

[Scribner's] Stories by English Authors in Italy

The Project Gutenberg Etext Stories by English Authors in Italy Selected by the Editors of Scribners See others in our "Stories by English Authors in" series.

Copyright laws are changing all over the world, be sure to check the copyright laws for your country before posting these files!!

Please take a look at the important information in this header.

We encourage you to keep this file on your own disk, keeping an electronic path open for the next readers. Do not remove this.

****Welcome To The World of Free Plain Vanilla Electronic Texts****

****Etexts Readable By Both Humans and By Computers, Since 1971****

These Etexts Prepared By Hundreds of Volunteers and Donations

Information on contacting Project Gutenberg to get Etexts, and further information is included below. We need your donations.

STORIES BY ENGLISH AUTHORS: ITALY By Various

January, 2001 [Etext #2457]

CONTENTS

A FAITHFUL RETAINER James Payn BIANCA W. E. Norris GONERIL A. Mary F. Robinson THE BRIGAND'S BRIDE Laurence Oliphant MRS. GENERAL TALBOYS Anthony Trollope

The Project Gutenberg Etext Stories by English Authors in Italy *****This file should be named sbeai10.txt or sbeai10.zip*****

Corrected EDITIONS of our etexts get a new NUMBER, sbeai11.txt VERSIONS based on separate sources get new LETTER, sbeai10a.txt

Etext prepared by Dagny, dagnyj@hotmail.com and John Bickers, jbickers@ihug.co.nz

Project Gutenberg Etexts are usually created from multiple editions, all of which are in the Public Domain in the United States, unless a copyright notice is included. Therefore, we usually do NOT keep any of these books in compliance with any particular paper edition.

We are now trying to release all our books one month in advance of the official release dates, leaving time for better editing.

Please note: neither this list nor its contents are final till midnight of the last day of the month of any such announcement. The official release date of all Project Gutenberg Etexts is at Midnight, Central Time, of the last day of the stated month. A preliminary version may often be posted for suggestion, comment and editing by those who wish to do so. To be sure you have an up to date first edition [xxxxx10x.xxx] please check file sizes in the first week of the next month. Since our ftp program has a bug in it that scrambles the date [tried to

fix and failed] a look at the file size will have to do, but we will try to see a new copy has at least one byte more or less.

Information about Project Gutenberg

(one page)

We produce about two million dollars for each hour we work. The time it takes us, a rather conservative estimate, is fifty hours to get any etext selected, entered, proofread, edited, copyright searched and analyzed, the copyright letters written, etc. This projected audience is one hundred million readers. If our value per text is nominally estimated at one dollar then we produce \$2 million dollars per hour this year as we release thirty-six text files per month, or 432 more Etexts in 1999 for a total of 2000+ If these reach just 10% of the computerized population, then the total should reach over 200 billion Etexts given away this year.

The Goal of Project Gutenberg is to Give Away One Trillion Etext Files by December 31, 2001. [10,000 x 100,000,000 = 1 Trillion] This is ten thousand titles each to one hundred million readers, which is only about 5% of the present number of computer users.

At our revised rates of production, we will reach only one-third of that goal by the end of 2001, or about 3,333 Etexts unless we manage to get some real funding; currently our funding is mostly from Michael Hart's salary at Carnegie-Mellon University, and an assortment of sporadic gifts; this salary is only good for a few more years, so we are looking for something to replace it, as we don't want Project Gutenberg to be so dependent on one person.

We need your donations more than ever!

All donations should be made to "Project Gutenberg/CMU": and are tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. (CMU = Carnegie- Mellon University).

For these and other matters, please mail to:

Project Gutenberg P. O. Box 2782 Champaign, IL 61825

When all other email fails. . .try our Executive Director: Michael S. Hart <hart@pobox.com>
hart@pobox.com forwards to hart@prairienet.org and archive.org if your mail bounces from archive.org, I will still see it, if it bounces from prairienet.org, better resend later on. . . .

We would prefer to send you this information by email.

To access Project Gutenberg etexts, use any Web browser to view <http://promo.net/pg>. This site lists Etexts by author and by title, and includes information about how to get involved with Project Gutenberg. You could also download our past Newsletters, or subscribe here. This is one of our major sites, please email hart@pobox.com, for a more complete list of our various sites.

To go directly to the etext collections, use FTP or any Web browser to visit a Project Gutenberg mirror (mirror sites are available on 7 continents; mirrors are listed at <http://promo.net/pg>).

Mac users, do NOT point and click, typing works better.

Example FTP session:

```
ftp sunsite.unc.edu
login: anonymous
password: your@login
cd pub/docs/books/gutenberg
cd etext90 through etext99
dir [to see files]
get or mget [to get files. . .set bin for zip files]
GET GUTINDEX.?? [to get a year's listing of books, e.g., GUTINDEX.99]
GET GUTINDEX.ALL [to get a listing of ALL books]
```

**

Information prepared by the Project Gutenberg legal advisor

**

(Three Pages)

*****START**THE SMALL PRINT!**FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN ETEXTS**START***** Why is this "Small Print!" statement here? You know: lawyers. They tell us you might sue us if there is something wrong with your copy of this etext, even if you got it for free from someone other than us, and even if what's wrong is not our fault. So, among other things, this "Small Print!" statement disclaims most of our liability to you. It also tells you how you can distribute copies of this etext if you want to.

***BEFORE!* YOU USE OR READ THIS ETEXT**

By using or reading any part of this PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, you indicate that you understand, agree to and accept this "Small Print!" statement. If you do not, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for this etext by sending a request within 30 days of receiving it to the person you got it from. If you received this etext on a physical medium (such as a disk), you must return it with your request.

ABOUT PROJECT GUTENBERG-TM ETEXTS

This PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext, like most PROJECT GUTENBERG- tm etexts, is a "public domain" work distributed by Professor Michael S. Hart through the Project Gutenberg Association at Carnegie-Mellon University (the "Project"). Among other things, this means that no one owns a United States copyright on or for this work, so the Project (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth below, apply if you wish to copy and distribute this etext under the Project's "PROJECT GUTENBERG" trademark.

To create these etexts, the Project expends considerable efforts to identify, transcribe and proofread public domain works. Despite these efforts, the Project's etexts and any medium they may be on may contain "Defects". Among other things, Defects may take the form of incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other etext medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

LIMITED WARRANTY; DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES

But for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described below, [1] the Project (and any other party you may receive this etext from as a PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm etext) disclaims all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees, and [2] YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE OR UNDER STRICT LIABILITY, OR FOR BREACH OF WARRANTY OR CONTRACT, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES, EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES.

If you discover a Defect in this etext within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending an explanatory note within that time to the person you received it from. If you received it on a physical medium, you must return it with your note, and such person may choose to alternatively give you a replacement copy. If you received it electronically, such person may choose to alternatively give you a second opportunity to receive it electronically.

THIS ETEXT IS OTHERWISE PROVIDED TO YOU "AS-IS". NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, ARE MADE TO YOU AS TO THE ETEXT OR ANY MEDIUM IT MAY BE ON, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE.

Some states do not allow disclaimers of implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of consequential damages, so the above disclaimers and exclusions may not apply to you, and you may have other legal rights.

INDEMNITY

You will indemnify and hold the Project, its directors, officers, members and agents harmless from all liability, cost and expense, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following that you do or cause: [1] distribution of this etext, [2] alteration, modification, or addition to the etext, or [3] any Defect.

DISTRIBUTION UNDER "PROJECT GUTENBERG-tm"

You may distribute copies of this etext electronically, or by disk, book or any other medium if you either delete this "Small Print!" and all other references to Project Gutenberg, or:

[1] Only give exact copies of it. Among other things, this requires that you do not remove, alter or modify the etext or this "small print!" statement. You may however, if you wish, distribute this etext in machine readable binary, compressed, mark-up, or proprietary form, including any form resulting from conversion by word processing or hypertext software, but only so long as *EITHER*:

[*] The etext, when displayed, is clearly readable, and does *not* contain characters other than those intended by the author of the work, although tilde (~), asterisk (*) and underline (_) characters may be used to convey punctuation intended by the author, and additional characters may be used to indicate hypertext links; OR

[*] The etext may be readily converted by the reader at no expense into plain ASCII, EBCDIC or equivalent form by the program that displays the etext (as is the case, for instance, with most word processors); OR

[*] You provide, or agree to also provide on request at no additional cost, fee or expense, a copy of the etext in its original plain ASCII form (or in EBCDIC or other equivalent proprietary form).

[2] Honor the etext refund and replacement provisions of this "Small Print!" statement.

[3] Pay a trademark license fee to the Project of 20% of the net profits you derive calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. If you don't derive profits, no royalty is due. Royalties are

payable to "Project Gutenberg Association/Carnegie-Mellon University" within the 60 days following each date you prepare (or were legally required to prepare) your annual (or equivalent periodic) tax return.

WHAT IF YOU *WANT* TO SEND MONEY EVEN IF YOU DON'T HAVE TO?

The Project gratefully accepts contributions in money, time, scanning machines, OCR software, public domain etexts, royalty free copyright licenses, and every other sort of contribution you can think of. Money should be paid to "Project Gutenberg Association / Carnegie-Mellon University".

*END*THE SMALL PRINT! FOR PUBLIC DOMAIN ETEXTS*Ver.04.29.93*END*

Etext prepared by Dagny, dagnyj@hotmail.com and John Bickers, jbickers@ihug.co.nz

STORIES BY ENGLISH AUTHORS

ITALY

CONTENTS

A FAITHFUL RETAINER James Payn BIANCA W. E. Norris GONERIL A. Mary F. Robinson THE BRIGAND'S BRIDE Laurence Oliphant MRS. GENERAL TALBOYS Anthony Trollope

A FAITHFUL RETAINER

BY

JAMES PAYN

When I lived in the country,--which was a long time ago,--our nearest neighbours were the Luscombes. They were very great personages in the country indeed, and the family were greatly "respected"; though not, so far as I could discern, for any particular reason, except from their having been there for several generations. People are supposed to improve, like wine, from keeping--even if they are rather "ordinary" at starting; and the Luscombes, at the time I knew them, were considered quite a "vintage" family. They had begun in Charles II.'s time, and dated their descent from greatness in the female line. That they had managed to keep a great estate not very much impaired so long was certainly a proof of great cleverness, since there had been many spend-thrifts among them; but fortunately there had been a miser or two, who had restored the average, and their fortunes.

Mr. Roger Luscombe, the present proprietor, was neither the one nor the other, but he was inclined to frugality, and no wonder; a burnt child dreads the fire, even though he may have had nothing to do with lighting it himself, and his father had kicked down a good many thousands with the help of "the bones" (as dice were called in his day) and "the devil's books" (which was the name for cards with those that disapproved of them) and race-horses; there was plenty left, but it made the old gentleman careful and especially solicitous to keep it. There was no stint, however, of any kind at the Court, which to me, who lived in the little vicarage of Dalton with my father, seemed a palace.

It was indeed a very fine place, with statues in the hall and pictures in the gallery and peacocks on the terrace. Lady Jane, the daughter of a wealthy peer, who had almost put things on their old footing with her ample dowry, was a very great lady, and had been used, I was told, to an even more splendid home; but to me, who had no mother, she was simply the kindest and most gracious woman I had ever known.

My connection with the Luscombes arose from their only son Richard being my father's pupil. We were both brought up at home, but for very different reasons. In my case it was from economy: the living was small and our family was large, though, as it happened, I had no brothers. Richard was too precious to his parents to be trusted to the tender mercies of a public school. He was in delicate health, not so much natural to him as caused by an excess of care--coddling. Though he and I were very good friends, unless when we were quarreling, it must be owned that he was a spoiled boy.

There is a good deal of nonsense talked of young gentlemen who are brought up from their cradles in an atmosphere of flattery /not/ being spoiled; but unless they are angels--which is a very exceptional case --it cannot be otherwise. Richard Luscombe was a good fellow in many ways; liberal with his money (indeed, apt to be lavish), and kind- hearted, but self-willed, effeminate, and impulsive. He had also-- which was a source of great alarm and grief to his father--a marked taste for speculation.

After the age of "alley tors and commoneys," of albert-rock and hard- bake, in which we both gambled frightfully, I could afford him no opportunities of gratifying this passion; but if he could get a little money "on" anything, there was nothing that pleased him better--not that he cared for the money, but for the delight of winning it. The next moment he would give it away to a beggar. Numbers of good people look upon gambling with even greater horror than it deserves, because they cannot understand this; the attraction of risk, and the wild joy of "pulling off" something when the chances are against one, are unknown to them. It is the same with the love of liquor. Richard Luscombe had not a spark of that (his father left him one of the best cellars in England, but he never touches even a glass of claret after dinner; "I should as soon think," he says, "of eating when I am not hungry"); but he dearly liked what he called a "spec." Never shall I forget the first time he realised anything that could be termed a stake.

When he was about sixteen, he and I had driven over to some little country races a few miles away from Dalton, without, I fear, announcing our intention of so doing. Fresh air was good for "our dear Richard," and since pedestrian exercise (which he also hated) exhausted him, he had a groom and dog-cart always at his own disposal. It was a day of great excitement for me, who had never before seen a race-course. The flags, the grand stand (a rude erection of planks, which came down, by-the-bye, the next year during the race for the cup, and reduced the sporting population), the insinuating gipsies, the bawling card-sellers, and especially the shining horses with their twisted manes, all excited my admiration.

I was well acquainted with them in fiction; and these illustrations of the books I loved so well delighted me. Richard, who had read less and seen more, was bent on business.

He was tall for his age, but very slight and youthful-looking, and the contrast of his appearance with that of the company in the little ring, composed as it was of a choice selection of the roughest blackguards in England, was very striking.

Many of these knew who he was, and were very glad to see him, but only one of the book-makers secured his patronage. The fact was, Master Richard had but one five-pound note to lay; he had been saving up his pocket-money for weeks for this very purpose, and he took ten to one about an outsider, "Don Sebastian,"--a name I shall remember when all other historical knowledge has departed from me,--not because he knew anything of the horse, but because the longest odds were laid against him.

I didn't like the look of the "gentleman sportsman" who took custody of that five-pound note, but Richard (who had never seen him before) assured me, with his usual confidence, that he was "straight as a die" and "as honest as the day."

The race excited me exceedingly; Richard had lent me a field-glass (for everything he had was in duplicate, if not triplicate), and I watched the progress of that running rainbow with a beating heart. At first Yellow Cap (the Don) seemed completely out of it, the last of all; but presently he began to creep up, and as they drew

near the winning-post, shouts of "Yellow Cap wins!" "Yellow Cap wins!" rent the air. He did win by a head, and with a well-pleased flush on my face at my friend's marvellous good fortune, I turned to congratulate him. He was gone. The tumult and confusion were excessive; but looking toward the exit gate, I just caught a glimpse of the book-maker passing rapidly through it, and then of Richard in pursuit of him.

A stout young farmer, whom I knew, was standing behind me, and in a few hurried words I told him what had happened. "Come with me," he said, and off we ran, as though we had been entered for the cup ourselves. The other two were already a field ahead, and far away from the course; but, fast as the book-maker ran, the delicate Richard had come up with him. I could imagine how pumped he was, but the idea of having been swindled by this scoundrel, who was running off with his five-pound note, as well as the fifty pounds he owed him, had no doubt lent him wings. It could not, however, lend him strength, nor teach him the art of self-defence, and after a few moments, passed doubtless in polite request and blunt refusal, we saw the miscreant strike out from the shoulder and Richard go down.

The time thus lost, however, short-lived as was the combat, was fatal to the victor. There were few better runners in Dalton than my companion and myself, and we gained on the book-maker, who had probably trained on gin and bad tobacco, hand over hand. As we drew near him he turned round and inquired, with many expletives, made half inarticulate by want of breath, what we wanted with a gentleman engaged on his own private affairs.

"Well," I said,--for as I could trust my agricultural friend with the more practical measures that were likely to follow I thought it only fair that I should do the talking,--"we want first the five-pound note which that young gentleman, whom you have just knocked down, intrusted to your care, and then the fifty pounds you have lost to him."

He called Heaven to witness that he had never made a bet in his life with any young gentleman, but that, having been molested, he believed by a footpad, as he was returning home to his family, he had been compelled to defend himself.

"I heard you make the bet and saw you take the money," I remarked, with confidence.

"That's good enough," said the farmer. "Now if you don't shell out that money this instant, I'll have you back in the ring in a brace of shakes and tell them what has happened. Last year they tore a welsher pretty nigh to pieces, and this year, if you don't 'part,' they'll do it quite."

The book-maker turned livid,--I never saw a man in such a funk in my life,--and produced a greasy pocket-book, out of which he took Richard's bank-note, and ten quite new ones; and I noticed there were more left, so that poverty was not his excuse for fraud.

"Let me look at 'em against the sun," said the farmer, "to see as the water-mark is all right."

This was a precaution I should never have thought of, and it gave me for the first time a sense of the great intelligence of my father's parishioner.

"Yes, they're all correct. And now you may go; but if ever you show your face again on Southick (Southwick) race-course it will be the worst for you."

He slunk away, and we returned to Richard, who was sitting on the ground, looking at his nose, which was bleeding and had attained vast dimensions.

"Did you get the money?" were his first words, which I thought very characteristic.

"Yes, there it is, squire--ten fivers and your own note."

"Very good; I should never have seen a shilling of it but for you and Charley, so we will just divide it into three shares."

The farmer said, "No," but eventually took his L16 13s. 4d., and quite right too. Of course I did not take Richard's money, but he afterward bought me a rifle with it, which I could not refuse. The farmer, as may be well imagined, could be trusted to say nothing of our adventure; but it was impossible to hide Richard's nose. He was far too honest a fellow to tell a lie about it, and the whole story came out. His father was dreadfully shocked at it, and Lady Jane in despair: the one about his gambling propensities, and the other about his nose; she thought, if the injury did not prove fatal, he would be disfigured for life.

He was well in a week, but the circumstances had the gravest consequences. It was decided that something must be done with the heir of the Luscombes to wean him from low company (this was not me, but grooms and racing people); but even this predilection was ascribed in part to his fragile constitution. A fashionable physician came down from London to consider the case. He could not quite be brought to the point desired by Lady Jane, to lay Richard's love of gambling at the door of the delicacy of his lungs; but he was brought very near it. The young fellow, his "opinion" was, had been brought up too much like a hothouse flower; his tastes were what they were chiefly because he had no opportunities of forming better ones; with improved strength his moral nature would become more elevated. That he was truthful was a great source of satisfaction (this was with reference to his distinct refusal to give up gambling to please anybody) and a most wholesome physical sign. "My recommendation is that he should be temporarily removed from his present dull surroundings; there is not scope in them for his mind; he should be sent abroad for a month or two with his tutor. That will do him a world of good."

If it was not very good advice, it was probably quite as judicious as other "opinions" for which a hundred and fifty guineas have been cheerfully paid. It was at all events a great comfort to hear that there was nothing constitutionally wrong with "dearest Richard," and that he only wanted a tonic for mind and body. The doctor's verdict was accepted by both parents, but there was an insurmountable obstacle to its being carried into effect in Master Richard himself. My father could not leave his parish and his family, and with no other tutor could the young gentleman be induced to go.

Now it happened that the butler at the Court, John Maitland, who, as is often the case in such households, had the gravity and dignity of a bishop, was so fortunate as to be a favourite both with the old folks and the young one. He really was a superior person, and not only "honest as the day" in Richard's eyes (which, as we have seen, was not a guarantee of straightforwardness), but in those of every one else. He had been born in the village, had been page to Mr. Luscombe's father, and had lived more than fifty years at the Court. The relations between master and servant were feudal, mingled with the more modern attachment that comes of good service properly appreciated. He thought the Luscombes, if not the only old family in the world, the best, and worshipped--though in a dignified and ecclesiastical manner--the ground trodden on both by the squire and Master Richard. My own impression was that under pretence of giving way to the latter he played into the parental hands; but as this was certainly for my young friend's good, I never communicated my suspicions to him. Maitland, at all events, had more influence over him than any man except my father. Still it astonished us all not a little, notwithstanding the high opinion we entertained of him, when we heard that the butler was to be intrusted with the guardianship of Richard abroad. Such a thing could not have happened in any other family, but so it was arranged; and partly as valet, partly as confidential companion and treasurer Maitland started with his young master on his travels.

These were to last for not less than six months, and Italy, because of its warm climate, was the country to which they were bound. That it would do the young fellow good, both moral and physical, we all hoped; but my father had his doubts. He feared that Maitland's influence over his companion would wane when away from the Court; but it never entered into his mind that he would willingly permit any wrong doing, and still

less that the man would himself succumb to any temptation that involved dishonesty.

They travelled by easy stages; though they used the railway, of course, they did so only for a few hours a day, and got out and remained at places of interest. Richard was very amenable, and indeed showed no desire for dissipation; his one weakness--that of having a "spree"--had no opportunity of being gratified; and Maitland wrote home the most gratifying letters, not only respecting the behaviour of his charge, but of the improvement in his health. As they drew nearer to Italy, Richard observed one day that he should spend a day or two at Monte Carlo. Maitland had never heard of the place or of its peculiar attractions; and "Master Richard" only told him that it was very picturesque. The horror of the faithful retainer may therefore be imagined when he found that it was a gambling resort.

He could not prevent his young master frequenting the tables, and though he kept the purse, with the exception of a few pounds, and would certainly have stood between him and ruin, he could not prevent his winning. Richard had the luck, and more, that proverbially attends young people--he had the luck of the devil; his few napoleons swelling to a great many on the very first day, and he was in the seventh heaven of happiness. The next day and the next he won largely, immensely; in vain Maitland threatened to write to his father, and even to leave him.

"All right," replied the reckless youth. "You may do as you like; even if the governor disinherits me I can make my fortune by stopping here. And as to leaving me, go by all means; I shall get on very well with a French valet."

It was dreadful.

Richard grew happier and happier every day, as the golden flood flowed in upon him, but also extremely hectic. He passed the whole day at the tables, and the want of air and exercise, and, still more, the intense excitement which possessed him, began to have the most serious effect. That prescription of "seeing the world," and "escaping from his dull surroundings," was having a very different result from what had been expected. "The paths of glory lead but to the grave"; the young Englishman and his luck were the talk of all Monte Carlo, and he enjoyed his notoriety very much; but, as the poor butler plaintively observed, what was the good of that when Master Richard was "killing himself"?

How the news was received at the Court I had no means of judging, for the squire kept a rigid silence, except that he had long conferences with my father; and Lady Jane kept her room. It was indeed a very sore subject. The squire wanted to start for Monte Carlo at once; but he was singularly insular, detested travel, and in truth was very unfit for such a "cutting-out expedition" as was contemplated. He waited, half out of his mind with anxiety, but in hopes of a better report; what he hoped for was that luck would turn, and Richard lose every shilling.

The very reverse of this, however, took place; Richard won more and more. He would come home to his hotel in the evening with a porter carrying his gains. His portmanteau was full of napoleons. It was characteristic of him that he never thought of banking it. One evening he came in with very bright eyes, but a most shrunken and cadaverous face.

"This has been my best day of all, Johnny," he said. "See, I have won two thousand pounds; and you shall have a hundred of it."

But Maitland refused to have anything to do with such ill-gotten gains, for which, too, his young master was sacrificing his health, and perhaps his life. Still--though this did not strike Richard till afterward--he could not help regarding the great heap of gold with considerable interest. Added to the lad's previous gains, the amount was now very large indeed--more than five thousand pounds.

"I should really think, Master Richard, as you had now won enough."

"Enough? Certainly not. I have not broken the bank yet. I mean to do that before I've done with it, Johnny."

"That will be after you've killed yourself," said honest John.

"Well, then I shall die /rich/," was the reckless rejoinder.

Richard, who was too exhausted for repose, tossed and tumbled on his bed for hours, and eventually dropped into a heavy slumber, and slept far into the next morning. He awoke feeling very unwell, but his chief anxiety was lest he should miss the opening of the tables; he was always the first to begin. He rang his bell violently for Maitland. There was no reply, and when he rang again, one of the hotel servants came up.

"Where is my man?" he inquired.

"Monsieur's man-servant took monsieur's luggage to the railway-station; he is gone by the early train to Turin."

"Gone to Turin with my luggage?"

"Yes, with the two portmanteaus--very heavy ones."

Richard got out of bed, and dragged his weary limbs into the dressing-room, an inner apartment, where the portmanteaus were kept for safety. They were both gone.

"What train did the scoundrel go by? Where is my watch? Why, the villain has taken that too! Send for the police! No; there is no time to be lost--send a telegram. Why, he has not even left me enough money to pay a telegram!"

All his small change was gone. Honest John had taken everything; he had not left his young master a single sixpence. At this revelation of the state of affairs, poor Richard, weakened as he was by his long excitement, threw himself on the bed and burst into tears. The attendant, to whom, as usual, he had been liberal, was affected by an emotion so strange in an Englishman.

"Monsieur must not fret; the thief will be caught and the money restored. It will be well, perhaps to tell the /maitre d'hotel/."

The master of the hotel appeared with a very grave face. He was desolated to hear of the misfortune that had befallen his young guest. Perhaps there was not quite so much taken as had been reported.

"I tell you it's all gone; more than five thousand pounds, and my watch and chain; I have not half a franc in my possession."

"That is unfortunate indeed," said the /maitre d'hotel/, looking graver than ever, "because there is my bill to settle."

"Oh, hang your bill!" cried Richard. "/That/ will be all right. I must telegraph to my father at once."

"But how is monsieur to telegraph if he has no money?"

It was probably the first time in his life that the young fellow had ever understood how inconvenient a thing is poverty. What also amazed him beyond measure was the man's manner; yesterday, and all other days, it had

been polite to obsequiousness; now it was dry almost to insolence. It seemed, indeed, to imply some doubt of the bona fides of his guest--that he might not, in short, be much better than honest John himself, of whom he was possibly the confederate; that the whole story was a trumped-up one to account for the inability to meet his bill. As to his having won largely at the tables, that might be true enough; but he also might have lost it all, and more with it; money changes hands at Monte Carlo very rapidly.

In the end, however, and not without much objection, the landlord advanced a sufficient sum to enable Richard to telegraph home. He also permitted him to stay on at the hotel, stipulating, however, that he should call for no wine, nor indulge in anything expensive--a humiliating arrangement enough, but not so much so as the terms of another proviso, that he was never to enter the gambling saloon or go beyond the public gardens. Even there he was under surveillance, and it was, in short, quite clear that he was suspected of an intention to run away without paying his bill--perhaps even of joining his "confederate," Mr. John Maitland.

The only thing that comforted Richard was the conviction that he should have a remittance from his father in a few hours; but nothing of the sort, not even a telegram, arrived. Day after day went by, and the young fellow was in despair; he felt like a pariah, for he had been so occupied with the tables that he had made no friends; and his few acquaintances looked askance at him, as being under a cloud, with the precise nature of which they were unacquainted. Friendless and penniless in a foreign land, his spirit was utterly broken, and he began to understand what a fool he had made of himself; especially how ungratefully he had behaved to his father, without whom it was not so easy to "get on," it appeared, as he had imagined. He saw, too, the evil of his conduct in having thrust a temptation in the way of honest John too great to be resisted. The police could hear no news of him, and, indeed, seemed very incredulous with respect to Richard's account of the matter.

On the fourth day Richard received a letter from his father of the gravest kind, though expressed in the most affectionate terms. He hardly alluded to the immediate misfortune that had happened to him, but spoke of the anxiety and alarm which his conduct had caused his mother and himself. "I enclose you a check," he wrote, "just sufficient to comfortably bring you home and pay your hotel bill, and exceedingly regret that I cannot trust my son with more--lest he should risk it in a way that gives his mother and myself more distress of mind than I can express."

Richard's heart was touched, as it well might have been; though perhaps the condition of mind in which his father's communication found him had something to do with it. By that night's mail he despatched a letter home which gave the greatest delight at the Court, and also at the vicarage, for Mr. Luscombe, full of pride and joy, brought it to my father to read. "I have been very foolish, sir, and very wicked," it ran. "I believe I should have been dead by this time had not Maitland stolen my money (so that I have no reason to feel very angry with him) and deprived me of the means of suicide. I give you my word of honour that I will never gamble again."

Lady Jane sent a telegram to meet Master Richard in Paris, to say what a dear good boy he was, and how happy he had made her. This did not surprise him, but what did astonish him very much on arriving at the Court was that John Maitland opened the door for him.

"Why, you old scoundrel!"

"Yes, sir, I know; I'm a thief and all that, but I did it for the best; I did, indeed."

Though the fatted calf was killed for Master Richard, he had by no means returned like the prodigal son. On the contrary, he had sent home a remittance, as it were, by the butler, of more than five thousand pounds. The whole plot had been devised by honest John as the only method of extricating Master Richard from that Monte Carlo spider's web, and had been carried out by the help of the /maitre d'hotel/, with the squire's approval. And to do the young fellow justice, he never resented the trick that had been played upon him.

Richard was not sent abroad again, but to Cambridge, where eventually he took a fourth-class (poll) degree; and Lady Jane was as proud of it as if he had been senior wrangler. He kept his word, in spite of all temptations to the contrary, and never touched a card--a circumstance which drove him to take a fair amount of exercise, and, in consequence, he steadily improved in health. He was sometimes chaffed by his companions for his abstinence from play; they should have thought he was the last man to be afraid of losing his money.

"You are right, so far," he would answer, drily; "but the fact is, I have had enough of winning."

To which they would reply:

"Oh yes, we dare say," an elliptical expression, which conveyed disbelief.

He never told them the story of his Monte Carlo experiences; but in the vacations he would often talk to honest John about them. We may be sure that that faithful retainer did not go unrewarded for his fraudulent act.

BIANCA

BY

W. E. NORRIS

Not long since, I was one among a crowd of nobodies at a big official reception in Paris when the Marchese and Marchesa di San Silvestro were announced. There was a momentary hush; those about the doorway fell back to let this distinguished couple pass, and some of us stood on tiptoe to get a glimpse of them; for San Silvestro is a man of no small importance in the political and diplomatic world, and his wife enjoys quite a European fame for beauty and amiability, having had opportunities of displaying both these attractive gifts at the several courts where she has acted as Italian ambassadress. They made their way quickly up the long room,--she short, rather sallow, inclined toward embonpoint, but with eyes whose magnificence was rivalled only by that of her diamonds; he bald-headed, fat, gray-haired, covered with orders,--and were soon out of sight. I followed them with a sigh which caused my neighbour to ask me jocosely whether the marchesa was an old flame of mine.

"Far from it," I answered. "Only the sight of her reminded me of bygone days. Dear, dear me! how time does slip on! It is fifteen years since I saw her last."

I moved away, looking down rather ruefully at the waistcoat to whose circumference fifteen years have made no trifling addition, and wondering whether I was really as much altered and aged in appearance as the marchesa was.

Fifteen years--it is no such very long time; and yet I dare say that the persons principally concerned in the incident which I am about to relate have given up thinking about it as completely as I had done, until the sound of that lady's name, and the sight of her big black eyes, recalled it to me, and set me thinking of the sunny spring afternoon on which my sister Anne and I journeyed from Verona to Venice, and of her naive exclamations of delight on finding herself in a real gondola, gliding smoothly down the Grand Canal. My sister Anne is by some years my senior. She is what might be called an old lady now, and she certainly was an old maid then, and had long accepted her position as such. Then, as now, she habitually wore a gray alpaca gown, a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, gloves a couple of sizes too large for her, and a shapeless, broad-leaved straw hat, from which a blue veil was flung back and streamed out in the breeze behind her, like a ship's ensign. Then, as now, she was the simplest, the most kind-hearted, the most prejudiced of mortals; an enthusiastic admirer of the arts, and given, as her own small contribution thereto, to the production of endless

water-colour landscapes, a trifle woolly, indeed, as to outline, and somewhat faulty as to perspective, but warm in colouring, and highly thought of in the family. I believe, in fact, that it was chiefly with a view to the filling of her portfolio that she had persuaded me to take her to Venice; and, as I am constitutionally indolent, I was willing enough to spend a few weeks in the city which, of all cities in the world, is the best adapted for lazy people. We engaged rooms at Danielli's, and unpacked all our clothes, knowing that we were not likely to make another move until the heat should drive us away.

The first few days, I remember, were not altogether full of enjoyment for one of us. My excellent Anne, who has all her brother's virtues, without his failings, would have scouted the notion of allowing any dread of physical fatigue to stand between her and the churches and pictures which she had come all the way from England to admire; and, as Venice was an old haunt of mine, she very excusably expected me to act as cicerone to her, and allowed me but little rest between the hours of breakfast and of the /table d'hote/. At last, however, she conceived the modest and felicitous idea of making a copy of Titian's "Assumption"; and, having obtained the requisite permission for that purpose, set to work upon the first of a long series of courageous attempts, all of which she conscientiously destroyed when in a half-finished state. At that rate it seemed likely that her days would be fully occupied for some weeks to come; and I urged her to persevere, and not to allow herself to be disheartened by a few brilliant failures; and so she hurried away, early every morning, with her paint-box, her brushes, and her block, and I was left free to smoke my cigarettes in peace, in front of my favourite cafe on the Piazza San Marco.

I was sitting there one morning, watching, with half-closed eyes, the pigeons circling overhead under a cloudless sky, and enjoying the fresh salt breeze that came across the ruffled water from the Adriatic, when I was accosted by one of the white-coated Austrian officers by whom Venice was thronged in those days, and whom I presently recognised as a young fellow named Von Rosenau, whom I had known slightly in Vienna the previous winter. I returned his greeting cordially, for I always like to associate as much as possible with foreigners when I am abroad, and little did I foresee into what trouble this fair-haired, innocent-looking youth was destined to lead me.

I asked him how he liked Venice, and he answered laughingly that he was not there from choice. "I am in disgrace," he explained. "I am always in disgrace, only this time it is rather worse than usual. Do you remember my father, the general? No? Perhaps he was not in Vienna when you were there. He is a soldier of the old school, and manages his family as they tell me he used to manage his regiment in former years, boasting that he never allowed a breach of discipline to pass unpunished, and never will. Last year I exceeded my allowance, and the colonel got orders to stop my leave; this year I borrowed from the Jews, the whole thing was found out, and I was removed from the cavalry, and put into a Croat regiment under orders for Venice. Next year will probably see me enrolled in the police; and so it will go on, I suppose, till some fine morning I shall find myself driving a two-horse yellow diligence in the wilds of Carinthia, and blowing a horn to let the villagers know that the imperial and royal mail is approaching."

After a little more conversation we separated, but only to meet again, that same evening, on the Piazza San Marco, whither I had wandered to listen to the band after dinner, and where I found Von Rosenau seated with a number of his brother officers in front of the principal cafe. These gentlemen, to whom I was presently introduced, were unanimous in complaining of their present quarters. Venice, they said, might be all very well for artists and travellers; but viewed as a garrison it was the dullest of places. There were no amusements, there was no sport, and just now no society; for the Italians were in one of their periodical fits of sulks, and would not speak to, or look at, a German if they could possibly avoid it. "They will not even show themselves when our band is playing," said one of the officers, pointing toward the well-nigh empty piazza. "As for the ladies, it is reported that if one of them is seen speaking to an Austrian, she is either assassinated or sent off to spend the rest of her days in a convent. At all events, it is certain that we have none of us any successes to boast of, except Von Rosenau, who has had an affair, they say, only he is pleased to be very mysterious about it."

"Where does she live, Von Rosenau?" asked another. "Is she rich? Is she noble? Has she a husband, who will stab you both? or only a mother, who will send her to a nunnery, and let you go free? You might gratify our curiosity a little. It would do you no harm, and it would give us something to talk about."

"Bah! he will tell you nothing," cried a third. "He is afraid. He knows that there are half a dozen of us who could cut him out in an hour."

"Von Rosenau," said a young ensign, solemnly, "you would do better to make a clean breast of it. Concealment is useless. Janovicz saw you with her in Santa Maria della Salute the other day, and could have followed her home quite easily if he had been so inclined."

"They were seen together on the Lido, too. People who want to keep their secrets ought not to be so imprudent."

"A good comrade ought to have no secrets from the regiment."

"Come, Von Rosenau, we will promise not to speak to her without your permission if you will tell us how you managed to make her acquaintance."

The object of all these attacks received them with the most perfect composure, continuing to smoke his cigar and gaze out seaward, without so much as turning his head toward his questioners, to whom he vouchsafed no reply whatever. Probably, as an ex-hussar and a sprig of nobility, he may have held his head a little above those of his present brother officers, and preferred disregarding their familiarity to resenting it, as he might have done if it had come from men whom he considered on a footing of equality with himself. Such, at least, was my impression; and it was confirmed by the friendly advances which he made toward me, from that day forth, and by the persistence with which he sought my society. I thought he seemed to wish for some companion whose ideas had not been developed exclusively in barrack atmosphere; and I, on my side, was not unwilling to listen to the chatter of a lively, good-natured young fellow, at intervals, during my long idle days.

It was at the end of a week, I think, or thereabouts, that he honoured me with his full confidence. We had been sea-fishing in a small open boat which he had purchased, and which he managed without assistance; that is to say, that we had provided ourselves with what was requisite for the pursuit of that engrossing sport, and that the young count had gone through the form of dropping his line over the side and pulling it up, baitless and fishless, from time to time, while I had dispensed with even this shallow pretence of employment, and had stretched myself out full length upon the cushions which I had thoughtfully brought with me, inhaling the salt-laden breeze, and luxuriating in perfect inaction, till such time as it had become necessary for us to think of returning homeward. My companion had been sighing portentously every now and again all through the afternoon, and had repeatedly given vent to a sound as though he had been about to say something, and had as often checked himself, and fallen back into silence. So that I was in a great measure prepared for the disclosure that fell from him at length as we slipped before the wind across the broad lagoon, toward the haze and blaze of sunset which was glorifying the old city of the doges.

"Do you know," said he, suddenly, "that I am desperately in love?" I said I had conjectured as much; and he seemed a good deal surprised at my powers of divination. "Yes," he resumed, "I am in love; and with an Italian lady too, unfortunately. Her name is Bianca,--the Signorina Bianca Marinelli,--and she is the most divinely beautiful creature the sun ever shone upon."

"That," said I, "is of course."

"It is the truth; and when you have seen her, you will acknowledge that I do not exaggerate. I have known her nearly two months now. I became acquainted with her accidentally--she dropped her handkerchief in a shop, and I took it to her, and so we got to be upon speaking terms, and--and-- But I need not give you the whole

history. We have discovered that we are all the world to each other; we have sworn to remain faithful to each other all our lives long; and we renew the oath whenever we meet. But that, unhappily, is very seldom! for her father, the Marchese Marinelli, scarcely ever lets her out of his sight; and he is a sour, narrow-minded old fellow, as proud as he is poor, an intense hater of all Austrians; and if he were to discover our attachment, I shudder to think of what the consequences might be."

"And your own father--the stern old general of whom you told me--what would he say to it all?"

"Oh, he, of course, would not hear of such a marriage for a moment. He detests and despises the Venetians as cordially as the marchese abhors the /Tedeschi/; and, as I am entirely dependent upon him, I should not dream of saying a word to him about the matter until I was married, and nothing could be done to separate me from Bianca."

"So that, upon the whole, you appear to stand a very fair chance of starvation, if everything turns out according to your wishes. And pray, in what way do you imagine that I can assist you toward this desirable end? For I take it for granted that you have some reason for letting me into your secret."

Von Rosenau laughed good-humouredly.

"You form conclusions quickly," he said. "Well, I will confess to you that I have thought lately that you might be of great service to me without inconveniencing yourself much. The other day, when you did me the honour to introduce me to your sister, I was very nearly telling her all. She has such a kind countenance; and I felt sure that she would not refuse to let my poor Bianca visit her sometimes. The old marchese, you see, would have no objection to leaving his daughter for hours under the care of an English lady; and I thought that perhaps when Miss Jenkinson went out to work at her painting--I might come in."

"Fortunate indeed is it for you," I said, "that your confidence in the kind countenance of my sister Anne did not carry you quite to the point of divulging this precious scheme to her. I, who know her pretty well, can tell you exactly the course she would have pursued if you had. Without one moment's hesitation, she would have found out the address of the young lady's father, hurried off thither, and told him all about it. Anne is a thoroughly good creature; but she has little sympathy with love-making, still less with surreptitious love-making, and she would as soon think of accepting the part you are so good as to assign to her as of forging a check."

He sighed, and said he supposed, then, that they must continue to meet as they had been in the habit of doing, but that it was rather unsatisfactory.

"It says something for your ingenuity that you contrive to meet at all," I remarked.

"Well, yes, there are considerable difficulties, because the old man's movements are so uncertain; and there is some risk too, for, as you heard the other day, we have been seen together. Moreover, I have been obliged to tell everything to my servant Johann, who waylays the marchese's housekeeper at market in the mornings, and finds out from her when and where I can have an opportunity of meeting Bianca. I would rather not have trusted him; but I could think of no other plan."

"At any rate, I should have thought you might have selected some more retired rendezvous than the most frequented church in Venice."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I wish you would suggest one within reach," he said. "There are no retired places in this accursed town. But, in fact, we see each other very seldom. Often for days together the only way in which I can get a glimpse of her is by loitering about in my boat in front of her father's house, and watching till she shows herself at the window. We are in her neighborhood now, and it is close upon the hour at which I

can generally calculate upon her appearing. Would you mind my making a short detour that way before I set you down at your hotel?"

We had entered the Grand Canal while Von Rosenau had been relating his love-tale, and some minutes before he had lowered his sail and taken to the oars. He now slewed the boat's head round abruptly, and we shot into a dark and narrow waterway, and so, after sundry twistings and turnings, arrived before a grim, time-worn structure, so hemmed in by the surrounding buildings that it seemed as if no ray of sunshine could ever penetrate within its walls.

"That is the Palazzo Marinelli," said my companion. "The greater part of it is let to different tenants. The family has long been much too poor to inhabit the whole of it, and now the old man only reserves himself four rooms on the third floor. Those are the windows, in the far corner; and there--no!--yes!--there is Bianca."

I brought my eyeglass to bear upon the point indicated just in time to catch sight of a female head, which was thrust out through the open window for an instant, and then withdrawn with great celerity.

"Ah," sighed the count, "it is you who have driven her away. I ought to have remembered that she would be frightened at seeing a stranger. And now she will not show herself again, I fear. Come; I will take you home. Confess now--is she not more beautiful than you expected?"

"My dear sir, I had hardly time to see whether she was a man or a woman; but I am quite willing to take your word for it that there never was anybody like her."

"If you would like to wait a little longer--half an hour or so--she /might/ put her head out again," said the young man, wistfully.

"Thank you very much; but my sister will be wondering why I do not come to take her down to the /table d'hote/. And besides, I am not in love myself, I may perhaps be excused for saying that I want my dinner."

"As you please," answered the count, looking the least bit in the world affronted; and so he pulled back in silence to the steps of the hotel, where we parted.

I don't know whether Von Rosenau felt aggrieved by my rather unsympathetic reception of his confidence, or whether he thought it useless to discuss his projects further with one who could not or would not assist him in carrying them out; but although we continued to meet daily, as before, he did not recur to the interesting subject, and it was not for me to take the initiative in doing so. Curiosity, I confess, led me to direct my gondolier more than once to the narrow canal over which the Palazzo Martinelli towered; and on each occasion I was rewarded by descrying, from the depths of the miniature mourning-coach which concealed me, the faithful count, seated in his boat and waiting in patient faith, like another Ritter Toggenburg, with his eyes fixed upon the corner window; but of the lady I could see no sign. I was rather disappointed at first, as day after day went by and my young friend showed no disposition to break the silence in which he had chosen to wrap himself; for I had nothing to do in Venice, and I thought it would have been rather amusing to watch the progress of this incipient romance. By degrees, however, I ceased to trouble myself about it; and at the end of a fortnight I had other things to think of, in the shape of plans for the summer, my sister Anne having by that time satisfied herself that, all things considered, Titian's "Assumption" was a little too much for her.

It was Captain Janovicz who informed me casually one evening that Von Rosenau was going away in a few days on leave, and that he would probably be absent for a considerable time.

"For my own part," remarked my informant, "I shall be surprised if we see him back in the regiment at all. He was only sent to us as a sort of punishment for having been a naughty boy, and I suppose now he will be forgiven, and restored to the hussars."

"So much for undying love," thinks I, with a cynical chuckle. "If there is any gratitude in man, that young fellow ought to be showering blessings on me for having refused to hold the noose for him to thrust his head into."

Alas! I knew not of what I was speaking. I had not yet heard the last of Herr von Rosenau's entanglement, nor was I destined to escape from playing my part in it. The very next morning, after breakfast, as I was poring over a map of Switzerland, "Murray" on my right hand and "Bradshaw" on my left, his card was brought to me, together with an urgent request that I would see him immediately and alone; and before I had had time to send a reply, he came clattering into the room, trailing his sabre behind him, and dropped into the first arm-chair with a despairing self-abandonment which shook the house to its foundations.

"Mr. Jenkinson," said he, "I am a ruined man!"

I answered rather drily that I was very sorry to hear it. If I must confess the truth, I thought he had come to borrow money of me.

"A most cruel calamity has befallen me," he went on; "and unless you will consent to help me out of it--"

"I am sure I shall be delighted to do anything in my power," I interrupted, apprehensively; "but I am afraid--"

"You cannot refuse me till you have heard what I have to say. I am aware that I have no claim whatever upon your kindness; but you are the only man in the world who can save me, and, whereas the happiness of my whole life is at stake, the utmost you can have to put up with will be a little inconvenience. Now I will explain myself in as few words as possible, because I have only a minute to spare. In fact, I ought to be out on the ramparts at this moment. You have not forgotten what I told you about myself and the Signorina Martinelli, and how we had agreed to seize the first opportunity that offered to be privately married, and to escape over the mountains to my father's house, and throw ourselves upon his mercy?"

"I don't remember your having mentioned any such plan."

"No matter--so it was. Well, everything seemed to have fallen out most fortunately for us. I found out some time ago that the marchese would be going over to Padua this evening on business, and would be absent at least one whole day, and I immediately applied for my leave to begin to-morrow. This I obtained at once through my father, who now expects me to be with him in a few days, and little knows that I shall not come alone. Johann and the marchese's housekeeper arranged the rest between them. I was to meet my dear Bianca early in the morning on the Lido; thence we were to go by boat to Mestre, where a carriage was to be in waiting for us; and the same evening we were to be married by a priest, to whom I have given due notice, at a place called Longarone. And so we should have gone on, across the Ampezzo Pass homeward. Now would you believe that all this has been defeated by a mere freak on the part of my colonel? Only this morning, after it was much too late to make any alteration in our plans, he told me that he should require me to be on duty all to-day and to-morrow, and that my leave could not begin until the next day. Is it not maddening? And the worst of it is that I have no means of letting Bianca know of this, for I dare not send a message to the palazzo, and there is no chance of my seeing her myself; and of course she will go to the Lido to-morrow morning, and will find no one there. Now, my dear Mr. Jenkinson--my good, kind friend--do you begin to see what I want you to do for me?"

"Not in the very least."

"No? But it is evident enough. Now listen. You must meet Bianca to-morrow morning; you explain to her what has happened; you take her in the boat, which will be waiting for you, to Mestre; you proceed in the travelling-carriage, which will also be waiting for you, to Longarone; you see the priest, and appoint with him for the following evening; and the next day I arrive, and you return to Venice. Is that clear?"

The volubility with which this programme was enunciated so took away my breath that I scarcely realised its audacity.

"You will not refuse; I am sure you will not," said the count, rising and hooking up his sword, as if about to depart.

"Stop, stop!" I exclaimed. "You don't consider what you are asking. I can't elope with young women in this casual sort of way. I have a character--and a sister. How am I to explain all this to my sister, I should like to know?"

"Oh, make any excuse you can think of to her. Now, Mr. Jenkinson, you know there cannot be any real difficulty in that. You consent then? A thousand, thousand thanks! I will send you a few more instructions by letter this evening. I really must not stay any longer now. Good-bye."

"Stop! Why can't your servant Johann do all this instead of me?"

"Because he is on duty like myself. Good-bye."

"Stop! Why can't you postpone your flight for a day? I don't so much mind meeting the young lady and telling her all about it."

"Quite out of the question, my dear sir. It is perfectly possible that the marchese may return from Padua to-morrow night, and what should we do then? No, no; there is no help for it. Good-bye."

"Stop! Hi! Come back!"

But it was too late. My impetuous visitor was down the staircase and away before I had descended a single flight in pursuit, and all I could do was to return to my room and register a vow within my own heart that I would have nothing to do with this preposterous scheme.

Looking back upon what followed across the interval of fifteen years, I find that I can really give no satisfactory reason for my having failed to adhere to this wise resolution. I had no particular feeling of friendship for Von Rosenau; I did not care two straws about the Signorina Bianca, whom I had never seen; and certainly I am not, nor ever was, the sort of person who loves romantic adventures for their own sake. Perhaps it was good-nature, perhaps it was only an indolent shrinking from disobliging anybody, that influenced me--it does not much matter now. Whatever the cause of my yielding may have been, I did yield. I prefer to pass over in silence the doubts and hesitations which beset me for the remainder of the day; the arrival, toward evening, of the piteous note from Von Rosenau, which finally overcame my weak resistance to his will; and the series of circumstantial false statements (I blush when I think of them) by means of which I accounted to my sister for my proposed sudden departure.

Suffice it to say that, very early on the following morning, there might have been seen, pacing up and down the shore on the seaward side of the Lido, and peering anxiously about him through an eyeglass, as if in search of somebody or something, the figure of a tall, spare Englishman, clad in a complete suit of shepherd's tartan, with a wide-awake on his head, a leather bag slung by a strap across his shoulder, and a light coat over his arm. Myself, in point of act, in the travelling-costume of the epoch.

I was kept waiting a long time--longer than I liked; for, as may be supposed, I was most anxious to be well away from Venice before the rest of the world was up and about; but at length there appeared, round the corner of a long white wall which skirted the beach, a little lady, thickly veiled, who, on catching sight of me, whisked round, and incontinently vanished. This was so evidently the fair Bianca that I followed her without hesitation, and almost ran into her arms as I swung round the angle of the wall behind which she had retreated.

She gave a great start, stared at me, for an instant, like a startled fawn, and then took to her heels and fled. It was rather ridiculous; but there was nothing for me to do but to give chase. My legs are long, and I had soon headed her round.

"I presume that I have the honour of addressing the Signorina Marinelli?" I panted, in French, as I faced her, hat in hand.

She answered me by a piercing shriek, which left no room for doubt as to her identity.

"For the love of Heaven, don't do that!" I entreated, in an agony. "You will alarm the whole neighbourhood and ruin us both. Believe me, I am only here as your friend, and very much against my own wishes. I have come on the part of Count Albrecht von Rosenau, who is unable to come himself, because--"

Here she opened her mouth with so manifest an intention of raising another resounding screech that I became desperate, and seized her by the wrists in my anxiety. *"Sgridi ancora una volta,"* says I, in the purest *lingua Toscana*, *"e la lascerò qui--to get out of this mess as best you can--/così sicuro che il mio nome è Jenkinsono!"*

To my great relief she began to laugh. Immediately afterward, however, she sat down on the shingle and began to cry. It was too vexatious: what on earth was I to do?

"Do you understand English?" I asked, despairingly.

She shook her head, but sobbed out that she spoke French; so I proceeded to address her in that language.

"Signorina, if you do not get up and control your emotion, I will not be answerable for the consequences. We are surrounded by dangers of the most--compromising description; and every moment of delay must add to them. I know that the officers often come out here to bathe in the morning; so do many of the English people from Danielli's. If we are discovered together there will be such a scandal as never was, and you will most assuredly not become Countess von Rosenau. Think of that, and it will brace your nerves. What you have to do is to come directly with me to the boat which is all ready to take us to Mestre. Allow me to carry your hand-bag."

Not a bit of it! The signorina refused to stir.

"What is it? Where is Alberto? What has happened?" she cried. "You have told me nothing."

"Well, then, I will explain," I answered, impatiently. And I explained accordingly.

But, dear me, what a fuss she did make over it all! One would have supposed, to hear her, that I had planned this unfortunate complication for my own pleasure, and that I ought to have been playing the part of a suppliant instead of that of a sorely tried benefactor. First she was so kind as to set me down as an imposter, and was only convinced of my honesty when I showed her a letter in the beloved Alberto's handwriting. Then she declared that she could not possibly go off with a total stranger. Then she discovered that, upon further consideration, she could not abandon poor dear papa in his old age. And so forth, and so forth, with a running accompaniment of tears and sobs. Of course she consented at last to enter the boat; but I was so exasperated by her silly behaviour that I would not speak to her, and had really scarcely noticed whether she was pretty or plain till we were more than half-way to Mestre. But when we had hoisted our sail, and were running before a fine, fresh breeze toward the land, and our four men had shipped their oars and were chattering and laughing under their breath in the bows, and the first perils of our enterprise seemed to have been safely surmounted, my equanimity began to return to me, and I stole a glance at the partner of my flight, who had lifted her veil, and showed a pretty, round, childish face, with a clear, brown complexion, and a pair of the most splendid

dark eyes it has ever been my good fortune to behold. There were no tears in them now, but a certain half-frightened, half-mischievous light instead, as if she rather enjoyed the adventure, in spite of its inauspicious opening. A very little encouragement induced her to enter into conversation, and ere long she was prattling away as unrestrainedly as if we had been friends all our lives. She asked me a great many questions. What was I doing in Venice? Had I known Alberto long? Was I very fond of him? Did I think that the old Count von Rosenau would be very angry when he heard of his son's marriage? I answered her as best I could, feeling very sorry for the poor little soul, who evidently did not in the least realise the serious nature of the step which she was about to take; and she grew more and more communicative. In the course of a quarter of an hour I had been put in possession of all the chief incidents of her uneventful life.

I had heard how she had lost her mother when she was still an infant; how she had been educated partly by two maiden aunts, partly in a convent at Verona; how she had latterly led a life of almost complete seclusion in the old Venetian palace; how she had first met Alberto; and how, after many doubts and misgivings, she had finally been prevailed upon to sacrifice all for his sake, and to leave her father, who,--stern, severe, and suspicious, though he had always been generous to her,--had tried to give her such small pleasures as his means and habits would permit. She had a likeness of him with her, she said,--perhaps I might like to see it. She dived into her travelling-bag as she spoke, and produced from thence a full-length photograph of a tall, well-built gentleman of sixty or thereabouts, whose gray hair, black moustache, and intent, frowning gaze made up an ensemble more striking than attractive.

"Is he not handsome--poor papa?" she asked.

I said the marchese was certainly a very fine-looking man, and inwardly thanked my stars that he was safely at Padua; for looking at the breadth of his chest, the length of his arm, and the somewhat forbidding cast of his features, I could not help perceiving that "poor papa" was precisely one of those persons with whom a prudent man prefers to keep friends than to quarrel.

And so, by the time that we reached Mestre, we had become quite friendly and intimate, and had half forgotten, I think, the absurd relation in which we stood toward each other. We had rather an awkward moment when we left the boat and entered our travelling-carriage; for I need scarcely say that both the boatmen and the grinning vetturino took me for the bridegroom whose place I temporarily occupied, and they were pleased to be facetious in a manner which was very embarrassing to me, but which I could not very well check. Moreover, I felt compelled so far to sustain my assumed character as to be specially generous in the manner of a /buona mano/ to those four jolly watermen, and for the first few miles of our drive I could not help remembering this circumstance with some regret, and wondering whether it would occur to Von Rosenau to reimburse me.

Probably our coachman thought that, having a runaway couple to drive, he ought to make some pretence, at least, of fearing pursuit; for he set off at such a furious pace that our four half-starved horses were soon beat, and we had to perform the remainder of the long, hot, dusty journey at a foot's pace. I have forgotten how we made the time pass. I think we slept a good deal. I know we were both very tired and a trifle cross when in the evening we reached Longarone, a small, poverty-stricken village, on the verge of that dolomite region which, in these latter days, has become so frequented by summer tourists.

Tourists usually leave in their wake some of the advantages as well as the drawbacks of civilisation; and probably there is now a respectable hotel at Longarone. I suppose, therefore, that I may say, without risk of laying myself open to an action for slander, that a more filthy den than the /osteria/ before which my charge and I alighted no imagination, however disordered, could conceive. It was a vast, dismal building, which had doubtless been the palace of some rich citizen of the republic in days of yore, but which had now fallen into dishonoured old age. Its windows and outside shutters were tightly closed, and had been so, apparently, from time immemorial; a vile smell of rancid oil and garlic pervaded it in every part; the cornices of its huge, bare rooms were festooned with blackened cobwebs, and the dust and dirt of ages had been suffered to accumulate

upon the stone floors of its corridors. The signorina tucked up her petticoats as she picked her way along the passages to her bedroom, while I remained behind to order dinner of the sulky, black-browed padrona to whom I had already had to explain that my companion and I were not man and wife, and who, I fear, had consequently conceived no very high opinion of us. Happily the priest had already been warned by telegram that his service would not be required until the morrow; so I was spared the nuisance of an interview with him.

After a time we sat down to our tete-a-tete dinner. Such a dinner! Even after a lapse of all these years I am unable to think of it without a shudder. Half famished though we were, we could not do much more than look at the greater part of the dishes which were set before us; and the climax was reached when we were served with an astonishing compote, made up, so far as I was able to judge, of equal proportions of preserved plums and mustard, to which vinegar and sugar had been superadded. Both the signorina and I partook of this horrible mixture, for it really looked as if it might be rather nice; and when, after the first mouthful, each of us looked up, and saw the other's face of agony and alarm, we burst into a simultaneous peal of laughter. Up to that moment we had been very solemn and depressed; but the laugh did us good, and sent us to bed in somewhat better spirits; and the malignant compote at least did us the service of effectually banishing our appetite.

I forbear to enlarge upon the horrors of the night. Mosquitos, and other insects, which, for some reason or other, we English seldom mention, save under a modest pseudonym, worked their wicked will upon me till daybreak set me free; and I presume that the fair Bianca was no better off, for when the breakfast hour arrived I received a message from her to the effect that she was unable to leave her room.

I was sitting over my dreary little repast, wondering how I should get through the day, and speculating upon the possibility of my release before nightfall, and I had just concluded that I must make up my mind to face another night with the mosquitos and their hardy allies, when, to my great joy, a slatternly serving-maid came lolliping into the room, and announced that a gentleman styling himself "/il Conte di Rosenau/" had arrived and demanded to see me instantly. Here was a piece of unlooked-for good fortune! I jumped up, and flew to the door to receive my friend, whose footsteps I already heard on the threshold.

"My dear, good soul!" I cried, "this is too delightful! How did you manage----"

The remainder of my sentence died away upon my lips; for, alas! it was not the missing Alberto whom I had nearly embraced, but a stout, red- faced, white-moustached gentleman, who was in a violent passion, judging by the terrific salute of Teutonic expletives with which he greeted my advance. Then he, too, desisted as suddenly as I had done, and we both fell back a few paces, and stared at each other blankly. The new-comer was the first to recover himself.

"This is some accursed mistake," said he, in German.

"Evidently," said I.

"But they told me that you and an Italian young lady were the only strangers in the house."

"Well, sir," I said, "I can't help it if we are. The house is not of a kind likely to attract strangers; and I assure you that, if I could consult my own wishes, the number of guests would soon be reduced by one."

He appeared to be a very choleric old person. "Sir," said he, "you seem disposed to carry things off with a high hand; but I suspect that you know more than you choose to reveal. Be so good as to tell me the name of the lady who is staying here."

"I think you are forgetting yourself," I answered with dignity. "I must decline to gratify your curiosity."

He stuck his arms akimbo, and planted himself directly in front of me, frowning ominously. "Let us waste no more words," he said. "If I have made a mistake, I shall be ready to offer you a full apology. If not-- But that is nothing to the purpose. I am Lieutenant-General Graf von Rosenau, at your service, and I have reason to believe that my son, Graf Albrecht von Rosenau, a lieutenant in his Imperial and Royal Majesty's 99th Croat Regiment, has made a runaway match with a certain Signorina Bianca Marinelli of Venice. Are you prepared to give me your word of honour as a gentleman and an Englishman that you are not privy to this affair?"

At these terrible words I felt my blood run cold. I may have lost my presence of mind; but I don't know how I could have got out of the dilemma even if I had preserved it.

"Your son has not yet arrived," I stammered.

He pounced upon me like a cat upon a mouse, and gripped both my arms above the elbow. "Is he married?" he hissed, with his red nose a couple of inches from mine.

"No," I answered, "he is not. Perhaps I had better say at once that if you use personal violence I shall defend myself, in spite of your age."

Upon this he was kind enough to relax his hold.

"And pray, sir," he resumed, in a somewhat more temperate tone, after a short period of reflection, "what have you to do with all this?"

"I am not bound to answer your questions, Herr Graf," I replied; "but, as things have turned out, I have no special objection to doing so. Out of pure good-nature to your son, who was detained by duty in Venice at the last moment, I consented to bring the Signorina Marinelli here yesterday, and to await his arrival, which I am now expecting."

"So you ran away with the girl, instead of Albrecht, did you? Ho, ho, ho!"

I had seldom heard a more grating or disagreeable laugh.

"I did nothing of the sort," I answered, tartly. "I simply undertook to see her safely through the first stage of her journey."

"And you will have the pleasure of seeing her back, I imagine; for as for my rascal of a boy, I mean to take him off home with me as soon as he arrives; and I can assure you that I have no intention of providing myself with a daughter-in-law in the course of the day."

I began to feel not a little alarmed. "You cannot have the brutality to leave me here with a young woman whom I am scarcely so much as acquainted with on my hands!" I ejaculated, half involuntarily. "What in the world should I do?"

The old gentleman gave vent to a malevolent chuckle. "Upon my word, sir," said he, "I can only see one course open to you as a man of honour. You must marry her yourself."

At this I fairly lost all patience, and gave the Graf my opinion of his conduct in terms the plainness of which left nothing to be desired. I included him, his son, and the entire German people in one sweeping anathema. No Englishman, I said, would have been capable of either insulting an innocent lady, or of so basely leaving in the lurch one whose only fault had been a too great readiness to sacrifice his own convenience to the interests of others. My indignation lent me a flow of words such as I should never have been able to command in calmer moments; and I dare say I should have continued in the same strain for an indefinite time, had I not

been summarily cut short by the entrance of a third person.

There was no occasion for this last intruder to announce himself, in a voice of thunder, as the Marchese Marinelli. I had at once recognised the original of the signorina's photograph, and I perceived that I was now in about as uncomfortable a position as my bitterest enemy could have desired for me. The German old gentleman had been very angry at the outset; but his wrath, as compared with that of the Italian, was as a breeze to a hurricane. The marchese was literally quivering from head to foot with concentrated fury. His face was deadly white, his strongly marked features twitched convulsively, his eyes blazed like those of a wild animal. Having stated his identity in the manner already referred to, he made two strides toward the table by which I was seated, and stood glaring at me as though he would have sprung at my throat. I thought it might avert consequences which we should both afterward deplore if I were to place the table between us; and I did so without loss of time. From the other side of that barrier I adjured my visitor to keep cool, pledging him my word, in the same breath, that there was no harm done as yet.

"No harm!" he repeated, in a strident shout that echoed through the bare room. "Dog! Villain! You ensnare my daughter's affections--you entice her away from her father's house--you cover my family with eternal disgrace--and then you dare to tell me there is no harm done! Wait a little, and you shall see that there will be harm enough for you. Marry her you must, since you have ruined her; but you shall die for it the next day! It is I--I, Ludovico Marinelli--who swear it!"

I am aware that I do but scant justice to the marchese's inimitable style. The above sentences must be imagined as hurled forth in a series of yells, with a pant between each of them. As a melodramatic actor this terrific Marinelli would, I am sure, have risen to the first rank in his profession.

"Signore," I said, "you are under a misapprehension. I have ensnared nobody's affections, and I am entirely guiltless of all the crimes which you are pleased to attribute to me."

"What? Are you not, then, the hound who bears the vile and dishonoured name of Von Rosenau?"

"I am not. I bear the less distinguished, but, I hope, equally respectable patronymic of Jenkinson."

But my modest disclaimer passed unheeded, for now another combatant had thrown himself into the fray.

"Vile and dishonoured name! No one shall permit himself such language in my presence. I am Lieutenant-General Graf von Rosenau, sir, and you shall answer to me for your words."

The Herr Graf's knowledge of Italian was somewhat limited; but, such as it was, it had enabled him to catch the sense of the stigma cast upon his family, and now he was upon his feet, red and gobbling, like a turkey-cock, and prepared to do battle with a hundred irate Venetians if need were.

The marchese stared at him in blank amazement. "/You!/" he ejaculated--"you Von Rosenau! It is incredible--preposterous. Why, you are old enough to be her grandfather."

"Not old enough to be in my dotage,--as I should be if I permitted my son to marry a beggarly Italian,--nor too old to punish impertinence as it deserves," retorted the Graf.

"Your son? You are the father then? It is all the same to me. I will fight you both. But the marriage shall take place first."

"It shall not."

"It shall."

"Insolent slave of an Italian, I will make you eat your words!"

"Triple brute of a German, I spit upon you!"

"Silence, sir!"

"Silence yourself!"

During this animated dialogue I sat apart, softly rubbing my hands. What a happy dispensation it would be, I could not help thinking, if these two old madmen were to exterminate each other, like the Kilkenny cats! Anyhow, their attention was effectually diverted from my humble person, and that was something to be thankful for.

Never before had I been privileged to listen to so rich a vocabulary of vituperation. Each disputant had expressed himself, after the first few words, in his own language, and between them they were now making hubbub enough to bring the old house down about their ears. Up came the padrona to see the fun; up came her fat husband, in his shirt-sleeves and slippers; and her long-legged sons, and her tousle-headed daughters, and the maid-servant, and the cook, and the ostler--the whole establishment, in fact, collected at the open folding-doors, and watched with delight the progress of this battle of words. Last of all, a poor little trembling figure, with pale face and eyes big with fright, crept in, and stood, hand on heart, a little in advance of the group. I slipped to her side, and offered her a chair, but she neither answered me nor noticed my presence. She was staring at her father as a bird stares at a snake, and seemed unable to realise anything except the terrible fact that he had followed and found her.

Presently the old man wheeled round, and became aware of his daughter.

"Unhappy girl!" he exclaimed, "what is this that you have done?"

I greatly fear that the marchese's paternal corrections must have sometimes taken a more practical shape than mere verbal upbraidings; for poor Bianca shrank back, throwing up one arm, as if to shield her face, and, with a wild cry of "Alberto! come to me!" fell into the arms of that tardy lover, who at that appropriate moment had made his appearance, unobserved, upon the scene.

The polyglot disturbance that ensued baffles all description. Indeed, I should be puzzled to say exactly what took place, or after how many commands, defiances, threats, protestations, insults, and explanations, a semblance of peace was finally restored. I only know that, at the expiration of a certain time, three of us were sitting by the open window, in a softened and subdued frame of mind, considerably turning our backs upon the other two, who were bidding each other farewell at the farther end of the room.

It was the faithless Johann, as I gathered, who was responsible for this catastrophe. His heart, it appeared, had failed him when he had discovered that nothing less than a bona-fide marriage was to be the outcome of the meetings he had shown so much skill in contriving, and, full of penitence and alarm, he had written to his old master, divulging the whole project. It so happened that a recent storm in the mountains had interrupted telegraphic communication, for the time, between Austria and Venice, and the only course that had seemed open to Herr von Rosenau was to start post-haste for the latter place, where, indeed, he would have arrived a day too late had not Albrecht's colonel seen fit to postpone his leave. In this latter circumstance also the hand of Johann seemed discernible. As for the marchese, I suppose he must have returned rather sooner than had been expected from Padua, and finding his daughter gone, must have extorted the truth from his housekeeper. He did not volunteer any explanation of his presence, nor were any of us bold enough to question him.

As I have said before, I have no very clear recollection of how an understanding was arrived at and bloodshed averted and the padrona and her satellites hustled downstairs again. Perhaps I may have had some share in the

work of pacification. Be that as it may, when once the exasperated parents had discovered that they both really wanted the same thing,--namely, to recover possession of their respective offspring, to go home, and never meet each other again,--a species of truce was soon agreed upon between them for the purpose of separating the two lovers, who all this time were locked in each other's arms, in the prettiest attitude in the world, vowing loudly that nothing should ever part them.

How often since the world began have such vows been made and broken-- broken, not willingly, but of necessity--broken and mourned over, and, in due course of time, forgotten! I looked at the Marchese di San Silvestro the other night, as she sailed up the room in her lace and diamonds, with her fat little husband toddling after her, and wondered whether, in these days of her magnificence, she ever gave a thought to her lost Alberto--Alberto, who has been married himself this many a long day, and has succeeded to his father's estates, and has numerous family, I am told. At all events, she was unhappy enough over parting with him at the time. The two old gentlemen, who, as holders of the purse-strings, knew that they were completely masters of the situation, and could afford to be generous, showed some kindness of feeling at the last. They allowed the poor lovers an uninterrupted half-hour in which to bid each other adieu forever, and abstained from any needless harshness in making their decision known. When the time was up, two travelling-carriages were seen waiting at the door. Count von Rosenau pushed his son before him into the first; the marchese assisted the half-fainting Bianca into the second; the vetturini cracked their whips, and presently both vehicles were rolling away, the one toward the north, the other toward the south. I suppose the young people had been promising to remain faithful to each other until some happier future time should permit of their union, for at the last moment Albrecht thrust his head out of the carriage window, and, waving his hand, cried, "/A rivederci!/" I don't know whether they ever met again.

The whole scene, I confess, had affected me a good deal, in spite of some of the absurdities by which it had been marked; and it was not until I had been alone for some time, and silence had once more fallen upon the Longarone /osteria/, that I awoke to the fact that it was /my/ carriage which the Marchese Marinelli had calmly appropriated to his own use, and that there was no visible means of my getting back to Venice that day. Great was my anger and great my dismay when the ostler announced this news to me, with a broad grin, in reply to my order to put the horses to without delay.

"But the marchese himself--how did he get here?" I inquired.

"Oh, he came by the diligence."

"And the count--the young gentleman?"

"On horseback, signore; but you cannot have his horse. The poor beast is half dead as it is."

"Then will you tell me how I am to escape from your infernal town? For nothing shall induce me to pass another night here."

"Eh! there is the diligence which goes through at two o'clock in the morning!"

There was no help for it. I sat up for that diligence, and returned by it to Mestre, seated between a Capuchin monk and a peasant farmer whose whole system appeared to be saturated with garlic. I could scarcely have fared worse in my bed at Longarone.

And so that was my reward for an act of disinterested kindness. It is only experience that can teach a man to appreciate the ingrained thanklessness of the human race. I was obliged to make a clean breast of it to my sister, who of course did not keep the secret long; and for some time afterward I had to submit to a good deal of mild chaff upon the subject from my friends. But it is an old story now, and two of the actors in it are dead, and of the remaining three I dare say I am the only one who cares to recall it. Even to me it is a somewhat

painful reminiscence.

GONERIL

BY

A. MARY F. ROBINSON

CHAPTER I

THE TWO OLD LADIES

On one of the pleasant hills round Florence, a little beyond Camerata, there stands a house so small that an Englishman would probably take it for a lodge of the great villa behind, whose garden trees at sunset cast their shadow over the cottage and its terrace on to the steep white road. But any of the country people could tell him that this, too, is a */casa signorile/*, despite its smallness. It stands somewhat high above the road, a square white house with a projecting roof, and with four green-shuttered windows overlooking the gay but narrow terrace. The beds under the windows would have fulfilled the fancy of that French poet who desired that in his garden one might, in gathering a nosegay, cull a salad, for they boasted little else than sweet basil, small and white, and some tall gray rosemary bushes. Nearer to the door an unusually large oleander faced a strong and sturdy magnolia-tree, and these, with their profusion of red and white sweetness, made amends for the dearth of garden flowers. At either end of the terrace flourished a thicket of gum-cistus, syringa, stephanotis, and geranium bushes; and the wall itself, dropping sheer down to the road, was bordered with the customary Florentine hedge of China roses and irises, now out of bloom. Great terra-cotta flower-pots, covered with devices, were placed at intervals along the wall; as it was summer, the oranges and lemons, full of wonderfully sweet white blossoms and young green fruit, were set there in the sun to ripen.

It was the 17th of June. Although it was after four o'clock, the olives on the steep hill that went down to Florence looked blindingly white, shadeless, and sharp. The air trembled round the bright green cypresses behind the house. The roof steamed. All the windows were shut, all the jalousies shut, yet it was so hot that no one could stir within. The maid slept in the kitchen; the two elderly mistresses of the house dozed upon their beds. Not a movement; not a sound.

Gradually along the steep road from Camerata there came a roll of distant carriage-wheels. The sound came nearer and nearer, till one could see the carriage, and see the driver leading the tired, thin, cab-horse, his bones starting under the shaggy hide. Inside the carriage reclined a handsome, middle-aged lady, with a stern profile turned toward the road; a young girl in pale pink cotton and a broad hat trudged up the hill at the side.

"Goneril," said Miss Hamelyn, "let me beg you again to come inside the carriage."

"Oh no, Aunt Margaret; I'm not a bit tired."

"But I have asked you; that is reason enough."

"It's so hot!" cried Goneril.

"That is why I object to your walking."

"But if it's so hot for me, just think how hot it must be for the horse."

Goneril cast a commiserating glance at the poor, halting, wheezing nag.

"The horse, probably," rejoined Miss Hamelyn, "does not suffer from malaria, neither has he kept his aunt in Florence nursing him till the middle heat of the summer."

"True!" said Goneril. Then, after a few minutes, "I'll get in, Aunt Margaret, on one condition."

"In my time young people did not make conditions."

"Very well, auntie; I'll get in, and you shall answer all my questions when you feel inclined."

The carriage stopped. The poor horse panted at his ease, while the girl seated herself beside Miss Hamelyn. Then for a few minutes they drove on in silence past the orchards; past the olive-yards, yellow underneath the ripening corn; past the sudden wide views of the mountains, faintly crimson in the mist of heat, and, on the other side, of Florence, the towers and domes steaming beside the hazy river.

"How hot it looks down there!" cried Goneril.

"How hot it /feels/!" echoed Miss Hamelyn, rather grimly.

"Yes, I am so glad you can get away at last, dear, poor old auntie." Then, a little later, "Won't you tell me something about the old ladies with whom you are going to leave me?"

Miss Hamelyn was mollified by Goneril's obedience.

"They are very nice old ladies," she said; "I met them at Mrs. Gorthrup's." But this was not at all what the young girl wanted.

"Only think, Aunt Margaret," she cried, impatiently, "I am to stay there for at least six weeks, and I know nothing about them, not what age they are, nor if they are tall or short, jolly or prim, pretty, or ugly, not even if they speak English!"

"They speak English," said Miss Hamelyn, beginning at the end. "One of them is English, or at least Irish: Miss Prunty."

"And the other?"

"She is an Italian, Signora Petrucci; she used to be very handsome."

"Oh!" said Goneril, looking pleased. "I'm glad she's handsome, and that they speak English. But they are not relations?"

"No, they are not connected; they are friends."

"And have they always lived together?"

"Ever since Madame Lilli died," and Miss Hamelyn named a very celebrated singer.

"Why!" cried Goneril, quite excited; "were they singers too?"

"Madame Petrucci; nevertheless a lady of the highest respectability. Miss Prunty was Madame Lilli's secretary."

"How nice!" cried the young girl; "how interesting! O auntie, I'm so glad you found them out."

"So am I, child; but please remember it is not an ordinary pension. They only take you, Goneril, till you are strong enough to travel, as an especial favour to me and to their old friend, Mrs. Gorthrup."

"I'll remember, auntie."

By this time they were driving under the terrace in front of the little house.

"Goneril," said the elder lady, "I shall leave you outside; you can play in the garden or the orchard."

"Very well."

Miss Hamelyn left the carriage and ascended the steep little flight of steps that leads from the road to the cottage garden.

In the porch a singular figure was awaiting her.

"Good-afternoon, Madame Petrucci," said Miss Hamelyn.

A slender old lady, over sixty, rather tall, in a brown silk skirt, and a white burnoose that showed the shrunken slimness of her arms, came eagerly forward. She was rather pretty, with small refined features, large expressionless blue eyes, and long whitish-yellow ringlets down her cheeks, in the fashion of forty years ago.

"Oh, /dear/ Miss Hamelyn," she cried, "how /glad/ I am to see you! And have you brought your /charming/ young relation?"

She spoke with a languid foreign accent, and with an emphatic and bountiful use of adjectives, that gave to our severer generation an impression of insincerity. Yet it was said with truth that Giulia Petrucci had never forgotten a friend nor an enemy.

"Goneril is outside," said Miss Hamelyn. "How is Miss Prunty?"

"Brigida? Oh, you must come inside and see my invaluable Brigida. She is, as usual, fatiguing herself with our accounts." The old lady led the way into the darkened parlour. It was small and rather stiff. As one's eyes became accustomed to the dim green light one noticed the incongruity of the furniture: the horsehair chairs and sofa, and large accountant's desk with ledgers; the large Pleyel grand piano; a bookcase, in which all the books were rare copies or priceless MSS. of old-fashioned operas; hanging against the wall an inlaid guitar and some faded laurel crowns; moreover, a fine engraving of a composer, twenty years ago the most popular man in Italy; lastly, an oil-colour portrait, by Winterman, of a fascinating blonde, with very bare white shoulders, holding in her hands a scroll, on which were inscribed some notes of music, under the title Giulia Petrucci. In short, the private parlour of an elderly and respectable diva of the year '40.

"Brigida!" cried Madame Petrucci, going to the door. "Brigida! our charming English friend is arrived!"

"All right!" answered a strong, hearty voice from upstairs. "I'm coming."

"You must excuse me, dear Miss Hamelyn," went on Madame Petrucci. "You must excuse me for shouting in your presence, but we have only one little servant, and during this suffocating weather I find that any movement reminds me of approaching age." The old lady smiled as if that time were still far ahead.

"I am sure you ought to take care of yourself," said Miss Hamelyn. "I hope you will not allow Goneril to fatigue you."

"Gonerilla! What a pretty name! Charming! I suppose it is in your family?" asked the old lady.

Miss Hamelyn blushed a little, for her niece's name was a sore point with her.

"It's an awful name for any Christian woman," said a deep voice at the door. "And pray, who's called Goneril?"

Miss Prunty came forward: a short, thick-set woman of fifty, with fine dark eyes, and, even in a Florentine summer, with something stiff and masculine in the fashion of her dress.

"And have you brought your niece?" she said, as she turned to Miss Hamelyn.

"Yes, she is in the garden."

"Well, I hope she understands that she'll have to rough it here."

"Goneril is a very simple girl," said Miss Hamelyn.

"So it's she that's called Goneril?"

"Yes," said the aunt, making an effort. "Of course I am aware of the strangeness of the name, but--but, in fact, my brother was devotedly attached to his wife, who died at Goneril's birth."

"Whew!" whistled Miss Prunty. "The parson must have been a fool who christened her!"

"He did, in fact, refuse; but my brother would have no baptism saving with that name, which, unfortunately, it is impossible to shorten."

"I think it is a charming name!" said Madame Petrucci, coming to the rescue. "Gonerilla--it dies on one's lips like music! And if you do not like it, Brigida, what's in a name? as your charming Byron said."

"I hope we shall make her happy," said Miss Prunty.

"Of course we shall!" cried the elder lady.

"Goneril is easily made happy," asserted Miss Hamelyn.

"That's a good thing, snapped Miss Prunty, "for there's not much here to make her so!"

"O Brigida! I am sure there are many attractions. The air, the view, the historic association! and, more than all, you know there is always a chance of the signorino!"

"Of whom?" said Miss Hamelyn, rather anxiously.

"Of him!" cried Madame Petrucci, pointing to the engraving opposite. "He lives, of course, in the capital; but he rents the villa behind our house,--the Medici Villa,--and when he is tired of Rome he runs down here for a week or so; and so your Gonerilla may have the benefit of /his/ society!"

"Very nice, I'm sure," said Miss Hamelyn, greatly relieved; for she knew that Signor Graziano must be fifty.

"We have known him," went on the old lady, "very nearly thirty years. He used to largely frequent the salon of our dear, our cherished Madame Lilli."

The tears came into the old lady's eyes. No doubt those days seemed near and dear to her; she did not see the dust on those faded triumphs.

"That's all stale news!" cried Miss Prunty, jumping up. "And Gon'ril (since I'll have to call her so) must be tired of waiting in the garden."

They walked out on to the terrace. The girl was not there, but by the gate into the olive-yard, where there was a lean-to shed for tools, they found her sitting on a cask, whittling a piece of wood and talking to a curly-headed little contadino.

Hearing steps, Goneril turned round. "He was asleep," she said. "Fancy, in such beautiful weather!"

Then, remembering that two of the ladies were still strangers, she made an old-fashioned little courtesy.

"I hope you won't find me a trouble, ladies," she said.

"She is charming!" said Madame Petrucci, throwing up her hands.

Goneril blushed; her hat had slipped back and showed her short brown curls of hair, strong regular features, and flexile scarlet mouth laughing upward like a faun's. She had sweet dark eyes, a little too small and narrow.

"I mean to be very happy," she exclaimed.

"Always mean that, my dear," said Miss Prunty.

"And now, since Gonerilla is no longer a stranger," added Madame Petrucci, "we will leave her to the rustic society of Angiolino while we show Miss Hamelyn our orangery."

"And conclude our business!" said Bridget Prunty.

CHAPTER II

THE SIGNORINO

One day, when Goneril, much browner and rosier for a week among the mountains, came in to lunch at noon, she found no signs of that usually regular repast. The little maid was on her knees polishing the floor; Miss Prunty was scolding, dusting, ordering dinner, arranging vases, all at once; strangest of all, Madame Petrucci had taken the oil-cloth cover from her grand piano, and, seated before it, was practising her sweet and faded notes, unheeding of the surrounding din and business.

"What's the matter?" cried Goneril.

"We expect the signorino," said Miss Prunty.

"And is he going to stay here?"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped that lady; and then she added, "Go into the kitchen and get some of the pasty and some bread and cheese--there's a good girl."

"All right!" said Goneril.

Madame Petrucci stopped her vocalising. "You shall have all the better a dinner to compensate you, my Gonerilla!" She smiled sweetly, and then again became Zerlina.

Goneril cut her lunch, and took it out of doors to share with her companion, Angiolino. He was harvesting the first corn under the olives, but at noon it was too hot to work. Sitting still there was, however, a cool breeze that gently stirred the sharp-edged olive-leaves.

Angiolino lay down at full length and munched his bread and cheese in perfect happiness. Goneril kept shifting about to get herself into the narrow shadow cast by the split and writhen trunk.

"How aggravating it is!" she cried. "In England, where there's no sun, there's plenty of shade; and here, where the sun is like a mustard-plaster on one's back, the leaves are all set edgewise on purpose that they sha'n't cast any shadow!"

Angiolino made no answer to this intelligent remark.

"He is going to sleep again!" cried Goneril, stopping her lunch in despair. "He is going to sleep, and there are no end of things I want to know. Angiolino!"

"/Si/, signora," murmured the boy.

"Tell me about Signor Graziano."

"He is our padrone; he is never here."

"But he is coming to-day. Wake up, wake up, Angiolino. I tell you, he is on the way!"

"Between life and death there are so many combinations," drawled the boy, with Tuscan incredulity and sententiousness.

"Ah!" cried the girl, with a little shiver of impatience. "Is he young?"

"/Che!/"

"Is he old then?"

"/Neppure!/"

"What is he like? He must be /something/."

"He's our padrone," repeated Angiolino, in whose imagination Signor Graziano could occupy no other place.

"How stupid you are!" exclaimed the young English girl.

"Maybe," said Angiolino, stolidly.

"Is he a good padrone? Do you like him?"

"Rather!" The boy smiled and raised himself on one elbow; his eyes twinkled with good-humoured malice.

"My /babbo/ had much better wine than /quel signore/," he said.

"But that is wrong!" cried Goneril, quite shocked.

"Who knows?"

After this conversation flagged. Goneril tried to imagine what a great musician could be like: long hair, of course; her imagination did not get much beyond the hair. He would of course be much older now than his portrait. Then she watched Angiolino cutting the corn, and learned how to tie the swathes together. She was occupied in this useful employment when the noise of wheels made them both stop and look over the wall.

"Here's the padrone!" cried the boy.

"Oh, he is old!" said Goneril. "He is old and brown, like a coffee- bean."

"To be old and good is better than youth with malice," suggested Angiolino, by way of consolation.

"I suppose so," acquiesced Goneril.

Nevertheless she went in to dinner a little disappointed.

The signorino was not in the house; he had gone up to the villa; but he had sent a message that later in the evening he intended to pay his respects to his old friends. Madame Petrucci was beautifully dressed in soft black silk, old lace, and a white Indian shawl. Miss Prunty had on her starchiest collar and most formal tie. Goneril saw it was necessary that she, likewise should deck herself in her best. She was much too young and impressionable not to be influenced by the flutter of excitement and interest which filled the whole of the little cottage. Goneril, too, was excited and anxious, although Signor Graziano had seemed so old and like a coffee-bean. She made no progress in the piece of embroidery she was working as a present for the two old ladies, jumping up and down to look out of the window. When, about eight o'clock, the door-bell rang, Goneril blushed, Madame Petrucci gave a pretty little shriek, Miss Prunty jumped up and rang for coffee. A moment afterward the signorino entered. While he was greeting her hostesses Goneril cast a rapid glance at him. He was tall for an Italian, rather bent and rather gray; fifty at least--therefore very old. He certainly was brown, but his features were fine and good, and he had a distinguished and benevolent air that somehow made her think of an abbe, a French abbe of the last century. She could quite imagine him saying, "/Enfant de St. Louis, montez au ciel!/"

Thus far had she got in her meditations when she felt herself addressed in clear, half-mocking tones:

"And how, this evening, is Madamigella Ruth?"

So he had seen her this evening binding his corn.

"I am quite well, padrone," she said, smiling shyly.

The two old ladies looked on amazed, for of course they were not in the secret.

"Signor Graziano, Miss Goneril Hamelyn," said Miss Prunty, rather severely.

Goneril felt that the time had come for silence and good manners. She sat quite quiet over her embroidery, listening to the talk of Sontag, of Clementi, of musicians and singers dead and gone. She noticed that the ladies treated Signore Graziano with the utmost reverence, even the positive Miss Prunty furling her opinions in deference to his gayest hint. They talked too of Madame Lilli, and always as if she were still young and fair, as if she had died yesterday, leaving the echo of her triumph loud behind her. And yet all this had happened years before Goneril had ever seen the light.

"Mees Goneril is feeling very young!" said the signorino, suddenly turning his sharp, kind eyes upon her.

"Yes," said Goneril, all confusion.

Madame Petrucci looked almost annoyed--the gay, serene little lady that nothing ever annoyed.

"It is she that is young!" she cried, in answer to an unspoken thought. "She is a baby!"

"Oh, I am seventeen!" said Goneril.

They all laughed, and seemed at ease again.

"Yes, yes; she is very young," said the signorino.

But a little shadow had fallen across their placid entertainment: the spirit had left their memories; they seemed to have grown shapeless, dusty, as the fresh and comely faces of dead Etruscan kings crumble into mould at the touch of the pitiless sunshine.

"Signorino," said Madame Petrucci, presently, "if you will accompany me we will perform one of your charming melodies."

Signor Graziano rose a little stiffly and led the pretty, withered little diva to the piano.

Goneril looked on, wondering, admiring. The signorino's thin white hands made a delicate, fluent melody, reminding her of running water under the rippled shade of trees, and, like a high, sweet bird, the thin, penetrating notes of the singer rose, swelled, and died away, admirably true and just even in this latter weakness. At the end Signor Graziano stopped his playing to give time for an elaborate cadenza. Suddenly Madame Petrucci gasped; a sharp discordant sound cracked the delicate finish of her singing. She put her handkerchief to her mouth.

"Bah!" she said, "this evening I am abominably husky."

The tears rose to Goneril's eyes. Was it so hard to grow old? This doubt made her voice loudest of all in the chorus of mutual praise and thanks which covered the song's abrupt finale.

And then there came a terrible ordeal. Miss Prunty, anxious to divert the current of her friend's ideas, had suggested that the girl should sing. Signor Graziano and madame insisted; they would take no refusal.

"Sing, sing, little bird!" cried the old lady.

"But, madame, how can one--after you?"

The homage in the young girl's voice made the little diva more good-humouredly insistent than before, and Goneril was too well-bred to make a fuss. She stood by the piano wondering which to choose, the Handels that she always drawled or the Pinsuti that she always galloped. Suddenly she came by an inspiration.

"Madame," she pleaded, "may I sing one of Angiolino's songs?"

"Whatever you like, /cara mia/."

And, standing by the piano, her arms hanging loose, she began a chant such as the peasants use working under the olives. Her voice was small and deep, with a peculiar thick sweetness that suited the song, half

humorous, half pathetic. These were the words she sang:

"Vorrei morir di morte piccinina, Morta la sera e viva la mattina. Vorrei morire, e non vorrei morire, Vorrei veder chi mi piange e chi ride; Vorrei morir, e star sulle finestre, Vorrei veder chi mi cuce la veste; Vorrei morir, e stare sulla scala, Vorrei veder chi mi porta la bara: Vorrei morir, e vorre' alzar la voce, Vorrei veder chi mi porta la croce."

"Very well chosen, my dear," said Miss Prunty, when the song was finished.

"And very well sung, my Gonerilla!" cried the old lady.

But the signorino went up to the piano and shook hands with her.

"Little Mees Goneril," he said, "you have the makings of an artist."

The two old ladies stared, for, after all, Goneril's performance had been very simple. You see, they were better versed in music than in human nature.

CHAPTER III

SI VIEILLESSE POUVAIT!

Signor Graziano's usual week of holiday passed and lengthened into almost two months, and still he stayed on at the villa. The two old ladies were highly delighted.

"At last he has taken my advice!" cried Miss Prunty. "I always told him those premature gray hairs came from late hours and Roman air."

Madame Petrucci shook her head and gave a meaning smile. Her friendship with the signorino had begun when he was a lad and she a charming married woman; like many another friendship, it had begun with a flirtation, and perhaps (who knows?) she thought the flirtation had revived.

As for Goneril, she considered him the most charming old man she had ever known, and liked nothing so much as to go out a walk with him. That, indeed, was one of the signorino's pleasures; he loved to take the young girl all over his gardens and vineyards, talking to her in the amiable, half-petting, half-mocking manner that he had adopted from the first; and twice a week he gave her a music lesson.

"She has a splendid organ!" he would say.

"/Vous croyez/?" fluted Madame Petrucci, with the vilest accent and the most aggravating smile imaginable.

It was the one hobby of the signorino's that she regarded with disrespect.

Goneril too was a little bored by the music lesson, but, on the other hand, the walks delighted her.

One day Goneril was out with her friend.

"Are the peasants very much afraid of you, signore?" she asked.

"Am I such a tyrant?" counter-questioned the signorino.

"No; but they are always begging me to ask you things. Angiolino wants to know if he may go for three days to see his uncle at Fiesole."

"Of course."

"But why, then, don't they ask you themselves? Is it they think me so cheeky?"

"Perhaps they think I can refuse you nothing."

"/Che!/ In that case they would ask Madame Petrucci."

Goneril ran on to pick some China roses. The signorino stopped confounded.

"It is impossible!" he cried. "She cannot think I am in love with Giulia! She cannot think I am so old as that!"

The idea seemed horrible to him. He walked on very quickly till he came up to Goneril, who was busy plucking roses in a hedge.

"For whom are those flowers?" he asked.

"Some are for you and some are for Madame Petrucci."

"She is a charming woman, Madame Petrucci."

"A dear old lady," murmured Goneril, much more interested in her posy.

"Old, do you call her?" said the signorino, rather anxiously. "I should scarcely call her that, though of course she is a good deal older than either of us."

"Either of us!" Goneril looked up astounded. Could the signorino have suddenly gone mad?

He blushed a little under his brown skin that had reminded her of a coffee-bean.

"She is a good ten years older than I am," he explained.

"Ah, well, ten years isn't much."

"You don't think so?" he cried, delighted. Who knows? she might not think even thirty too much.

"Not at that age," said Goneril, blandly.

Signor Graziano could think of no reply.

But from that day one might have dated a certain assumption of youthfulness in his manners. At cards it was always the signorino and Goneril against the two elder ladies; in his conversation, too, it was to the young girl that he constantly appealed, as if she were his natural companion--she, and not his friends of thirty years. Madame Petrucci, always serene and kind, took no notice of these little changes, but they were particularly irritating to Miss Prunty, who was, after all, only four years older than the signorino.

That lady had, indeed, become more than usually sharp and foreboding. She received the signorino's gay effusions in ominous silence, and would frown darkly while Madame Petrucci petted her "little bird," as she called Goneril. Once, indeed, Miss Prunty was heard to remark that it was tempting Providence to have

dealings with a creature whose very name was a synonym for ingratitude. But the elder lady only smiled and declared that her Gonerilla was charming, delicious, a real sunshine in the house.

"Now I call on you to support me, signorino," she cried one evening, when the three elders sat together in the room, while Goneril watered the roses on the terrace. "Is not my Gonerilla a charming little /bebe/?"

Signor Graziano withdrew his eyes from the window.

"Most charming, certainly, but scarcely such a child. She is seventeen, you know, my dear signora."

"Seventeen! /Santo Dio!/ And what is one at seventeen but an innocent, playful, charming little kitten?"

"You are always right, madame," agreed the signorino, but he looked as if he thought she were very wrong.

"Of course I am right," laughed the little lady. "Come here, my Gonerilla, and hold my skein for me. Signor Graziano is going to charm us with one of his delightful airs."

"I hoped she would sing," faltered the signorino.

"Who? Gonerilla? Nonsense, my friend. She winds silk much better than she sings."

Goneril laughed; she was not at all offended. But Signor Graziano made several mistakes in his playing. At last he left the piano. "I cannot play to-night," he cried. "I am not in the humour. Goneril, will you come and walk with me on the terrace?"

Before the girl could reply Miss Prunty had darted an angry glance at Signor Graziano.

"Good Lord, what fools men are!" she ejaculated. "And do you think, now, I'm going to let that girl, who's just getting rid of her malaria, go star-gazing with any old idiot while all the mists are curling out of the valleys?"

"Brigida, my love, you forget yourself," said Madame Petrucci.

"Bah!" cried the signorino. He was evidently out of temper.

The little lady hastened to smooth the troubled waters. "Talking of malaria," she began, in her serenest manner, "I always remember what my dearest Madame Lilli told me. It was at one of Prince Teano's concerts. You remember, signorino?"

"/Che!/ How should I remember?" he exclaimed. "It was a lifetime ago, dead and forgotten."

The old lady shrank, as if a glass of water had been rudely thrown in her face. She said nothing, staring blindly.

"Go to bed, Goneril!" cried Miss Prunty, in a voice of thunder.

CHAPTER IV

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

A few mornings after these events the postman brought a letter for Goneril. This was such a rare occurrence that she blushed rose red at the very sight of it and had to walk up and down the terrace several times before

she felt calm enough to read it. Then she went upstairs and knocked at the door of Madame Petrucci's room."

"Come in, little bird."

The old lady, in pink merino and curl-papers, opened the door. Goneril held up her letter.

"My cousin Jack is coming to Florence, and he is going to walk over to see me this afternoon. And may he stay to dinner, /cara/ signora?"

"Why, of course, Gonerilla. I am charmed!"

Goneril kissed the old lady, and danced downstairs brimming over with delight.

Later in the morning Signor Graziano called.

"Will you come out with me, Mees Goneril?" he said. "On my land the earliest vintage begins to-day."

"Oh, how nice!" she cried.

"Come, then," said the signorino, smiling.

"Oh, I can't come to-day, because of Jack."

"Jack?"

"My cousin; he may come at any time."

"Your cousin!" The signorino frowned a little. "Ah, you English," he said, "you consider all your cousins brothers and sisters!"

Goneril laughed.

"Is it not so?" he asked, a little anxiously.

"Jack is much nicer than my brothers," said the young girl.

"And who is he, this Jack?"

"He's a dear boy," said Goneril, "and very clever; he is going home for the Indian civil-service exam; he has been out to Calcutta to see my father."

The signorino did not pay any attention to the latter part of this description, but he appeared to find the beginning very satisfactory.

"So he is only a boy," he muttered to himself, and went away comparatively satisfied.

Goneril spent most of the day watching the road from Florence. She might not walk on the highway, but a steep short cut that joined the main road at the bottom of the hill was quite at her disposal. She walked up and down for more than an hour. At last she saw some one on the Florence road. She walked on quickly. It was the telegraph-boy.

She tore open the envelope and read: "Venice.--Exam. on Wednesday. Start at once. /Arivederci/."

It was with very red eyes that Goneril went in to dinner.

"So the cousin hasn't come?" said Miss Prunty, kindly.

"No; he had to go home at once for his examination."

"I dare say he'll come over again soon, my dear," said that discriminating lady. She had quite taken Goneril back into her good graces.

They all sat together in the little parlor after dinner. At eight o'clock the door-bell rang. It was now seven weeks since Goneril had blushed with excitement when first she heard that ring, and now she did not blush.

The signorino entered. He walked very straight and his lips were set. He came in with the air of one prepared to encounter opposition.

"Mees Goneril," he said, "will you come out on the terrace?--before it is too late," he added, with a savage glance at Miss Prunty.

"Yes," said Goneril; and they went out together.

"So the cousin did not come?" said the signorino.

"No."

They went on a little way in silence together. The night was moon-lit and clear; not a wind stirred the leaves; the sky was like a sapphire, containing but not shedding light. The late oleanders smelled very sweet; the moon was so full that one could distinguish the peculiar grayish-pink of the blossoms.

"It is a lovely night!" said Goneril.

"And a lovely place."

"Yes."

Then a bird sang.

"You have been here just eight weeks," said the signorino.

"I have been very happy."

He did not speak for a minute or two, and then he said:

"Would you like to live here always?"

"Ah, yes! but that is impossible."

He took her hand and turned her gently, so that her face was in the light.

"Dear Mees Goneril, why is it impossible?"

For a moment the young girl did not answer. She blushed very red, and looked brave.

"Because of Jack!" she said.

"Ah!"

"Nothing is settled," added the young girl, "but it is no use pretending not to know."

"It is no use," he repeated, very sadly.

And then for a little while they listened to the bird.

"Mees Goneril," said the signorino at last, "do you know why I brought you out here?"

"Not at all," she answered.

It was a minute before he spoke again.

"I am going to Rome to-morrow," he said, "and I wanted to bid you good-bye. You will sing to me to-night, as it will be the last time?"

"Oh, I hope not the last time!"

"Yes, yes," he said, a little testily; "unless--and I pray it may not be so--unless you ever need the help of an old friend."

"Dear Signor Graziano!"

"And now you will sing me my 'Nobil Amore'?"

"I will do anything you like."

The signorino sighed and looked at her for a minute. Then he led her into the little parlour, where Madame Petrucci was singing shrilly in the twilight.

THE BRIGAND'S BRIDE: A TALE OF SOUTHERN ITALY

BY

LAURENCE OLIPHANT

The Italian peninsula during the years 1859, 1860, and 1861 offered a particularly tempting field for adventure to ardent spirits in search of excitement; and, attracted partly by my sympathy with the popular movement, and partly by that simple desire, which gives so much zest to the life of youth, of risking it on all possible occasions, I had taken an active part, chiefly as an officious spectator, in all the principal events of those stirring years. It was in the spring of 1862 that I found matters beginning to settle down to a degree that threatened monotony; and with the termination of the winter gaities at Naples and the close of the San Carlo, I seriously bethought me of accepting the offer of a naval friend who was about to engage in blockade-running, and offered to land me in the Confederate States, when a recrudescence of activity on the part of the brigand bands in Calabria induced me to turn my attention in that direction. The first question I had to consider was, whether I should enjoy myself most by joining the brigands, or the troops which were engaged in suppressing them. As the former aspired to a political character, and called themselves patriotic bands fighting for their church, their country, and their king,--the refugee monarch of Naples,--one could espouse their cause without exactly laying one's self open to the charge of being a bandit; but it was notorious

in point of fact that the bands cared for neither the pope nor the exiled king nor their annexed country, but committed the most abominable atrocities in the names of all the three, for the simple purpose of filling their pockets. I foresaw not only extreme difficulty in being accepted as a member of the fraternity, more especially as I had hitherto been identified with the Garibaldians, but also the probability of finding myself compromised by acts from which my conscience would revolt, and for which my life would in all likelihood pay the forfeit. On the other hand, I could think of no friend among the officers of the bersaglieri and cavalry regiments then engaged in brigand-hunting in the Capitanata and Basilicata to whom I could apply for an invitation to join them.

Under these circumstances I determined to trust to the chapter of accidents; and, armed with a knapsack, a sketch-book, and an air-gun, took my seat one morning in the Foggia diligence, with the vague idea of getting as near the scene of operations as possible, and seeing what would turn up. The air-gun was not so much a weapon of offence or defence as a means of introduction to the inhabitants. It had the innocent appearance of rather a thick walking-cane, with a little brass trigger projecting; and in the afternoon I would join the group sitting in front of the chemist's, which, for some reason or other, is generally a sort of open-air club in a small Neapolitan town, or stroll into the single modest cafe of which it might possibly boast, and toy abstractedly with the trigger. This, together with my personal appearance,--for do what I would I could never make myself look like a Neapolitan,--would be certain to attract attention, and some one bolder than the rest would make himself the spokesman, and politely ask me whether the cane in my hand was an umbrella or a fishing-rod; on which I would amiably reply that it was a gun, and that I should have much pleasure in exhibiting my skill and the method of its operation to the assembled company. Then the whole party would follow me to an open space, and I would call for a pack of cards, and possibly--for I was a good shot in those days--pink the ace of hearts at fifteen paces. At any rate, my performances usually called forth plaudits, and this involved a further interchange of compliments and explanations, and the production of my sketch-book, which soon procured me the acquaintance of some ladies, and an invitation as an English artist to the house of some respectable citizen.

So it happened that, getting out of the diligence before it reached Foggia, I struck south, and wandered for some days from one little town to another, being always hospitably entertained, whether there happened to be an /albergo/ or not, at private houses, seeing in this way more of the manners and customs of the inhabitants than would have been otherwise possible, gaining much information as to the haunts of the brigands, the whereabouts of the troops, and hearing much local gossip generally. The ignorance of the most respectable classes at this period was astounding; it has doubtless all changed since. I have been at a town of two thousand inhabitants, not one of whom took in a newspaper; the whole population, therefore, was in as profound ignorance of what was transpiring in the rest of the world as if they had been in Novaia Zemlia. I have stayed with a mayor who did not know that England was an island; I have been the guest of a citizen who had never heard of Scotland, and to whom, therefore, my nationality was an enigma; but I never met any one--I mean of this same class--who had not heard of Palmerston. He was a mysterious personage, execrated by the "blacks" and adored by the "reds." And I shone with a reflected lustre as the citizen of a country of which he was the Prime Minister. As a consequence, we had political discussions, which were protracted far into the night; for the principal meal of the twenty-four hours was a 10-o'clock-P.M. supper, at which, after the inevitable macaroni, were many unwholesome dishes, such as salads made of thistles, cows' udders, and other delicacies, which deprived one of all desire for sleep. Notwithstanding which, we rose early, my hostess and the ladies of the establishment appearing in the early part of the day in the most extreme deshabelle. Indeed, on one occasion when I was first introduced into the family of a respectable citizen and shown into my bedroom, I mistook one of the two females who were making the bed for the servant, and was surprised to see her hand a little *douceur* I gave her as an earnest of attention on her part to the other, with a smile. She soon afterward went to bed: we all did, from 11 A.M. till about 3 P.M., at which hour I was horrified to meet her arrayed in silks and satins, and to find that she was the wife of my host. She kindly took me a drive with her in a carriage and pair, and with a coachman in livery.

It was by this simple means, and by thus imposing myself upon the hospitality of these unsophisticated people, that I worked my way, by slow degrees, chiefly on foot, into the part of the country I desired to visit;

and I trust that I in a measure repaid them for it by the stores of information which I imparted to them, and of which they stood much in need, and by little sketches of their homes and the surrounding scenery, with which I presented them. I was, indeed, dependent in some measure for hospitality of this description, as I had taken no money with me, partly because, to tell the truth, I had scarcely got any, and partly because I was afraid of being robbed by brigands of the little I had. I therefore eschewed the character of a */milordo Inglese/*; but I never succeeded in dispelling all suspicion that I might not be a nephew of the Queen, or at least a very near relative of Palmerston in disguise. It was so natural, seeing what a deep interest both her Majesty and the Prime Minister took in Italy, that they should send some one incognito whom they could trust to tell them all about it.

Meantime, I was not surprised, when I came to know the disposition of the inhabitants, at the success of brigandage. It has never been my fortune before or since to live among such a timid population. One day at a large town a leading landed proprietor received notice that if he did not pay a certain sum in blackmail,--I forget at this distance of time the exact amount,--his farm or */masseria/* would be robbed. This farm, which was in fact a handsome country house, was distant about ten miles from the town. He therefore made an appeal to the citizens that they should arm themselves and help him to defend his property, as he had determined not to pay, and had taken steps to be informed as to the exact date when the attack was to be made in default of payment. More than three hundred citizens enrolled themselves as willing to turn out in arms. On the day preceding the attack by the brigands, a rendezvous was given to these three hundred on the great square for five in the morning, and thither I accordingly repaired, unable, however, to induce my host to accompany me, although he had signed as a volunteer. On reaching the rendezvous, I found the landed proprietor and a friend who was living with him, and about ten minutes afterward two other volunteers strolled up. Five was all we could muster out of three hundred. It was manifestly useless to attempt anything with so small a force, and no arguments could induce any of the others to turn out; so the unhappy gentleman had the satisfaction of knowing that the brigands had punctually pillaged his place, carrying off all his live stock on the very day and at the very hour they said they would. As for the inhabitants venturing any distance from town, except under military escort, such a thing was unknown, and all communication with Naples was for some time virtually intercepted. I was regarded as a sort of monomaniac of recklessness because I ventured on a solitary walk of a mile or two in search of a sketch--an act of no great audacity on my part, for I had walked through various parts of the country without seeing a brigand, and found it difficult to realise that there was any actual danger in strolling a mile from a moderately large town.

Emboldened by impunity, I was tempted one day to follow up a most romantic glen in search of a sketch, when I came upon a remarkably handsome peasant girl, driving a donkey before her loaded with wood. My sudden appearance on the narrow path made the animal shy against a projecting piece of rock, off which he rebounded to the edge of the path, which, giving way, precipitated him and his load down the ravine. He was brought up unhurt against a bush some twenty feet below, the fagots of wood being scattered in his descent in all directions. For a moment the girl's large, fierce eyes flashed upon me with anger; but the impetuosity with which I went headlong after the donkey, with a view of repairing my error, and the absurd attempts I made to reverse the position of his feet, which were in the air, converted her indignation into a hearty fit of laughter, as, seeing that the animal was apparently uninjured, she scrambled down to my assistance. By our united efforts we at last succeeded in hoisting the donkey up to the path, and then I collected the wood and helped her to load it again--an operation which involved a frequent meeting of hands and of the eyes, which had now lost the ferocity that had startled me at first, and seemed getting more soft and beaming every time I glanced at them, till at last, producing my sketch-book, I ventured to remark, "Ah, signorina, what a picture you would make! Now that the ass is loaded, let me draw you before we part, that I may carry away the recollection of the loveliest woman I have seen."

"First draw the donkey," she replied, "that I may carry away a recollection of the */galantuomo/* who first upset him over the bank, and then helped me to load him."

Smiling at this ambiguous compliment, I gave her the sketch she desired, and was about to claim my reward,

when she abruptly remarked:

"There is not time now; it is getting late, and I must not linger, as I have still an hour to go before reaching home. How is it that you are not afraid to be wandering in this solitary glen by yourself? Do you not know the risks?"

"I have heard of them, but I do not believe in them," I said; "besides, I should be poor plunder for robbers."

"But you have friends, who would pay to ransom you, I suppose, if you were captured?"

"My life is not worth a hundred scudi to any of them," I replied, laughing; "but I am willing to forego the please of drawing you now, /bellissima/, if you will tell me where you live, and let me come and paint you there at my leisure."

"You're a brave one," she said, with a little laugh; "there is not another man in all Ascoli who would dare to pay me a visit without an escort of twenty soldiers. But I am too grateful for your amiability to let you run such a risk. /Addio/, Signor Inglese. There are many reasons why I can't let you draw my picture, but I am not ungrateful, see!"--and she offered me her cheek, on which I instantly imprinted a chaste and fraternal salute.

"Don't think that you've seen the last of me, /carrissima/," I called out, as she turned away. "I shall live on the memory of that kiss till I have an opportunity of repeating it."

And as I watched her retreating figure with an artist's eye, I was struck with its grace and suppleness, combined, as I had observed while she was helping me to lead the donkey, with an unusual degree of muscular strength for a woman.

The spot at which this episode had taken place was so romantic that I determined to make a sketch of it, and the shades of evening were closing in so fast that they warned me to hurry if I would reach the town before dark. I had just finished it and was stooping to pick up by air-gun, when I heard a sudden rush, and before I had time to look up I was thrown violently forward on my face, and found myself struggling in the embrace of a powerful grasp, from which I had nearly succeeded in freeing myself, when the arms which were clasping me were reinforced by several more pairs, and I felt a rope being passed round my body.

"All right, signors!" I exclaimed. "I yield to superior numbers. You need not pull so hard; let me get up, and I promise to go with you quietly." And by this time I had turned sufficiently on my back to see that four men were engaged in tying me up.

"Tie his elbows together and let him get up," said one; "he is not armed. Here, Giuseppe, carry his stick and paint-box while I feel his pockets. /Corpo di Baccho!/ twelve bajocchi," he exclaimed, producing those copper coins with an air of profound disgust. "It is to be hoped he is worth more to his friends. Now, young man, trudge, and remember that the first sign you make of attempting to run away means four bullets through you."

As I did not anticipate any real danger, and as a prolonged detention was a matter of no consequence to a man without an occupation, I stepped forward with a light heart, rather pleased than otherwise with anticipations of the brigand's cave, and turning over in my mind whether or not I should propose to join the band.

We had walked an hour and it had become dark, when we turned off the road, up a narrow path that led between rocky sides to a glade, at the extremity of which, under an overhanging ledge, was a small cottage, with what seemed to be a patch of garden in front.

"Ho! Anita!" called out the man who appeared to be the leader of the band; "open! We have brought a friend to supper, who will require a night's lodgings."

An old woman with a light appeared, and over her shoulder, to my delight, I saw the face I had asked to be allowed to paint so shortly before. I was about to recognise her with an exclamation, when I saw a hurried motion of her finger to her lip, which looked a natural gesture to the casual observer, but which I construed into a sign of prudence.

"Where did you pick him up, Croppo?" she asked, carelessly. "He ought to be worth something."

"Just twelve bajocchi," he answered, with a sneering laugh. "Come, /amico mio/, you will have to give us the names of some of your friends."

"I am tolerably intimate with his Holiness the Pope, and I have a bowing acquaintance with the King of Naples, whom may God speedily restore to his own," I replied, in a light and airy fashion, which seemed exceedingly to exasperate the man called Croppo.

"Oh, yes, we know all about that; we never catch a man who does not profess to be a Nero of the deepest dye in order to conciliate our sympathies. It is just as well that you should understand, my friend, that all are fish who come into our net. The money of the pope's friends is quite as good as the money of Garibaldi's. You need not hope to put us off with your Italian friends of any colour; what we want is English gold--good, solid English gold, and plenty of it."

"Ah," said I, with a laugh, "if you did but know, my friend, how long I have wanted it too! If you could only suggest an Englishman who would pay you for my life, I would write to him immediately, and we would go halves in the ransom. Hold!" I said, a bright idea suddenly striking me. "Suppose I were to write to my government--how would that do?"

Croppo was evidently puzzled; my cheerful and unembarrassed manner apparently perplexed him. He had a suspicion that I was even capable of the audacity of making a fool of him, and yet that proposition about the government rather staggered him; there might be something in it.

"Don't you think," he remarked, grimly, "it would add to the effect of your communication if you were to enclose your own ears in your letter? I can easily supply them; and if you are not a little more guarded in your speech you may possibly have to add your tongue."

"It would not have the slightest effect," I replied, paying no heed to his threat; "you don't know Palmerston as I do. If you wish to get anything out of him you must be excessively civil. What does he care about my ears?" And I laughed with such scornful contempt that Croppo this time felt that he had made a fool of himself, and I observed the lovely girl behind, while the corners of her mouth twitched with suppressed laughter, make a sign of caution.

"/Per Dio!/" he exclaimed, jumping up with fury. "Understand, Signor Inglese, that Croppo is not to be trifled with. I have a summary way of treating disrespect," and he drew a long and exceedingly sharp- looking two-edged knife.

"So you would kill the goose" ("and I certainly am a goose," I reflected) "that may lay a golden egg." But my allusion was lost upon him, and I saw my charmer touch her forehead significantly, as though to imply to Croppo that I was weak in the upper story.

"An imbecile without friends and twelve bajocchi in his pocket," he muttered, savagely. "Perhaps the night without food will restore his senses. Come, fool!" and he roughly pushed me into a dark little chamber adjoining. "Here, Valeria, hold the light."

So Valeria was the name of the heroine of the donkey episode. As she held a small oil-lamp aloft I perceived

that the room in which I was to spend the night had more the appearance of a cellar than a chamber; it had been excavated on two sides from the bank; on the third there was a small hole about six inches square, apparently communicating with another room, and on the fourth was the door by which I had entered, and which opened into the kitchen and general living-room of the inhabitants. There was a heap of onions running to seed, the fagots of fire-wood which Valeria had brought that afternoon, and an old cask or two.

"Won't you give him some kind of a bed?" she asked Croppo.

"Bah! he can sleep on the onions," responded that worthy. "If he had been more civil and intelligent he should have had something to eat. You three," he went on, turning to the other men, "sleep in the kitchen, and watch that the prisoner does not escape. The door has a strong bolt besides. Come, Valeria."

And the pair disappeared, leaving me in a dense gloom, strongly pervaded by an ordour of fungus and decaying onions. Groping into one of the casks, I found some straw, and spreading it on a piece of plank, I prepared to pass the night sitting with my back to the driest piece of wall I could find, which happened to be immediately under the air-hole--a fortunate circumstance, as the closeness was often stifling. I had probably been dozing for some time in a sitting position, when I felt something tickle the top of my head. The idea that it might be a large spider caused me to start, when, stretching up my hand, it came in contact with what seemed to be a rag, which I had not observed. Getting carefully up, I perceived a faint light gleaming through the aperture, and then saw that a hand was protruded through it, apparently waving the rag. As I felt instinctively that the hand was Valeria's, I seized the finger-tips, which was all I could get hold of, and pressed them to my lips. They were quickly drawn away, and then the whisper reached my ears:

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes."

"Then eat this," and she passed me a tin pannikin full of cold macaroni, which would just go through the opening.

"Dear Valeria," I said, with my mouth full, "how good and thoughtful you are!"

"Hush! he'll hear."

"Who?"

"Croppo."

"Where is he?"

"Asleep in the bed just behind me."

"How do you come to be in his bedroom?"

"Because I'm his wife."

"Oh!" A long pause, during which I collapsed upon my straw seat, and swallowed macaroni thoughtfully. As the result of my meditations, "Valeria, /carissima!"

"Hush! Yes."

"Can't you get me out of this infernal den?"

"Perhaps, if they all three sleep in the kitchen; at present one is awake. Watch for my signal, and if they all three sleep I will manage to slip the bolt. Then you must give me time to get back into bed, and when you hear me snore you may make the attempt. They are all three sleeping on the floor, so be very careful where you tread; I will also leave the front door a little open, so that you can slip through without noise."

"Dearest Valeria!"

"Hush! Yes."

"Hand me that cane--it is my fishing-rod, you know--through this hole; you can leave the sketch-book and paint-box under the tree that the donkey fell against; I will call for them some day soon. And, Valeria, don't you think we could make our lips meet through this beastly hole?"

"Impossible. There's my hand; heavens! Croppo would murder me if he knew. Now keep quiet till I give the signal. Oh, do let go my hand!"

"Remember, Valeria, /bellissima, carissima/, whatever happens, that I love you."

But I don't think she heard this, and I went and sat on the onions, because I could see the hole better and the smell of them kept me awake.

It was at least two hours after this that the faint light appeared at the hole in the wall and a hand was pushed through. I rushed at the finger-tips.

"Here's your fishing-rod," she said, when I had released them and she had passed me my air-gun. "Now be very careful how you tread. There is one asleep across the door, but you can open it about two feet. Then step over him; then make for a gleam of moonlight that comes through the crack of the front door, open it very gently, and slip out. /Addio, caro Inglese/; mind you wait till you hear me snoring."

Then she lingered, and I heard a sigh.

"What is it, sweet Valeria?" and I covered her hand with kisses.

"I wish Croppo had blue eyes like you."

This was murmured so softly that I may have been mistaken, but I'm nearly sure that was what she said; then she drew softly away, and two minutes afterward I heard her snoring. As the first sound issued from her lovely nostrils I stealthily approached the door, gently pushed it open, stealthily stepped over a space which I trusted cleared the recumbent figure that I could not see, cleared him, stole gently on for the streak of moonlight, trod squarely on something that seemed like an outstretched hand, for it gave under my pressure and produced a yell, felt that I must now rush for my life, dashed the door open, and down the path with four yelling ruffians at my heels. I was a pretty good runner, but the moon was behind a cloud and the way was rocky; moreover, there must have been a short cut I did not know, for one of my pursuers gained upon me with unaccountable rapidity--he appeared suddenly within ten yards of my heels. The others were at least a hundred yards behind. I had nothing for it but to turn round, let him almost run against the muzzle of my air-gun, pull the trigger, and see him fall in his tracks. It was the work of a second, but it checked my pursuers. They had heard no noise, but they found something that they did not bargain for, and lingered a moment; then, they took up the chase with redoubled fury. But I had too good a start; and where the path joined the main road, instead of turning down toward the town as they expected I would, I dodged round in the opposite direction, the uncertain light this time favouring me, and I heard their footsteps and their curses dying away on the wrong track. Nevertheless I ran on at full speed, and it was not till the day was dawning that I began to feel safe and relax my efforts. The sun had been up an hour when I reached a small town, and

the little /locanda/ was just opening for the day when I entered it, thankful for a hot cup of coffee and a dirty little room, with a dirtier bed, where I could sleep off the fatigue and excitement of the night. I was strolling down almost the only street in the afternoon when I met a couple of carabinieri riding into it, and shortly after encountered the whole troop, to my great delight in command of an intimate friend whom I had left a month before in Naples.

"Ah, /caro mio/," he exclaimed, when he saw me, "well met! What on earth are you doing here? Looking for those brigands you were so anxious to find when you left Naples? Considering that you are in the heart of their country, you should not have much difficulty in gratifying your curiosity."

"I have had an adventure or two," I replied, carelessly. "Indeed, that is partly the reason you find me here. I was just thinking how I could get safely back to Ascoli, when your welcome escort appeared; for I suppose you are going there and will let me take advantage of it."

"Only too delighted; and you can tell me your adventures. Let us dine together to-night, and I will find you a horse to ride on with us in the morning."

I am afraid my account of the episode with which I have acquainted the reader was not strictly accurate in all its details, as I did not wish to bring down my military friends on poor Valeria; so I skipped all allusion to her and my detention in her home, merely saying that I had had a scuffle with brigands and had been fortunate enough to escape under cover of the night. As we passed it next morning I recognised the path which led up to Valeria's cottage, and shortly after observed that young woman herself coming up the glen.

"Holloa!" I said, with great presence of mind, as she drew near, "my lovely model, I declare! Just you ride on, old fellow, while I stop and ask her when she can come and sit to me again."

"You artists are sad rogues; what chances your profession must give you!" remarked my companion, as he cast an admiring glance on Valeria and rode discreetly on.

"There is nothing to be afraid of, lovely Valeria," I said, in a low tone, as I lingered behind; "be sure I will never betray either you or your rascally--hem! I mean your excellent Croppo. By the by, was that man much hurt that I was obliged to trip up?"

"Hurt! Santa Maria! he is dead, with a bullet through his heart. Croppo says it must have been magic, for he had searched you and he knew you were not armed, and he was within a hundred yards of you when poor Pippo fell, and he heard no sound."

"Croppo is not far wrong," I said, glad of the opportunity thus offered of imposing on the ignorance and credulity of the natives. "He seemed surprised that he could not frighten me the other night. Tell him he was much more in my power than I was in his, dear Valeria," I added, looking tenderly into his eyes. "I didn't want to alarm you; that was the reason I let him off so easily; but I may not be so merciful next time. Now, sweetest, that kiss you owe me, and which the wall prevented your giving me the other night." She held up her face with the innocence of a child as I stooped from my saddle.

"I shall never see you again, Signor Inglese," she said, with a sigh; "for Croppo says it is not safe, after what happened the night before last, to stay another hour. Indeed, he went off yesterday, leaving me orders to follow to-day; but I went first to put your sketch-book under the bush where the donkey fell, and where you will find it."

It took us another minute or two to part after this; and when I had ridden away I turned to look back, and there was Valeria gazing after me. "Positively," I reflected, "I am over head and ears in love with the girl, and I believe she is with me. I ought to have nipped my feelings in the bud when she told me she was his wife; but

then he is a brigand, who threatened both my ears and my tongue, to say nothing of my life. To what extent is the domestic happiness of such a ruffian to be respected?" And I went on splitting the moral straws suggested by this train of thought until I had recovered my sketch-book and overtaken my escort, with whom I rode triumphantly back into Ascoli, where my absence had been the cause of much anxiety and my fate was even then being eagerly discussed. My friends with whom I usually sat round the chemist's door were much exercised by the reserve which I manifested in reply to the fire of cross-examination to which I was subjected for the next few days; and English eccentricity, which was proverbial even in this secluded town, received a fresh illustration in the light and airy manner with which I treated a capture and escape from brigands, which I regarded with such indifference that I could not be induced even to condescend to details. "It was a mere scuffle; there were only four; and, being an Englishman, I polished them all off with the 'box,' " and I closed my fist and struck a scientific attitude of self-defence, branching off into a learned disquisition on the pugilistic art, which filled my hearers with respect and amazement. From this time forward the sentiment with which I regarded my air-gun underwent a change. When a friend had made me a present of it a year before I regarded it in the light of a toy and rather resented the gift as too juvenile. "I wonder he did not give me a kite or a hoop," I mentally reflected. Then I had found it useful among Italians, who are a trifling people and like playthings; but now that it had saved my life and sent a bullet through a man's heart, I no longer entertained the same feeling of contempt for it. Not again would I make light of it--this potent engine of destruction which had procured me the character of being a magician. I would hide it from human gaze and cherish it as a sort of fetich. So I bought a walking-stick and an umbrella, and strapped it up with them, wrapped in my plaid; and when, shortly after, an unexpected remittance from an aunt supplied me with money enough to buy a horse from one of the officers of my friend's regiment, which soon after arrived, and I accepted their invitation to accompany them on their brigand-hunting expeditions, not one of them knew that I had such a weapon as an air-gun in my possession.

Our *modus operandi* on these occasions was as follows: On receiving information from some proprietor that the brigands were threatening his property,--it was impossible to get intelligence from the peasantry, for they were all in league with the brigands; indeed, they all took a holiday from regular work and joined a band for a few weeks from time to time,--we proceeded, with a force sufficiently strong to cope with the supposed strength of the band, to the farm in question. The bands were all mounted, and averaged from 200 to 400 men each. It was calculated that upward of 2000 men were thus engaged in harrying the country, and this enabled the Neri to talk of the king's forces engaged in legitimate warfare against those of Victor Emmanuel. Riding over the vast plains of Capitanata, we would discern against the sky outline the figure of a solitary horseman. This we knew to be a picket. Then there was no time to be lost, and away we would go for him helter-skelter across the plain; he would instantly gallop in on the main body, probably occupying a *masseria*. If they thought they were strong enough they would show fight. If not they would take to their heels in the direction of the mountains, with us in full cry after them. If they were hardly pressed they would scatter, and we were obliged to do the same, and the result would be that the swiftest horsemen might possibly effect a few captures. It was an exciting species of warfare, partaking a good deal more of the character of a hunting-field than of cavalry skirmishing. Sometimes, where the ground was hilly, we had *bersaglieri* with us, and as the brigands took to the mountains the warfare assumed a different character. Sometimes, in default of these active little troops, we took local volunteers, whom we found a very poor substitute. On more than one occasion when we came upon the brigands in a farm they thought themselves sufficiently strong to hold it against us, and once the cowardice of the volunteers was amusingly illustrated. The band was estimated at about 200, and we had 100 volunteers and a detachment of 50 cavalry. On coming under the fire of the brigands the cavalry captain, who was in command, ordered the volunteers to charge, intending when they had dislodged the enemy to ride him down on the open; but the volunteer officer did not repeat the word and stood stock-still, his men all imitating his example.

"Charge! I say," shouted the cavalry captain, "why don't you charge? I believe you're afraid!"

"*E vero*," said the captain of volunteers, shrugging his shoulders.

"Here, take my horse--you're only fit to be a groom; and you, men, dismount and let these cowards hold your horses, while you follow me." And, jumping from his horse, the gallant fellow, followed by his men, charged the building, from which a hot fire was playing upon them, sword in hand. In less than a quarter of an hour the brigands were scampering, some on foot and some on horseback, out of the farm buildings, followed by a few stray and harmless shots from such of the volunteers as had their hands free. We lost three men killed and five wounded in this little skirmish, and killed six of the brigands, besides making a dozen prisoners. When I say "we" I mean my companions, for, having no weapon, I had discreetly remained with the volunteers. The scene of this gallant exploit was on the classic battle-field of Cannae. This captain, who was not the friend I had joined the day after my brigand adventure, was a most plucky and dashing cavalry officer, and was well seconded by his men, who were all Piedmontese and of a very different temperament from the Neapolitans. On one occasion a band of 250 brigands waited for us on the top of a small hill, never dreaming that we should charge up it with the odds five to one against us; but we did, and after firing a volley at us, which emptied a couple of saddles, they broke and fled when we were about twenty yards from them. Then began one of the most exciting scurries across country it was ever my fortune to be engaged in. The brigands scattered--so did we; and I found myself with two troopers in chase of a pair of bandits, one of whom seemed to be the chief of the band. A small stream wound through the plain, which we dashed across. Just beyond was a tributary ditch, which would have been considered a fair jump in the hunting-field: both brigands took it in splendid style. The hindmost was not ten yards ahead of the leading trooper, who came a cropper; on which the brigand reined up, fired a pistol-shot into the prostrate horse and man, and was off; but the delay cost him dear. The other trooper, who was a little ahead of me, got safely over. I followed suit. In another moment he had fired his carbine into the brigand's horse, and down they both came by the run. We instantly reined up, for I saw there was no chance of overtaking the remaining brigand, and the trooper was in the act of cutting down the man as he struggled to his feet, when to my horror I recognised the lovely features of--Valeria.

"Stay, man!" I shouted, throwing myself from my horse. "It's a woman! touch her if you dare!" And then, seeing the man's eye gleam with indignation, I added, "Brave soldiers, such as you have proved yourself to be, do not kill women; though your traducers say you do, do not give them cause to speak truth. I will be responsible for this woman's safety. Here, to make it sure you had better strap us together." I piqued myself exceedingly on this happy inspiration, whereby I secured an arm-in-arm walk, of a peculiar kind, it is true, with Valeria; and indeed my readiness to sacrifice myself seemed rather to astonish the soldier, who hesitated. However, his comrade, whose horse had been shot in the ditch, now came up, and seconded my proposal as I offered him a mount on mine.

"How on earth am I to let you escape, dear Valeria?" I whispered, giving her a sort of affectionate nudge; the position of our arms prevented my squeezing hers as I could have wished, and the two troopers kept behind us, watching us, I thought, suspiciously.

"It is quite impossible now--don't attempt it," she answered; "perhaps there may be an opportunity later."

"Was that Croppo who got away?" I asked.

"Yes. He could not get his cowardly men to stand on that hill."

"What a bother those men are behind, dearest! Let me pretend to scratch my nose with this hand that is tied to yours, which I can thus bring to my lips."

I accomplished this manoeuvre rather neatly, but parties now came straggling in from other directions, and I was obliged to give up whispering and become circumspect. They all seemed rather astonished at our group, and the captain laughed heartily as he rode up and called out, "Who have you got tied to you there, /caro mio/?"

"Croppo's wife. I had her tied to me for fear she should escape; besides, she is not bad-looking."

"What a prize!" he exclaimed. "We have made a tolerable haul this time --twenty prisoners in all, among them the priest of the band. Our colonel has just arrived, so I am in luck; he will be delighted. See the prisoners are being brought up to him now; but you had better remount and present yours in a less singular fashion."

When we reached the colonel we found him examining the priest. His breviary contained various interesting notes written on some of the fly-leaves.

For instance:

"Administered extreme unction to A----, shot by Croppo's order; my share ten scudi.

"Ditto, ditto, to R----, hung by Croppo's order, my share two scudi.

"Ditto, ditto, to S----, roasted by Croppo's order to make him name an agent to bring his ransom; overdone by mistake, and died, so got nothing.

"Ditto, ditto, to P----, executed by the knife by Croppo's order for disobedience.

"M---- and F---- and D----, three new members, joined to-day; confessed them, and received the usual fees."

He was a dark, beetle-browed-looking ruffian, this holy man; and the colonel, when he had finished examining his book of prayer and crime, tossed it to me, saying, "There! that will show your friends in England the kind of politicians we make war against. Ha! what have we here? This is more serious." And he unfolded a piece of paper which had been concealed in the breast of the priest. "This contains a little valuable information," he added, with a grim smile. "Nobody like priests and women for carrying about political secrets, so you may have made a valuable capture," and he turned to where I stood with Valeria; "let her be carefully searched."

Now the colonel was a very pompous man, and the document he had just discovered on the priest added to his sense of self-importance. When, therefore, a large, carefully folded paper was produced from the neighbourhood of Valeria's lovely bosom his eyes sparkled with admiration. "Ho, ho!" he exclaimed, as he clutched it eagerly, "the plot is thickening!" And he spread out triumphantly, before he had himself seen what it was, the exquisitely drawn portrait of a donkey. There was a suppressed titter, which exploded into a shout when the bystanders looked into the colonel's indignant face. I only was affected differently as my gaze fell upon this touching evidence of dear Valeria's love for me, and I glanced at her tenderly. "This has a deeper significance than you think for," said the colonel, looking round angrily. "Croppo's wife does not carefully secrete a drawing like that on her person for nothing. See, it is done by no common artist. It means something, and must be preserved."

"It may have a biblical reference to the state of Italy. You remember Issachar was likened to an ass between two burdens. In that case it probably emanated from Rome," I remarked; but nobody seemed to see the point of the allusion, and the observation fell flat.

That night I dined with the colonel, and after dinner I persuaded him to let me visit Valeria in prison, as I wished to take the portrait of the wife of the celebrated brigand chief. I thanked my stars that my friend who had seen her when we met in the glen was away on duty with his detachment and could not testify to our former acquaintance.

My meeting with Valeria on this occasion was too touching and full of tender passages to be of any general interest. Valeria told me that she was still a bride, that she had only been married a few months, and that she had been compelled to become Croppo's wife against her choice, as the brigand's will was too powerful to be resisted; but that, though he was jealous and attached to her, he was stern and cruel, and, so far from winning

her love since her marriage, he had rather estranged it by his fits of passion and ferocity. As may be imagined, the portrait, which was really very successful, took some time in execution, the more especially as we had to discuss the possibilities of Valeria's escape.

"We are going to be transferred to-morrow to the prison at Foggia," she said. "If while we were passing through the market-place a disturbance of some sort could be created, as it is market-day and all the country people know me and are my friends, a rescue might be attempted. I know how to arrange for that, only they must see some chance of success."

A bright thought suddenly struck me; it was suggested by a trick I had played shortly after my arrival in Italy.

"You know I am something of a magician, Valeria; you have had proof of that. If I create a disturbance by magic to-morrow when you are passing through the market-place, you won't stay to wonder what is the cause of the confusion, but instantly take advantage of it to escape."

"Trust me for that, /caro mio/."

"And if you escape when shall we meet again?"

"I am known too well now to risk another meeting. I shall be in hiding with Croppo, where it will be impossible for you to find me, nor while he lives could I ever dare to think of leaving him; but I shall never forget you,"--and she pressed my hands to her lips,--"though I shall no longer have the picture of the donkey to remember you by."

"See, here's my photograph; that will be better," said I, feeling a little annoyed--foolishly, I admit. Then we strained each other to our respective hearts and parted. Now it so happened that my room in the /lacanda/ in which I was lodging overlooked the market-place. Here at ten o'clock in the morning I posted myself; for that was the hour, as I had been careful to ascertain, when the prisoners were to start for Foggia. I opened the window about three inches and fixed it there; I took out my gun, put eight balls in it, and looked down upon the square. It was crowded with the country people in their bright- coloured costumes chaffering over their produce. I looked above them to the tall campanile of the church which filled one side of the square. I receded a step and adjusted my gun on the ledge of the window to my satisfaction. I then looked down the street in which the prison was situated, and which debouched on the square, and awaited events. At ten minutes past ten I saw the soldiers at the door of the prison form up, and then I knew that the twenty prisoners of whom they formed the escort were starting; but the moment they began to move I fired at the big bell in the campanile, which responded with a loud clang. All the people in the square looked up. As the prisoners entered the square, which they had begun to cross in its whole breadth, I fired again and again. The bell banged twice, and the people began to buzz about. "Now," I thought, "I must let the old bell have it." By the time five more balls had struck the bell with a resounding din the whole square was in commotion. A miracle was evidently in progress or the campanile was bewitched. People began to run hither and thither; all the soldiers forming the escort gaped open-mouthed at the steeple as the clangour continued. As soon as the last shot had been fired I looked down into the square and saw all this, and I saw that the prisoners were attempting to escape, and in more than one instance had succeeded, for the soldiers began to scatter in pursuit, and the country people to form themselves into impeding crowds as though by accident; but nowhere could I see Valeria. When I was quite sure she had escaped I went down and joined the crowd. I saw three prisoners captured and brought back, and when I asked the officer in command how many had escaped he said three-- Croppo's wife, the priest, and another.

When I met my cavalry friends at dinner that evening it was amusing to hear them speculate upon the remarkable occurrence which had, in fact, upset the wits of the whole town. Priests and vergers and sacristans had visited the campanile, and one of them had brought away a flattened piece of lead, which looked as if it might have been a bullet; but the suggestion that eight bullets could have hit the bell in succession without

anybody hearing a sound was treated with ridicule. I believe the bell was subsequently exorcised with holy water. I was afraid to remain with the regiment with my air-gun after this, lest some one should discover it and unravel the mystery; besides, I felt a sort of traitor to the brave friends who had so generously offered me their hospitality; so I invented urgent private affairs which demanded my immediate return to Naples, and on the morning of my departure found myself embraced by all the officers of the regiment from the colonel downward, who in the fervour of their kisses thrust sixteen waxed moustache-points against my cheeks.

About eighteen months after this I heard of the capture and execution of Croppo, and I knew that Valeria was free; but I had unexpectedly inherited a property and was engaged to be married. I am now a country gentleman with a large family. My sanctum is stocked with various mementos of my youthful adventures, but none awakens in me such thrilling memories as are excited by the breviary of the brigand priest and the portrait of the brigand's bride.

MRS. GENERAL TALBOYS

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

Why Mrs. General Talboys first made up her mind to pass the winter of 1859 at Rome I never clearly understood. To myself she explained her purposes soon after her arrival at the Eternal City, by declaring, in her own enthusiastic manner, that she was inspired by a burning desire to drink fresh at the still living fountains of classical poetry and sentiment. But I always thought that there was something more than this in it. Classical poetry and sentiment were doubtless very dear to her, but so also, I imagine, were the substantial comforts of Hardover Lodge, the general's house in Berkshire; and I do not think that she would have emigrated for the winter had there not been some slight domestic misunderstanding. Let this, however, be fully made clear-- that such misunderstanding, if it existed, must have been simply an affair of temper. No impropriety of conduct has, I am very sure, ever been imputed to the lady. The general, as all the world knows, is hot; and Mrs. Talboys, when the sweet rivers of her enthusiasm are unfed by congenial waters, can, I believe, make herself disagreeable.

But be this as it may, in November, 1859, Mrs. Talboys came among us English at Rome, and soon succeeded in obtaining for herself a comfortable footing in our society. We all thought her more remarkable for her mental attributes than for physical perfection, but nevertheless she was in her own way a sightly woman. She had no special brilliance, either of eye or complexion, such as would produce sudden flames in susceptible hearts, nor did she seem to demand instant homage by the form and step of a goddess; but we found her to be a good-looking woman of some thirty or thirty-three years of age, with soft, peach-like cheeks,--rather too like those of a cherub,-- with sparkling eyes which were hardly large enough, with good teeth, a white forehead, a dimpled chin, and a full bust. Such outwardly was Mrs. General Talboys. The description of the inward woman is the purport to which these few pages will be devoted.

There are two qualities to which the best of mankind are much subject, which are nearly related to each other, and as to which the world has not yet decided whether they are to be classed among the good or evil attributes of our nature. Men and women are under the influence of them both, but men oftenest undergo the former, and women the latter. They are ambition and enthusiasm. Now Mrs. Talboys was an enthusiastic woman.

As to ambition, generally as the world agrees with Mark Antony in stigmatising it as a grievous fault, I am myself clear that it is a virtue; but with ambition at present we have no concern. Enthusiasm also, as I think, leans to virtue's side, or, at least, if it be a fault, of all faults it is the prettiest. But then, to partake at all of virtue or even to be in any degree pretty, the enthusiasm must be true.

Bad coin is known from good by the ring of it, and so is bad enthusiasm. Let the coiner be ever so clever at his art, in the coining of enthusiasm the sound of true gold can never be imparted to the false metal; and I doubt whether the cleverest she in the world can make false enthusiasm palatable to the taste of man; to the taste of any woman the enthusiasm of another woman is never very palatable.

We understood at Rome that Mrs. Talboys had a considerable family,-- four or five children, we were told,--but she brought with her only one daughter, a little girl about twelve years of age. She had torn herself asunder, as she told me, from the younger nurslings of her heart, and had left them to the care of a devoted female attendant, whose love was all but maternal. And then she said a word or two about the general in terms which made me almost think that this quasi- maternal love extended itself beyond the children. The idea, however, was a mistaken one, arising from the strength of her language, to which I was then unaccustomed. I have since become aware that nothing can be more decorous than old Mrs. Upton, the excellent head nurse at Hardover Lodge; and no gentleman more discreet in his conduct than General Talboys.

And I may as well here declare also that there could be no more virtuous woman than the general's wife. Her marriage vow was to her paramount to all other vows and bonds whatever. The general's honour was quite safe when he sent her off to Rome by herself, and he no doubt knew that it was so. *Illi robur et oes triplex*, of which I believe no weapons of any assailant could get the better. But nevertheless we used to fancy that she had no repugnance to impropriety in other women--to what the world generally calls impropriety. Invincibly attached herself to the marriage tie, she would constantly speak of it as by no means necessarily binding on others; and virtuous herself as any griffin of propriety, she constantly patronised, at any rate, the theory of infidelity in her neighbours. She was very eager in denouncing the prejudices of the English world, declaring that she found existence among them to be no longer possible for herself. She was hot against the stern unforgiveness of British matrons, and equally eager in reprobating the stiff conventionalities of a religion in which she said that none of its votaries had faith, though they all allowed themselves to be enslaved.

We had at that time a small set at Rome consisting chiefly of English and Americans, who habitually met at one another's rooms, and spent many of our evening hours in discussing Italian politics. We were, most of us, painters, poets, novelists, or sculptors--perhaps I should say would-be painters, poets, novelists, and sculptors, aspirants hoping to become some day recognised; and among us Mrs. Talboys took her place naturally enough on account of a very pretty taste she had for painting. I do not know that she ever originated anything that was grand, but she made some nice copies and was fond, at any rate, of art conversation. She wrote essays too, which she showed in confidence to various gentlemen, and had some idea of taking lessons in modelling.

In all our circle Conrad Mackinnon, an American, was perhaps the person most qualified to be styled its leader. He was one who absolutely did gain his living, and an ample living too, by his pen, and was regarded on all sides as a literary lion, justified by success in roaring at any tone he might please. His usual roar was not exactly that of a sucking dove or a nightingale, but it was a good-humoured roar, not very offensive to any man and apparently acceptable enough to some ladies. He was a big, burly man, near to fifty, as I suppose, somewhat awkward in his gait, and somewhat loud in his laugh. But though nigh to fifty, and thus ungainly, he liked to be smiled on by pretty women, and liked, as some said, to be flattered by them also. If so he should have been happy, for the ladies at Rome at that time made much of Conrad Mackinnon.

Of Mrs. Mackinnon no one did make very much, and yet she was one of the sweetest, dearest, quietest little creatures that ever made glad a man's fireside. She was exquisitely pretty, always in good humour, never stupid, self-denying to a fault, and yet she was generally in the background. She would seldom come forward of her own will, but was contented to sit behind her teapot and hear Mackinnon do his roaring. He was certainly much given to what the world at Rome called flirting, but this did not in the least annoy her. She was twenty years his junior, and yet she never flirted with any one. Women would tell her-- good-natured friends--how Mackinnon went on, but she received such tidings as an excellent joke, observing that he had always done the same, and no doubt always would until he was ninety. I do believe that she was a happy woman, and yet I used to think that she should have been happier. There is, however, no knowing the inside of

another man's house or reading the riddles of another man's joy and sorrow.

We had also there another lion,--a lion cub,--entitled to roar a little, and of him also I must say something. Charles O'Brien was a young man about twenty-five years of age, who had sent out from his studio in the preceding year a certain bust supposed by his admirers to be unsurpassed by any effort of ancient or modern genius. I am no judge of sculpture, and will not therefore pronounce an opinion, but many who considered themselves to be judges declared that it was a "goodish head and shoulders" and nothing more. I merely mention the fact, as it was on the strength of that head and shoulders that O'Brien separated himself from a throng of others such as himself in Rome, walked solitary during the days, and threw himself at the feet of various ladies when the days were over. He had ridden on the shoulders of his bust into a prominent place in our circle, and there encountered much feminine admiration--from Mrs. General Talboys and others.

Some eighteen or twenty of us used to meet every Sunday evening in Mrs. Mackinnon's drawing-room. Many of us, indeed, were in the habit of seeing one another daily and of visiting together the haunts in Rome which are best loved by art-loving strangers; but here in this drawing-room we were sure to come together, and here before the end of November Mrs. Talboys might always be found, not in any accustomed seat, but moving about the room as the different male mental attractions of our society might chance to move themselves. She was at first greatly taken by Mackinnon, who also was, I think, a little stirred by her admiration, though he stoutly denied the charge. She became, however, very dear to us all before she left us, and certainly we owed to her our love, for she added infinitely to the joys of our winter.

"I have come here to refresh myself," she said to Mackinnon one evening--to Mackinnon and myself, for we were standing together.

"Shall I get you tea?" said I.

"And will you have something to eat?" Mackinnon asked.

"No, no, no," she answered. "Tea, yes; but for heaven's sake let nothing solid dispel the associations of such a meeting as this!"

"I thought you might have dined early," said Mackinnon. Now Mackinnon was a man whose own dinner was very dear to him. I have seen him become hasty and unpleasant, even under the pillars of the Forum, when he thought that the party were placing his fish in jeopardy by their desire to linger there too long.

"Early! Yes--no; I know not when it was. One dines and sleeps in obedience to that dull clay which weighs down so generally the particle of our spirit; but the clay may sometimes be forgotten; here I can always forget it."

"I thought you asked for refreshment," I said. She only looked at me, whose small attempts at prose composition had up to that time been altogether unsuccessful, and then addressed herself to reply to Mackinnon.

"It is the air which we breathe that fills our lungs and gives us life and light; it is that which refreshes us if pure or sinks us into stagnation if it be foul. Let me for a while inhale the breath of an invigorating literature. Sit down, Mr. Mackinnon; I have a question that I must put to you." And then she succeeded in carrying him off into a corner. As far as I could see he went willingly enough at that time, though he soon became averse to any long retirement in company with Mrs. Talboys.

We none of us quite understood what were her exact ideas on the subject of revealed religion. Somebody, I think, had told her that there were among us one or two whose opinions were not exactly orthodox according to the doctrines of the established English church. If so she was determined to show us that she also was

advanced beyond the prejudices of an old and dry school of theology. "I have thrown down all the barriers of religion," she said to poor Mrs. Mackinnon, "and am looking for the sentiments of a pure Christianity."

"Thrown down all the barriers of religion!" said Mrs. Mackinnon, in a tone of horror which was not appreciated.

"Indeed, yes," said Mrs. Talboys, with an exulting voice. "Are not the days for such trammels gone by?"

"But yet you hold by Christianity?"

"A pure Christianity, unstained by blood and perjury, by hypocrisy and verbose genuflection. Can I not worship and say my prayers among the clouds?" And she pointed to the lofty ceiling and the handsome chandelier.

"But Ida goes to church," said Mrs. Mackinnon. Ida Talboys was her daughter. Now it may be observed that many who throw down the barriers of religion, so far as those barriers may affect themselves, still maintain them on behalf of their children. "Yes," said Mrs. Talboys; "dear Ida! her soft spirit is not yet adapted to receive the perfect truth. We are obliged to govern children by the strength of their prejudices." And then she moved away, for it was seldom that Mrs. Talboys remained long in conversation with any lady.

Mackinnon, I believe, soon became tired of her. He liked her flattery, and at first declared that she was clever and nice, but her niceness was too purely celestial to satisfy his mundane tastes. Mackinnon himself can revel among the clouds in his own writings, and can leave us sometimes in doubt whether he ever means to come back to earth, but when his foot is on terra firma he loves to feel the earthy substratum which supports his weight. With women he likes a hand that can remain an unnecessary moment within his own, an eye that can glisten with the sparkle of champagne, a heart weak enough to make its owner's arm tremble within his own beneath the moonlight gloom of the Colosseum arches. A dash of sentiment the while makes all these things the sweeter, but the sentiment alone will not suffice for him. Mrs. Talboys did, I believe, drink her glass of champagne, as do other ladies, but with her it had no such pleasing effect. It loosened only her tongue, but never her eyes. Her arm, I think, never trembled and her hand never lingered. The general was always safe, and happy perhaps in his solitary safety.

It so happened that we had unfortunately among us two artists who had quarrelled with their wives. O'Brien, whom I have before mentioned, was one of them. In his case I believe him to have been almost as free from blame as a man can be whose marriage was in itself a fault. However, he had a wife in Ireland some ten years older than himself, and though he might sometimes almost forget the fact, his friends and neighbours were well aware of it. In the other case the whole fault probably was with the husband. He was an ill-tempered, bad-hearted man, clever enough, but without principle; and he was continually guilty of the great sin of speaking evil of the woman whose name he should have been anxious to protect. In both cases our friend, Mrs. Talboys, took a warm interest, and in each of them she sympathised with the present husband against the absent wife.

Of the consolation which she offered in the latter instance we used to hear something from Mackinnon. He would repeat to his wife and to me and my wife the conversations which she had with him. "Poor Brown!" she would say; "I pity him with my very heart's blood."

"You are aware that he has comforted himself in his desolation," Mackinnon replied.

"I know very well to what you allude. I think I may say that I am conversant with all the circumstances of this heart-blighting sacrifice." Mrs. Talboys was apt to boast of the thorough confidence reposed in her by all those in whom she took an interest. "Yes, he has sought such comfort in another love as the hard cruel world would allow him."

"Or perhaps something more than that," said Mackinnon. "He has a family here in Rome, you know; two little babies."

"I know it, I know it," she said; "cherub angels!" And as she spoke she looked up into the ugly face of Marcus Aurelius, for they were standing at the moment under the figure of the great horseman on the Campidoglio. "I have seen them, and they are children of innocence. If all the blood of all the Howards ran in their veins it could not make their birth more noble!"

"Not if the father and mother of all the Howards had never been married," said Mackinnon.

"What! that from you, Mr. Mackinnon!" said Mrs. Talboys, turning her back with energy upon the equestrian statue and looking up into the faces first of Pollux and then of Castor, as though from them she might gain some inspiration on the subject, which Marcus Aurelius in his coldness had denied to her. "From you, who have so nobly claimed for mankind the divine attributes of free action! From you, who have taught my mind to soar above the petty bonds which one man in his littleness contrives for the subjection of his brother. Mackinnon--you who are so great!" And she now looked up into his face. "Mackinnon, unsay those words."

"They /are/ illegitimate," said he, "and if there was any landed property--"

"Landed property! and that from an American!"

"The children are English, you know."

"Landed property! The time will shortly come--ay, and I see it coming --when that hateful word shall be expunged from the calendar, when landed property shall be no more. What! shall the free soul of a God-born man submit itself for ever to such trammels as that? Shall we never escape from the clay which so long has manacled the subtler particles of the divine spirit? Ay, yes, Mackinnon!" and then she took him by the arm, and led him to the top of the huge steps which lead down from the Campidoglio into the streets of modern Rome. "Look down upon that countless multitude." Mackinnon looked down, and saw three groups of French soldiers, with three or four little men in each group; he saw also a couple of dirty friars, and three priests very slowly beginning the side ascent to the church of the Ara Coeli. "Look down upon that countless multitude," said Mrs. Talboys, and she stretched her arms out over the half-deserted city. "They are escaping now from those trammels--now, now--now that I am speaking."

"They have escaped long ago from all such trammels as that of landed property," said Mackinnon.

"Ay, and from all terrestrial bonds," she continued, not exactly remarking the pith of his last observation; "from bonds quasi-terrestrial and quasi-celestial. The full-formed limbs of the present age, running with quick streams of generous blood, will no longer bear the ligatures which past time have woven for the decrepit. Look down upon that multitude, Mackinnon; they shall all be free." And then, still clutching him by the arm and still standing at the top of those stairs, she gave forth her prophecy with the fury of a sibyl.

"They shall all be free. O Rome, thou eternal one! thou who hast bowed thy neck to imperial pride and priestly craft, thou who has suffered sorely even to this hour, from Nero down to Pio Nono, the days of thine oppression are over. Gone from thy enfranchised ways for ever is the clang of the praetorian cohorts and the more odious drone of meddling monks!" And yet, as Mackinnon observed, there still stood the dirty friars and the small French soldiers, and there still toiled the slow priests, wending their tedious way up to the church of the Ara Coeli. But that was the mundane view of the matter, a view not regarded by Mrs. Talboys in her ecstasy. "O Italia," she continued, "O Italia una, one and indivisible in thy rights, and indivisible also in thy wrongs! to us is it given to see the accomplishment of thy glory. A people shall arise around thine altars greater in the annals of the world than thy Scipios, thy Gracchi, or thy Caesars. Not in torrents of blood or with screams of bereaved mothers shall thy new triumphs be stained; but mind shall dominate over matter,

and, doomed together with popes and Bourbons, with cardinals, diplomatists, and police spies, ignorance and prejudice shall be driven from thy smiling terraces. And then Rome shall again become the fair capital of the fairest region of Europe. Hither shall flock the artisans of the world, crowding into thy marts all that God and man can give. Wealth, beauty, and innocence shall meet in thy streets--"

"There will be a considerable change before that takes place," said Mackinnon.

"There shall be a considerable change," she answered. "Mackinnon, to thee it is given to read the signs of the time; and hast thou not read? Why have the fields of Magenta and Solferino been piled with the corpses of dying heroes? Why have the waters of the Mincio run red with the blood of martyrs? That Italy might be united and Rome immortal. Here, standing on the Capitolium of the ancient city, I say that it shall be so; and thou, Mackinnon, who hearest me knowest that my words are true."

There was not then in Rome--I may almost say there was not in Italy-- an Englishman or an American who did not wish well to the cause for which Italy was and is still contending, as also there is hardly one who does not now regard that cause as well-nigh triumphant; but nevertheless it was almost impossible to sympathise with Mrs. Talboys. As Mackinnon said, she flew so high that there was no comfort in flying with her.

"Well," said he, "Brown and the rest of them are down below. Shall we go and join them?"

"Poor Brown! How was it that in speaking of his troubles we were led on to this heart-stirring theme? Yes, I have seen them, the sweet angels; and I tell you also that I have seen their mother. I insisted on going to her when I heard her history from him."

"And what was she like, Mrs. Talboys?"

"Well, education has done more for some of us than for others, and there are those from whose morals and sentiments we might thankfully draw a lesson, whose manners and outward gestures are not such as custom has made agreeable to us. You, I know, can understand that. I have seen her, and feel sure that she is pure in heart and high in principle. Has she not sacrificed herself, and is not self-sacrifice the surest guarantee for true nobility of character? Would Mrs. Mackinnon object to my bringing them together?"

Mackinnon was obliged to declare that he thought his wife would object, and from that time forth he and Mrs. Talboys ceased to be very close in their friendship. She still came to the house every Sunday evening, still refreshed herself at the fountains of his literary rills, but her special prophecies from henceforth were poured into other ears; and it so happened that O'Brien now became her chief ally. I do not remember that she troubled herself much further with the cherub angels or with their mother, and I am inclined to think that, taking up warmly as she did the story of O'Brien's matrimonial wrongs, she forgot the little history of the Browns. Be that as it may, Mrs. Talboys and O'Brien now became strictly confidential, and she would enlarge by the half-hour together on the miseries of her friend's position to any one whom she could get to hear her.

"I'll tell you what, Fanny," Mackinnon said to his wife one day--to his wife and to mine, for we were all together--"we shall have a row in the house if we don't take care. O'Brien will be making love to Mrs. Talboys."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Mackinnon; "you are always thinking that somebody is going to make love to some one."

"Somebody always is," said he.

"She's old enough to be his mother," said Mrs. Mackinnon.

"What does that matter to an Irishman?" said Mackinnon. "Besides, I doubt if there is more than five years' difference between them."

"There must be more than that," said my wife. "Ida Talboys is twelve, I know, and I am not quite sure that Ida is the eldest."

"If she had a son in the Guards it would make no difference," said Mackinnon. "There are men who consider themselves bound to make love to a woman under certain circumstances, let the age of the lady be what it may. O'Brien is such a one; and if she sympathises with him much oftener he will mistake the matter and go down on his knees. You ought to put him on his guard," he said, addressing himself to his wife.

"Indeed, I shall do no such thing," said she; "if they are two fools they must, like other fools, pay the price of their folly." As a rule there could be no softer creature than Mrs. Mackinnon, but it seemed to me that her tenderness never extended itself in the direction of Mrs. Talboys.

Just at this time, toward the end, that is, of November, we made a party to visit the tombs which lie along the Appian Way beyond that most beautiful of all sepulchres, the tomb of Cecilia Metella. It was a delicious day, and we had driven along this road for a couple of miles beyond the walls of the city, enjoying the most lovely view which the neighborhood of Rome affords, looking over the wondrous ruins of the old aqueducts up toward Tivoli and Palestrina. Of all the environs of Rome this is, on a fair day, the most enchanting; and here perhaps, among a world of tombs, thoughts and almost memories of the old, old days come upon one with the greatest force. The grandeur of Rome is best seen and understood from beneath the walls of the Colosseum, and its beauty among the pillars of the Forum and the arches of the Sacred Way; but its history and fall become more palpable to the mind and more clearly realised out here among the tombs, where the eyes rest upon the mountains, whose shades were cool to the old Romans as to us, than anywhere within the walls of the city. Here we look out at the same Tivoli and the same Praeneste glittering in the sunshine, embowered among the far-off valleys, which were dear to them; and the blue mountains have not crumbled away into ruins. Within Rome itself we can see nothing as they saw it.

Our party consisted of some dozen or fifteen persons, and, as a hamper with luncheon in it had been left on the grassy slope at the base of the tomb of Cecilia Metella, the expedition had in it something of the nature of a picnic. Mrs. Talboys was of course with us, and Ida Talboys. O'Brien also was there. The hamper had been prepared in Mrs. Mackinnon's room under the immediate eye of Mackinnon himself, and they therefore were regarded as the dominant spirits of the party. My wife was leagued with Mrs. Mackinnon, as was usually the case; and there seemed to be a general opinion, among those who were closely in confidence together, that something would happen in the O'Brien- Talboys matter. The two had been inseparable on the previous evening, for Mrs. Talboys had been urging on the young Irishman her counsels respecting his domestic troubles. Sir Cresswell Cresswell, she had told him, was his refuge. "Why should his soul submit to bonds which the world had now declared to be intolerable? Divorce was not now the privilege of the dissolute rich. Spirits which were incompatible need no longer be compelled to fret beneath the same couples." In short, she had recommended him to go to England and get rid of his wife, as she would with a little encouragement have recommended any man to get rid of anything. I am sure that, had she been skilfully brought on to the subject, she might have been induced to pronounce a verdict against such ligatures for the body as coats, waistcoats, and trousers. Her aspirations for freedom ignored all bounds, and in theory there were no barriers which she was not willing to demolish.

Poor O'Brien, as we all now began to see, had taken the matter amiss. He had offered to make a bust of Mrs. Talboys, and she had consented, expressing a wish that it might find a place among those who had devoted themselves to the enfranchisement of their fellow-creatures. I really think she had but little of a woman's customary personal vanity. I know she had an idea that her eye was lighted up in her warmer moments by some special fire, that sparks of liberty shone round her brow, and that her bosom heaved with glorious aspirations; but all these feelings had reference to her inner genius, not to any outward beauty. But O'Brien

misunderstood the woman, and thought it necessary to gaze into her face and sigh as though his heart were breaking. Indeed, he declared to a young friend that Mrs. Talboys was perfect in her style of beauty, and began the bust with this idea. It was gradually becoming clear to us all that he would bring himself to grief; but in such a matter who can caution a man?

Mrs. Mackinnon had contrived to separate them in making the carriage arrangements on this day, but this only added fuel to the fire which was now burning within O'Brien's bosom. I believe that he really did love her in his easy, eager, susceptible Irish way. That he would get over the little episode without any serious injury to his heart no one doubted; but then what would occur when the declaration was made? How would Mrs. Talboys bear it?"

"She deserves it," said Mrs. Mackinnon.

"And twice as much," my wife added. Why is it that women are so spiteful to one another?

Early in the day Mrs. Talboys clambered up to the top of a tomb, and made a little speech, holding a parasol over her head. Beneath her feet, she said, reposed the ashes of some bloated senator, some glutton of the empire, who had swallowed into his maw the provision necessary for a tribe. Old Rome had fallen through such selfishness as that, but new Rome would not forget the lesson. All this was very well, and then O'Brien helped her down; but after this there was no separating them. For her own part, she would sooner have had Mackinnon at her elbow; but Mackinnon now had found some other elbow. "Enough of that was as good as a feast," he had said to his wife. And therefore Mrs. Talboys, quite unconscious of evil, allowed herself to be engrossed by O'Brien.

And then, about three o'clock, we returned to the hamper. Luncheon under such circumstances always means dinner, and we arranged ourselves for a very comfortable meal. To those who know the tomb of Cecilia Metella no description of the scene is necessary, and to those who do not no description will convey a fair idea of its reality. It is itself a large low tower of great diameter, but of beautiful proportion, standing far outside the city, close on to the side of the old Roman way. It has been embattled on the top by some latter-day baron in order that it might be used for protection to the castle which has been built on and attached to it. If I remember rightly, this was done by one of the Frangipani, and a very lovely ruin he has made of it. I know no castellated old tumble-down residence in Italy more picturesque than this baronial adjunct to the old Roman tomb, or which better tallies with the ideas engendered within our minds by Mrs. Radcliffe and "The Mysteries of Udolpho." It lies along the road, protected on the side of the city by the proud sepulchre of the Roman matron, and up to the long ruined walls of the back of the building stretches a grassy slope, at the bottom of which are the remains of an old Roman circus. Beyond that is the long, thin, graceful line of the Claudian aqueduct, with Soracte in the distance to the left, and Tivoli, Palestrina, and Frascati lying among the hills which bound the view. That Frangipani baron was in the right of it, and I hope he got the value of his money out of the residence which he built for himself. I doubt, however, that he did but little good to those who lived in his close neighbourhood.

We had a very comfortable little banquet seated on the broken lumps of stone which lie about under the walls of the tomb. I wonder whether the shade of Cecilia Metella was looking down upon us. We have heard much of her in these latter days, and yet we know nothing about her, nor can conceive why she was honoured with a bigger tomb than any other Roman matron. There were those then among our party who believed that she might still come back among us, and, with due assistance from some cognate susceptible spirit, explain to us the cause of her widowed husband's liberality. Alas, alas! if we may judge of the Romans by ourselves the true reason for such sepulchral grandeur would redound little to the credit of the lady Cecilia Metella herself or to that of Crassus, her bereaved and desolate lord.

She did not come among us on the occasion of this banquet, possibly because we had no tables there to turn in preparation for her presence; but had she done so, she could not have been more eloquent of things of the

other world than was Mrs. Talboys. I have said that Mrs. Talboys's eye never glanced more brightly after a glass of champagne, but I am inclined to think that on this occasion it may have done so. O'Brien enacted Ganymede, and was perhaps more liberal than other latter-day Ganymedes to whose services Mrs. Talboys had been accustomed. Let it not, however, be suspected by any one that she exceeded the limits of a discreet joyousness. By no means! The generous wine penetrated, perhaps, to some inner cells of her heart, and brought forth thoughts in sparkling words which otherwise might have remained concealed; but there was nothing in what she thought or spoke calculated to give umbrage either to an anchorite or to a vestal. A word or two she said or sung about the flowing bowl, and once she called for Falernian; but beyond this her converse was chiefly of the rights of man and the weakness of women, of the iron ages that were past, and of the golden time that was to come.

She called a toast and drank to the hopes of the latter historians of the nineteenth century. Then it was that she bade O'Brien "fill high the bowl with Samian wine." The Irishman took her at her word, and she raised the bumper and waved it over her head before she put it to her lips. I am bound to declare that she did not spill a drop. "The true Falernian grape," she said, as she deposited the empty beaker on the grass beneath her elbow. "Viler champagne I do not think I ever swallowed; but it was the theory of the wine, not its palpable body present there, as it were in the flesh, which inspired her. There was really something grand about her on that occasion, and her enthusiasm almost amounted to reality.

Mackinnon was amused, and encouraged her, as I must confess did I also. Mrs. Mackinnon made useless little signs to her husband, really fearing that the Falernian would do its good offices too thoroughly. My wife, getting me apart as I walked round the circle distributing viands, remarked that "the woman was a fool and would disgrace herself." But I observed that after the disposal of that bumper she worshipped the rosy god in theory only, and therefore saw no occasion to interfere. "Come, Bacchus," she said, "and come, Silenus, if thou wilt; I know that ye are hovering round the graves of your departed favourites. And ye, too, nymphs of Egeria," and she pointed to the classic grove which was all but close to us as we sat there. "In olden days ye did not always despise the abodes of men. But why should we invoke the presence of the gods--we who can become godlike ourselves! We ourselves are the deities of the present age. For us shall the tables be spread with ambrosia, for us shall the nectar flow."

Upon the whole it was a very good fooling--for a while; and as soon as we were tired of it we arose from our seats and began to stroll about the place. It was beginning to be a little dusk and somewhat cool, but the evening air was pleasant, and the ladies, putting on their shawls, did not seem inclined at once to get into the carriages. At any rate, Mrs. Talboys was not so inclined, for she started down the hill toward the long low wall of the old Roman circus at the bottom, and O'Brien, close at her elbow, started with her.

"Ida, my dear, you had better remain here," she said to her daughter; "you will be tired if you come as far as we are going."

"Oh no, mamma, I shall not," said Ida; "you get tired much quicker than I do."

"Oh yes, you will; besides, I do not wish you to come." There was an end of it for Ida, and Mrs. Talboys and O'Brien walked off together, while we all looked into one another's faces.

"It would be a charity to go with them," said Mackinnon.

"Do you be charitable then," said his wife.

"It should be a lady," said he.

"It is a pity that the mother of the spotless cherubim is not here for the occasion," said she. "I hardly think that any one less gifted will undertake such a self-sacrifice." Any attempt of the kind would, however, now have

been too late, for they were already at the bottom of the hill. O'Brien had certainly drunk freely of the pernicious contents of those long-necked bottles, and, though no one could fairly accuse him of being tipsy, nevertheless that which might have made others drunk had made him bold, and he dared to do perhaps more than might become a man. If under any circumstances he could be fool enough to make an avowal of love to Mrs. Talboys he might be expected, as we all thought, to do it now.

We watched them as they made for a gap in the wall which led through into the large enclosed space of the old circus. It had been an arena for chariot games, and they had gone down with the avowed purpose of searching where might have been the meta and ascertaining how the drivers could have turned when at their full speed. For a while we had heard their voices, or rather her voice especially. "The heart of a man, O'Brien, should suffice for all emergencies," we had heard her say. She had assumed a strange habit of calling men by their simple names, as men address one another. When she did this to Mackinnon, who was much older than herself, we had been all amused by it, and other ladies of our party had taken to call him "Mackinnon" when Mrs. Talboys was not by; but we had felt the comedy to be less safe with O'Brien, especially when on one occasion we heard him address her as Arabella. She did not seem to be in any way struck by his doing so, and we supposed therefore that it had become frequent between them. What reply he made at the moment about the heart of a man I do not know, and then in a few minutes they disappeared through the gap in the wall.

None of us followed them, although it would have seemed the most natural thing in the world to do so had nothing out of the way been expected. As it was, we remained there round the tomb quizzing the little foibles of our dear friend and hoping that O'Brien would be quick in what he was doing. That he would undoubtedly get a slap in the face, metaphorically, we all felt certain, for none of us doubted the rigid propriety of the lady's intentions. Some of us strolled into the buildings and some of us got out on to the road, but we all of us were thinking that O'Brien was very slow a considerable time before we saw Mrs. Talboys reappear through the gap.

At last, however, she was there, and we at once saw that she was alone. She came on, breasting the hill with quick steps, and when she drew near we could see that there was a frown as of injured majesty on her brow. Mackinnon and his wife went forward to meet her. If she were really in trouble it would be fitting in some way to assist her, and of all women Mrs. Mackinnon was the last to see another woman suffer from ill usage without attempting to aid her. "I certainly never liked her," Mrs. Mackinnon said afterward, "but I was bound to go and hear her tale when she really had a tale to tell."

And Mrs. Talboys now had a tale to tell--if she chose to tell it. The ladies of our party declared afterward that she would have acted more wisely had she kept to herself both O'Brien's words to her and her answer. "She was well able to take care of herself," Mrs. Mackinnon said; "and after all the silly man had taken an answer when he got it." Not, however, that O'Brien had taken his answer quite immediately, as far as I could understand from what we heard of the matter afterward.

At the present moment Mrs. Talboys came up the rising ground all alone and at a quick pace. "The man has insulted me," she said aloud, as well as her panting breath would allow her, and as soon as she was near enough to Mrs. Mackinnon to speak to her.

"I am sorry for that," said Mrs. Mackinnon. "I suppose he has taken a little too much wine."

"No; it was a premeditated insult. The base-hearted churl has failed to understand the meaning of true, honest sympathy."

"He will forget all about it when he is sober," said Mackinnon, meaning to comfort her.

"What care I what he remembers or what he forgets?" she said, turning upon poor Mackinnon indignantly. "You men grovel so in your ideas--" ("And yet," as Mackinnon said afterward, "she had been telling me that I

was a fool for the last three weeks.") "You men grovel so in your ideas that you cannot understand the feelings of a true-hearted woman. What can his forgetfulness or his remembrance be to me? Must not I remember this insult? Is it possible that I should forget it?"

Mr. and Mrs. Mackinnon only had gone forward to meet her, but nevertheless she spoke so loud that all heard her who were still clustered round the spot on which we had dined.

"What has become of Mr. O'Brien?" a lady whispered to me.

I had a field-glass with me, and, looking round, I saw his hat as he was walking inside the walls of the circus in the direction toward the city. "And very foolish he must feel," said the lady.

"No doubt he is used to it," said another.

"But considering her age, you know," said the first, who might have been perhaps three years younger than Mrs. Talboys, and who was not herself averse to the excitement of a moderate flirtation. But then why should she have been averse, seeing that she had not as yet become subject to the will of any imperial lord?

"He would have felt much more foolish," said the third, "if she had listened to what he said to her."

"Well, I don't know," said the second; "nobody would have known anything about it then, and in a few weeks they would have gradually become tired of each other in the ordinary way."

But in the meantime Mrs. Talboys was among us. There had been no attempt at secrecy, and she was still loudly inveighing against the grovelling propensities of men. "That's quite true, Mrs. Talboys," said one of the elder ladies; "but then women are not always so careful as they should be. Of course I do not mean to say that there has been any fault on your part."

"Fault on my part! Of course there has been fault on my part. No one can make any mistake without fault to some extent. I took him to be a man of sense, and he is a fool. Go to Naples indeed."

"Did he want you to go to Naples?" asked Mrs. Mackinnon.

"Yes; that was what he suggested. We were to leave by the train for Civita Vecchia at six to-morrow morning, and catch the steamer which leaves Leghorn to-night. Don't tell me of wine. He was prepared for it!" And she looked round about on us with an air of injured majesty in her face which was almost insupportable.

"I wonder whether he took the tickets overnight," said Mackinnon.

"Naples!" she said, as though now speaking exclusively to herself, "the only ground in Italy which has as yet made no struggle on behalf of freedom--a fitting residence for such a dastard!"

"You would have found it very pleasant at this season," said the unmarried lady who was three years her junior.

My wife had taken Ida out of the way when the first complaining note from Mrs. Talboys had been heard ascending the hill. But now, when matters began gradually to become quiescent, she brought her back, suggesting as she did so that they might begin to think of returning.

"It is getting very cold, Ida dear, is it not?" said she.

"But where is Mr. O'Brien?" said Ida.

"He has fled--as poltroons always fly," said Mrs. Talboys. I believe in my heart that she would have been glad to have had him there in the middle of the circle, and to have triumphed over him publicly among us all. No feeling of shame would have kept her silent for a moment.

"Fled!" said Ida, looking up into her mother's face.

"Yes, fled, my child." And she seized her daughter in her arms, and pressed her closely to her bosom.

"Cowards always fly."

"Is Mr. O'Brien a coward?" Ida asked.

"Yes, a coward, a very coward! And he has fled before the glance of an honest woman's eye. Come, Mrs. Mackinnon, shall we go back to the city? I am sorry that the amusement of the day should have received this check." And she walked forward to the carriage and took her place in it with an air that showed that she was proud of the way in which she had conducted herself.

"She is a little conceited about it after all," said that unmarried lady. "If poor Mr. O'Brien had not shown so much premature anxiety with reference to that little journey to Naples, things might have gone quietly after all."

But the unmarried lady was wrong in her judgment. Mrs. Talboys was proud and conceited in the matter, but not proud of having excited the admiration of her Irish lover. She was proud of her own subsequent conduct, and gave herself credit for coming out strongly as the noble-minded matron. "I believe she thinks," said Mrs. Mackinnon, "that her virtue is quite Spartan and unique; and if she remains in Rome she'll boast of it through the whole winter."

"If she does, she may be certain that O'Brien will do the same," said Mackinnon. "And in spite of his having fled from the field, it is upon the cards that he may get the best of it. Mrs. Talboys is a very excellent woman. She has proved her excellence beyond a doubt. But nevertheless she is susceptible of ridicule."

We all felt a little anxiety to hear O'Brien's account of the matter, and after having deposited the ladies at their homes Mackinnon and I went off to his lodgings. At first he was denied to us, but after a while we got his servant to acknowledge that he was at home, and then we made our way up to his studio. We found him seated behind a half-formed model, or rather a mere lump of clay punched into something resembling the shape of a head, with a pipe in his mouth and a bit of stick in his hand. He was pretending to work, though we both knew that it was out of the question that he should do anything in his present frame of mind.

"I think I heard my servant tell you that I was not at home," said he.

"Yes, he did," said Mackinnon, "and would have sworn it too if we would have let him. Come, don't pretend to be surly."

"I am very busy, Mr. Mackinnon."

"Completing your head of Mrs. Talboys, I suppose, before you start for Naples."

"You don't mean to say that she has told you all about it?" And he turned away from his work, and looked up into our faces with a comical expression, half of fun and half of despair.

"Every word of it," said I. "When you want a lady to travel with you never ask her to get up so early in winter."

"But, O'Brien, how could you be such an ass?" said Mackinnon. "As it has turned out, there is no very great harm done. You have insulted a respectable middle-aged woman, the mother of a family and the wife of a general officer, and there is an end of it--unless, indeed, the general officer should come out from England to call you to account."

"He is welcome," said O'Brien haughtily.

"No doubt, my dear fellow," said Mackinnon; "that would be a dignified and pleasant ending to the affair. But what I want to know is this: what would you have done if she had agreed to go?"

"He never calculated on the possibility of such a contingency," said I.

"By heavens, then, I thought she would like it," said he.

"And to oblige her you were content to sacrifice yourself," said Mackinnon.

"Well, that was just it. What the deuce is a fellow to do when a woman goes on in that way? She told me down there, upon the old race-course, you know, that matrimonial bonds were made for fools and slaves. What was I to suppose that she meant by that? But, to make all sure, I asked her what sort of a fellow the general was. 'Dear old man,' she said, clasping her hands together. 'He might, you know, have been my father.' 'I wish he were,' said I, 'because then you'd be free.' 'I am free,' said she, stamping on the ground, and looking up at me so much as to say that she cared for no one. 'Then,' said I, 'accept all that is left of the heart of Wenceslaus O'Brien,' and I threw myself before her in her path. 'Hand,' said I, 'I have none to give, but the blood which runs red through my veins is descended from a double line of kings.' I said that because she is always fond of riding a high horse. I had gotten close under the wall so that none of you should see me from the tower."

"And what answer did she make?" said Mackinnon.

"Why, she was pleased as Punch--gave me both her hands and declared that we would be friends for ever. It is my belief, Mackinnon, that that woman never heard anything of the kind before. The general, no doubt, did it by letter."

"And how was it that she changed her mind?"

"Why, I got up, put my arm round her waist, and told her that we would be off to Naples. I'm blessed if she didn't give me a knock in the ribs that nearly sent me backward. She took my breath away, so that I couldn't speak to her."

"And then----"

"Oh, there was nothing more. Of course I saw how it was. So she walked off one way and I the other. On the whole, I consider that I am well out of it."

"And so do I," said Mackinnon, very gravely. "But if you will allow me to give you my advice, I would suggest that it would be well to avoid such mistakes in future."

"Upon my word," said O'Brien, excusing himself, "I don't know what a man is to do under such circumstances. I give you my honour that I did it all to oblige her."

We then decided that Mackinnon should convey to the injured lady the humble apology of her late admirer. It was settled that no detailed excuses should be made. It should be left to her to consider whether the deed

which had been done might have been occasioned by wine or by the folly of a moment, or by her own indiscreet enthusiasm. No one but the two were present when the message was given, and therefore we were obliged to trust to Mackinnon's accuracy for an account of it.

She stood on very high ground indeed, he said, at first refusing to hear anything that he had to say on the matter. The foolish young man, she declared, was below her anger and below her contempt.

"He is not the first Irishman that has been made indiscreet by beauty," said Mackinnon.

"A truce to that," she replied, waving her hand with an air of assumed majesty. "The incident, contemptible as it is, has been unpleasant to me. It will necessitate my withdrawal from Rome."

"Oh no, Mrs. Talboys; that will be making too much of him."

"The greatest hero that lives," she answered, "may have his house made uninhabitable by a very small insect." Mackinnon swore that those were her own words. Consequently a sobriquet was attached to O'Brien of which he by no means approved, and from that day we always called Mrs. Talboys "the hero."

Mackinnon prevailed at last with her, and she did not leave Rome. She was even induced to send a message to O'Brien conveying her forgiveness. They shook hands together with great eclat in Mrs. Mackinnon's drawing-room; but I do not suppose that she ever again offered to him sympathy on the score of his matrimonial troubles.

End of The Project Gutenberg Etext Stories by English Authors in Italy

[Scribner's] Stories by English Authors in Italy

from <http://manybooks.net/>