disagreement with the Emperor, or to describe again the sack of the Eternal City by the rabble of the Constable de Bourbon's army. That wreck of Rome in 1527 was the closing scene of the Italian Renaissance—the last of the Apocalyptic tragedies foretold by Savonarola—the death of the old age.

When the Florentines knew what was happening in Rome, they rose and forced the Cardinal Passerini to depart with the Medicean bastards from the city. The youth demanded arms for the defence of the town, and they received them. The whole male population was enrolled in a militia. The Grand Council was reformed, and the republic was restored upon the basis of 1495. Niccolo Capponi was elected Gonfalonier. The name of Christ was again registered as chief of the commonwealth—to such an extent did the memory of Savonarola still sway the popular imagination. The new State hastened to form an alliance with France, and Malatesta Baglioni was chosen as military Commander-in-Chief. Meanwhile the city armed itself for siege—Michel Angelo Buonarroti and Francesco da San Gallo undertaking the construction of new forts and ramparts. These measures were adopted with sudden decision, because it was soon known that Clement had made peace with the Emperor, and that the army which had sacked Rome was going to be marched on Florence.



Page 155

XXVI

In the month of August 1529 the Prince of Orange assembled his forces at Terni, and thence advanced by easy stages into Tuscany. As he approached, the Florentines laid waste their suburbs, and threw down their wreath of towers, in order that the enemy might have no harbourage or points of vantage for attack. Their troops were concentrated within the city, where a new Gonfalonier, Francesco Carducci, furiously opposed to the Medici, and attached to the Piagnoni party, now ruled. On September 4th the Prince of Orange appeared before the walls, and opened the memorable siege. It lasted eight months, at the end of which time, betrayed by their generals, divided among themselves, and worn out with delays, the Florentines capitulated. Florence was paid as compensation for the insult offered to the pontiff in the sack of Rome.

The long yoke of the Medici had undermined the character of the Florentines. This, their last glorious struggle for liberty, was but a flash in the pan—a final flare-up of the dying lamp. The city was not satisfied with slavery; but it had no capacity for united action. The Ottimati were egotistic and jealous of the people. The Palleschi desired to restore the Medici at any price—some of them frankly wishing for a principality, others trusting that the old quasi-republican government might still be reinstated. The Red Republicans, styled Libertini and Arrabbiati, clung together in blind hatred of the Medicean party; but they had no further policy to guide them. The Piagnoni, or Frateschi, stuck to the memory of Savonarola, and believed that angels would descend to guard the battlements when human help had failed. These enthusiasts still formed the true nerve of the nation—the class that might have saved the State, if salvation had been possible. Even as it was, the energy of their fanaticism prolonged the siege until resistance seemed no longer physically possible. The hero developed by the crisis was Francesco Ferrucci, a plebeian who had passed his youth in manual labour, and who now displayed rare military genius. He fell fighting outside the walls of Florence. Had he commanded the troops from the beginning, and remained inside the city, it is just possible that the fate of the war might have been less disastrous. As it was, Malatesta Baglioni, the Commander-in-Chief, turned out an arrant scoundrel. He held secret correspondence with Clement and the Prince of Orange. It was he who finally sold Florence to her foes, 'putting on his head,' as the Doge of Venice said before the Senate, 'the cap of the biggest traitor upon record.'

XXVII



Page 156

What remains of Florentine history may be briefly told. Clement, now the undisputed arbiter of power and honour in the city, chose Alessandro de' Medici to be prince. Alessandro was created Duke of Civita di Penna, and married to a natural daughter of Charles V. Ippolito was made a cardinal. Ippolito would have preferred a secular to a priestly kingdom; nor did he conceal his jealousy for his cousin. Therefore Alessandro had him poisoned. Alessandro in his turn was murdered by his kinsman, Lorenzino de' Medici. Lorenzino paid the usual penalty of tyrannicide some years later. When Alessandro was killed in 1539, Clement had himself been dead five years. Thus the whole posterity of Cosimo de' Medici, with the exception of Catherine, Queen of France, was utterly extinguished. But the Medici had struck root so firmly in the State, and had so remodelled it upon the type of tyranny, that the Florentines were no longer able to do without them. The chiefs of the Ottimati selected Cosimo, the representative of Giovanni the Invincible, for their prince, and thus the line of the elder Lorenzo came at last to power. This Cosimo was a boy of eighteen, fond of field-sports, and unused to party intrigues. When Francesco Guicciardini offered him a privy purse of one hundred and twenty thousand ducats annually, together with the presidency of Florence, this wily politician hoped that he would rule the State through Cosimo, and realise at last that dream of the Ottimati, a *Governo Stretto* or *di Pochi*. He was notably mistaken in his calculations. The first days of Cosimo's administration showed that he possessed the craft of his family and the vigour of his immediate progenitors, and that he meant to be sole master in Florence. He it was who obtained the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany from the Pope—a title confirmed by the Emperor, fortified by Austrian alliances, and transmitted through his heirs to the present century.

XXVIII

In this sketch of Florentine history, I have purposely omitted all details that did not bear upon the constitutional history of the republic, or on the growth of the Medici as despots; because I wanted to present a picture of the process whereby that family contrived to fasten itself upon the freest and most cultivated State in Italy. This success the Medici owed mainly to their own obstinacy, and to the weakness of republican institutions in Florence. Their power was founded upon wealth in the first instance, and upon the ingenuity with which they turned the favour of the proletariat to use. It was confirmed by the mistakes and failures of their enemies, by Rinaldo degli Albizzi's attack on Cosimo, by the conspiracy of Neroni and Pitti against Piero, and by Francesco de' Pazzi's attempt to assassinate Lorenzo. It was still further strengthened by the Medicean sympathy for arts and letters—a sympathy which placed both Cosimo and Lorenzo at the head of the Renaissance



Page 157

movement, and made them worthy to represent Florence, the city of genius, in the fifteenth century. While thus founding and cementing their dynastic influence upon the basis of a widespread popularity, the Medici employed persistent cunning in the enfeeblement of the Republic. It was their policy not to plant themselves by force or acts of overt tyranny, but to corrupt ambitious citizens, to secure the patronage of public officers, and to render the spontaneous working of the State machinery impossible. By pursuing this policy over a long series of years they made the revival of liberty in 1494, and again in 1527, ineffectual. While exiled from Florence, they never lost the hope of returning as masters, so long as the passions they had excited, and they alone could gratify, remained in full activity. These passions were avarice and egotism, the greed of the grasping Ottimati, the jealousy of the nobles, the self-indulgence of the proletariat. Yet it is probable they might have failed to recover Florence, on one or other of these two occasions, but for the accident which placed Giovanni de' Medici on the Papal chair, and enabled him to put Giulio in the way of the same dignity. From the accession of Leo in 1513 to the year 1527 the Medici ruled Florence from Rome, and brought the power of the Church into the service of their despotism. After that date they were still further aided by the imperial policy of Charles V., who chose to govern Italy through subject princes, bound to himself by domestic alliances and powerful interests. One of these was Cosimo, the first Grand Duke of Tuscany.

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THE DEBT OF ENGLISH TO ITALIAN LITERATURE

To an Englishman one of the chief interests of the study of Italian literature is derived from the fact that, between England and Italy, an almost uninterrupted current of intellectual intercourse has been maintained throughout the last five centuries. The English have never, indeed, at any time been slavish imitators of the Italians; but Italy has formed the dreamland of the English fancy, inspiring poets with their most delightful thoughts, supplying them with subjects, and implanting in their minds that sentiment of Southern beauty which, engrafted on our more passionately imaginative Northern nature, has borne rich fruit in the works of Chaucer, Spenser, Marlowe, Shakspeare, Milton, and the poets of this century.

It is not strange that Italy should thus in matters of culture have been the guide and mistress of England. Italy, of all the European nations, was the first to produce high art and literature in the dawn of modern civilisation. Italy was the first to display refinement in domestic life, polish of manners, civilities of intercourse. In Italy the commerce of courts first developed a society of men and women, educated by the same traditions of humanistic culture. In Italy the principles of government were first discussed



Page 158

and reduced to theory. In Italy the zeal for the classics took its origin; and scholarship, to which we owe our mental training, was at first the possession of none almost but Italians. It therefore followed that during the age of the Renaissance any man of taste or genius, who desired to share the newly discovered privileges of learning, had to seek Italy. Every one who wished to be initiated into the secrets of science or philosophy, had to converse with Italians in person or through books. Every one who was eager to polish his native language, and to render it the proper vehicle of poetic thought, had to consult the masterpieces of Italian literature. To Italians the courtier, the diplomatist, the artist, the student of statecraft and of military tactics, the political theorist, the merchant, the man of laws, the man of arms, and the churchman turned for precedents and precepts. The nations of the North, still torpid and somnolent in their semi-barbarism, needed the magnetic touch of Italy before they could awake to intellectual life. Nor was this all. Long before the thirst for culture possessed the English mind, Italy had appropriated and assimilated all that Latin literature contained of strong or splendid to arouse the thought and fancy of the modern world; Greek, too, was rapidly becoming the possession of the scholars of Florence and Rome; so that English men of letters found the spirit of the ancients infused into a modern literature; models of correct and elegant composition existed for them in a language easy, harmonious, and not dissimilar in usage to their own.

The importance of this service, rendered by Italians to the rest of Europe, cannot be exaggerated. By exploring, digesting, and reproducing the classics, Italy made the labour of scholarship comparatively light for the Northern nations, and extended to us the privilege of culture without the peril of losing originality in the enthusiasm for erudition. Our great poets could handle lightly, and yet profitably, those masterpieces of Greece and Rome, beneath the weight of which, when first discovered, the genius of the Italians had wavered. To the originality of Shakspeare an accession of wealth without weakness was brought by the perusal of Italian works, in which the spirit of the antique was seen as in a modern mirror. Then, in addition to this benefit of instruction, Italy gave to England a gift of pure beauty, the influence of which, in refining our national taste, harmonising the roughness of our manners and our language, and stimulating our imagination, has been incalculable. It was a not unfrequent custom for young men of ability to study at the Italian universities, or at least to undertake a journey to the principal Italian cities. From their sojourn in that land of loveliness and intellectual life they returned with their Northern brains most powerfully stimulated. To produce, by masterpieces of the imagination, some work of style that should remain as a memento of that glorious country, and should vie on English soil with the art of Italy, was their generous ambition. Consequently the substance of the stories versified by our poets, the forms of our metres, and the cadences of our prose periods reveal a close attention to Italian originals.



Page 159

This debt of England to Italy in the matter of our literature began with Chaucer. Truly original and national as was the framework of the 'Canterbury Tales,' we can hardly doubt but that Chaucer was determined in the form adopted for his poem by the example of Boccaccio. The subject-matter, also, of many of his tales was taken from Boccaccio's prose or verse. For example, the story of Patient Grizzel is founded upon one of the legends of the 'Decameron,' while the Knight's Tale is almost translated from the 'Teseide' of Boccaccio, and Troilus and Creseide is derived from the 'Filostrato' of the same author. The Franklin's Tale and the Reeve's Tale are also based either on stories of Boccaccio or else on French 'Fabliaux,' to which Chaucer, as well as Boccaccio, had access. I do not wish to lay too much stress upon Chaucer's direct obligations to Boccaccio, because it is incontestable that the French 'Fabliaux,' which supplied them both with subjects, were the common property of the mediaeval nations. But his indirect debt in all that concerns elegant handling of material, and in the fusion of the romantic with the classic spirit, which forms the chief charm of such tales as the Palamon and Arcite, can hardly be exaggerated. Lastly, the seven-lined stanza, called *rime royal*, which Chaucer used with so much effect in narrative poetry, was probably borrowed from the earlier Florentine 'Ballata,' the last line rhyming with its predecessor being substituted for the recurrent refrain. Indeed, the stanza itself, as used by our earliest poets, may be found in Guido Cavalcanti's 'Ballatetta,' beginning, *Posso degli occhi miei*.

Between Chaucer and Surrey the Muse of England fell asleep; but when in the latter half of the reign of Henry VIII. she awoke again, it was as a conscious pupil of the Italian that she attempted new strains and essayed fresh metres. 'In the latter end of Henry VIII.'s reign,' says Puttenham, 'sprang up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir T. Wyatt the elder, and Henry Earl of Surrey, were the two chieftains, who, having travelled into Italy, and there tasted the sweet and stately measures and style of the Italian poesy, as novices newly crept out of the schools of Dante, Ariosto, and Petrarch, they greatly polished our rude and homely manner of vulgar poesy, from that it had been before, and for that cause may justly be said the first reformers of our English metre and style.' The chief point in which Surrey imitated his 'master, Francis Petrarcha,' was in the use of the sonnet. He introduced this elaborate form of poetry into our literature; and how it has thriven with us, the masterpieces of Spenser, Shakspeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Rossetti attest. As practised by Dante and Petrarch, the sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines, divided into two quatrains and two triplets, so arranged that the two quatrains repeat one pair of rhymes, while the two triplets repeat another pair. Thus an Italian sonnet of the strictest form is composed upon four rhymes, interlaced with great art. But much divergence from this rigid scheme of rhyming was admitted even by Petrarch, who not unfrequently divided the six final lines of the sonnet into three couplets, interwoven in such a way that the two last lines never rhymed.[17]



Page 160

It has been necessary to say thus much about the structure of the Italian sonnet, in order to make clear the task which lay before Surrey and Wyatt, when they sought to transplant it into English. Surrey did not adhere to the strict fashion of Petrarch: his sonnets consist either of three regular quatrains concluded with a couplet, or else of twelve lines rhyming alternately and concluded with a couplet. Wyatt attempted to follow the order and interlacement of the Italian rhymes more closely, but he too concluded his sonnet with a couplet. This introduction of the final couplet was a violation of the Italian rule, which may be fairly considered as prejudicial to the harmony of the whole structure, and which has insensibly caused the English sonnet to terminate in an epigram. The famous sonnet of Surrey on his love, Geraldine, is an excellent example of the metrical structure as adapted to the supposed necessities of English rhyming, and as afterwards adhered to by Shakspeare in his long series of love-poems. Surrey, while adopting the form of the sonnet, kept quite clear of the Petrarchist's mannerism. His language is simple and direct: there is no subtilising upon far-fetched conceits, no wire-drawing of exquisite sentimentalism, although he celebrates in this, as in his other sonnets, a lady for whom he appears to have entertained no more than a Platonic or imaginary passion. Surrey was a great experimentalist in metre. Besides the sonnet, he introduced into England blank verse, which he borrowed from the Italian *versi sciolti*, fixing that decasyllable iambic rhythm for English versification in which our greatest poetical triumphs have been achieved.

Before quitting the subject of the sonnet it would, however, be well to mention the changes which were wrought in its structure by early poets desirous of emulating the Italians. Shakspeare, as already hinted, adhered to the simple form introduced by Surrey: his stanzas invariably consist of three separate quatrains followed by a couplet. But Sir Philip Sidney, whose familiarity with Italian literature was intimate, and who had resided long in Italy, perceived that without a greater complexity and interweaving of rhymes the beauty of the poem was considerably impaired. He therefore combined the rhymes of the two quatrains, as the Italians had done, leaving himself free to follow the Italian fashion in the conclusion, or else to wind up after English usage with a couplet. Spenser and Drummond follow the rule of Sidney; Drayton and Daniel, that of Surrey and Shakspeare. It was not until Milton that an English poet preserved the form of the Italian sonnet in its strictness; but, after Milton, the greatest sonnet-writers—Wordsworth, Keats, and Rossetti—have aimed at producing stanzas as regular as those of Petrarch.



Page 161

The great age of our literature—the age of Elizabeth—was essentially one of Italian influence. In Italy the Renaissance had reached its height: England, feeling the new life which had been infused into arts and letters, turned instinctively to Italy, and adopted her canons of taste. 'Euphues' has a distinct connection with the Italian discourses of polite culture. Sidney's 'Arcadia' is a copy of what Boccaccio had attempted in his classical romances, and Sanazzaro in his pastorals.[18] Spenser approached the subject of the 'Faery Queen' with his head full of Ariosto and the romantic poets of Italy. His sonnets are Italian; his odes embody the Platonic philosophy of the Italians.[19] The extent of Spenser's deference to the Italians in matters of poetic art may be gathered from this passage in the dedication to Sir Walter Raleigh of the 'Faery Queen:'

I have followed all the antique poets historical: first Homer, who in the persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good governor and a virtuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis; then Virgil, whose like intention was to do in the person of Aeneas; after him Ariosto comprised them both in his Orlando; and lately Tasso dissevered them again, and formed both parts in two persons, namely, that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or virtues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo, the other named Politico in his Goffredo.

From this it is clear that, to the mind of Spenser, both Ariosto and Tasso were authorities of hardly less gravity than Homer and Virgil. Raleigh, in the splendid sonnet with which he responds to this dedication, enhances the fame of Spenser by affecting to believe that the great Italian, Petrarch, will be jealous of him in the grave. To such an extent were the thoughts of the English poets occupied with their Italian masters in the art of song.

It was at this time, again, that English literature was enriched by translations of Ariosto and Tasso—the one from the pen of Sir John Harrington, the other from that of Fairfax. Both were produced in the metre of the original—the octave stanza, which, however, did not at that period take root in England. At the same period the works of many of the Italian novelists, especially Bandello and Cinthio and Boccaccio, were translated into English; Painter's 'Palace of Pleasure' being a treasure-house of Italian works of fiction. Thomas Hoby translated Castiglione's 'Courtier' in 1561. As a proof of the extent to which Italian books were read in England at the end of the sixteenth century, we may take a stray sentence from a letter of Harvey, in which he disparages the works of Robert Greene:—'Even Guicciardine's silver histories and Ariosto's golden cantos grow out of request: and the Countess of Pembroke's "Arcadia" is not green enough for queasy stomachs; but they must have seen Greene's "Arcadia," and I believe most eagerly longed for Greene's "Faery Queen."'



Page 162

Still more may be gathered on the same topic from the indignant protest uttered by Roger Ascham in his 'Schoolmaster' (pp. 78-91, date 1570) against the prevalence of Italian customs, the habit of Italian travel, and the reading of Italian books translated into English. Selections of Italian stories rendered into English were extremely popular; and Greene's tales, which had such vogue that Nash says of them, 'glad was that printer that might be so blest to pay him dear for the very dregs of his wit,' were all modelled on the Italian. The education of a young man of good family was not thought complete unless he had spent some time in Italy, studied its literature, admired its arts, and caught at least some tincture of its manners. Our rude ancestors brought back with them from these journeys many Southern vices, together with the culture they had gone to seek. The contrast between the plain dealing of the North and the refined Machiavellism of the South, between Protestant earnestness in religion and Popish scepticism, between the homely virtues of England and the courtly libertinism of Venice or Florence, blunted the moral sense, while it stimulated the intellectual activity of the English travellers, and too often communicated a fatal shock to their principles. *Inglese Italianato e un diavolo incarnato* passed into a proverb: we find it on the lips of Parker, of Howell, of Sidney, of Greene, and of Ascham; while Italy itself was styled by severe moralists the court of Circe. In James Howell's 'Instructions for forreine travell' we find this pregnant sentence: 'And being now in Italy, that great limbique of working braines, he must be very circumspect in his carriage, for she is able to turne a Saint into a devill, and deprave the best natures, if one will abandon himselfe, and become a prey to dissolut courses and wantonnesse.' Italy, in truth, had already become corrupt, and the fruit of her contact with the nations of the North was seen in the lives of such scholars as Robert Greene, who confessed that he returned from his travels instructed 'in all the villanies under the sun.' Many of the scandals of the Court of James might be ascribed to this aping of Southern manners.

Yet, together with the evil of depraved morality, the advantage of improved culture was imported from Italy into England; and the constitution of the English genius was young and healthy enough to purge off the mischief, while it assimilated what was beneficial. This is very manifest in the history of our drama, which, taking it altogether, is at the same time the purest and the most varied that exists in literature; while it may be affirmed without exaggeration that one of the main impulses to free dramatic composition in England was communicated by the attraction everything Italian possessed for the English fancy. It was in the drama that the English displayed the richness and the splendour of the Renaissance, which had blazed so gorgeously and at times so balefully below the



Page 163

Alps. The Italy of the Renaissance fascinated our dramatists with a strange wild glamour—the contrast of external pageant and internal tragedy, the alternations of radiance and gloom, the terrible examples of bloodshed, treason, and heroism emergent from ghastly crimes. Our drama began with a translation of Ariosto's 'Suppositi' and ended with Davenant's 'Just Italian.' In the very dawn of tragic composition Greene versified a portion of the 'Orlando Furioso,' and Marlowe devoted one of his most brilliant studies to the villainies of a Maltese Jew. Of Shakspeare's plays five are incontestably Italian: several of the rest are furnished with Italian names to suit the popular taste. Ben Jonson laid the scene of his most subtle comedy of manners, 'Volpone,' in Venice, and sketched the first cast of 'Every Man in his Humour' for Italian characters. Tourneur, Ford, and Webster were so dazzled by the tragic lustre of the wickedness of Italy that their finest dramas, without exception, are minute and carefully studied psychological analyses of great Italian tales of crime. The same, in a less degree, is true of Middleton and Dekker. Massinger makes a story of the Sforza family the subject of one of his best plays. Beaumont and Fletcher draw the subjects of comedies and tragedies alike from the Italian novelists. Fletcher in his 'Faithful Shepherdess' transfers the pastoral style of Tasso and Guarini to the North. So close is the connection between our tragedy and Italian novels that Marston and Ford think fit to introduce passages of Italian dialogue into the plays of 'Giovanni and Annabella' and 'Antonio and Mellida.' But the best proof of the extent to which Italian life and literature had influenced our dramatists, may be easily obtained by taking down Halliwell's 'Dictionary of Old Plays,' and noticing that about every third drama has an Italian title. Meanwhile the poems composed by the chief dramatists—Shakspeare's 'Venus and Adonis,' Marlowe's 'Hero and Leander,' Marston's 'Pygmalion,' and Beaumont's 'Hermaphrodite'—are all of them conceived in the Italian style, by men who had either studied Southern literature, or had submitted to its powerful aesthetic influences. The Masques, moreover, of Jonson, of Lyly, of Fletcher, and of Chapman are exact reproductions upon the English court theatres of such festival pageants as were presented to the Medici at Florence or to the Este family at Ferrara.[20] Throughout our drama the influence of Italy, direct or indirect, either as supplying our playwrights with subjects or as stimulating their imagination, may thus be traced. Yet the Elizabethan drama is in the highest sense original. As a work of art pregnant with deepest wisdom, and splendidly illustrative of the age which gave it birth, it far transcends anything that Italy produced in the same department. Our poets have a more masculine judgment, more fiery fancy, nobler sentiment, than the Italians of any age but that of Dante. What Italy gave, was the impulse toward creation, not patterns to be imitated—the excitement of the imagination by a spectacle of so much grandeur, not rules and precepts for production—the keen sense of tragic beauty, not any tradition of accomplished art.

Page 164

The Elizabethan period of our literature was, in fact, the period during which we derived most from the Italian nation.

The study of the Italian language went hand in hand with the study of Greek and Latin, so that the three together contributed to form the English taste. Between us and the ancient world stood the genius of Italy as an interpreter. Nor was this connection broken until far on into the reign of Charles II. What Milton owed to Italy is clear not only from his Italian sonnets, but also from the frequent mention of Dante and Petrarch in his prose works, from his allusions to Boiardo and Ariosto in the 'Paradise Lost,' and from the hints which he probably derived from Pulci, Tasso and Andreini. It would, indeed, be easy throughout his works to trace a continuous vein of Italian influence in detail. But, more than this, Milton's poetical taste in general seems to have been formed and ripened by familiarity with the harmonies of the Italian language. In his Tractate on Education addressed to Mr. Hartlib, he recommends that boys should be instructed in the Italian pronunciation of vowel sounds, in order to give sonorousness and dignity to elocution. This slight indication supplies us with a key to the method of melodious structure employed by Milton in his blank verse. Those who have carefully studied the harmonies of the 'Paradise Lost,' know how all-important are the assonances of the vowel sounds of *o* and *a* in its most musical passages. It is just this attention to the liquid and sonorous recurrences of open vowels that we should expect from a poet who proposed to assimilate his diction to that of the Italians.

After the age of Milton the connection between Italy and England is interrupted. In the seventeenth century Italy herself had sunk into comparative stupor, and her literature was trivial. France not only swayed the political destinies of Europe, but also took the lead in intellectual culture. Consequently, our poets turned from Italy to France, and the French spirit pervaded English literature throughout the period of the Restoration and the reigns of William and Queen Anne. Yet during this prolonged reaction against the earlier movement of English literature, as manifested in Elizabethanism, the influence of Italy was not wholly extinct. Dryden's 'Tales from Boccaccio' are no insignificant contribution to our poetry, and his 'Palamon and Arcite,' through Chaucer, returns to the same source. But when, at the beginning of this century, the Elizabethan tradition was revived, then the Italian influence reappeared more vigorous than ever. The metre of 'Don Juan,' first practised by Frere and then adopted by Lord Byron, is Pulci's octave stanza; the manner is that of Berni, Folengo, and the Abbe Casti, fused and heightened by the brilliance of Byron's genius into a new form. The subject of Shelley's strongest work of art is Beatrice Cenci. Rogers's poem is styled 'Italy.' Byron's dramas are



Page 165

chiefly Italian. Leigh Hunt repeats the tale of Francesca da Rimini. Keats versifies Boccaccio's 'Isabella.' Passing to contemporary poets, Rossetti has acclimated in English the metres and the manner of the earliest Italian lyrists. Swinburne dedicates his noblest song to the spirit of liberty in Italy. Even George Eliot and Tennyson have each of them turned stories of Boccaccio into verse. The best of Mrs. Browning's poems, 'Casa Guidi Windows' and 'Aurora Leigh,' are steeped in Italian thought and Italian imagery. Browning's longest poem is a tale of Italian crime; his finest studies in the 'Men and Women' are portraits of Italian character of the Renaissance period. But there is more than any mere enumeration of poets and their work can set forth, in the connection between Italy and England. That connection, so far as the poetical imagination is concerned, is vital. As poets in the truest sense of the word, we English live and breathe through sympathy with the Italians. The magnetic touch which is required to inflame the imagination of the North, is derived from Italy. The nightingales of English song who make our oak and beech copses resonant in spring with purest melody, are migratory birds, who have charged their souls in the South with the spirit of beauty, and who return to warble native wood-notes in a tongue which is their own.

What has hitherto been said about the debt of the English poets to Italy, may seem to imply that our literature can be regarded as to some extent a parasite on that of the Italians. Against such a conclusion no protest too energetic could be uttered. What we have derived directly from the Italian poets are, first, some metres—especially the sonnet and the octave stanza, though the latter has never taken firm root in England. 'Terza rima,' attempted by Shelley, Byron, Morris, and Mrs. Browning, has not yet become acclimated. Blank verse, although originally remodelled by Surrey upon the *versi sciolti* of the Italians, has departed widely from Italian precedent, first by its decasyllabic structure, whereas Italian verse consists of hendecasyllables; and, secondly, by its greater force, plasticity, and freedom. The Spenserian stanza, again, is a new and original metre peculiar to our literature; though it is possible that but for the complex structures of Italian lyric verse, it might not have been fashioned for the 'Faery Queen.' Lastly, the so-called heroic couplet is native to England; at any rate, it is in no way related to Italian metre. Therefore the only true Italian exotic adopted without modification into our literature is the sonnet.



Page 166

In the next place, we owe to the Italians the subject-matter of many of our most famous dramas and our most delightful tales in verse. But the English treatment of these histories and fables has been uniformly independent and original. Comparing Shakspeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' with Bandello's tale, Webster's 'Duchess of Malfy' with the version given from the Italian in Painter's 'Palace of Pleasure,' and Chaucer's Knight's Tale with the 'Teseide' of Boccaccio, we perceive at once that the English poets have used their Italian models merely as outlines to be filled in with freedom, as the canvas to be embroidered with a tapestry of vivid groups. Nothing is more manifest than the superiority of the English genius over the Italian in all dramatic qualities of intense passion, profound analysis, and living portrayal of character in action. The mere rough detail of Shakspeare's 'Othello' is to be found in Cinthio's Collection of Novelle; but let an unprejudiced reader peruse the original, and he will be no more deeply affected by it than by any touching story of treachery, jealousy, and hapless innocence. The wily subtleties of Iago, the soldierly frankness of Cassio, the turbulent and volcanic passions of Othello, the charm of Desdemona, and the whole tissue of vivid incidents which make 'Othello' one of the most tremendous extant tragedies of characters in combat, are Shakspeare's, and only Shakspeare's. This instance, indeed, enables us exactly to indicate what the English owed to Italy and what was essentially their own. From that Southern land of Circe about which they dreamed, and which now and then they visited, came to their imaginations a spirit-stirring breath of inspiration. It was to them the country of marvels, of mysterious crimes, of luxurious gardens and splendid skies, where love was more passionate and life more picturesque, and hate more bloody and treachery more black, than in our Northern climes. Italy was a spacious grove of wizardry, which mighty poets, on the quest of fanciful adventure, trod with fascinated senses and quickened pulses. But the strong brain which converted what they heard and read and saw of that charmed land into the stuff of golden romance or sable tragedy, was their own.

English literature has been defined a literature of genius.

Our greatest work in art has been achieved not so much by inspiration, subordinate to sentiments of exquisite good taste or guided by observance of classical models, as by audacious sallies of pure inventive power. This is true as a judgment of that constellation which we call our drama, of the meteor Byron, of Milton and Dryden, who are the Jupiter and Mars of our poetic system, and of the stars which stud our literary firmament under the names of Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Chatterton, Scott, Coleridge, Clough, Blake, Browning, Swinburne, Tennyson. There are only a very few of the English poets, Pope and Gray, for example, in whom the free instincts of genius are kept systematically in check



Page 167

by the laws of the reflective understanding. Now Italian literature is in this respect all unlike our own. It began, indeed, with Dante, as a literature pre-eminently of genius; but the spirit of scholarship assumed the sway as early as the days of Petrarch and Boccaccio, and after them Italian has been consistently a literature of taste. By this I mean that even the greatest Italian poets have sought to render their style correct, have endeavoured to subordinate their inspiration to what they considered the rules of sound criticism, and have paid serious attention to their manner as independent of the matter they wished to express. The passion for antiquity, so early developed in Italy, delivered the later Italian poets bound hand and foot into the hands of Horace. Poliziano was content to reproduce the classic authors in a mosaic work of exquisite translations. Tasso was essentially a man of talent, producing work of chastened beauty by diligent attention to the rule and method of his art. Even Ariosto submitted the liberty of his swift spirit to canons of prescribed elegance. While our English poets have conceived and executed without regard for the opinion of the learned and without obedience to the usages of language—Shakspeare, for example, producing tragedies which set Aristotle at defiance, and Milton engrafting Latinisms on the native idiom—the Italian poets thought and wrote with the fear of Academies before their eyes, and studied before all things to maintain the purity of the Tuscan tongue. The consequence is that the Italian and English literatures are eminent for very different excellences. All that is forcible in the dramatic presentation of life and character and action, all that is audacious in imagination and capricious in fancy, whatever strength style can gain from the sallies of original and untrammelled eloquence, whatever beauty is derived from spontaneity and native grace, belong in abundant richness to the English. On the other hand, the Italian poets present us with masterpieces of correct and studied diction, with carefully elaborated machinery, and with a style maintained at a uniform level of dignified correctness. The weakness of the English proceeds from inequality and extravagance; it is the weakness of self-confident vigour, intolerant of rule, rejoicing in its own exuberant resources. The weakness of the Italian is due to timidity and moderation; it is the weakness that springs not so much from a lack of native strength as from the over-anxious expenditure of strength upon the attainment of finish, polish, and correctness. Hence the two nations have everything to learn from one another. Modern Italian poets may seek by contact with Shakspeare and Milton to gain a freedom from the trammels imposed upon them by the slavish followers of Petrarch; while the attentive perusal of Tasso should be recommended to all English people who have no ready access to the masterpieces of Greek and Latin literature.



Page 168

Another point of view may be gained by noticing the pre-dominant tone of the two literatures. Whenever English poetry is really great, it approximates to the tragic and the stately; whereas the Italians are peculiarly felicitous in the smooth and pleasant style, which combines pathos with amusement, and which does not trespass beyond the region of beauty into the domain of sublimity or terror. Italian poetry is analogous to Italian painting and Italian music: it bathes the soul in a plenitude of charms, investing even the most solemn subjects with loveliness. Rembrandt and Albert Duerer depict the tragedies of the Sacred History with a serious and awful reality: Italian painters, with a few rare but illustrious exceptions, shrink from approaching them from any point of view but that of harmonious melancholy. Even so the English poets stir the soul to its very depths by their profound and earnest delineations of the stern and bitter truths of the world: Italian poets environ all things with the golden haze of an artistic harmony; so that the soul is agitated by no pain at strife with the persuasions of pure beauty.

* * * * *

POPULAR SONGS OF TUSCANY

It is a noticeable fact about the popular songs of Tuscany that they are almost exclusively devoted to love. The Italians in general have no ballad literature resembling that of our Border or that of Spain. The tragic histories of their noble families, the great deeds of their national heroes, and the sufferings of their country during centuries of warfare, have left but few traces in their rustic poetry. It is true that some districts are less utterly barren than others in these records of the past. The Sicilian people's poetry, for example, preserves a memory of the famous Vespers; and one or two terrible stories of domestic tragedy, like the tale of Rosmunda in 'La Donna Lombarda,' the romance of the Baronessa di Carini, and the so-called Caso di Sciacca, may still be heard upon the lips of the people. But these exceptions are insignificant in comparison with the vast mass of songs which deal with love; and I cannot find that Tuscany, where the language of this minstrelsy is purest, and where the artistic instincts of the race are strongest, has anything at all approaching to our ballads.[21] Though the Tuscan contadini are always singing, it rarely happens that

The plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago.

On the contrary, we may be sure, when we hear their voices ringing through the olive-groves or macchi, that they are chanting

Some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day,—
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again;

or else, since their melodies are by no means uniformly sad, some ditty of the joyousness of springtime or the ecstasy of love.



Page 169

This defect of anything corresponding to our ballads of 'Chevy Chase,' or 'Sir Patrick Spens,' or 'Gil Morrice,' in a poetry which is still so vital with the life of past centuries, is all the more remarkable because Italian history is distinguished above that of other nations by tragic episodes peculiarly suited to poetic treatment. Many of these received commemoration in the fourteenth century from Dante; others were embodied in the *novelle* of Boccaccio and Cinthio and Bandello, whence they passed into the dramas of Shakspeare, Webster, Ford, and their contemporaries. But scarcely an echo can be traced through all the volumes of the recently collected popular songs. We must seek for an explanation of this fact partly in the conditions of Italian life, and partly in the nature of the Italian imagination. Nowhere in Italy do we observe that intimate connection between the people at large and the great nobles which generates the sympathy of clanship. Politics in most parts of the peninsula fell at a very early period into the hands either of irresponsible princes, who ruled like despots, or else of burghers, who administered the state within the walls of their Palazzo Pubblico. The people remained passive spectators of contemporary history. The loyalty of subjects to their sovereign which animates the Spanish ballads, the loyalty of retainers to their chief which gives life to the tragic ballads of the Border, did not exist in Italy. Country-folk felt no interest in the doings of Visconti or Medici or Malatesti sufficient to arouse the enthusiasm of local bards or to call forth the celebration of their princely tragedies in verse. Amid the miseries of foreign wars and home oppression, it seemed better to demand from verse and song some mitigation of the woes of life, some expression of personal emotion, than to record the disasters which to us at a distance appear poetic in their grandeur.

These conditions of popular life, although unfavourable to the production of ballad poetry, would not, however, have been sufficient by themselves to check its growth, if the Italians had been strongly impelled to literature of this type by their nature. The real reason why their *Volkslieder* are amorous and personal is to be found in the quality of their imagination. The Italian genius is not creatively imaginative in the highest sense. The Italians have never, either in the ancient or the modern age, produced a great drama or a national epic, the 'Aeneid' and the 'Divine Comedy' being obviously of different species from the 'Iliad' or the 'Nibelungen Lied.' Modern Italians, again, are distinguished from the French, the Germans, and the English in being the conscious inheritors of an older, august, and strictly classical civilisation. The great memories of Rome weigh down their faculties of invention. It would also seem as though they shrank in their poetry from the representation of what is tragic and spirit-stirring. They incline

Page 170

to what is cheerful, brilliant, or pathetic. The dramatic element in human life, external to the personality of the poet, which exercised so strong a fascination over our ballad-bards and playwrights, has but little attraction for the Italian. When he sings, he seeks to express his own individual emotions—his love, his joy, his jealousy, his anger, his despair. The language which he uses is at the same time direct in its intensity, and hyperbolical in its display of fancy; but it lacks those imaginative touches which exalt the poetry of personal passion into a sublimer region. Again, the Italians are deficient in a sense of the supernatural. The wraiths that cannot rest because their love is still unsatisfied, the voices which cry by night over field and fell, the water-spirits and forest fairies, the second-sight of coming woes, the presentiment of death, the warnings and the charms and spells, which fill the popular poetry of all Northern nations, are absent in Italian songs. In the whole of Tigris's collection I only remember one mention of a ghost. It is not that the Italians are deficient in superstitions of all kinds. Every one has heard of their belief in the evil eye, for instance. But they do not connect this kind of fetichism with their poetry; and even their greatest poets, with the exception of Dante, have shown no capacity or no inclination for enhancing the imaginative effect of their creations by an appeal to the instinct of mysterious awe.

The truth is that the Italians as a race are distinguished as much by a firm grasp upon the practical realities of existence as by powerful emotions. They have but little of that dreamy *Schwaermerei* with which the people of the North are largely gifted. The true sphere of their genius is painting. What appeals to the imagination through the eyes, they have expressed far better than any other modern nation. But their poetry, like their music, is deficient in tragic sublimity and in the higher qualities of imaginative creation.

It may seem paradoxical to say this of the nation which produced Dante. But we must remember not to judge races by single and exceptional men of genius. Petrarch, the Troubadour of exquisite emotions, Boccaccio, who touches all the keys of life so lightly, Ariosto, with the smile of everlasting April on his lips, and Tasso, excellent alone when he confines himself to pathos or the picturesque, are no exceptions to what I have just said. Yet these poets pursued their art with conscious purpose. The tragic splendour of Greece, the majesty of Rome, were not unknown to them. Far more is it true that popular poetry in Italy, proceeding from the hearts of uncultivated peasants and expressing the national character in its simplicity, displays none of the stuff from which the greatest works of art in verse, epics and dramas, can be wrought. But within its own sphere of personal emotion, this popular poetry is exquisitely melodious, inexhaustibly rich, unique in modern literature for the direct expression which it has given to every shade of passion.



Page 171

Signor Tigri's collection,[22] to which I shall confine my attention in this paper, consists of eleven hundred and eighty-five *rispetti*, with the addition of four hundred and sixty-one *stornelli*. Rispetto, it may be said in passing, is the name commonly given throughout Italy to short poems, varying from six to twelve lines, constructed on the principle of the octave stanza. That is to say, the first part of the rispetto consists of four or six lines with alternate rhymes, while one or more couplets, called the *ripresa*, complete the poem.[23] The stornello, or ritournelle, never exceeds three lines, and owes its name to the return which it makes at the end of the last line to the rhyme given by the emphatic word of the first. Browning, in his poem of 'Fra Lippo Lippi,' has accustomed English ears to one common species of the stornello,[24] which sets out with the name of a flower, and rhymes with it, as thus:

Fior di narciso.
Prigionero d'amore mi son reso,
Nel rimirare il tuo leggiadro viso.

The divisions of those two sorts of songs, to which Tigri gives names like The Beauty of Women, The Beauty of Men, Falling in Love, Serenades, Happy Love, Unhappy Love, Parting, Absence, Letters, Return to Home, Anger and Jealousy, Promises, Entreaties and Reproaches, Indifference, Treachery and Abandonment, prove with what fulness the various phases of the tender passion are treated. Through the whole fifteen hundred the one theme of Love is never relinquished. Only two persons, 'I' and 'thou,' appear upon the scene; yet so fresh and so various are the moods of feeling, that one can read them from first to last without too much satiety.

To seek for the authors of these ditties would be useless. Some of them may be as old as the fourteenth century; others may have been made yesterday. Some are the native product of the Tuscan mountain villages, especially of the regions round Pistoja and Siena, where on the spurs of the Apennines the purest Italian is vernacular. Some, again, are importations from other provinces, especially from Sicily and Naples, caught up by the peasants of Tuscany and adapted to their taste and style; for nothing travels faster than a *Volkslied*. Born some morning in a noisy street of Naples, or on the solitary slopes of Radicofani, before the week is out, a hundred voices are repeating it. Waggoners and pedlars carry it across the hills to distant towns. It floats with the fishermen from bay to bay, and marches with the conscript to his barrack in a far-off province. Who was the first to give it shape and form? No one asks, and no one cares. A student well acquainted with the habits of the people in these matters says, 'If they knew the author of a ditty, they would not learn it, far less if they discovered that it was a scholar's.' If the cadence takes their ear, they consecrate the song at once by placing it upon the honoured list of 'ancient



Page 172

lays.' Passing from lip to lip and from district to district, it receives additions and alterations, and becomes the property of a score of provinces. Meanwhile the poet from whose soul it blossomed that first morning like a flower, remains contented with obscurity. The wind has carried from his lips the thistledown of song, and sown it on a hundred hills and meadows, far and wide. After such wise is the birth of all truly popular compositions. Who knows, for instance, the veritable author of many of those mighty German chorals which sprang into being at the period of the Reformation? The first inspiration was given, probably, to a single mind; but the melody, as it has reached us, is the product of a thousand. This accounts for the variations which in different dialects and districts the same song presents. Meanwhile, it is sometimes possible to trace the authorship of a ballad with marked local character to an improvisatore famous in his village, or to one of those professional rhymesters whom the country-folk employ in the composition of love-letters to their sweethearts at a distance.[25] Tommaseo, in the preface to his 'Canti Popolari,' mentions in particular a Beatrice di Pian degli Ontani, whose poetry was famous through the mountains of Pistoja; and Tigri records by name a little girl called Cherubina, who made *rispetti* by the dozen as she watched her sheep upon the hills. One of the songs in his collection (p. 181) contains a direct reference to the village letter-writer:—

Salutatemi, bella, lo scrivano;
Non lo conosco e non so chi si sia.
A me mi pare un poeta sovrano,
Tanto gli e sperto nella poesia.[26]

While I am writing thus about the production and dissemination of these love-songs, I cannot help remembering three days and nights which I once spent at sea between Genoa and Palermo, in the company of some conscripts who were going to join their regiment in Sicily. They were lads from the Milanese and Liguria, and they spent a great portion of their time in composing and singing poetry. One of them had a fine baritone voice; and when the sun had set, his comrades gathered round him and begged him to sing to them 'Con quella patetica tua voce.' Then followed hours of singing, the low monotonous melodies of his ditties harmonising wonderfully with the tranquillity of night, so clear and calm that the sky and all its stars were mirrored on the sea, through which we moved as if in a dream. Sometimes the songs provoked conversation, which, as is usual in Italy, turned mostly upon 'le bellezze delle donne.' I remember that once an animated discussion about the relative merits of blondes and brunettes nearly ended in a quarrel, when the youngest of the whole band, a boy of about seventeen, put a stop to the dispute by theatrically raising his eyes and arms to heaven and crying, 'Tu sei innamorato d' una grande Diana cacciatrice nera, ed io d' una bella Venere bionda.' Though they were but village lads, they supported their several opinions with arguments not unworthy of Firenzuola, and showed the greatest

delicacy of feeling in the treatment of a subject which could scarcely have failed to reveal any latent coarseness.



Page 173

The purity of all the Italian love-songs collected by Tigri is very remarkable.[27] Although the passion expressed in them is Oriental in its vehemence, not a word falls which could offend a virgin's ear. The one desire of lovers is lifelong union in marriage. The *damo*—for so a sweetheart is termed in Tuscany—trembles until he has gained the approval of his future mother-in-law, and forbids the girl he is courting to leave her house to talk to him at night:—

Dice che tu ti affacci alia finestra;
Ma non ti dice che tu vada fuora,
Perche, la notte, e cosa disonesta.

All the language of his love is respectful. *Signore*, or master of my soul, *madonna*, *anima mia*, *dolce mio ben*, *nobil persona*, are the terms of adoration with which he approaches his mistress. The elevation of feeling and perfect breeding which Manzoni has so well delineated in the loves of Renzo and Lucia are traditional among Italian country-folk. They are conscious that true gentleness is no matter of birth or fortune:—

E tu non mi lasciar per poverta,
Che poverta non guasta gentilezza.[28]

This in itself constitutes an important element of culture, and explains to some extent the high romantic qualities of their impassioned poetry. The beauty of their land reveals still more. 'O fortunatos nimium sua si bona norint!' Virgil's exclamation is as true now as it was when he sang the labours of Italian country-folk some nineteen centuries ago. To a traveller from the north there is a pathos even in the contrast between the country in which these children of a happier climate toil, and those bleak, winter-beaten fields where our own peasants pass their lives. The cold nights and warm days of Tuscan springtime are like a Swiss summer. They make rich pasture and a hardy race of men. Tracts of corn and oats and rye alternate with patches of flax in full flower, with meadows yellow with buttercups or pink with ragged robin; the young vines, running from bough to bough of elm and mulberry, are just coming into leaf. The poplars are fresh with bright green foliage. On the verge of this blooming plain stand ancient cities ringed with hills, some rising to snowy Apennines, some covered with white convents and sparkling with villas. Cypressess shoot, black and spirelike, amid grey clouds of olive-boughs upon the slopes; and above, where vegetation borders on the barren rock, are masses of ilex and arbutus interspersed with chestnut-trees not yet in leaf. Men and women are everywhere at work, ploughing with great white oxen, or tilling the soil with spades six feet in length—Sabellian ligones. The songs of nightingales among acacia-trees, and the sharp scream of swallows wheeling in air, mingle with the monotonous chant that always rises from the country-people at their toil. Here and there on points of vantage, where the hill-slopes sink into the plain, cluster white villages with flower-like campanili. It



Page 174

is there that the *veglia*, or evening rendezvous of lovers, the serenades and balls and feste, of which one hears so much in the popular minstrelsy, take place. Of course it would not be difficult to paint the darker shades of this picture. Autumn comes, when the *contadini* of Lucca and Siena and Pistoja go forth to work in the unwholesome marshes of the Maremma, or of Corsica and Sardinia. Dismal superstitions and hereditary hatreds cast their blight over a life externally so fair. The bad government of centuries has perverted in many ways the instincts of a people naturally mild and cheerful and peace-loving. But as far as nature can make men happy, these husbandmen are surely to be reckoned fortunate, and in their songs we find little to remind us of what is otherwise than sunny in their lot.

A translator of these *Volkslieder* has to contend with difficulties of no ordinary kind. The freshness of their phrases, the spontaneity of their sentiments, and the melody of their unstudied cadences, are inimitable. So again is the peculiar effect of their frequent transitions from the most fanciful imagery to the language of prose. No mere student can hope to rival, far less to reproduce, in a foreign tongue, the charm of verse which sprang untaught from the hearts of simple folk, which lives unwritten on the lips of lovers, and which should never be dissociated from singing.[29] There are, besides, peculiarities in the very structure of the popular *rispetto*. The constant repetition of the same phrase with slight variations, especially in the closing lines of the *ripresa* of the Tuscan *rispetto*, gives an antique force and flavour to these ditties, like that which we appreciate in our own ballads, but which may easily, in the translation, degenerate into weakness and insipidity. The Tuscan rhymester, again, allows himself the utmost licence. It is usual to find mere assonances like *bene* and *piacere*, *oro* and *volo*, *ala* and *alata*, in the place of rhymes; while such remote resemblances of sound as *colli* and *poggi*, *lascia* and *piazza*, are far from uncommon. To match these rhymes by joining 'home' and 'alone,' 'time' and 'shine,' &c, would of course be a matter of no difficulty; but it has seemed to me on the whole best to preserve, with some exceptions, such accuracy as the English ear requires. I fear, however, that, after all, these wild-flowers of song, transplanted to another climate and placed in a hothouse, will appear but pale and hectic by the side of their robust brethren of the Tuscan hills.

In the following serenade many of the peculiarities which I have just noticed occur. I have also adhered to the irregularity of rhyme which may be usually observed about the middle of the poem (p. 103):—

Sleeping or waking, thou sweet face,
Lift up thy fair and tender brow:
List to thy love in this still place;
He calls thee to thy window now:
But bids thee not the house to quit,
Since in the night this were not meet.



Come to thy window, stay within;
I stand without, and sing and sing:
Come to thy window, stay at home;
I stand without, and make my moan.



Page 175

Here is a serenade of a more impassioned character (p. 99):—

I come to visit thee, my beauteous queen,
Thee and the house where thou art harboured:
All the long way upon my knees, my queen,
I kiss the earth where'er thy footsteps tread.
I kiss the earth, and gaze upon the wall,
Whereby thou goest, maid imperial!
I kiss the earth, and gaze upon the house,
Whereby thou farest, queen most beauteous!

In the next the lover, who has passed the whole night beneath his sweetheart's window, takes leave at the break of day. The feeling of the half-hour before dawn, when the sound of bells rises to meet the growing light, and both form a prelude to the glare and noise of day, is expressed with much unconscious poetry (p. 105):—

I see the dawn e'en now begin to peer:
Therefore I take my leave, and cease to sing,
See how the windows open far and near,
And hear the bells of morning, how they ring!
Through heaven and earth the sounds of ringing swell;
Therefore, bright jasmine flower, sweet maid, farewell!
Through heaven and Rome the sound of ringing goes;
Farewell, bright jasmine flower, sweet maiden rose!
The next is more quaint (p. 99):—

I come by night, I come, my soul aflame;
I come in this fair hour of your sweet sleep;
And should I wake you up, it were a shame.
I cannot sleep, and lo! I break your sleep.
To wake you were a shame from your deep rest;
Love never sleeps, nor they whom Love hath blest.

A very great many rispetti are simple panegyrics of the beloved, to find similitude for whose beauty heaven and earth are ransacked. The compliment of the first line in the following song is perfect (p. 23):—

Beauty was born with you, fair maid:
The sun and moon inclined to you;
On you the snow her whiteness laid
The rose her rich and radiant hue:
Saint Magdalen her hair unbound,
And Cupid taught you how to wound—



How to wound hearts Dan Cupid taught:
Your beauty drives me love-distraught.

The lady in the next was December's child (p. 25):—

O beauty, born in winter's night,
Born in the month of spotless snow:
Your face is like a rose so bright;
Your mother may be proud of you!
She may be proud, lady of love,
Such sunlight shines her house above:
She may be proud, lady of heaven,
Such sunlight to her home is given.

The sea wind is the source of beauty to another (p. 16):—

Nay, marvel not you are so fair;
For you beside the sea were born:
The sea-waves keep you fresh and fair,
Like roses on their leafy thorn.
If roses grow on the rose-bush,
Your roses through midwinter blush;
If roses bloom on the rose-bed,
Your face can show both white and red.

The eyes of a fourth are compared, after quite a new and original fashion, to stars (p. 210):—



Page 176

The moon hath risen her plaint to lay
Before the face of Love Divine.
Saying in heaven she will not stay,
Since you have stolen what made her shine:
Aloud she wails with sorrow wan,—
She told her stars and two are gone:
They are not there; you have them now;
They are the eyes in your bright brow.

Nor are girls less ready to praise their lovers, but that they do not dwell so much on physical perfection. Here is a pleasant greeting (p. 124):—

O welcome, welcome, lily white,
Thou fairest youth of all the valley!
When I'm with you, my soul is light;
I chase away dull melancholy.
I chase all sadness from my heart:
Then welcome, dearest that thou art!
I chase all sadness from my side:
Then welcome, O my love, my pride!
I chase all sadness far away:
Then welcome, welcome, love, to-day!

The image of a lily is very prettily treated in the next (p 79):—

I planted a lily yestreen at my window;
I set it yestreen, and to-day it sprang up:
When I opened the latch and leaned out of my window,
It shadowed my face with its beautiful cup.
O lily, my lily, how tall you are grown!
Remember how dearly I loved you, my own.
O lily, my lily, you'll grow to the sky!
Remember I love you for ever and aye.

The same thought of love growing like a flower receives another turn (p. 69):—

On yonder hill I saw a flower;
And, could it thence be hither borne,
I'd plant it here within my bower,
And water it both eve and morn.
Small water wants the stem so straight;
'Tis a love-lily stout as fate.
Small water wants the root so strong:
'Tis a love-lily lasting long.



Small water wants the flower so sheen:
'Tis a love-lily ever green.

Envious tongues have told a girl that her complexion is not good. She replies, with imagery like that of Virgil's 'Alba ligustra cadunt, vaccinia nigra leguntur' (p. 31):—

Think it no grief that I am brown,
For all brunettes are born to reign:
White is the snow, yet trodden down;
Black pepper kings need not disdain:
White snow lies mounded on the vales
Black pepper's weighed in brazen scales.

Another song runs on the same subject (p. 38):—

The whole world tells me that I'm brown,
The brown earth gives us goodly corn:
The clove-pink too, however brown,
Yet proudly in the hand 'tis borne.
They say my love is black, but he
Shines like an angel-form to me:
They say my love is dark as night;
To me he seems a shape of light.

The freshness of the following spring song recalls the ballads of the Val de Vire in Normandy (p. 85):—



Page 177

It was the morning of the first of May,
Into the close I went to pluck a flower;
And there I found a bird of woodland gay,
Who whiled with songs of love the silent hour.
O bird, who fliest from fair Florence, how
Dear love begins, I prithee teach me now!—
Love it begins with music and with song,
And ends with sorrow and with sighs ere long.

Love at first sight is described (p. 79):—

The very moment that we met,
That moment love began to beat:
One glance of love we gave, and swore
Never to part for evermore;
We swore together, sighing deep,
Never to part till Death's long sleep.

Here too is a memory of the first days of love (p. 79):—

If I remember, it was May
When love began between us two:
The roses in the close were gay,
The cherries blackened on the bough.
O cherries black and pears so green!
Of maidens fair you are the queen.
Fruit of black cherry and sweet pear!
Of sweethearts you're the queen, I swear.

The troth is plighted with such promises as these (p. 230):—

Or ere I leave you, love divine,
Dead tongues shall stir and utter speech,
And running rivers flow with wine,
And fishes swim upon the beach;
Or ere I leave or shun you, these
Lemons shall grow on orange-trees.

The girl confesses her love after this fashion (p. 86):—

Passing across the billowy sea,
I let, alas, my poor heart fall;
I bade the sailors bring it me;
They said they had not seen it fall.



I asked the sailors, one and two;
They said that I had given it you.
I asked the sailors, two and three;
They said that I had given it thee.

It is not uncommon to speak of love as a sea. Here is a curious play upon this image (p. 227):—

Ho, Cupid! Sailor Cupid, ho!
Lend me awhile that bark of thine;
For on the billows I will go,
To find my love who once was mine:
And if I find her, she shall wear
A chain around her neck so fair,
Around her neck a glittering bond,
Four stars, a lily, a diamond.

It is also possible that the same thought may occur in the second line of the next ditty (p. 120):—

Beneath the earth I'll make a way
To pass the sea and come to you.
People will think I'm gone away;
But, dear, I shall be seeing you.
People will say that I am dead;
But we'll pluck roses white and red:
People will think I'm lost for aye;
But we'll pluck roses, you and I.

All the little daily incidents are beautified by love. Here is a lover who thanks the mason for making his window so close upon the road that he can see his sweetheart as she passes (p. 118):—

Blest be the mason's hand who built
This house of mine by the roadside,
And made my window low and wide
For me to watch my love go by.
And if I knew when she went by,
My window should be fairly gilt;
And if I knew what time she went,
My window should be flower-besprent.



Page 178

Here is a conceit which reminds one of the pretty epistle of Philostratus, in which the footsteps of the beloved are called [*Greek: erereismena philempta*] (p. 117):—

What time I see you passing by;
I sit and count the steps you take:
You take the steps; I sit and sigh:
Step after step, my sighs awake.
Tell me, dear love, which more abound,
My sighs or your steps on the ground?
Tell me, dear love, which are the most,
Your light steps or the sighs they cost?

A girl complains that she cannot see her lover's house (p. 117):-

I lean upon the lattice, and look forth
To see the house where my lover dwells.
There grows an envious tree that spoils my mirth:
Cursed be the man who set it on these hills!
But when those jealous boughs are all unclad,
I then shall see the cottage of my lad:
When once that tree is rooted from the hills,
I'll see the house wherein my lover dwells.

In the same mood a girl who has just parted from her sweetheart is angry with the hill beyond which he is travelling (p. 167):—

I see and see, yet see not what I would:
I see the leaves atremble on the tree:
I saw my love where on the hill he stood,
Yet see him not drop downward to the lea.
O traitor hill, what will you do?
I ask him, live or dead, from you.
O traitor hill, what shall it be?
I ask him, live or dead, from thee.

All the songs of love in absence are very quaint. Here is one which calls our nursery rhymes to mind (p. 119):—

I would I were a bird so free,
That I had wings to fly away:
Unto that window I would flee,
Where stands my love and grinds all day.
Grind, miller, grind; the water's deep!
I cannot grind; love makes me weep.



Grind, miller, grind; the waters flow!
I cannot grind; love wastes me so.

The next begins after the same fashion, but breaks into a very shower of benedictions (p. 118):—

Would God I were a swallow free,
That I had wings to fly away:
Upon the miller's door I'd be,
Where stands my love and grinds all day:
Upon the door, upon the sill,
Where stays my love;—God bless him still!
God bless my love, and blessed be
His house, and bless my house for me;
Yea, blest be both, and ever blest
My lover's house, and all the rest!

The girl alone at home in her garden sees a wood-dove flying by and calls to it (p. 179):
—

O dove, who fliest far to yonder hill,
Dear dove, who in the rock hast made thy nest,
Let me a feather from thy pinion pull,
For I will write to him who loves me best.
And when I've written it and made it clear,
I'll give thee back thy feather, dove so dear:
And when I've written it and sealed it, then
I'll give thee back thy feather love-laden.



Page 179

A swallow is asked to lend the same kind service (p. 179):—

O swallow, swallow, flying through the air,
Turn, turn, I prithee, from thy flight above!
Give me one feather from thy wing so fair,
For I will write a letter to my love.
When I have written it and made it clear,
I'll give thee back thy feather, swallow dear;
When I have written it on paper white,
I'll make, I swear, thy missing feather right;
When once 'tis written on fair leaves of gold,
I'll give thee back thy wing and flight so bold.

Long before Tennyson's song in the 'Princess,' it would seem that swallows were favourite messengers of love. In the next song which I translate, the repetition of one thought with delicate variation is full of character (p. 178):—

O swallow, flying over hill and plain,
If thou shouldst find my love, oh bid him come!
And tell him, on these mountains I remain
Even as a lamb who cannot find her home:
And tell him, I am left all, all alone,
Even as a tree whose flowers are overblown:
And tell him, I am left without a mate
Even as a tree whose boughs are desolate:
And tell him, I am left uncomforted
Even as the grass upon the meadows dead.

The following is spoken by a girl who has been watching the lads of the village returning from their autumn service in the plain, and whose damo comes the last of all (p. 240):

—
O dear my love, you come too late!
What found you by the way to do?
I saw your comrades pass the gate,
But yet not you, dear heart, not you!
If but a little more you'd stayed,
With sighs you would have found me dead;
If but a while you'd keep me crying,
With sighs you would have found me dying.

The *amantium irae* find a place too in these rustic ditties. A girl explains to her sweetheart (p. 240):—



'Twas told me and vouchsafed for true,
Your kin are wroth as wroth can be;
For loving me they swear at you,
They swear at you because of me;
Your father, mother, all your folk,
Because you love me, chafe and choke!
Then set your kith and kin at ease;
Set them at ease and let me die:
Set the whole clan of them at ease;
Set them at ease and see me die!

Another suspects that her damo has paid his suit to a rival (p. 200):—

On Sunday morning well I knew
Where gaily dressed you turned your feet;
And there were many saw it too,
And came to tell me through the street:
And when they spoke, I smiled, ah me!
But in my room wept privately;
And when they spoke, I sang for pride,
But in my room alone I sighed.

Then come reconciliations (p. 223):—

Let us make peace, my love, my bliss!
For cruel strife can last no more.
If you say nay, yet I say yes:
'Twixt me and you there is no war.
Princes and mighty lords make peace;
And so may lovers twain, I wis:
Princes and soldiers sign a truce;
And so may two sweethearts like us:
Princes and potentates agree;
And so may friends like you and me.



Page 180

There is much character about the following, which is spoken by the damo (p. 223):—

As yonder mountain height I trod,
I chanced to think of your dear name;
I knelt with clasped hands on the sod,
And thought of my neglect with shame:
I knelt upon the stone, and swore
Our love should bloom as heretofore.

Sometimes the language of affection takes a more imaginative tone, as in the following (p. 232):—

Dearest, what time you mount to heaven above,
I'll meet you holding in my hand my heart:
You to your breast shall clasp me full of love,
And I will lead you to our Lord apart.

Our Lord, when he our love so true hath known,
Shall make of our two hearts one heart alone;
One heart shall make of our two hearts, to rest
In heaven amid the splendours of the blest.

This was the woman's. Here is the man's (p. 113):—

If I were master of all loveliness,
I'd make thee still more lovely than thou art:
If I were master of all wealthiness,
Much gold and silver should be thine, sweetheart:
If I were master of the house of hell,
I'd bar the brazen gates in thy sweet face;
Or ruled the place where purging spirits dwell,
I'd free thee from that punishment apace.
Were I in paradise and thou shouldst come,
I'd stand aside, my love, to make thee room;
Were I in paradise, well seated there,
I'd quit my place to give it thee, my fair!

Sometimes, but very rarely, weird images are sought to clothe passion, as in the following (p. 136):—

Down into hell I went and thence returned:
Ah me! alas! the people that were there!
I found a room where many candles burned,
And saw within my love that languished there.



When as she saw me, she was glad of cheer,
And at the last she said: Sweet soul of mine;
Dost thou recall the time long past, so dear,
When thou didst say to me, Sweet soul of mine?
Now kiss me on the mouth, my dearest, here;
Kiss me that I for once may cease to pine!
So sweet, ah me, is thy dear mouth, so dear,
That of thy mercy prithee sweeten mine!
Now, love, that thou hast kissed me, now, I say,
Look not to leave this place again for aye.

Or again in this (p. 232):—

Methinks I hear, I hear a voice that cries:
Beyond the hill it floats upon the air.
It is my lover come to bid me rise,
If I am fain forthwith toward heaven to fare.
But I have answered him, and said him No!
I've given my paradise, my heaven, for you:
Till we together go to paradise,
I'll stay on earth and love your beauteous eyes.

But it is not with such remote and eerie thoughts that the rustic muse of Italy can deal successfully. Far better is the following half-playful description of love-sadness (p. 71):



Page 181

Ah me, alas! who know not how to sigh!
Of sighs I now full well have learned the art:
Sighing at table when to eat I try,
Sighing within my little room apart,
Sighing when jests and laughter round me fly,
Sighing with her and her who know my heart:
I sigh at first, and then I go on sighing;
'Tis for your eyes that I am ever sighing:
I sigh at first, and sigh the whole year through;
And 'tis your eyes that keep me sighing so.

The next two rispetti, delicious in their naivete, might seem to have been extracted from the libretto of an opera, but that they lack the sympathising chorus, who should have stood at hand, ready to chime in with 'he,' 'she,' and 'they,' to the 'I,' 'you,' and 'we' of the lovers (p. 123):—

Ah, when will dawn that glorious day
When you will softly mount my stair?
My kin shall bring you on the way;
I shall be first to greet you there.
Ah, when will dawn that day of bliss
When we before the priest say Yes?

Ah, when will dawn that blissful day
When I shall softly mount your stair,
Your brothers meet me on the way,
And one by one I greet them there?
When comes the day, my staff, my strength,
To call your mother mine at length?
When will the day come, love of mine,
I shall be yours and you be mine?

Hitherto the songs have told only of happy love, or of love returned. Some of the best, however, are unhappy. Here is one, for instance, steeped in gloom (p. 142):—

They have this custom in fair Naples town;
They never mourn a man when he is dead:
The mother weeps when she has reared a son
To be a serf and slave by love misled;
The mother weeps when she a son hath born
To be the serf and slave of galley scorn;
The mother weeps when she a son gives suck
To be the serf and slave of city luck.



The following contains a fine wild image, wrought out with strange passion in detail (p. 300):—

I'll spread a table brave for revelry,
And to the feast will bid sad lovers all.
For meat I'll give them my heart's misery;
For drink I'll give these briny tears that fall.
Sorrows and sighs shall be the varletry,
To serve the lovers at this festival:
The table shall be death, black death profound;
Weep, stones, and utter sighs, ye walls around!
The table shall be death, yea, sacred death;
Weep, stones, and sigh as one that sorroweth!

Nor is the next a whit less in the vein of mad Jeronimo (p. 304):—

High up, high up, a house I'll rear,
High up, high up, on yonder height;
At every window set a snare,
With treason, to betray the night;
With treason, to betray the stars,
Since I'm betrayed by my false feres;
With treason, to betray the day,
Since Love betrayed me, well away!



Page 182

The vengeance of an Italian reveals itself in the energetic song which I quote next (p. 303):—

I have a sword; 'twould cut a brazen bell,
Tough steel 'twould cut, if there were any need:
I've had it tempered in the streams of hell
By masters mighty in the mystic rede:
I've had it tempered by the light of stars;
Then let him come whose skin is stout as Mars;
I've had it tempered to a trenchant blade;
Then let him come who stole from me my maid.

More mild, but brimful of the bitterness of a soul to whom the whole world has become but ashes in the death of love, is the following lament (p. 143):—

Call me the lovely Golden Locks no more,
But call me Sad Maid of the golden hair.
If there be wretched women, sure I think
I too may rank among the most forlorn.
I fling a palm into the sea; 'twill sink:
Others throw lead, and it is lightly borne.
What have I done, dear Lord, the world to cross?
Gold in my hand forthwith is turned to dross.
How have I made, dear Lord, dame Fortune wroth?
Gold in my hand forthwith is turned to froth.
What have I done, dear Lord, to fret the folk?
Gold in my hand forthwith is turned to smoke.

Here is pathos (p. 172):—

The wood-dove who hath lost her mate,
She lives a dolorous life, I ween;
She seeks a stream and bathes in it,
And drinks that water foul and green:
With other birds she will not mate,
Nor haunt, I wis, the flowery treen;
She bathes her wings and strikes her breast;
Her mate is lost: oh, sore unrest!

And here is fanciful despair (p. 168):—

I'll build a house of sobs and sighs,
With tears the lime I'll slack;
And there I'll dwell with weeping eyes



Until my love come back:
And there I'll stay with eyes that burn
Until I see my love return.

The house of love has been deserted, and the lover comes to moan beneath its silent eaves (p. 171):—

Dark house and window desolate!
Where is the sun which shone so fair?
'Twas here we danced and laughed at fate:
Now the stones weep; I see them there.
They weep, and feel a grievous chill:
Dark house and widowed window-sill!

And what can be more piteous than this prayer? (p. 809):—

Love, if you love me, delve a tomb,
And lay me there the earth beneath;
After a year, come see my bones,
And make them dice to play therewith.
But when you're tired of that game,
Then throw those dice into the flame;
But when you're tired of gaming free,
Then throw those dice into the sea.

The simpler expression of sorrow to the death is, as usual, more impressive. A girl speaks thus within sight of the grave (p. 808):—



Page 183

Yes, I shall die: what wilt thou gain?
The cross before my bier will go;
And thou wilt hear the bells complain,
The *Misereres* loud and low.
Midmost the church thou'lt see me lie
With folded hands and frozen eye;
Then say at last, I do repent!—
Nought else remains when fires are spent.

Here is a rustic Oenone (p. 307):—

Fell death, that fliest fraught with woe!
Thy gloomy snares the world ensphere:
Where no man calls, thou lov'st to go;
But when we call, thou wilt not hear.
Fell death, false death of treachery,
Thou makest all content but me.

Another is less reproachful, but scarcely less sad (p. 308):—

Strew me with blossoms when I die,
Nor lay me 'neath the earth below;
Beyond those walls, there let me lie,
Where oftentimes we used to go.
There lay me to the wind and rain;
Dying for you, I feel no pain:
There lay me to the sun above;
Dying for you, I die of love.

Yet another of these pitiful love-wailings displays much poetry of expression (p. 271):—

I dug the sea, and delved the barren sand:
I wrote with dust and gave it to the wind:
Of melting snow, false Love, was made thy band,
Which suddenly the day's bright beams unbind.
Now am I ware, and know my own mistake—
How false are all the promises you make;
Now am I ware, and know the fact, ah me!
That who confides in you, deceived will be.

It would scarcely be well to pause upon these very doleful ditties. Take, then, the following little serenade, in which the lover on his way to visit his mistress has unconsciously fallen on the same thought as Bion (p. 85):—



Yestreen I went my love to greet,
By yonder village path below:
Night in a coppice found my feet;
I called the moon her light to show—
O moon, who needs no flame to fire thy face,
Look forth and lend me light a little space!

Enough has been quoted to illustrate the character of the Tuscan popular poetry. These village *rispetti* bear the same relation to the *canzoniere* of Petrarch as the 'savage drupe' to the 'suave plum.' They are, as it were, the wild stock of that highly artificial flower of art. Herein lies, perhaps, their chief importance. As in our ballad literature we may discern the stuff of the Elizabethan drama undeveloped, so in the Tuscan people's songs we can trace the crude form of that poetic instinct which produced the sonnets to Laura. It is also very probable that some such rustic minstrelsy preceded the *Idylls* of Theocritus and the *Bucolics* of Virgil; for coincidences of thought and imagery, which can scarcely be referred to any conscious study of the ancients, are not a few. Popular poetry has this great value for the student of literature: it enables him to trace those forms of fancy and of feeling which are native to the people, and which must ultimately determine the character of national art, however much that may be modified by culture.



Page 184

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POPULAR ITALIAN POETRY OF THE RENAISSANCE

The semi-popular poetry of the Italians in the fifteenth century formed an important branch of their national literature, and flourished independently of the courtly and scholastic studies which gave a special character to the golden age of the revival. While the latter tended to separate the people from the cultivated classes, the former established a new link of connection between them, different indeed from that which existed when smiths and carters repeated the Canzoni of Dante by heart in the fourteenth century, but still sufficiently real to exercise a weighty influence over the national development. Scholars like Angelo Poliziano, princes like Lorenzo de' Medici, men of letters like Feo Belcari and Benivieni, borrowed from the people forms of poetry, which they handled with refined taste, and appropriated to the uses of polite literature. The most important of these forms, native to the people but assimilated by the learned classes, were the Miracle Play or 'Sacra Rappresentazione;' the 'Ballata' or lyric to be sung while dancing; the 'Canto Carnascialesco' or Carnival Chorus; the 'Rispetto' or short love-ditty; the 'Lauda' or hymn; the 'Maggio' or May-song; and the 'Madrigale' or little part-song.

At Florence, where even under the despotism of the Medici a show of republican life still lingered, all classes joined in the amusements of carnival and spring time; and this poetry of the dance, the pageant, and the villa flourished side by side with the more serious efforts of the humanistic muse. It is not my purpose in this place to inquire into the origins of each lyrical type, to discuss the alterations they may have undergone at the hands of educated versifiers, or to define their several characteristics; but only to offer translations of such as seem to me best suited to represent the genius of the people and the age.

In the composition of the poetry in question, Angelo Poliziano was indubitably the most successful. This giant of learning, who filled the lecture-rooms of Florence with students of all nations, and whose critical and rhetorical labours marked an epoch in the history of scholarship, was by temperament a poet, and a poet of the people. Nothing was easier for him than to throw aside his professor's mantle, and to improvise 'Ballate' for the girls to sing as they danced their 'Carola' upon the Piazza di Santa Trinita in summer evenings. The peculiarity of this lyric is that it starts with a couplet, which also serves as refrain, supplying the rhyme to each successive stanza. The stanza itself is identical with our rime royal, if we count the couplet in the place of the seventh line. The form is in itself so graceful and is so beautifully treated by Poliziano that I cannot content myself with fewer than four of his *Ballate*.^[30] The first is written on the world-old theme of 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.'



Page 185

I went a roaming, maidens, one bright day,
In a green garden in mid month of May.

Violets and lilies grew on every side
Mid the green grass, and young flowers wonderful,
Golden and white and red and azure-eyed;
Toward which I stretched my hands, eager to pull
Plenty to make my fair curls beautiful,
To crown my rippling curls with garlands gay.

I went a roaming, maidens, one bright day,
In a green garden in mid month of May.

But when my lap was full of flowers I spied
Roses at last, roses of every hue;
Therefore I ran to pluck their ruddy pride,
Because their perfume was so sweet and true
That all my soul went forth with pleasure new,
With yearning and desire too soft to say.

I went a roaming, maidens, one bright day,
In a green garden in mid month of May.

I gazed and gazed. Hard task it were to tell
How lovely were the roses in that hour:
One was but peeping from her verdant shell,
And some were faded, some were scarce in flower:
Then Love said: Go, pluck from the blooming bower
Those that thou seest ripe upon the spray.

I went a roaming, maidens, one bright day,
In a green garden in mid month of May.

For when the full rose quits her tender sheath,
When she is sweetest and most fair to see,
Then is the time to place her in thy wreath,
Before her beauty and her freshness flee.
Gather ye therefore roses with great glee,
Sweet girls, or ere their perfume pass away.

I went a roaming, maidens, one bright day,
In a green garden in mid month of May.



The next Ballata is less simple, but is composed with the same intention. It may here be parenthetically mentioned that the courtly poet, when he applied himself to this species of composition, invented a certain rusticity of incident, scarcely in keeping with the spirit of his art. It was in fact a conventional feature of this species of verse that the scene should be laid in the country, where the burgher, on a visit to his villa, is supposed to meet with a rustic beauty who captivates his eyes and heart. Guido Cavalcanti, in his celebrated Ballata, 'In un boschetto trovai pastorella,' struck the keynote of this music, which, it may be reasonably conjectured, was imported into Italy through Provençal literature from the pastorals of Northern France. The lady so quaintly imaged by a bird in the following Ballata of Poliziano is supposed to have been Monna Ippolita Leoncina of Prato, white-throated, golden-haired, and dressed in crimson silk.

I found myself one day all, all alone,
For pastime in a field with blossoms strewn.

I do not think the world a field could show
With herbs of perfume so surpassing rare;
But when I passed beyond the green hedge-row,
A thousand flowers around me flourished fair,
White, pied and crimson, in the summer air;
Among the which I heard a sweet bird's tone.



Page 186

I found myself one day all, all alone,
For pastime in a field with blossoms strewn.

Her song it was so tender and so clear
That all the world listened with love; then I
With stealthy feet a-tiptoe drawing near,
Her golden head and golden wings could spy,
Her plumes that flashed like rubies 'neath the sky,
Her crystal beak and throat and bosom's zone.

I found myself one day all, all alone,
For pastime in a field with blossoms strewn.

Fain would I snare her, smit with mighty love;
But arrow-like she soared, and through the air
Fled to her nest upon the boughs above;
Wherefore to follow her is all my care,
For haply I might lure her by some snare
Forth from the woodland wild where she is flown.

I found myself one day all, all alone,
For pastime in a field with blossoms strewn.

Yea, I might spread some net or woven wile;
But since of singing she doth take such pleasure,
Without or other art or other guile
I seek to win her with a tuneful measure;
Therefore in singing spend I all my leisure,
To make by singing this sweet bird my own.

I found myself one day all, all alone,
For pastime in a field with blossoms strewn.

The same lady is more directly celebrated in the next Ballata, where Poliziano calls her by her name, Ippolita. I have taken the liberty of substituting Myrrha for this somewhat unmanageable word.

He who knows not what thing is Paradise,
Let him look fixedly on Myrrha's eyes.

From Myrrha's eyes there flieth, girt with fire,
An angel of our lord, a laughing boy,
Who lights in frozen hearts a flaming pyre,
And with such sweetness doth the soul destroy,



That while it dies, it murmurs forth its joy;
Oh blessed am I to dwell in Paradise!

He who knows not what thing is Paradise,
Let him look fixedly on Myrrha's eyes.

From Myrrha's eyes a virtue still doth move,
So swift and with so fierce and strong a flight,
That it is like the lightning of high Jove,
Riving of iron and adamant the might;
Nathless the wound doth carry such delight
That he who suffers dwells in Paradise.

He who knows not what thing is Paradise,
Let him look fixedly on Myrrha's eyes.

From Myrrha's eyes a lovely messenger
Of joy so grave, so virtuous, doth flee,
That all proud souls are bound to bend to her;
So sweet her countenance, it turns the key
Of hard hearts locked in cold security:
Forth flies the prisoned soul to Paradise.

He who knows not what thing is Paradise,
Let him look fixedly on Myrrha's eyes.

In Myrrha's eyes beauty doth make her throne,
And sweetly smile and sweetly speak her mind:
Such grace in her fair eyes a man hath known
As in the whole wide world he scarce may find:
Yet if she slay him with a glance too kind,
He lives again beneath her gazing eyes.



Page 187

He who knows not what thing is Paradise,
Let him look fixedly on Myrrha's eyes.

The fourth Ballata sets forth the fifteenth-century Italian code of love, the code of the Novelle, very different in its avowed laxity from the high ideal of the trecentisti poets.

I ask no pardon if I follow Love;
Since every gentle heart is thrall thereof.

From those who feel the fire I feel, what use
Is there in asking pardon? These are so
Gentle, kind-hearted, tender, piteous,
That they will have compassion, well I know.
From such as never felt that honeyed woe,
I seek no pardon: nought they know of Love.

I ask no pardon if I follow Love;
Since every gentle heart is thrall thereof.

Honour, pure love, and perfect gentleness,
Weighed in the scales of equity refined,
Are but one thing: beauty is nought or less,
Placed in a dame of proud and scornful mind.
Who can rebuke me then if I am kind
So far as honesty comports and Love?

I ask no pardon if I follow Love;
Since every gentle heart is thrall thereof.

Let him rebuke me whose hard heart of stone
Ne'er felt of Love the summer in his vein!
I pray to Love that who hath never known
Love's power, may ne'er be blessed with Love's great gain;
But he who serves our lord with might and main,
May dwell for ever in the fire of Love!

I ask no pardon if I follow Love;
Since every gentle heart is thrall thereof.

Let him rebuke me without cause who will;
For if he be not gentle, I fear nought:
My heart obedient to the same love still
Hath little heed of light words envy-fraught:



So long as life remains, it is my thought
To keep the laws of this so gentle Love.

I ask no pardon if I follow Love;
Since every gentle heart is thrall thereof.

This Ballata is put into a woman's mouth. Another, ascribed to Lorenzo de' Medici, expresses the sadness of a man who has lost the favour of his lady. It illustrates the well-known use of the word *Signore* for mistress in Florentine poetry.

How can I sing light-souled and fancy-free,
When my loved lord no longer smiles on me?

Dances and songs and merry wakes I leave
To lovers fair, more fortunate and gay;
Since to my heart so many sorrows cleave
That only doleful tears are mine for aye:
Who hath heart's ease, may carol, dance, and play
While I am fain to weep continually.

How can I sing light-souled and fancy-free,
When my loved lord no longer smiles on me?

I too had heart's ease once, for so Love willed,
When my lord loved me with love strong and great:
But envious fortune my life's music stilled,
And turned to sadness all my gleeful state.
Ah me! Death surely were less desolate
Than thus to live and love-neglected be!



Page 188

How can I sing light-souled and fancy-free,
When my loved lord no longer smiles on me?

One only comfort soothes my heart's despair,
And mid this sorrow lends my soul some cheer;
Unto my lord I ever yielded fair
Service of faith untainted pure and clear;
If then I die thus guiltless, on my bier
It may be she will shed one tear for me.

How can I sing light-souled and fancy-free,
When my loved lord no longer smiles on me?

The Florentine *Rispetto* was written for the most part in octave stanzas, detached or continuous. The octave stanza in Italian literature was an emphatically popular form; and it is still largely used in many parts of the peninsula for the lyrical expression of emotion.[31] Poliziano did no more than treat it with his own facility, sacrificing the unstudied raciness of his popular models to literary elegance.

Here are a few of these detached stanzas or *Rispetti Spicciolati*:—

Upon that day when first I saw thy face,
I vowed with loyal love to worship thee.
Move, and I move; stay, and I keep my place:
Whate'er thou dost, will I do equally.

In joy of thine I find most perfect grace,
And in thy sadness dwells my misery:
Laugh, and I laugh; weep, and I too will weep.
Thus Love commands, whose laws I loving keep.

Nay, be not over-proud of thy great grace,
Lady! for brief time is thy thief and mine.
White will he turn those golden curls, that lace
Thy forehead and thy neck so marble-fine.
Lo! while the flower still flourisheth apace,
Pluck it: for beauty but awhile doth shine.
Fair is the rose at dawn; but long ere night
Her freshness fades, her pride hath vanished quite.

Fire, fire! Ho, water! for my heart's afire!
Ho, neighbours! help me, or by God I die!
See, with his standard, that great lord, Desire!
He sets my heart aflame: in vain I cry.



Too late, alas! The flames mount high and higher.
Alack, good friends! I faint, I fail, I die.
Ho! water, neighbours mine! no more delay I
My heart's a cinder if you do but stay.

Lo, may I prove to Christ a renegade,
And, dog-like, die in pagan Barbary;
Nor may God's mercy on my soul be laid,
If ere for aught I shall abandon thee:
Before all-seeing God this prayer be made—
When I desert thee, may death feed on me:
Now if thy hard heart scorn these vows, be sure
That without faith none may abide secure.

I ask not, Love, for any other pain
To make thy cruel foe and mine repent,
Only that thou shouldst yield her to the strain
Of these my arms, alone, for chastisement;
Then would I clasp her so with might and main,
That she should learn to pity and relent,
And, in revenge for scorn and proud despite,
A thousand times I'd kiss her forehead white.



Page 189

Not always do fierce tempests vex the sea,
Nor always clinging clouds offend the sky;
Cold snows before the sunbeams haste to flee,
Disclosing flowers that 'neath their whiteness lie;
The saints each one doth wait his day to see,
And time makes all things change; so, therefore, I
Ween that 'tis wise to wait my turn, and say,
That who subdues himself, deserves to sway.

It will be observed that the tone of these poems is not passionate nor elevated. Love, as understood in Florence of the fifteenth century, was neither; nor was Poliziano the man to have revived Platonic mysteries or chivalrous enthusiasms. When the octave stanzas, written with this amorous intention, were strung together into a continuous poem, this form of verse took the title of *Rispetto Gontinuato*. In the collection of Poliziano's poems there are several examples of the long *Rispetto*, carelessly enough composed, as may be gathered from the recurrence of the same stanzas in several poems. All repeat the old arguments, the old enticements to a less than lawful love. The one which I have chosen for translation, styled *Serenata ovvero Lettera in Istrombotti*, might be selected as an epitome of Florentine convention in the matter of love-making.

O thou of fairest fairs the first and queen,
Most courteous, kind, and honourable dame,
Thine ear unto thy servant's singing lean,
Who loves thee more than health, or wealth, or fame;
For thou his shining planet still hast been,
And day and night he calls on thy fair name:
First wishing thee all good the world can give,
Next praying in thy gentle thoughts to live.

He humbly prayeth that thou shouldst be kind
To think upon his pure and perfect faith,
And that such mercy in thy heart and mind
Should reign, as so much beauty argueth:
A thousand, thousand hints, or he were blind,
Of thy great courtesy he reckoneth:
Wherefore thy loyal subject now doth sue
Such guerdon only as shall prove them true.

He knows himself unmeet for love from thee,
Unmeet for merely gazing on thine eyes;
Seeing thy comely squires so plenteous be,
That there is none but 'neath thy beauty sighs:
Yet since thou seekest fame and bravery,



Nor carest aught for gauds that others prize,
And since he strives to honour thee alway,
He still hath hope to gain thy heart one day.

Virtue that dwells untold, unknown, unseen,
Still findeth none to love or value it;
Wherefore his faith, that hath so perfect been,
Not being known, can profit him no whit:
He would find pity in thine eyes, I ween,
If thou shouldst deign to make some proof of it;
The rest may flatter, gape, and stand agaze;
Him only faith above the crowd doth raise.



Page 190

Suppose that he might meet thee once alone,
Face unto face, without or jealousy,
Or doubt or fear from false misgiving grown,
And tell his tale of grievous pain to thee,
Sure from thy breast he'd draw full many a moan.
And make thy fair eyes weep right plenteously:
Yea, if he had but skill his heart to show,
He scarce could fail to win thee by its woe.

Now art thou in thy beauty's blooming hour;
Thy youth is yet in pure perfection's prime:
Make it thy pride to yield thy fragile flower,
Or look to find it paled by envious time:
For none to stay the flight of years hath power,
And who culls roses caught by frosty rime?
Give therefore to thy lover, give, for they
Too late repent who act not while they may.

Time flies: and lo! thou let'st it idly fly:
There is not in the world a thing more dear;
And if thou wait to see sweet May pass by,
Where find'st thou roses in the later year?
He never can, who lets occasion die:
Now that thou canst, stay not for doubt or fear;
But by the forelock take the flying hour,
Ere change begins, and clouds above thee lower.

Too long 'twixt yea and nay he hath been wrung;
Whether he sleep or wake he little knows,
Or free or in the bands of bondage strung:
Nay, lady, strike, and let thy lover loose!
What joy hast thou to keep a captive hung?
Kill him at once, or cut the cruel noose:
No more, I prithee, stay; but take thy part:
Either relax the bow, or speed the dart.

Thou feedest him on words and windiness,
On smiles, and signs, and bladders light as air;
Saying, thou fain wouldst comfort his distress,
But dar'st not, canst not: nay, dear lady fair,
All things are possible beneath the stress
Of will, that flames above the soul's despair!
Dally no longer: up, set to thy hand;
Or see his love unclothed and naked stand.



For he hath sworn, and by this oath will bide,
E'en though his life be lost in the endeavour,
To leave no way, nor art, nor wile untried,
Until he pluck the fruit he sighs for ever:
And, though he still would spare thy honest pride,
The knot that binds him he must loose or sever;
Thou too, O lady, shouldst make sharp thy knife,
If thou art fain to end this amorous strife.

Lo! if thou lingerest still in dubious dread,
Lest thou shouldst lose fair fame of honesty,
Here hast thou need of wile and warihead,
To test thy lover's strength in screening thee;
Indulge him, if thou find him well bestead,
Knowing that smothered love flames outwardly:
Therefore, seek means, search out some privy way;
Keep not the steed too long at idle play.



Page 191

Or if thou heedest what those friars teach,
I cannot fail, lady, to call thee fool:
Well may they blame our private sins and preach;
But ill their acts match with their spoken rule;
The same pitch clings to all men, one and each.
There, I have spoken: set the world to school
With this true proverb, too, be well acquainted
The devil's ne'er so black as he is painted.

Nor did our good Lord give such grace to thee
That thou shouldst keep it buried in thy breast,
But to reward thy servant's constancy,
Whose love and loyal faith thou hast repressed:
Think it no sin to be some trifle free,
Because thou livest at a lord's behest;
For if he take enough to feed his fill,
To cast the rest away were surely ill.

They find most favour in the sight of heaven
Who to the poor and hungry are most kind;
A hundred-fold shall thus to thee be given
By God, who loves the free and generous mind;
Thrice strike thy breast, with pure contrition riven,
Crying: I sinned; my sin hath made me blind!—
He wants not much: enough if he be able
To pick up crumbs that fall beneath thy table.

Wherefore, O lady, break the ice at length;
Make thou, too, trial of love's fruits and flowers:
When in thine arms thou feel'st thy lover's strength,
Thou wilt repent of all these wasted hours;
Husbands, they know not love, its breadth and length,
Seeing their hearts are not on fire like ours:
Things longed for give most pleasure; this I tell thee:
If still thou doubtest let the proof compel thee.

What I have spoken is pure gospel sooth;
I have told all my mind, withholding nought:
And well, I ween, thou canst unhusk the truth,
And through the riddle read the hidden thought:
Perchance if heaven still smile upon my youth,
Some good effect for me may yet be wrought:
Then fare thee well; too many words offend:
She who is wise is quick to comprehend.



The levity of these love-declarations and the fluency of their vows show them to be 'false as dicers' oaths,' mere verses of the moment, made to please a facile mistress. One long poem, which cannot be styled a Rispetto, but is rather a Canzone of the legitimate type, stands out with distinctness from the rest of Poliziano's love-verses. It was written by him for Giuliano de' Medici, in praise of the fair Simonetta. The following version attempts to repeat its metrical effects in some measure:—

My task it is, since thus Love wills, who strains
And forces all the world beneath his sway,
In lowly verse to say
The great delight that in my bosom reigns.
For if perchance I took but little pains
To tell some part of all the joy I find,
I might be deem'd unkind
By one who knew my heart's deep



Page 192

happiness.

He feels but little bliss who hides his bliss;
Small joy hath he whose joy is never sung;
And he who curbs his tongue
Through cowardice, knows but of love the name.
Wherefore to succour and augment the fame
Of that pure, virtuous, wise, and lovely may,
Who like the star of day
Shines mid the stars, or like the rising sun,
Forth from my burning heart the words shall run.
Far, far be envy, far be jealous fear,
With discord dark and drear,
And all the choir that is of love the foe.—
The season had returned when soft winds blow,
The season friendly to young lovers coy,
Which bids them clothe their joy
In divers garbs and many a masked disguise.
Then I to track the game 'neath April skies
Went forth in raiment strange apparelled,
And by kind fate was led
Unto the spot where stayed my soul's desire.
The beauteous nymph who feeds my soul with fire,
I found in gentle, pure, and prudent mood,
In graceful attitude,
Loving and courteous, holy, wise, benign.
So sweet, so tender was her face divine,
So gladsome, that in those celestial eyes
Shone perfect paradise,
Yea, all the good that we poor mortals crave.
Around her was a band so nobly brave
Of beauteous dames, that as I gazed at these
Methought heaven's goddesses
That day for once had deigned to visit earth.
But she who gives my soul sorrow and mirth,
Seemed Pallas in her gait, and in her face
Venus; for every grace
And beauty of the world in her combined.
Merely to think, far more to tell my mind
Of that most wondrous sight, confoundeth me,
For mid the maidens she
Who most resembled her was found most rare.
Call ye another first among the fair;



Not first, but sole before my lady set:
Lily and violet
And all the flowers below the rose must bow.
Down from her royal head and lustrous brow
The golden curls fell sportively unpent,
While through the choir she went
With feet well lessoned to the rhythmic sound.
Her eyes, though scarcely raised above the ground,
Sent me by stealth a ray divinely fair;
But still her jealous hair
Broke the bright beam, and veiled her from my gaze.
She, born and nursed in heaven for angels' praise,
No sooner saw this wrong, than back she drew,
With hand of purest hue,
Her truant curls with kind and gentle mien.
Then from her eyes a soul so fiery keen,
So sweet a soul of love she cast on mine,
That scarce can I divine
How then I 'scaped from burning utterly.
These are the first fair signs of love to be,
That bound my heart with adamant, and these
The matchless courtesies
Which, dreamlike, still before mine eyes must hover.



Page 193

This is the honeyed food she gave her lover,
To make him, so it pleased her, half-divine;
Nectar is not so fine,
Nor ambrosy, the fabled feast of Jove.
Then, yielding proofs more clear and strong of love,
As though to show the faith within her heart,
She moved, with subtle art,
Her feet accordant to the amorous air.
But while I gaze and pray to God that ne'er
Might cease that happy dance angelical,
O harsh, unkind recall!
Back to the banquet was she beckoned.
She, with her face at first with pallor spread,
Then tinted with a blush of coral dye,
'The ball is best!' did cry,
Gentle in tone and smiling as she spake.
But from her eyes celestial forth did break
Favour at parting; and I well could see
Young love confusedly
Enclosed within the furtive fervent gaze,
Heating his arrows at their beauteous rays,
For war with Pallas and with Dian cold.
Fairer than mortal mould,
She moved majestic with celestial gait;
And with her hand her robe in royal state
Raised, as she went with pride ineffable.
Of me I cannot tell,
Whether alive or dead I there was left.
Nay, dead, methinks! since I of thee was reft,
Light of my life! and yet, perchance, alive—
Such virtue to revive
My lingering soul possessed thy beauteous face,
But if that powerful charm of thy great grace
Could then thy loyal lover so sustain,
Why comes there not again
More often or more soon the sweet delight?
Twice hath the wandering moon with borrowed light
Stored from her brother's rays her crescent horn,
Nor yet hath fortune borne
Me on the way to so much bliss again.



Earth smiles anew; fair spring renews her reign:
The grass and every shrub once more is green;
The amorous birds begin,
From winter loosed, to fill the field with song.
See how in loving pairs the cattle throng;
The bull, the ram, their amorous jousts enjoy:
Thou maiden, I a boy,
Shall we prove traitors to love's law for aye?
Shall we these years that are so fair let fly?
Wilt thou not put thy flower of youth to use?
Or with thy beauty choose
To make him blest who loves thee best of all?
Haply I am some hind who guards the stall,
Or of vile lineage, or with years outworn,
Poor, or a cripple born,
Or faint of spirit that you spurn me so?
Nay, but my race is noble and doth grow
With honour to our land, with pomp and power;
My youth is yet in flower,
And it may chance some maiden sighs for me.
My lot it is to deal right royally
With all the goods that fortune spreads around,
For still they more abound,
Shaken from her full lap, the more I waste.
My strength is such as whoso tries shall



Page 194

taste;

Circled with friends, with favours crowned am I:
Yet though I rank so high
Among the blest, as men may reckon bliss,
Still without thee, my hope, my happiness,
It seems a sad, and bitter thing to live!
Then stint me not, but give
That joy which holds all joys enclosed in one.
Let me pluck fruits at last, not flowers alone!

With much that is frigid, artificial, and tedious in this old-fashioned love-song, there is a curious monotony of sweetness which commends it to our ears; and he who reads it may remember the profile portrait of Simonetta from the hand of Piero della Francesca in the Pitti Palace at Florence.

It is worth comparing Poliziano's treatment of popular or semi-popular verse-forms with his imitations of Petrarch's manner. For this purpose I have chosen a *Canzone*, clearly written in competition with the celebrated 'Chiare, fresche e dolci acque,' of Laura's lover. While closely modelled upon Petrarch's form and similar in motive, this *Canzone* preserves Poliziano's special qualities of fluency and emptiness of content.

Hills, valleys, caves and fells,
With flowers and leaves and herbage spread;
Green meadows; shadowy groves where light is low;
Lawns watered with the rills
That cruel Love hath made me shed,
Cast from these cloudy eyes so dark with woe;
Thou stream that still dost know
What fell pangs pierce my heart,
So dost thou murmur back my moan;
Lone bird that chauntest tone for tone,
While in our descant drear Love sings his part:
Nymphs, woodland wanderers, wind and air;
List to the sound out-poured from my despair!
Seven times and once more seven
The roseate dawn her beauteous brow
Enwreathed with orient jewels hath displayed;
Cynthia once more in heaven
Hath orbed her horns with silver now;
While in sea waves her brother's light was laid;
Since this high mountain glade
Felt the white footsteps fall



Of that proud lady, who to spring
Converts whatever woodland thing
She may o'ershadow, touch, or heed at all.
Here bloom the flowers, the grasses spring
From her bright eyes, and drink what mine must bring.
Yea, nourished with my tears
Is every little leaf I see,
And the stream rolls therewith a prouder wave.
Ah me! through what long years
Will she withhold her face from me,
Which stills the stormy skies howe'er they rave?
Speak! or in grove or cave
If one hath seen her stray,
Plucking amid those grasses green
Wreaths for her royal brows serene,
Flowers white and blue and red and golden gay!
Nay, prithee, speak, if pity dwell
Among these woods, within this leafy dell!
O Love! 'twas here we saw,
Beneath the new-fledged leaves



Page 195

that spring

From this old beech, her fair form lowly laid:—
The thought renews my awe!
How sweetly did her tresses fling
Waves of wreathed gold unto the winds that strayed
Fire, frost within me played,
While I beheld the bloom
Of laughing flowers—O day of bliss!—
Around those tresses meet and kiss,
And roses in her lap of Love the home!
Her grace, her port divinely fair,
Describe it, Love! myself I do not dare.

In mute intent surprise

I gazed, as when a hind is seen
To dote upon its image in a rill;
Drinking those love-lit eyes,
Those hands, that face, those words serene,
That song which with delight the heaven did fill,
That smile which thralls me still,
Which melteth stones unkind,
Which in this woodland wilderness
Tames every beast and stills the stress
Of hurrying waters. Would that I could find
Her footprints upon field or grove!
I should not then be envious of Jove.

Thou cool stream rippling by,

Where oft it pleased her to dip
Her naked foot, how blest art thou!
Ye branching trees on high,
That spread your gnarled roots on the lip
Of yonder hanging rock to drink heaven's dew!
She often leaned on you,
She who is my life's bliss!
Thou ancient beech with moss o'ergrown,
How do I envy thee thy throne,
Found worthy to receive such happiness!
Ye winds, how blissful must ye be,
Since ye have borne to heaven her harmony!

The winds that music bore,

And wafted it to God on high,
That Paradise might have the joy thereof.
Flowers here she plucked, and wore



Wild roses from the thorn hard by:
This air she lightened with her look of love:
This running stream above,
She bent her face!—Ah me!
Where am I? What sweet makes me swoon?
What calm is in the kiss of noon?
Who brought me here? Who speaks? What melody?
Whence came pure peace into my soul?
What joy hath rapt me from my own control?

Poliziano's refrain is always: 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may. It is spring-time now and youth. Winter and old age are coming!' A *Maggio*, or May-day song, describing the games, dances, and jousting matches of the Florentine lads upon the morning of the first of May, expresses this facile philosophy of life with a quaintness that recalls Herrick. It will be noticed that the *Maggio* is built, so far as rhymes go, on the same system as Poliziano's *Ballata*. It has considerable historical interest, for the opening couplet is said to be Guido Cavalcanti's, while the whole poem is claimed by Roscoe for Lorenzo de' Medici, and by Carducci with better reason for Poliziano.

Welcome in the May
And the woodland garland gay!



Page 196

Welcome in the jocund spring
Which bids all men lovers be!
Maidens, up with carolling,
With your sweethearts stout and free,
With roses and with blossoms ye
Who deck yourselves this first of May!

Up, and forth into the pure
Meadows, mid the trees and flowers!
Every beauty is secure
With so many bachelors:
Beasts and birds amid the bowers
Burn with love this first of May.

Maidens, who are young and fair,
Be not harsh, I counsel you;
For your youth cannot repair
Her prime of spring, as meadows do:
None be proud, but all be true
To men who love, this first of May.

Dance and carol every one
Of our band so bright and gay!
See your sweethearts how they run
Through the jousts for you to-day!
She who saith her lover nay,
Will deflower the sweets of May,

Lads in love take sword and shield
To make pretty girls their prize:
Yield ye, merry maidens, yield
To your lovers' vows and sighs:
Give his heart back ere it dies:
Wage not war this first of May.

He who steals another's heart,
Let him give his own heart too:
Who's the robber? 'Tis the smart
Little cherub Cupid, who
Homage comes to pay with you,
Damsels, to the first of May.

Love comes smiling; round his head
Lilies white and roses meet:



'Tis for you his flight is sped.
Fair one, haste our king to greet:
Who will fling him blossoms sweet
Soonest on this first of May?

Welcome, stranger! welcome, king!
Love, what hast thou to command?
That each girl with wreaths should ring
Her lover's hair with loving hand,
That girls small and great should band
In Love's ranks this first of May.

The *Canto Carnascialesco*, for the final development if not for the invention of which all credit must be given to Lorenzo de' Medici, does not greatly differ from the Maggio in structure. It admitted, however, of great varieties, and was generally more complex in its interweaving of rhymes. Yet the essential principle of an exordium which should also serve for a refrain, was rarely, if ever, departed from. Two specimens of the Carnival Song will serve to bring into close contrast two very different aspects of Florentine history. The earlier was composed by Lorenzo de' Medici at the height of his power and in the summer of Italian independence. It was sung by masquers attired in classical costume, to represent Bacchus and his crew.

Fair is youth and void of sorrow;
But it hourly flies away.—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
Nought ye know about to-morrow.

This is Bacchus and the bright
Ariadne, lovers true!
They, in flying time's despite,
Each with each find pleasure new;
These their Nymphs, and all their crew
Keep perpetual holiday.—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
Nought ye know about to-morrow.



Page 197

These blithe Satyrs, wanton-eyed,
Of the Nymphs are paramours:
Through the caves and forests wide
They have snared them mid the flowers;
Warmed with Bacchus, in his bowers,
Now they dance and leap away.—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
Nought ye know about to-morrow.

These fair Nymphs, they are not loth
To entice their lovers' wiles.
None but thankless folk and rough
Can resist when Love beguiles.
Now enlaced, with wreathed smiles,
All together dance and play.—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
Nought ye know about to-morrow.

See this load behind them plodding
On the ass! Silenus he,
Old and drunken, merry, nodding,
Full of years and jollity;
Though he goes so swayingly,
Yet he laughs and quaffs away.—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
Nought ye know about to-morrow.

Midas treads a wearier measure:
All he touches turns to gold:
If there be no taste of pleasure,
What's the use of wealth untold?
What's the joy his fingers hold,
When he's forced to thirst for aye?—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
Nought ye know about to-morrow.

Listen well to what we're saying;
Of to-morrow have no care!
Young and old together playing,
Boys and girls, be blithe as air!
Every sorry thought forswear!
Keep perpetual holiday.—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day;
Nought ye know about to-morrow.



Ladies and gay lovers young!
Long live Bacchus, live Desire!
Dance and play; let songs be sung;
Let sweet love your bosoms fire;
In the future come what may!—
Youths and maids, enjoy to-day!
Nought ye know about to-morrow.

Fair is youth and void of sorrow;
But it hourly flies away.

The next, composed by Antonio Alamanni, after Lorenzo's death and the ominous passage of Charles VIII., was sung by masquers habited as skeletons. The car they rode on, was a Car of Death designed by Piero di Cosimo, and their music was purposely gloomy. If in the jovial days of the Medici the streets of Florence had rung to the thoughtless refrain, 'Nought ye know about to-morrow,' they now re-echoed with a cry of 'Penitence;' for times had strangely altered, and the heedless past had brought forth a doleful present. The last stanza of Alamanni's chorus is a somewhat clumsy attempt to adapt the too real moral of his subject to the customary mood of the Carnival.

Sorrow, tears, and penitence
Are our doom of pain for aye;
This dead concourse riding by
Hath no cry but penitence!

E'en as you are, once were we:
You shall be as now we are:
We are dead men, as you see:
We shall see you dead men, where
Nought avails to take great care,
After sins, of penitence.



Page 198

We too in the Carnival
Sang our love-songs through the town;
Thus from sin to sin we all
Headlong, heedless, tumbled down:—
Now we cry, the world around,
Penitence! oh, Penitence!

Senseless, blind, and stubborn fools!
Time steals all things as he rides:
Honours, glories, states, and schools,
Pass away, and nought abides;
Till the tomb our carcase hides,
And compels this penitence.

This sharp scythe you see us bear,
Brings the world at length to woe:
But from life to life we fare;
And that life is joy or woe:
All heaven's bliss on him doth flow
Who on earth does penitence.

Living here, we all must die;
Dying, every soul shall live:
For the King of kings on high
This fixed ordinance doth give:
Lo, you all are fugitive!
Penitence! Cry Penitence!

Torment great and grievous dole
Hath the thankless heart mid you;
But the man of piteous soul
Finds much honour in our crew:
Love for loving is the due
That prevents this penitence.

Sorrow, tears, and penitence
Are our doom of pain for aye:
This dead concourse riding by
Hath no cry but Penitence!

One song for dancing, composed less upon the type of the Ballata than on that of the Carnival Song, may here be introduced, not only in illustration of the varied forms assumed by this style of poetry, but also because it is highly characteristic of Tuscan town-life. This poem in the vulgar style has been ascribed to Lorenzo de' Medici, but



probably without due reason. It describes the manners and customs of female street gossips.

Since you beg with such a grace,
How can I refuse a song,
Wholesome, honest, void of wrong,
On the follies of the place?

Courteously on you I call;
Listen well to what I sing:
For my roundelay to all
May perchance instruction bring,
And of life good lessoning.—
When in company you meet,
Or sit spinning, all the street
Clamours like a market-place.

Thirty of you there may be;
Twenty-nine are sure to buzz,
And the single silent she
Racks her brains about her coz:—
Mrs. Buzz and Mrs. Huzz,
Mind your work, my ditty saith;
Do not gossip till your breath
Fails and leaves you black of face!

Governments go out and in:—
You the truth must needs discover.
Is a girl about to win
A brave husband in her lover?—
Straight you set to talk him over:
'Is he wealthy?' 'Does his coat
Fit?' 'And has he got a vote?'
'Who's his father?' 'What's his race?'



Page 199

Out of window one head pokes;
Twenty others do the same:—
Chatter, clatter!—creaks and croaks
All the year the same old game!—
'See my spinning!' cries one dame,
'Five long ells of cloth, I trow!'
Cries another, 'Mine must go,
Drat it, to the bleaching base!'

'Devil take the fowl!' says one:
'Mine are all bewitched, I guess;
Cocks and hens with vermin run,
Mangy, filthy, featherless.'
Says another: 'I confess
Every hair I drop, I keep—
Plague upon it, in a heap
Falling off to my disgrace!'

If you see a fellow walk
Up or down the street and back,
How you nod and wink and talk,
Hurry-skurry, cluck and clack!—
'What, I wonder, does he lack
Here about?'—'There's something wrong!'
Till the poor man's made a song
For the female populace.

It were well you gave no thought
To such idle company;
Shun these gossips, care for nought
But the business that you ply.
You who chatter, you who cry,
Heed my words; be wise, I pray:
Fewer, shorter stories say:
Bide at home, and mind your place.

Since you beg with such a grace,
How can I refuse a song,
Wholesome, honest, void of wrong,
On the follies of the place?

The *Madrigale*, intended to be sung in parts, was another species of popular poetry cultivated by the greatest of Italian writers. Without seeking examples from such men as Petrarch, Michelangelo, or Tasso, who used it as a purely literary form, I will content



myself with a few Madrigals by anonymous composers, more truly popular in style, and more immediately intended for music.[32] The similarity both of manner and matter, between these little poems and the Ballate, is obvious. There is the same affectation of rusticity in both.

Cogliendo per un prato.

Plucking white lilies in a field I saw
Fair women, laden with young Love's delight:
Some sang, some danced; but all were fresh and bright.
Then by the margin of a fount they leaned,
And of those flowers made garlands for their hair—
Wreaths for their golden tresses quaint and rare.
Forth from the field I passed, and gazed upon
Their loveliness, and lost my heart to one.

Togliendo l' una all' altra.

One from the other borrowing leaves and flowers,
I saw fair maidens 'neath the summer trees,
Weaving bright garlands with low love-ditties.
Mid that sweet sisterhood the loveliest
Turned her soft eyes to me, and whispered, 'Take!'
Love-lost I stood, and not a word I spake.
My heart she read, and her fair garland gave:
Therefore I am her servant to the grave.



Page 200

Appress' un fiume chiaro.

Hard by a crystal stream
Girls and maids were dancing round
A lilac with fair blossoms crowned.
Mid these I spied out one
So tender-sweet, so love-laden,
She stole my heart with singing then:
Love in her face so lovely-kind
And eyes and hands my soul did bind.

Di riva in riva.

From lawn to lea Love led me down the valley,
Seeking my hawk, where 'neath a pleasant hill
I spied fair maidens bathing in a rill.
Lina was there all loveliness excelling;
The pleasure of her beauty made me sad,
And yet at sight of her my soul was glad.
Downward I cast mine eyes with modest seeming,
And all a tremble from the fountain fled:
For each was naked as her maidenhead.
Thence singing fared I through a flowery plain,
Where bye and bye I found my hawk again!

Nel chiaro fiume.

Down a fair streamlet crystal-clear and pleasant
I went a fishing all alone one day,
And spied three maidens bathing there at play.
Of love they told each other honeyed stories,
While with white hands they smote the stream, to wet
Their sunbright hair in the pure rivulet.
Gazing I crouched among thick flowering leafage,
Till one who spied a rustling branch on high,
Turned to her comrades with a sudden cry,
And 'Go! Nay, prithee go!' she called to me:
'To stay were surely but scant courtesy.'

Quel sole che nutrica.

The sun which makes a lily bloom,
Leans down at times on her to gaze—
Fairer, he deems, than his fair rays:



Then, having looked a little while,
He turns and tells the saints in bliss
How marvellous her beauty is.
Thus up in heaven with flute and string
Thy loveliness the angels sing.

Di novo e giunt'.

Lo: here hath come an errant knight
On a barbed charger clothed in mail:
His archers scatter iron hail.
At brow and breast his mace he aims;
Who therefore hath not arms of proof,
Let him live locked by door and roof;
Until Dame Summer on a day
That grisly knight return to slay.

Poliziano's treatment of the octave stanza for Rispetti was comparatively popular. But in his poem of 'La Giostra,' written to commemorate the victory of Giuliano de' Medici in a tournament and to celebrate his mistress, he gave a new and richer form to the metre which Boccaccio had already used for epic verse. The slight and uninteresting framework of this poem, which opened a new sphere for Italian literature, and prepared the way for Ariosto's golden cantos, might be compared to one of those wire baskets which children steep in alum water, and incrust with crystals, sparkling, artificial, beautiful with colours not their own. The mind of Poliziano held,



Page 201

as it were, in solution all the images and thoughts of antiquity, all the riches of his native literature. In that vast reservoir of poems and mythologies and phrases, so patiently accumulated, so tenaciously preserved, so thoroughly assimilated, he plunged the trivial subject he had chosen, and triumphantly presented to the world the *spolia opima* of scholarship and taste. What mattered it that the theme was slight? The art was perfect, the result splendid. One canto of 125 stanzas describes the youth of Giuliano, who sought to pass his life among the woods, a hunter dead to love, but who was doomed to be ensnared by Cupid. The chase, the beauty of Simonetta, the palace of Venus, these are the three subjects of a book as long as the first Iliad. The second canto begins with dreams and prophecies of glory to be won by Giuliano in the tournament. But it stops abruptly. The tragic catastrophe of the Pazzi Conjurament cut short Poliziano's panegyric by the murder of his hero. Meanwhile the poet had achieved his purpose. His torso presented to Italy a model of style, a piece of written art adequate to the great painting of the Renaissance period, a double star of poetry which blent the splendours of the ancient and the modern world. To render into worthy English the harmonies of Poliziano is a difficult task. Yet this must be attempted if an English reader is to gain any notion of the scope and substance of the Italian poet's art. In the first part of the poem we are placed, as it were, at the mid point between the 'Hippolytus' of Euripides and Shakspeare's 'Venus and Adonis.' The cold hunter Giuliano is to see Simonetta, and seeing, is to love her. This is how he first discovers the triumphant beauty:[33]

White is the maid, and white the robe around her,
With buds and roses and thin grasses pied;
Enwreathed folds of golden tresses crowned her,
Shadowing her forehead fair with modest pride:

The wild wood smiled; the thicket where he found her,
To ease his anguish, bloomed on every side:
Serene she sits, with gesture queenly mild,
And with her brow tempers the tempests wild.

After three stanzas of this sort, in which the poet's style is more apparent than the object he describes, occurs this charming picture:—

Reclined he found her on the swarded grass
In jocund mood; and garlands she had made
Of every flower that in the meadow was,
Or on her robe of many hues displayed;
But when she saw the youth before her pass,
Raising her timid head awhile she stayed;
Then with her white hand gathered up her dress,
And stood, lap-full of flowers, in loveliness.



Then through the dewy field with footstep slow
The lingering maid began to take her way,
Leaving her lover in great fear and woe,
For now he longs for nought but her alway:
The wretch, who cannot bear that she should go,
Strives with a whispered prayer her feet to stay;
And thus at last, all trembling, all afire,
In humble wise he breathes his soul's desire:



Page 202

'Whoe'er thou art, maid among maidens queen,
Goddess, or nymph—nay, goddess seems most clear—
If goddess, sure my Dian I have seen;
If mortal, let thy proper self appear!
Beyond terrestrial beauty is thy mien;
I have no merit that I should be here!
What grace of heaven, what lucky star benign
Yields me the sight of beauty so divine?'

A conversation ensues, after which Giuliano departs utterly lovesick, and Cupid takes wing exultingly for Cyprus, where his mother's palace stands. In the following picture of the house of Venus, who shall say how much of Ariosto's Alcina and Tasso's Armida is contained? Cupid arrives, and the family of Love is filled with joy at Giuliano's conquest. From the plan of the poem it is clear that its beauties are chiefly those of detail. They are, however, very great. How perfect, for example, is the richness combined with delicacy of the following description of a country life:—

BOOK I. STANZAS 17-21.

How far more safe it is, how far more fair,
To chase the flying deer along the lea;
Through ancient woods to track their hidden lair,
Far from the town, with long-drawn subtlety:
To scan the vales, the hills, the limpid air,
The grass and flowers, clear ice, and streams so free;
To hear the birds wake from their winter trance,
The wind-stirred leaves and murmuring waters dance.

How sweet it were to watch the young goats hung
From toppling crags, cropping the tender shoot,
While in thick pleached shade the shepherd sung
His uncouth rural lay and woke his flute;
To mark, mid dewy grass, red apples flung,
And every bough thick set with ripening fruit,
The butting rams, kine lowing o'er the lea,
And cornfields waving like the windy sea.

Lo! how the rugged master of the herd
Before his flock unbars the wattled cote;
Then with his rod and many a rustic word
He rules their going: or 'tis sweet to note
The delver, when his toothed rake hath stirred
The stubborn clod, his hoe the glebe hath smote;



Barefoot the country girl, with loosened zone,
Spins, while she keeps her geese 'neath yonder stone.

After such happy wise, in ancient years,
Dwelt the old nations in the age of gold;
Nor had the fount been stirred of mothers' tears
For sons in war's fell labour stark and cold;
Nor trusted they to ships the wild wind steers,
Nor yet had oxen groaning ploughed the wold;
Their houses were huge oaks, whose trunks had store
Of honey, and whose boughs thick acorns bore.

Nor yet, in that glad time, the accursed thirst
Of cruel gold had fallen on this fair earth:
Joyous in liberty they lived at first;
Unploughed the fields sent forth their teeming birth;
Till fortune, envious of such concord, burst
The bond of law, and pity banned and worth;
Within their breasts sprang luxury and that rage
Which men call love in our degenerate age.



Page 203

We need not be reminded that these stanzas are almost a cento from Virgil, Hesiod, and Ovid. The merits of the translator, adapter, and combiner, who knew so well how to cull their beauties and adorn them with a perfect dress of modern diction, are so eminent that we cannot deny him the title of a great poet. It is always in picture-painting more than in dramatic presentation that Poliziano excels. Here is a basrelief of Venus rising from the Ocean foam:—

STANZAS 99-107.

In Thetis' lap, upon the vexed Egean,
The seed deific from Olympus sown,
Beneath dim stars and cycling empyrean
Drifts like white foam across the salt waves blown;
Thence, born at last by movements hymenean,
Rises a maid more fair than man hath known;
Upon her shell the wanton breezes waft her;
She nears the shore, while heaven looks down with laughter

Seeing the carved work you would cry that real
Were shell and sea, and real the winds that blow;
The lightning of the goddess' eyes you feel,
The smiling heavens, the elemental glow:
White-vested Hours across the smooth sands steal,
With loosened curls that to the breezes flow;
Like, yet unlike, are all their beauteous faces,
E'en as befits a choir of sister Graces.

Well might you swear that on those waves were riding
The goddess with her right hand on her hair,
And with the other the sweet apple hiding;
And that beneath her feet, divinely fair,
Fresh flowers sprang forth, the barren sands dividing;
Then that, with glad smiles and enticements rare,
The three nymphs round their queen, embosoming her,
Threw the starred mantle soft as gossamer.

The one, with hands above her head upraised,
Upon her dewy tresses fits a wreath,
With ruddy gold and orient gems emblazed;
The second hangs pure pearls her ears beneath;
The third round shoulders white and breast hath placed
Such wealth of gleaming carcanets as sheathe



Their own fair bosoms, when the Graces sing
Among the gods with dance and carolling.

Thence might you see them rising toward the spheres,
Seated upon a cloud of silvery white;
The trembling of the cloven air appears
Wrought in the stone, and heaven serenely bright;
The gods drink in with open eyes and ears
Her beauty, and desire her bed's delight;
Each seems to marvel with a mute amaze—
Their brows and foreheads wrinkle as they gaze.

The next quotation shows Venus in the lap of Mars, and Visited by Cupid:—

STANZAS 122—124.

Stretched on a couch, outside the coverlid,
Love found her, scarce unloosed from Mars' embrace;
He, lying back within her bosom, fed
His eager eyes on nought but her fair face;



Page 204

Roses above them like a cloud were shed,
To reinforce them in the amorous chace;
While Venus, quick with longings unsuppressed,
A thousand times his eyes and forehead kissed.

Above, around, young Loves on every side
Played naked, darting birdlike to and fro;
And one, whose plumes a thousand colours dyed,
Fanned the shed roses as they lay arow;
One filled his quiver with fresh flowers, and hied
To pour them on the couch that lay below;
Another, poised upon his pinions, through
The falling shower soared shaking rosy dew:

For, as he quivered with his tremulous wing,
The wandering roses in their drift were stayed;—
Thus none was weary of glad gambolling;
Till Cupid came, with dazzling plumes displayed,
Breathless; and round his mother's neck did fling
His languid arms, and with his winnowing made
Her heart burn:—very glad and bright of face,
But, with his flight, too tired to speak apace.

These pictures have in them the very glow of Italian painting. Sometimes we seem to see a quaint design of Piero di Cosimo, with bright tints and multitudinous small figures in a spacious landscape. Sometimes it is the languid grace of Botticelli, whose soul became possessed of classic inspiration as it were in dreams, and who has painted the birth of Venus almost exactly as Poliziano imagined it. Again, we seize the broader beauties of the Venetian masters, or the vehemence of Giulio Romano's pencil. To the last class belong the two next extracts:—

STANZAS 104—107.

In the last square the great artificer
Had wrought himself crowned with Love's perfect palm;
Black from his forge and rough, he runs to her,
Leaving all labour for her bosom's calm:
Lips joined to lips with deep love-longing stir,
Fire in his heart, and in his spirit balm;
Far fiercer flames through breast and marrow fly
Than those which heat his forge in Sicily.

Jove, on the other side, becomes a bull,
Goodly and white, at Love's behest, and rears



His neck beneath his rich freight beautiful:
She turns toward the shore that disappears,
With frightened gesture; and the wonderful
Gold curls about her bosom and her ears
Float in the wind; her veil waves, backward borne;
This hand still clasps his back, and that his horn.

With naked feet close-tucked beneath her dress,
She seems to fear the sea that dares not rise:
So, imaged in a shape of drear distress,
In vain unto her comrades sweet she cries;
They left amid the meadow-flowers, no less
For lost Europa wail with weeping eyes:
Europa, sounds the shore, bring back our bliss
But the bull swims and turns her feet to kiss.



Page 205

Here Jove is made a swan, a golden shower,
Or seems a serpent, or a shepherd-swain,
To work his amorous will in secret hour;
Here, like an eagle, soars he o'er the plain,
Love-led, and bears his Ganymede, the flower
Of beauty, mid celestial peers to reign;
The boy with cypress hath his fair locks crowned,
Naked, with ivy wreathed his waist around.

STANZAS 110—112.

Lo! here again fair Ariadne lies,
And to the deaf winds of false Theseus plains.
And of the air and slumber's treacheries;
Trembling with fear even as a reed that strain.
And quivers by the mere 'neath breezy skies:
Her very speechless attitude complains—
No beast there is so cruel as thou art,
No beast less loyal to my broken heart.

Throned on a car, with ivy crowned and vine,
Rides Bacchus, by two champing tigers driven:
Around him on the sand deep-soaked with brine
Satyrs and Bacchantes rush; the skies are riven
With shouts and laughter; Fauns quaff bubbling wine
From horns and cymbals; Nymphs, to madness driven,
Trip, skip, and stumble; mixed in wild enlacements,
Laughing they roll or meet for glad embracements.

Upon his ass Silenus, never sated,
With thick, black veins, wherethrough the must is soaking,
Nods his dull forehead with deep sleep belated;
His eyes are wine-inflamed, and red, and smoking:
Bold Maenads goad the ass so sorely weighted,
With stinging thyrsi; he sways feebly poking
The mane with bloated fingers; Fauns behind him,
E'en as he falls, upon the crupper bind him.

We almost seem to be looking at the frescoes in some Trasteverine palace, or at the canvas of one of the sensual Genoese painters. The description of the garden of Venus has the charm of somewhat artificial elegance, the exotic grace of style, which attracts us in the earlier Renaissance work:—



The leafy tresses of that timeless garden
Nor fragile brine nor fresh snow dares to whiten;
Frore winter never comes the rills to harden,
Nor winds the tender shrubs and herbs to frighten;
Glad Spring is always here, a laughing warden;
Nor do the seasons wane, but ever brighten;
Here to the breeze young May, her curls unbinding,
With thousand flowers her wreath is ever winding.

Indeed it may be said with truth that Poliziano's most eminent faculty as a descriptive poet corresponded exactly to the genius of the painters of his day. To produce pictures radiant with Renaissance colouring, and vigorous with Renaissance passion, was the function of his art, not to express profound thought or dramatic situations. This remark might be extended with justice to Ariosto, and Tasso, and Boiardo. The great narrative poets of the Renaissance in Italy were not dramatists; nor were their poems epics: their forte lay in the inexhaustible variety and beauty of their pictures.



Page 206

Of Poliziano's plagiarism—if this be the right word to apply to the process of assimilation and selection, by means of which the poet-scholar of Florence taught the Italians how to use the riches of the ancient languages and their own literature—here are some specimens. In stanza 42 of the 'Giostra' he says of Simonetta:—

E 'n lei discerne un non so che divino.

Dante has the line:—

Vostri risplende un non so che divino.

In the 44th he speaks about the birds:—

E canta ogni augelletto in suo latino.

This comes from Cavalcanti's:—

E cantinne gli augelli.
Ciascuno in suo latino.

Stanza 45 is taken bodily from Claudian, Dante, and Cavalcanti. It would seem as though Poliziano wished to show that the classic and medieval literature of Italy was all one, and that a poet of the Renaissance could carry on the continuous tradition in his own style. A, line in stanza 54 seems perfectly original:—

E gia dall'alte ville il fumo esala.

It comes straight from Virgil:—

Et jam summa pocul villarum culmina fumant.

In the next stanza the line—

Tal che 'l ciel tutto rassereno d'intorno,

is Petrarch's. So in the 56th, is the phrase 'il dolce andar celeste.' In stanza 57—

Par che 'l cor del petto se gli schianti,

belongs to Boccaccio. In stanza 60 the first line:—

La notte che le cose ci nasconde,

together with its rhyme, 'sotto le amate fronde,' is borrowed from the 23rd canto of the 'Paradiso.' In the second line, 'Stellato ammanto' is Claudian's 'stellantes sinus' applied



to the heaven. When we reach the garden of Venus we find whole passages translated from Claudian's 'Marriage of Honorius,' and from the 'Metamorphoses' of Ovid.

Poliziano's second poem of importance, which indeed may historically be said to take precedence of 'La Giostra,' was the so-called tragedy of 'Orfeo.' The English version of this lyrical drama must be reserved for a separate study: yet it belongs to the subject of this, inasmuch as the 'Orfeo' is a classical legend treated in a form already familiar to the Italian people. Nearly all the popular kinds of poetry of which specimens have been translated in this chapter, will be found combined in its six short scenes.

* * * * *

ORFEO

The 'Orfeo' of Messer Angelo Poliziano ranks amongst the most important poems of the fifteenth century. It was composed at Mantua in the short space of two days, on the occasion of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga's visit to his native town in 1472. But, though so hastily put together, the 'Orfeo' marks an epoch in the evolution of Italian poetry. It is the earliest example of a secular drama, containing within the compass of its brief scenes the germ of the opera, the tragedy, and the pastoral play.



Page 207

In form it does not greatly differ from the 'Sacre Rappresentazioni' of the fifteenth century, as those miracle plays were handled by popular poets of the earlier Renaissance. But while the traditional octave stanza is used for the main movement of the piece, Poliziano has introduced episodes of *terza rima*, madrigals, a carnival song, a *ballata*, and, above all, choral passages which have in them the future melodrama of the musical Italian stage. The lyrical treatment of the fable, its capacity for brilliant and varied scenic effects, its combination of singing with action, and the whole artistic keeping of the piece, which never passes into genuine tragedy, but stays within the limits of romantic pathos, distinguish the 'Orfeo' as a typical production of Italian genius. Thus, though little better than an improvisation, it combines the many forms of verse developed by the Tuscans at the close of the Middle Ages, and fixes the limits beyond which their dramatic poets, with a few exceptions, were not destined to advance. Nor was the choice of the fable without significance. Quitting the Bible stories and the Legends of Saints, which supplied the mediaeval playwright with material, Poliziano selects a classic story: and this story might pass for an allegory of Italy, whose intellectual development the scholar-poet ruled. Orpheus is the power of poetry and art, softening stubborn nature, civilising men, and prevailing over Hades for a season. He is the right hero of humanism, the genius of the Renaissance, the tutelary god of Italy, who thought she could resist the laws of fate by verse and elegant accomplishments. To press this kind of allegory is unwise; for at a certain moment it breaks in our hands. And yet in Eurydice the fancy might discover Freedom, the true spouse of poetry and art; Orfeo's last resolve too vividly depicts the vice of the Renaissance; and the Maenads are those barbarous armies destined to lay waste the plains of Italy, inebriate with wine and blood, obeying a new lord of life on whom the poet's harp exerts no charm. But a truce to this spinning of pedantic cobwebs. Let Mercury appear, and let the play begin.

THE FABLE OF ORPHEUS

MERCURY *announces the show.*

Ho, silence! Listen! There was once a hind,
Son of Apollo, Aristaeus hight,
Who loved with so untamed and fierce a mind
Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus wight,
That chasing her one day with will unkind
He wrought her cruel death in love's despite;
For, as she fled toward the mere hard by,
A serpent stung her, and she had to die.

Now Orpheus, singing, brought her back from hell,
But could not keep the law the fates ordain:
Poor wretch, he backward turned and broke the spell;



So that once more from him his love was ta'en.
Therefore he would no more with women dwell,
And in the end by women he was slain.



Page 208

Enter A SHEPHERD, *who says*—

Nay, listen, friends! Fair auspices are given,
Since Mercury to earth hath come from heaven.

SCENE I

MOPSUS, *an old shepherd*.

Say, hast thou seen a calf of mine, all white
Save for a spot of black upon her front,
Two feet, one flank, and one knee ruddy-bright?

ARISTAEUS, *a young shepherd*.

Friend Mopsus, to the margin of this fount
No herds have come to drink since break of day;
Yet may'st thou hear them low on yonder mount.
Go, Thyrsis, search the upland lawn, I pray!
Thou Mopsus shalt with me the while abide;
For I would have thee listen to my lay.

[Exit THYRSIS.

'Twas yester morn where trees yon cavern hide,
I saw a nymph more fair than Dian, who
Had a young lusty lover at her side:
But when that more than woman met my view,
The heart within my bosom leapt outright,
And straight the madness of wild Love I knew.
Since then, dear Mopsus, I have no delight;
But weep and weep: of food and drink I tire,
And without slumber pass the weary night.

MOPSUS.

Friend Aristaeus, if this amorous fire
Thou dost not seek to quench as best may be,
Thy peace of soul will vanish in desire.
Thou know'st that love is no new thing to me:
I've proved how love grown old brings bitter pain:
Cure it at once, or hope no remedy;
For if thou find thee in Love's cruel chain,
Thy bees, thy blossoms will be out of mind,
Thy fields, thy vines, thy flocks, thy cotes, thy grain



ARISTAEUS.

Mopsus, thou speakest to the deaf and blind:
Waste not on me these winged words, I pray,
Lest they be scattered to the inconstant wind,
I love, and cannot wish to say love nay;
Nor seek to cure so charming a disease:
They praise Love best who most against him say.
Yet if thou fain wouldst give my heart some ease,
Forth from thy wallet take thy pipe, and we
Will sing awhile beneath the leafy trees;
For well my nymph is pleased with melody.

THE SONG.

Listen, ye wild woods, to my roundelay;
Since the fair nymph will hear not, though I pray.

The lovely nymph is deaf to my lament,
Nor heeds the music of this rustic reed;
Wherefore my flocks and herds are ill content,
Nor bathe their hoof where grows the water weed,
Nor touch the tender herbage on the mead;
So sad, because their shepherd grieves, are they.

Listen, ye wild woods, to my roundelay;
Since the fair nymph will hear not, though I pray.

The herds are sorry for their master's moan;
The nymph heeds not her lover though he die,
The lovely nymph, whose heart is made of stone—
Nay steel, nay adamant! She still doth fly
Far, far before me, when she sees me nigh,
Even as a lamb flies fern the wolf away.



Page 209

Listen, ye wild woods, to my roundelay;
Since the fair nymph will hear not, though I pray.

Nay, tell her, pipe of mine, how swift doth flee
Beauty together with our years amain;
Tell her how time destroys all rarity,
Nor youth once lost can be renewed again;
Tell her to use the gifts that yet remain:
Roses and violets blossom not alway.

Listen, ye wild woods, to my roundelay;
Since the fair nymph will hear not, though I pray.

Carry, ye winds, these sweet words to her ears,
Unto the ears of my loved nymph, and tell
How many tears I shed, what bitter tears!
Beg her to pity one who loves so well:
Say that my life is frail and mutable,
And melts like rime before the rising day.

Listen, ye wild woods, to my roundelay;
Since the fair nymph will hear not, though I pray.

MOPSUS.

Less sweet, methinks the voice of waters falling
From cliffs that echo back their murmurous song;
Less sweet the summer sound of breezes calling
Through pine-tree tops sonorous all day long;
Than are thy rhymes, the soul of grief enthralling,
Thy rhymes o'er field and forest borne along:
If she but hear them, at thy feet she'll fawn.—
Lo, Thyrsis, hurrying homeward from the lawn!

[*Re-enters* THYRSIS.

ARISTAEUS.

What of the calf? Say, hast thou seen her now?

THYRSIS, *the cowherd*.

I have, and I'd as lief her throat were cut!
She almost ripped my bowels up, I vow,
Running amuck with horns well set to butt:



Nathless I've locked her in the stall below:
She's blown with grass, I tell you, saucy slut!

ARISTAEUS.

Now, prithee, let me hear what made you stay
So long upon the upland lawns away?

THYRSIS.

Walking, I spied a gentle maiden there,
Who plucked wild flowers upon the mountain side:
I scarcely think that Venus is more fair,
Of sweeter grace, most modest in her pride:
She speaks, she sings, with voice so soft and rare,
That listening streams would backward roll their tide:
Her face is snow and roses; gold her head;
All, all alone she goes, white-raimented,

ARISTAEUS.

Stay, Mopsus! I must follow: for 'tis she
Of whom I lately spoke. So, friend, farewell!

MOPSUS.

Hold, Aristaeus, lest for her or thee
Thy boldness be the cause of mischief fell!

ARISTAEUS.

Nay, death this day must be my destiny,
Unless I try my fate and break the spell.
Stay therefore, Mopsus, by the fountain stay!
I'll follow her, meanwhile, yon mountain way.

[*Exit* ARISTAEUS.]

MOPSUS.

Thyrsis, what thinkest thou of thy loved lord?
See'st thou that all his senses are distraught?
Couldst thou not speak some seasonable word,
Tell him what shame this idle love hath wrought?



Page 210

THYRSIS.

Free speech and servitude but ill accord,
Friend Mopsus, and the hind is folly-fraught
Who rates his lord! He's wiser far than I.
To tend these kine is all my mastery.

SCENE II

ARISTAEUS, *in pursuit of EURYDICE.*

Flee not from me, maiden!
Lo, I am thy friend!
Dearer far than life I hold thee.
List, thou beauty-laden,
To these prayers attend:
Flee not, let my arms enfold thee!
Neither wolf nor bear will grasp thee:
That I am thy friend I've told thee:
Stay thy course then; let me clasp thee!—
Since thou'rt deaf and wilt not heed me,
Since thou'rt still before me flying,
While I follow panting, dying,
Lend me wings, Love, wings to speed me!

[*Exit ARISTAEUS, pursuing EURYDICE.*

SCENE III

A DRYAD.

Sad news of lamentation and of pain,
Dear sisters, hath my voice to bear to you:
I scarcely dare to raise the dolorous strain.
Eurydice by yonder stream lies low;
The flowers are fading round her stricken head,
And the complaining waters weep their woe.
The stranger soul from that fair house hath fled;
And she, like privet pale, or white May-bloom
Untimely plucked, lies on the meadow, dead.
Hear then the cause of her disastrous doom!
A snake stole forth and stung her suddenly.
I am so burdened with this weight of gloom
That, lo, I bid you all come weep with me!



CHORUS OF DRYADS.

Let the wide air with our complaint resound!
For all heaven's light is spent.
Let rivers break their bound,
Swollen with tears outpoured from our lament!

Fell death hath ta'en their splendour from the skies:
The stars are sunk in gloom.
Stern death hath plucked the bloom
Of nymphs:—Eurydice down-trodden lies.
Weep, Love! The woodland cries.
Weep, groves and founts;
Ye craggy mounts; you leafy dell,
Beneath whose boughs she fell,
Bend every branch in time with this sad sound.

Let the wide air with our complaint resound!

Ah, fortune pitiless! Ah, cruel snake!
Ah, luckless doom of woes!
Like a cropped summer rose,
Or lily cut, she withers on the brake.
Her face, which once did make
Our age so bright
With beauty's light, is faint and pale;
And the clear lamp doth fail,
Which shed pure splendour all the world around

Let the wide air with our complaint resound!

Who e'er will sing so sweetly, now she's gone?
Her gentle voice to hear,
The wild winds dared not stir;
And now they breathe but sorrow, moan for moan:
So many joys are flown,
Such jocund days
Doth Death erase with her sweet eyes!
Bid earth's lament arise,
And make our dirge through heaven and sea rebound!



Page 211

Let the wide air with our complaint resound!

A DRYAD.

'Tis surely Orpheus, who hath reached the hill,
With harp in hand, glad-eyed and light of heart!
He thinks that his dear love is living still.
My news will stab him with a sudden smart:
An unforeseen and unexpected blow
Wounds worst and stings the bosom's tenderest part.
Death hath disjoined the truest love, I know,
That nature yet to this low world revealed,
And quenched the flame in its most charming glow.
Go, sisters, hasten ye to yonder field,
Where on the sward lies slain Eurydice;
Strew her with flowers and grasses! I must yield
This man the measure of his misery.

[*Exeunt DRYADS. Enter ORPHEUS, singing.*]

ORPHEUS.

*Musa, triumphales titulos et gesta canamus
Herculis, et forti monstra subacta manu;
Ut timidae malri pressos ostenderit angues,
Intrepidusque fero riserit ore puer.*

A DRYAD.

Orpheus, I bring thee bitter news. Alas!
Thy nymph who was so beautiful, is slain!
flying from Aristaeus o'er the grass,
What time she reached yon stream that threads the plain,

A snake which lurked mid flowers where she did pass,
Pierced her fair foot with his envenomed bane:
So fierce, so potent was the sting, that she
Died in mid course. Ah, woe that this should be!

[*ORPHEUS turns to go in silence.*]

MNESILLUS, *the satyr.*

Mark ye how sunk in woe
The poor wretch forth doth pass,



And may not answer, for his grief, one word?
On some lone shore, unheard,
Far, far away, he'll go,
And pour his heart forth to the winds, alas!
I'll follow and observe if he
Moves with his moan the hills to sympathy.

[Follows ORPHEUS.]

ORPHEUS.

Let us lament, O lyre disconsolate!
Our wonted music is in tune no more.
Lament we while the heavens revolve, and let
The nightingale be conquered on Love's shore!
O heaven, O earth, O sea, O cruel fate!
How shall I bear a pang so passing sore?
Eurydice, my love! O life of mine!
On earth I will no more without thee pine!
I will go down unto the doors of Hell,
And see if mercy may be found below:
Perchance we shall reverse fate's spoken spell
With tearful songs and words of honeyed woe:
Perchance will Death be pitiful; for well
With singing have we turned the streams that flow;
Moved stones, together hind and tiger drawn,
And made trees dance upon the forest lawn.

[Passes from sight on his way to Hades.]

MNESILLUS.



Page 212

The staff of Fate is strong
And will not lightly bend,
Nor yet the stubborn gates of steely Hell.
Nay, I can see full well
His life will not be long:
Those downward feet no more will earthward wend.
What marvel if they lose the light,
Who make blind Love their guide by day and night!

SCENE IV

ORPHEUS, *at the gate of Hell.*

Pity, nay pity for a lover's moan!
Ye Powers of Hell, let pity reign in you!
To your dark regions led me Love alone:
Downward upon his wings of light I flew.
Hush, Cerberus! Howl not by Pluto's throne!
For when you hear my tale of misery, you,
Nor you alone, but all who here abide
In this blind world, will weep by Lethe's tide.
There is no need, ye Furies, thus to rage;
To dart those snakes that in your tresses twine:
Knew ye the cause of this my pilgrimage,
Ye would lie down and join your moans with mine.
Let this poor wretch but pass, who war doth wage
With heaven, the elements, the powers divine!
I beg for pity or for death. No more!
But open, ope Hell's adamant door!

[ORPHEUS *enters Hell.*

PLUTO.

What man is he who with his golden lyre
Hath moved the gates that never move,
While the dead folk repeat his dirge of love?
The rolling stone no more doth tire
Swart Sisyphus on yonder hill;
And Tantalus with water slakes his fire;
The groans of mangled Tityos are still;
Ixion's wheel forgets to fly;
The Danaids their urns can fill:



I hear no more the tortured spirits cry;
But all find rest in that sweet harmony.

PROSERPINE.

Dear consort, since, compelled by love of thee,
I left the light of heaven serene,
And came to reign in hell, a sombre queen;
The charm of tenderest sympathy
Hath never yet had power to turn
My stubborn heart, or draw forth tears from me.
Now with desire for yon sweet voice I yearn;
Nor is there aught so dear
As that delight. Nay, be not stern
To this one prayer! Relax thy brows severe,
And rest awhile with me that song to hear!

[ORPHEUS *stands before the throne.*

ORPHEUS.

Ye rulers of the people lost in gloom,
Who see no more the jocund light of day!
Ye who inherit all things that the womb
Of Nature and the elements display!
Hear ye the grief that draws me to the tomb!
Love, cruel Love, hath led me on this way:
Not to chain Cerberus I hither come,
But to bring back my mistress to her home.
A serpent hidden among flowers and leaves
Stole my fair mistress—nay, my heart—from me:
Wherefore my wounded life for ever grieves,



Page 213

Nor can I stand against this agony.
Still, if some fragrance lingers yet and cleaves
Of your famed love unto your memory,
If of that ancient rape you think at all,
Give back Eurydice!—On you I call.
All things ere long unto this bourne descend:
All mortal lives to you return at last:
Whate'er the moon hath circled, in the end
Must fade and perish in your empire vast:
Some sooner and some later hither wend;
Yet all upon this pathway shall have passed:
This of our footsteps is the final goal;
And then we dwell for aye in your control.
Therefore the nymph I love is left for you
When nature leads her deathward in due time:
But now you've cropped the tendrils as they grew,
The grapes unripe, while yet the sap did climb:
Who reaps the young blades wet with April dew,
Nor waits till summer hath o'erpassed her prime?
Give back, give back my hope one little day!—
Not for a gift, but for a loan I pray.
I pray not to you by the waves forlorn
Of marshy Styx or dismal Acheron,
By Chaos where the mighty world was born,
Or by the sounding flames of Phlegethon;
But by the fruit which charmed thee on that morn
When thou didst leave our world for this dread throne!
O queen! if thou reject this pleading breath,
I will no more return, but ask for death!

PROSERPINE.

Husband, I never guessed
That in our realm oppressed
Pity could find a home to dwell:
But now I know that mercy teems in Hell.
I see Death weep; her breast
Is shaken by those tears that faultless fell.
Let then thy laws severe for him be swayed
By love, by song, by the just prayers he prayed!



PLUTO.

She's thine, but at this price:
Bend not on her thine eyes,
Till mid the souls that live she stay.
See that thou turn not back upon the way!
Check all fond thoughts that rise!
Else will thy love be torn from thee away.
I am well pleased that song so rare as thine
The might of my dread sceptre should incline.

SCENE V

ORPHEUS, *sings*.

*Ite tritumphales circum mea tempora lauri.
Vicimus Eurydicen: reddita vita mihi est,
Haec mea praecipue victoria digna corona.
Oredimus? an lateri juncta puella meo?*

EURYDICE.

All me! Thy love too great
Hath lost not thee alone!
I am torn from thee by strong Fate.
No more I am thine own.
In vain I stretch these arms. Back, back to Hell
I'm drawn, I'm drawn. My Orpheus, fare thee well!

[EURYDICE *disappears*.

ORPHEUS.

Who hath laid laws on Love?
Will pity not be given
For one short look so full thereof?
Since I am robbed of heaven,
Since all my joy so great is turned to pain,
I will go back and plead with Death again!



Page 214

[TISIPHONE *blocks his way.*

TISIPHONE.

Nay, seek not back to turn!
Vain is thy weeping, all thy words are vain.
Eurydice may not complain
Of aught but thee—albeit her grief is great.
Vain are thy verses 'gainst the voice of Fate!
How vain thy song! For Death is stern!
Try not the backward path: thy feet refrain!
The laws of the abyss are fixed and firm remain.

SCENE VI

ORPHEUS.

What sorrow-laden song shall e'er be found
To match the burden of my matchless woe?
How shall I make the fount of tears abound,
To weep apace with grief's unmeasured flow?
Salt tears I'll waste upon the barren ground,
So long as life delays me here below;
And since my fate hath wrought me wrong so sore,
I swear I'll never love a woman more!
Henceforth I'll pluck the buds of opening spring,
The bloom of youth when life is loveliest,
Ere years have spoiled the beauty which they bring:
This love, I swear, is sweetest, softest, best!
Of female charms let no one speak or sing;
Since she is slain who ruled within my breast.
He who would seek my converse, let him see
That ne'er he talk of woman's love to me!
How pitiful is he who changes mind
For woman! for her love laments or grieves!
Who suffers her in chains his will to bind,
Or trusts her words lighter than withered leaves,
Her loving looks more treacherous than the wind!
A thousand times she veers; to nothing cleaves:
Follows who flies; from him who follows, flees;
And comes and goes like waves on stormy seas!
High Jove confirms the truth of what I said,
Who, caught and bound in love's delightful snare,
Enjoys in heaven his own bright Ganymed:



Phoebus on earth had Hyacinth the fair:
Hercules, conqueror of the world, was led
Captive to Hylas by this love so rare.—
Advice for husbands! Seek divorce, and fly
Far, far away from female company!

[*Enter a MAENAD leading a train of BACCHANTES.*

A MAENAD.

Ho! Sisters! Up! Alive!
See him who doth our sex deride!
Hunt him to death, the slave!
Thou snatch the thyrsus! Thou this oak-tree rive!
Cast down this doeskin and that hide!
We'll wreak our fury on the knave!
Yea, he shall feel our wrath, the knave!
He shall yield up his hide
Riven as woodmen fir-trees rive!
No power his life can save;
Since women he hath dared deride!
Ho! To him, sisters! Ho! Alive!

[*ORPHEUS is chased off the scene and slain: the MAENADS then return.*

A MAENAD.



Page 215

Ho! Bacchus! Ho! I yield thee thanks for this!
Through all the woodland we the wretch have borne:
So that each root is slaked with blood of his:
Yea, limb from limb his body have we torn
Through the wild forest with a fearful bliss:
His gore hath bathed the earth by ash and thorn!—
Go then! thy blame on lawful wedlock fling!
Ho! Bacchus! take the victim that we bring!

CHORUS OF MAENADS.

Bacchus! we all must follow thee!
Bacchus! Bacchus! Ohe! Ohe!

With ivy coronals, bunch and berry,
Crown we our heads to worship thee!
Thou hast bidden us to make merry
Day and night with jollity!
Drink then! Bacchus is here! Drink free,
And hand ye the drinking-cup to me!
Bacchus! we all must follow thee!
Bacchus! Bacchus! Ohe! Ohe!

See, I have emptied my horn already:
Stretch hither your beaker to me, I pray:
Are the hills and the lawns where we roam unsteady?
Or is it my brain that reels away?
Let every one run to and fro through the hay,
As ye see me run! Ho! after me!
Bacchus! we all must follow thee!
Bacchus! Bacchus! Ohe! Ohe!

Methinks I am dropping in swoon or slumber:
Am I drunken or sober, yes or no?
What are these weights my feet encumber?
You too are tipsy, well I know!
Let every one do as ye see me do,
Let every one drink and quaff like me!
Bacchus! we all must follow thee!
Bacchus! Bacchus! Ohe! Ohe!

Cry Bacchus! Cry Bacchus! Be blithe and merry,
Tossing wine down your throats away!
Let sleep then come and our gladness bury:



Drink you, and you, and you, while ye may!
Dancing is over for me to-day.
Let every one cry aloud Evohe!
Bacchus! we all must follow thee!
Bacchus! Bacchus! Ohe! Ohe!

Though an English translation can do little toward rendering the facile graces of Poliziano's style, that 'roseate fluency' for which it has been praised by his Italian admirers, the main qualities of the 'Orfeo' as a composition may be traced in this rough copy. Of dramatic power, of that mastery over the deeper springs of human nature which distinguished the first effort of the English muse in Marlowe's plays, there is but little. A certain adaptation of the language to the characters, as in the rudeness of Thyrsis when contrasted with the rustic elegance of Aristaeus, a touch of simple feeling in Eurydice's lyrical outcry of farewell, a discrimination between the tender sympathy of Proserpine and Pluto's stern relenting, a spirited presentation of the Bacchanalian *furore* in the Maenads, an attempt to model the Satyr Mnesillus as apart from human nature and yet sympathetic to its anguish, these points constitute the chief dramatic features of the



Page 216

melodrama. Orpheus himself is a purely lyrical personage. Of character, he can scarcely be said to have anything marked; and his part rises to its height precisely in that passage where the lyrist has to be displayed. Before the gates of Hades and the throne of Proserpine he sings, and his singing is the right outpouring of a poet's soul; each octave resumes the theme of the last stanza with a swell of utterance, a crescendo of intonation that recalls the passionate and unpremeditated descant of a bird upon the boughs alone. To this true quality of music is added the persuasiveness of pleading. That the violin melody of his incomparable song is lost, must be reckoned a great misfortune. We have good reason to believe that the part of Orpheus was taken by Messer Baccio Ugolini, singing to the viol. Here too it may be mentioned that a *tondo* in monochrome, painted by Signorelli among the arabesques at Orvieto, shows Orpheus at the throne of Plato, habited as a poet with the laurel crown and playing on a violin of antique form. It would be interesting to know whether a rumour of the Mantuan pageant had reached the ears of the Cortonese painter.

If the whole of the 'Orfeo' had been conceived and executed with the same artistic feeling as the chief act, it would have been a really fine poem independently of its historical interest. But we have only to turn the page and read the lament uttered for the loss of Eurydice, in order to perceive Poliziano's incapacity for dealing with his hero in a situation of greater difficulty. The pathos which might have made us sympathise with Orpheus in his misery, the passion, approaching to madness, which might have justified his misogyny, are absent. It is difficult not to feel that in this climax of his anguish he was a poor creature, and that the Maenads served him right. Nothing illustrates the defect of real dramatic imagination better than this failure to dignify the catastrophe. Gifted with a fine lyrical inspiration, Poliziano seems to have already felt the Bacchic chorus which forms so brilliant a termination to his play, and to have forgotten his duty to the unfortunate Orpheus, whose sorrow for Eurydice is stultified and made unmeaning by the prosaic expression of a base resolve. It may indeed be said in general that the 'Orfeo' is a good poem only where the situation is not so much dramatic as lyrical, and that its finest passage—the scene in Hades—was fortunately for its author one in which the dramatic motive had to be lyrically expressed. In this respect, as in many others, the 'Orfeo' combines the faults and merits of the Italian attempts at melo-tragedy. To break a butterfly upon the wheel is, however, no fit function of criticism: and probably no one would have smiled more than the author of this improvisation, at the thought of its being gravely dissected just four hundred years after the occasion it was meant to serve had long been given over to oblivion.



Page 217

NOTE

Poliziano's 'Orfeo' was dedicated to Messer Carlo Canale, the husband of that famous Vannozza who bore Lucrezia and Cesare Borgia to Alexander VI. As first published in 1494, and as republished from time to time up to the year 1776, it carried the title of 'La Favola di Orfeo,' and was not divided into acts. Frequent stage-directions sufficed, as in the case of Florentine 'Sacre Rappresentazioni,' for the indication of the scenes. In this earliest redaction of the 'Orfeo' the chorus of the Dryads, the part of Mnesillus, the lyrical speeches of Proserpine and Pluto, and the first lyric of the Maenads are either omitted or represented by passages in *ottava rima*. In the year 1776 the Padre Ireneo Affo printed at Venice a new version of 'Orfeo, Tragedia di Messer Angelo Poliziano,' collated by him from two MSS. This play is divided into five acts, severally entitled 'Pastoricus,' 'Nymphas Habet,' 'Heroicus,' 'Necromanticus,' and 'Bacchanalis.' The stage-directions are given partly in Latin, partly in Italian; and instead of the 'Announcement of the Feast' by Mercury, a prologue consisting of two octave stanzas is appended. A Latin Sapphic ode in praise of the Cardinal Gonzaga, which was interpolated in the first version, is omitted, and certain changes are made in the last soliloquy of Orpheus. There is little doubt, I think, that the second version, first given to the press by the Padre Affo, was Poliziano's own recension of his earlier composition. I have therefore followed it in the main, except that I have not thought it necessary to observe the somewhat pedantic division into acts, and have preferred to use the original 'Announcement of the Feast,' which proves the integral connection between this ancient secular play and the Florentine Mystery or 'Sacra Rappresentazione.' The last soliloquy of Orpheus, again, has been freely translated by me from both versions for reasons which will be obvious to students of the original. I have yet to make a remark upon one detail of my translation. In line 390 (part of the first lyric of the Maenads) the Italian gives us:—

Spezzata come il fabbro il cribro spezza.

This means literally: 'Riven as a blacksmith rives a sieve or boulder.' Now sieves are made in Tuscany of a plate of iron, pierced with holes; and the image would therefore be familiar to an Italian. I have, however, preferred to translate thus:—

Riven as woodmen fir-trees rive,

instead of giving:—

Riven as blacksmiths boulders rive,

because I thought that the second and faithful version would be unintelligible as well as unpoetical for English readers.

* * * * *



EIGHT SONNETS OF PETRARCH

ON THE PAPAL COURT AT AVIGNON



Page 218

Fountain of woe! Harbour of endless ire!
 Thou school of errors, haunt of heresies!
 Once Rome, now Babylon, the world's disease,
 That maddenest men with fears and fell desire!
 O forge of fraud! O prison dark and dire,
 Where dies the good, where evil breeds increase!
 Thou living Hell! Wonders will never cease
 If Christ rise not to purge thy sins with fire.
 Founded in chaste and humble poverty,
 Against thy founders thou dost raise thy horn,
 Thou shameless harlot! And whence flows this pride?
 Even from foul and loathed adultery,
 The wage of lewdness. Constantine, return!
 Not so: the felon world its fate must bide.

* * * * *

TO STEFANO COLONNA

WRITTEN FROM VAUCLUSE

Glorius Colonna, thou on whose high head
 Rest all our hopes and the great Latin name,
 Whom from the narrow path of truth and fame
 The wrath of Jove turned not with stormful dread:
 Here are no palace-courts, no stage to tread;
 But pines and oaks the shadowy valleys fill
 Between the green fields and the neighbouring hill,
 Where musing oft I climb by fancy led.
 These lift from earth to heaven our soaring soul,
 While the sweet nightingale, that in thick bowers
 Through darkness pours her wail of tuneful woe,
 Doth bend our charmed breast to love's control;
 But thou alone hast marred this bliss of ours,
 Since from our side, dear lord, thou needs must go.

IN VITA DI MADONNA LAURA. XI

ON LEAVING AVIGNON

Backward at every weary step and slow
 These limbs I turn which with great pain I bear;



Then take I comfort from the fragrant air
That breathes from thee, and sighing onward go.
But when I think how joy is turned to woe,
Remembering my short life and whence I fare,
I stay my feet for anguish and despair,
And cast my tearful eyes on earth below.
At times amid the storm of misery
This doubt assails me: how frail limbs and poor
Can severed from their spirit hope to live.
Then answers Love: Hast thou no memory
How I to lovers this great guerdon give,
Free from all human bondage to endure?

* * * * *

IN VITA DI MADONNA LAURA. XII

THOUGHTS IN ABSENCE

The wrinkled sire with hair like winter snow
Leaves the beloved spot where he hath passed his years,
Leaves wife and children, dumb with bitter tears,
To see their father's tottering steps and slow.
Dragging his aged limbs with weary woe,
In these last days of life he nothing fears,



Page 219

But with stout heart his fainting spirit cheers,
And spent and wayworn forward still doth go;
Then comes to Rome, following his heart's desire,
To gaze upon the portraiture of Him
Whom yet he hopes in heaven above to see:
Thus I, alas! my seeking spirit tire,
Lady, to find in other features dim
The longed for, loved, true lineaments of thee.

IN VITA DI MADONNA LAURA. LII

OH THAT I HAD WINGS LIKE A DOVE!

I am so tired beneath the ancient load
Of my misdeeds and custom's tyranny,
That much I fear to fail upon the road
And yield my soul unto mine enemy.
'Tis true a friend from whom all splendour flowed,
To save me came with matchless courtesy:
Then flew far up from sight to heaven's abode,
So that I strive in vain his face to see.
Yet still his voice reverberates here below:
Oh ye who labour, lo! the path is here;
Come unto me if none your going stay!
What grace, what love, what fate surpassing fear
Shall give me wings like dove's wings soft as snow,
That I may rest and raise me from the clay?

* * * * *

IN MORTE DI MADONNA LAURA. XXIV

The eyes whereof I sang my fervid song,
The arms, the hands, the feet, the face benign,
Which severed me from what was rightly mine,
And made me sole and strange amid the throng,
The crisped curls of pure gold beautiful,
And those angelic smiles which once did shine
Imparadising earth with joy divine,



Are now a little dust—dumb, deaf, and dull.
And yet I live! wherefore I weep and wail,
Left alone without the light I loved so long,
Storm-tossed upon a bark that hath no sail.
Then let me here give o'er my amorous song;
The fountains of old inspiration fail,
And nought but woe my dolorous chords prolong.

IN MORTE DI MADONNA LAURA. XXXIV

In thought I raised me to the place where she
Whom still on earth I seek and find not, shines;
There 'mid the souls whom the third sphere confines,
More fair I found her and less proud to me.
She took my hand and said: Here shalt thou be
With me ensphered, unless desires mislead;
Lo! I am she who made thy bosom bleed,
Whose day ere eve was ended utterly:
My bliss no mortal heart can understand;
Thee only do I lack, and that which thou
So loved, now left on earth, my beauteous veil.
Ah! wherefore did she cease and loose my hand?
For at the sound of that celestial tale
I all but stayed in paradise till now.

* * * * *

IN MORTE DI MADONNA LAURA. LXXIV



Page 220

The flower of angels and the spirits blest,
Burghers of heaven, on that first day when she
Who is my lady died, around her pressed
Fulfilled with wonder and with piety.
What light is this? What beauty manifest?
Marvelling they cried: for such supremacy
Of splendour in this age to our high rest
Hath never soared from earth's obscurity.
She, glad to have exchanged her spirit's place,
Consorts with those whose virtues most exceed;
At times the while she backward turns her face
To see me follow—seems to wait and plead:
Therefore toward heaven my will and soul I raise,
Because I hear her praying me to speed.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote 1: We may compare with Venice what is known about the ancient Hellenic city of Sybaris. Sybaris and Ravenna were the Greek and Roman Venice of antiquity.]

[Footnote 2: His first wife was a daughter of the great general of the Venetians against Francesco Sforza. Whether Sigismondo murdered her, as Sansovino seems to imply in his *Famiglie Illustri*, or whether he only repudiated her after her father's execution on the Piazza di San Marco, admits of doubt. About the question of Sigismondo's marriage with Isotta there is also some uncertainty. At any rate she had been some time his mistress before she became his wife.]

[Footnote 3: For the place occupied in the evolution of Italian scholarship by this Greek sage, see my 'Revival of Learning,' *Renaissance in Italy*, part 2.]

[Footnote 4: The account of this church given by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pii Secundi, Comment., ii. 92) deserves quotation: 'Aedificavit tamen nobile templum Arimini in honorem divi Francisci, verum ita gentilibus operibus implevit, ut non tam Christianorum quam infidelium daemones adorantium templum esse videatur.']

[Footnote 5: Almost all the facts of Alberti's life are to be found in the Latin biography included in Muratori. It has been conjectured, and not without plausibility, by the last editor of Alberti's complete works, Bonucci, that this Latin life was penned by Alberti himself.]

[Footnote 6: There is in reality no doubt or problem about this Saint Clair. She was born in 1275, and joined the Augustinian Sisterhood, dying young, in 1308, as



Abbess of her convent. Continual and impassioned meditation on the Passion of our Lord impressed her heart with the signs of His suffering which have been described above. I owe this note to the kindness of an anonymous correspondent, whom I here thank.][Footnote 7: The balance of probability leans against Isabella in this affair. At the licentious court of the Medici she lived with unpardonable freedom. Troilo Orsini was



Page 221

himself assassinated in Paris by Bracciano's orders a few years afterwards.]

[Footnote 8: I have amplified and corrected this chronicle by the light of Professor Gnoli's monograph, *Vittoria Accoramboni*, published by Le Monnier at Florence in 1870.]

[Footnote 9: In dealing with Webster's tragedy, I have adhered to his use and spelling of names.]

[Footnote 10: The fresco of the Coronation of the Virgin upon the semi-dome of S. Giovanni is the work of a copyist, Cesare Aretusi. But part of the original fresco, which was removed in 1684, exists in a good state of preservation at the end of the long gallery of the library.]

[Footnote 11: See the chapter on Euripides in my *Studies of Greek Poets*, First Series, for a further development of this view of artistic evolution.]

[Footnote 12: I find that this story is common in the country round Canossa. It is mentioned by Professor A. Ferretti in his monograph entitled *Canossa, Studi e Ricerche*, Reggio, 1876, a work to which I am indebted, and which will repay careful study.]

[Footnote 13: Charles claimed under the will of Rene of Anjou, who in turn claimed under the will of Joan II.]

[Footnote 14: For an estimate of Cosimo's services to art and literature, his collection of libraries, his great buildings, his generosity to scholars, and his promotion of Greek studies, I may refer to my *Renaissance in Italy*: 'The Revival of Learning,' chap. iv.]

[Footnote 15: Giotto had painted the Duke of Athens, in like manner, on the same walls.]

[Footnote 16: See *Archivio Storico*.]

[Footnote 17: The order of rhymes runs thus: *a, b, b, a, a, b, b, a, c, d, c, d, c, d*; or in the terzets, *c, d, e, c, d, e*, or *c, d, e, d, c, e*, and so forth.]

[Footnote 18: It has extraordinary interest for the student of our literary development, inasmuch as it is full of experiments in metres, which have never thriven on English soil. Not to mention the attempt to write in asclepiads and other classical rhythms, we might point to Sidney's *terza rima*, poems with *sdrucchiolo* or treble rhymes. This peculiar and painful form he borrowed from Ariosto and Sanazzaro; but even in Italian it



cannot be handled without sacrifice of variety, without impeding the metrical movement and marring the sense.][Footnote 19: The stately structure of the *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion* is a rebuilding of the Italian Canzone. His Eclogues, with their allegories, repeat the manner of Petrarch's minor Latin poems.][Footnote 20: Marlowe makes Gaveston talk of 'Italian masques.' At the same time, in the prologue to *Tamburlaine*,



Page 222

he shows that he was conscious of the new and nobler direction followed by the drama in England.][Footnote 21: This sentence requires some qualification. In his *Poesia Popolare Italiana*, 1878, Professor d'Ancona prints a Pisan, a Venetian, and two Lombard versions of our Border ballad 'Where hae ye been, Lord Randal, my son,' so close in general type and minor details to the English, German, Swedish, and Finnish versions of this Volkslied as to suggest a very ancient community of origin. It remains as yet, however, an isolated fact in the history of Italian popular poetry.]

[Footnote 22: *Canti Popolari Toscani*, raccolti e annotati da Giuseppe Tigri. Volume unico. Firenze: G. Barbera, 1869.]

[Footnote 23: This is a description of the Tuscan rispetto. In Sicily the stanza generally consists of eight lines rhyming alternately throughout, while in the North of Italy it is normally a simple quatrain. The same poetical material assumes in Northern, Central, and Southern Italy these diverge but associated forms.][Footnote 24: This song, called Ciure (Sicilian for *fiore*) in Sicily, is said by Signor Pitre to be in disrepute there. He once asked an old dame of Palermo to repeat him some of these ditties. Her answer was, 'You must get them from light women; I do not know any. They sing them in bad houses and prisons, where, God be praised, I have never been.' In Tuscany there does not appear to be so marked a distinction between the flower song and the rispetto.]

[Footnote 25: Much light has lately been thrown on the popular poetry of Italy; and it appears that contemporary improvisatori trust more to their richly stocked memories and to their power of recombination than to original or novel inspiration. It is in Sicily that the vein of truly creative lyric utterance is said to flow most freely and most copiously at the present time.]

[Footnote 26: 'Remember me, fair one, to the scrivener. I do not know him or who he is, but he seems to me a sovereign poet, so cunning is he in his use of verse.']

[Footnote 27: It must be remarked that Tigri draws a strong contrast in this respect between the songs of the mountain districts which he has printed and those of the towns, and that Pitre, in his edition of Sicilian *Volkslieder*, expressly alludes to the coarseness of a whole class which he had omitted. The MSS. of Sicilian and Tuscan songs, dating from the fifteenth century and earlier, yield a fair proportion of decidedly obscene compositions. Yet the fact stated above is integrally correct. When acclimatised in the large towns, the rustic Muse not unfrequently assumes a garb of grossness. At home, among the fields and on the mountains, she remains chaste and romantic.]

[Footnote 28: In a rispetto, of which I subjoin a translation, sung by a poor lad to a mistress of higher rank, love itself is pleaded as the sign of a gentle soul:—



Page 223

My state is poor: I am not meet
To court so nobly born a love;
For poverty hath tied my feet,
Trying to climb too far above.
Yet am I gentle, loving thee;
Nor need thou shun my poverty.

[Footnote 29: When the Cherubina, of whom mention has been made above, was asked by Signor Tigri to dictate some of her *rispetti*, she answered, 'O signore! ne dico tanti quando li canto! . . . ma ora . . . bisognerebbe averli tutti in visione; se no, proprio non vengono.']

[Footnote 30: I need hardly guard myself against being supposed to mean that the form of *Ballata* in question was the only one of its kind in Italy.]

[Footnote 31: See my *Sketches in Italy and Greece*, p. 114.]

[Footnote 32: The originals will be found in Carducci's *Studi Letterari*, p. 273 *et seq.* I have preserved their rhyming structure.]

[Footnote 33: Stanza XLIII. All references are made to Carducci's excellent edition, *Le Stanze, l'Orfeo e le Rime di Messer Angelo Ambrogini Poliziano*. Firenze: G. Barbera. 1863.]