THE WIZARD OF THE MOUNTAIN

A SERIES OF TALES

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM GILBERT

1867

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SECOND VOLUME

William Gilbert, 1804-1890, was the father of W. S. Gilbert. Retired from the Royal Navy, William decided to begin a career as an author after noting the success of his son. He wrote a number of novels, from which can be discerned a commonality of the Gilberts' imaginations.

The Wizard Of The Mountain, written in 1867, is a series of tales linked together by the doings of the Innominato (Nameless; having no name). The Innominato lived in late fourteenth century Italy, and was a mysterious wizard who possessed magical powers. These tales had previously been serially published in various London monthly magazines.

The Innominato is the master of his own castle and is well-respected and feared by all those in the area. The local nobles are wary of him, and the local peasants and burghers come to him for advice and help. The Innominato is designated by Gilbert as an 'astrologer.' His powers are never enumerated, but they seem to include clairvoyance, prophecy, and various magical arts.

His origin is that as a young man he had planned to become a priest, but he got diverted to the secular life and drawn in to the study of magic. A mysterious acquaintance had helped him to gain magical powers, but only by foreswearing all religion. The acquaintance then took tried to get the young man to sell his soul. The Innominato refused, seeing that the Devil was behind this. Since that time he tried to live a good life and to use his powers to help people, rather than hurt them. The reader will need to determine the degree of success of the Innominato's efforts.

There are eleven tales that make up *The Wizard Of The Mountain*. The last tale is of the Innominato himself and how he came to be. The eleven tales are contained in two volumes. This is the Second Volume, which has tales seven through eleven. The First Volume has tales one through six.

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DON BUCEFALO AND THE CURATE - PART I

In a tall house in a narrow street, in Milan, there lived two intimate friends: the one was a clerk to a money-changer, whose office was in the Piazza del Mercanti; and the other was a curate of a small chapel near the church of St. Eustorgio. There was a great difference between them in manner, appearance, and temper. But this difference did not interfere in the slightest with their good feeling towards each other, which had been uninterrupted during the time they had lived in the same house.

In person, the clerk was short and fat, and his face utterly expressionless. It was a faithful index to his mind; he was phlegmatic in the extreme. It was difficult to put him out of humour, and impossible to excite him to passion. But he was not without a considerable amount of cunning in his disposition, when he was sufficiently moved, or not too indolent to use it. If anything annoyed him, he would try all he could to avoid it, provided that doing so did not cause him much exertion. He had a singular aptitude, possibly improved to its fullest extent by the arithmetical knowledge and practice necessary in his profession, for calculating whether the amount of annoyance was greater or less than the inconvenience he would suffer in the avoiding of it; and he accepted with resignation whichever turned out to be the smaller of the two evils. The real name of the clerk was unknown, but his friends had bestowed on him in derision the appellation of Don Bucefalo — his attributes being precisely the reverse of those of Alexander's fiery steed Bucephalus. At first this sobriquet caused the don considerable annoyance, and he resented it with as much energy as his lethargic temperament would allow. Finding, however, that it caused him incessant disputes, he calculated whether the amount of trouble they occasioned him was not more objectionable than to submit quietly to his new cognomen. On striking the balance he found it to be decidedly in favour of the latter course. So he accepted the name without further opposition, and afterwards answered as readily to it as if it had been his real one.

It must be admitted that the don's facility for avoiding untoward occurrences had a somewhat unpleasant effect on his disposition. Being naturally rather selfish, he at last became so completely egotistical, that his personal comfort was the sole object of his life. He had remained a bachelor for no other reason but to avoid the trouble a wife and family might entail on him; and he had quarrelled with the few relatives he had, because they were all poor, and might have claimed some aid from him had he continued on terms of intimacy with them. He was exceedingly superstitious, performing with great regularity the chief ordinances of the Church. He could not disguise from himself, however, that he was wanting in the virtue of charity; but he attempted to compromise the matter with his conscience by scrupulously following all the outward forms of religion. He regularly attended the confessional, considering that each time he received absolution all his wrong-doings were forgiven, and that he was then able to commence a new score, which he again wiped off as soon as the number of his sins began to be troublesome to memory and conscience.

His friend the curate differed from him remarkably in personal appearance. He was very tall and unusually thin. His neck was long and scraggy, his features strongly marked, his complexion sallow, and his cheeks hollow. The most remarkable feature in his face was his nose, which was large and singularly hooked — so much so, in fact, that his name (Padre Falcone) so well described his features that it might have been thought to have been given him in the same manner as his friend's. The padre, however, quite equalled the don in selfishness, though of course he was much better versed in theological matters. His sophistry in adapting the tenets of his religion to his own convenience was frequently far more ingenious than even that of his friend Don Bucefalo. The intimacy which existed between the don and the curate arose solely from the congeniality of their tastes, both having reduced selfishness and parsimony to a science.

It may now be fairly asked how, with so much avarice in his disposition, Don Bucefalo had contrived to accumulate such a quantity of fat. The fact is easily explained. The don had become a butt for the wit and ridicule of a number of young merchants, who carried on their business in the Piazza del Mercanti. It was a favourite amusement of theirs, when the duties of the day were over, to invite him into some neighbouring trattoria, or eating-house, to sup with them. On these occasions a sort of tacit agreement existed among them that the don was to be the object of the buffoonery of his hosts; and he in return was to be allowed to eat and drink as much as he pleased without any expense to himself. He took full advantage of his share in the bargain, the quantity of food and wine he consumed on these occasions being enormous. He was utterly indifferent to the wit and jokes of his companions, taking no further notice of them than now and then to exhibit a sort of unconscious smile, which he intended as a mark of admiration of their wit and humour; he would the placidly continue his meal till he had consumed as much as would last him for the next twenty-four hours. Even when the feast was over he allowed his friends to cram his pockets (which were very large) with bread and broken victuals, utterly indifferent to the sarcastic remarks made upon him the while.

The don's superstitious tendency and his ready sophistry came in here and allowed him to adapt his conscience to his convenience. He could not disguise from himself that in eating to the enormous extent he did, he was indulging in the vice of gluttony, and this conviction was forced upon him in a rather singular manner. Close by the entrance-gate of the Piazza del Mercanti, through which he had to pass daily, was a small chapel, on which was a fresco painting, representing a number of persons in the flames of purgatory, and among these was one who in form and countenance strongly resembled Don Bucefalo, which had perhaps been done purposely, though in jest, by the artist.

His friends often pointed out the resemblance to him, and told him that he must be careful not to fall into the sin of gluttony, or that the punishment he would hereafter have to endure was certain. Though the advice was given in joke, Don Bucefalo accepted it in right earnest, and he determined that after every supper he would spend no money on himself for the next four and twenty hours, in order thus to counterbalance by his mortification any little sins he might have been guilty of the night before, and save his own pocket into the bargain at the same time. The quantity of food he invariably took away with him for next day's consumption, he cleverly placed to the score of the supper itself. Scarcely a week passed without one of those suppers taking place, and these, combined with a natural tendency to obesity, at length so increased the don's corpulence, that he was unable to take any active exercise without causing considerable inconvenience to himself.

As we said before, the padre and the don lived in a tall house in a narrow street. Their rooms, which were situated on the third and fourth floors, looked out into a confined court-yard, in which was a well, with a rope and bucket, the former passing through a pulley fixed to the roof. The inmates of the house were thus enabled to draw up water without taking the trouble of descending the staircase. Whether there was really any economy of time or labour in the arrangement is much to be doubted, as the bucket oscillated so much in ascending that a great portion of its contents was lost, so that when it reached the fifth or top floor of the house — which had for its tenant a poor washerwoman, who used the bucket and pulley far more frequently than all the other inmates put together — it was nearly empty. It also kept all the ground beneath it in a damp state, which in fine warm weather was not so objectionable, but in wet winter weather it reduced the soil in the whole court to a frightful state of mud.

The bucket and pulley are of importance in the present narrative, inasmuch as they chiefly occasioned the intimacy between the Reverend Padre Falcone and Don Bucefalo, and united them in common cause against the poor washerwoman who lived on the floor above them. Using little water themselves — out of consideration, as they insisted, for their fellow-lodgers — they could not admit the washerwoman's right to have more than they had. The excuses which she urged were utterly ignored by them. As she had a sick husband and five small children, and had to maintain them by the labour of her hands, she held that she ought to be treated with more consideration. Finding complaints useless, our two friends ceased to hold further communication with her, and contented themselves with sympathizing with each other on the annoyance to which they were subjected. They would talk to each other about the injustice of her using more than her own share of water, in addition to spilling it on their balconies and in their rooms as she drew it up. The creaking of the pulley also greatly annoyed them, breaking the slumbers of the don in the morning, and disturbing the pious meditations of the padre when he was at home in the daytime.

The bucket, as we said before, was the immediate cause of the intimacy between the Padre Falcone and Don Bucefalo, the latter having one evening paid a visit to the priest to suggest that, if the splashing of the water and the creaking of the pulley disturbed his meditations, it might be worth while to get the woman excommunicated, or, if milder measures were more in unison with the charitable feelings of the reverend father, then the threat that a punishment of, say, ten thousand years in purgatory (when he doubtless had the power of inflicting) awaited her if she did not cease the annoyance.

The worthy padre listened with great attention to the don, and when the latter had ceased speaking, he remained for some moments silent, as if turning the proposition over in his mind. "Many thanks, my son," he said at length, "for your kind sympathy. Unfortunately, I cannot adopt your suggestion. A sentence of excommunication can only be pronounced by the dignitaries of the Church, and I doubt if, in a case like the present, they would listen to such an application. As to ten thousand years in purgatory, I can assure you, I should have much pleasure in awarding it" (and he evidently spoke from the heart); "but I am afraid it might raise scandal among the worldly-minded. No, let us submit with resignation to the infliction, and hope that, by our meekness, our own time in purgatory may be proportionally diminished."

The words of the curate sank deep into the spirit of Don Bucefalo. He hastily considered with himself whether anything was to be gained by quarrelling with the woman any further, and he came to the conclusion that the trouble would be greater than the benefit derived from it, especially as the priest had not adopted his suggestion. The don now resolved to submit to the annoyance with resignation, in order that it might be placed to the account of his good works, and to sympathise with the padre on the persecution, which, after all, would be an act of charity on his (Don Bucefalo's) part. As the padre had come to a similar conclusion in his own mind with respect to the don, their meetings at last became so frequent that they spent the evenings in each other's rooms, saving on those nights when the don was invited out to super.

It must, however, be admitted that sympathy for each other's annoyances, and the affinity which exists between kindred spirits, were not altogether the cause of their intimacy. As the don was exceedingly parsimonious, he calculated that by visiting the priest in the evening he should economise his own lamp-oil, and, singularly enough, the priest had come to the very same conclusion.

The friendship between them continued for some months without anything occurring to cause the least ill feeling or coolness. Their conversation, which generally turned on the common topics of the day, was occasionally interspersed with slight dissertations on scientific subjects, and also on religion and morals.

One evening, when Don Bucefalo, in the curate's apartments, had been listening attentively to the tale told him by the padre — how the washerwoman, in drawing up the bucket, had let it strike against the wooden railing outside his door, thereby inundating his apartment — he was led to remark that it was a pity they were not both richer, when they might have removed to better apartments, where annoyances of the kind were not to be feared.

"True my son," said the priest; "but unfortunately, so far as I am concerned, there is little prospect of my being able to move to a better lodging, seeing it would be impossible for me to pay a higher rent, and for the same money it is doubtful whether I could change for the better. If by moving I did free myself from the tyranny of that detestable washerwoman, I might meet with some other annoyance equally great. No, I will remain where I am. We poor priests are not like you money-changers, who all have the power of some day becoming noble and wealthy. I must remain poor so long as I am in this world."

"Although money-changers and bankers frequently become rich and noble," said the don, "that rarely happens with their clerks. I can assure you," he continued — anxious for personal reasons, that the priest should not imagine he was possessed of any money — "that no priest in Milan is so badly paid as money-changers' clerks; and it is extremely painful to us who have so much gold always passing through our hands, that we do not have the right to call a sequin [gold coin first minted 1284 in Venice, weighing 1/8 oz] of it our own. I frequently wish I could discover the secret of transmuting metals; do you not sometimes wish it too, reverend padre, you who would do so much good with the money?"

"Indeed my son, I have often wished for the power of making gold, but only for the purpose you mention. Thank Heaven, I have no love of riches for themselves, but only for the good I could do with them to others."

"Did you ever know any one who possessed the grand secret?" inquired the don.

"Never, though I have heard of many."

"But were not these all in bygone days?" asked the don.

"Not all," said the priest; "several have existed in our own days. It is said — but I do not give it to you as fact — that the Innominato, whose castle is near to Lecco, has discovered the secret, but will reveal it to no one."

"Why should people imagine anything of the kind? I certainly never heard of him spoken of as an alchymist," said Don Bucefalo. "Everybody says he has wonderful powers in curing diseases, but I never heard anything else of him."

"How do you account then for the enormous sums of money he has at his command? I know for a certainty that he is immensely rich."

"He is a very fortunate man if he possesses such a secret," said the don. "It would perhaps be as well if we tried to make his acquaintance. But it is getting dark, had you not better light the lamp?"

"To make his acquaintance might cost more than we should gain by it, I am afraid," said the priest, without taking the slightest notice of his friend's hint about the lamp.

"How so?" inquired Don Bucefalo.

"I don't believe it possible for any man to be endowed with knowledge such as he is reputed to have, without trafficking with the powers of darkness; and I have more than once heard that the Innominato is strongly suspected of sorcery." Here the priest crossed himself, and the don immediately followed his example.

"Still, we ought not to judge harshly on suspicion merely," said the don. "But it is really getting very dark; will you not light the lamp?"

"I should be sorry to judge harshly of the Innominato, or any one else," said his reverence; "but at the same time it is our duty to avoid temptation rather than to run into it. If we became acquainted with him and found it was true that he had the power of transmuting the baser metals into gold, we might be tempted to try the same experiment ourselves at the risk of our souls. No, it is better that we should avoid all temptation — poor weak mortals as we all are."

"But tell me, reverend padre," inquired the don, "how the case would stand respecting the sin we should commit. We are both poor, as far as I can see; — would you have any objection to lighting the lamp? As the temptation would be greater, would not our sin be the less?"

"I do not exactly understand the drift of your question, my son," said the priest.

"As I take it, reverend padre, the greater the temptation, the less the sin. We are both poor, and the temptation we have to become immensely rich in a moment would be so very great as to neutralize, to a great extent, the fault we should commit. — But once more, if you have no objection, would you light the lamp, for it is so dark I cannot see my hand before me."

"If we have nothing to do but talk," said the padre, somewhat sharply, "we can do that as well in the dark as with the lamp lighted."

"You did not think so when you were in my room yesterday evening," said the don, a little angrily. "I lighted the lamp an hour before this, and you made no objection."

"At the same time I thought it a sinful waste, my son, though, being your guest then, I did not like to say so."

"I should be ashamed to let a guest sit in the dark, even if I thought it would be wasteful to light a lamp," said the don, with increasing anger. "I wish you a good evening, and a little more hospitality. At any rate, I shall not trouble you with my society again if I am to sit in the dark."

"My son, you will please yourself," said the padre. "I can support even greater inflictions than that you threaten."

Don Bucefalo, who was now in a state of intense indignation, left the padre's room, angrily muttering to himself as he went. On entering his own apartments he gave full vent to his anger, at what he styled the want of hospitality on his reverence's part. "He had no hesitation," he said, "in enjoying himself by the light of my lamp, an yet he withholds from me the civility I so liberally offered to him. He is a mean, shabby fellow after all, and I am perhaps as well without his intimacy. Still, he is a priest, and it would be better not to quarrel with him openly, else he may do me an ill turn. No, I will still appear to be friendly with him, though, for the future, I shall always hold him in contempt."

The padre, on his part, was equally displeased. "I have, after all," he said, "given him a good lesson, and I hope he will profit by it. For some evenings past I noticed that he never lighted his own lamp till long after dark, and he generally got rid of me at as early an hour as possible. I don't wish to quarrel with him openly, though at the same time I have proved to him that he shall not impose upon me. If he chooses, we may still meet in the evenings, but whether it be in his room or my own, and we have nothing to do but talk, it shall be in the dark, and then we shall be on equal terms, and there will be no cause for disagreement."

As neither of the friends, however, would so far give way as to invite the other to visit him, they contented themselves with the common courtesies of salutation when they met, no other conversation passing between them.

Easter was now fast approaching, at which season the don always made his principal confession. Among the chief of his sins was that of having, on more than one occasion, omitted to fast in Lent, and those occasions were the evenings on which he supped with his friends. They were not only indifferent to the observance of Lent themselves — as far as regarded fasting — but knowing the superstitious character of the don, as well as his love of good cheer, they invited him to sup with them during that season at least once a week. The fourth week in Lent had now commenced, and having heard that the don had determined he would eat no meat till Lent was over, they invited him to a supper, which they assured him should be a better one than he had partaken of during the whole of the year. He at first firmly declined, but they would take no denial, and they urged it on him with so much earnestness, that his resolution at last gave way, and he joined them at supper. Here he did full justice to every dish set before him, eating and drinking enormously. Still there was one subject his hosts continually spoke of which caused him considerable uneasiness. They begged him particularly to remember every dish he eat of, that he might put it down in the catalogue of sins at confession. At the same time, he argued with himself, that, as the sin existed on the quality of the food he consumed, and not the quantity, he might as well make a plentiful meal while he was about it.

It was nearly midnight before the supper was over, and the guests rose to leave the house. When in the street, one of his friends asked him if he was not afraid, after having eaten such a supper, of passing the chapel with the picture of the souls in purgatory painted on it. He pretended he had no fear whatever, but as the night was fine, he should prefer a longer walk home, and some of his companions accompanied him a part of the way. When they left him, he entered into a long, narrow street, and after he had proceeded some distance, he heard loud cries for help, accompanied by the clashing of swords. As rashness in exposing himself to unnecessary danger was not one of the don's failings, he hid himself in a doorway, and there remained concealed till the disturbance was well over. Finding at last that all was quiet, he resumed his walk, when suddenly his foot struck against some substance which gave forth a metallic sound, strongly resembling gold. He stooped down, and taking the object in his hand, found that it was a leather bag, containing coins, but of what nature he could not determine, as the mouth of the bag was tightly fastened with a cord, which he had not strength enough to break, and the knot was so firmly tied that he could not unfasten it. From the weight of the bag, he concluded that it contained gold; so without more ado, he placed it in his pocket, and proceeded homewards at a far more rapid pace than was usual with him.

On arriving at his lodging, Don Bucefalo immediately set about procuring a light. He had hardly succeeded when the idea struck him, that some of his neighbours opposite might not be in bed, and that he might possibly be seen opening the bag. He therefore contented himself with placing it under his pillow, resolving to examine it at his ease next morning, after the curate (whom he dreaded more than any other person in the house) had gone to perform early mass. He accordingly threw himself on the bed, and attempted to sleep. This, however, was impossible. The knowledge that a bag of gold was under his head took away all his drowsiness, and, in spite of himself, he found his hand feeling beneath his pillow, clutching at his treasure. Never to anyone did time seem to pass more tardily than it did that night to Don Bucefalo. He though the dawn would never come. Thankful indeed was he when he saw the first faint rays of the sun in the east. Still he dared not look at his treasure or disturb it, as he was afraid (though without the slightest reason) that the padre might look in at his window as he passed. He now listened attentively for the priest's footsteps, but not hearing them, he began to fear that his reverence had overslept himself, and also to think whether it would not be an act of kindness on his part to go upstairs and inform him that it was getting late. At last he determined to do so, and had risen to a sitting posture in his bed preparatory to leaving it, when he heard the padre's footstep on the stairs, and immediately afterwards his voice speaking to some one as he descended. As soon as he had satisfied himself that the padre had left the house, he looked at his door carefully to see that the fastening was perfectly secure, and then took the bag from beneath his pillow and examined it attentively. It was small, but made of strong leather, and by shaking it he easily perceived that the coins it contained were of gold.

He now sought for his knife, that he might cut the cord with which it was bound, but he could not remember where he had placed it. His anxiety, in fact, was so great, that his mind became utterly confused. All his mental energies were concentrated on knowing the contents of the bag. His knife not being at hand, and his fingers not strong enough to untie the cord, he seized it with his teeth (which fortunately were strong and well set in his head), and like a rat, gnawed at it till it was cut in two.

As soon as the bag was opened, the don put his hand into it, and drew it out again full of sequins, all evidently fresh from the mint. He now counted his treasure and found there were exactly five hundred. After having examined them and turned each one over separately, he at last met with one, which though new, was evidently of much lighter weight than the rest. He looked at it for a moment, and then began in his own mind to abuse the government official for practising on him in this way. But after a moment's reflection he remembered that it was his duty to forgive him, and he felt his conscience greatly soothed by his self-denying act in excusing the dishonesty of the man who had imposed the light sequin on him.

His moral reflections over, he began to consider what he should do with the gold. He already felt that riches brought troubles with them, and he was afraid that some dishonest person might rob him of them. To secure his treasure, and avoid placing temptation in the way of an erring fellow-creature, he returned the coins to the bag, and having firmly tied its mouth, he cast about where he should place it so that it might be perfectly secure. After thinking over the matter for some time, it struck him that possibly there might be some interstice in the chimney where it could be lodged, and with a little difficulty, he found one, in which he placed the bag. [Five hundred sequins weighs four pounds.]

The time had now arrived for him to leave for his office, and he began to dress himself; for hitherto he had only worn his night costume. All being completed, he left the house in high spirits, and proceeded onwards till he came to the chapel of the souls in purgatory. As he passed it he fancied that the figure in the painting, which bore a strong resemblance to himself, appeared to be more life-like, and the expression of pain on its face more natural than usual. This caused him some anxiety, and he feared at first that it might be connected with the gold, but the moment afterwards he remembered the prohibited quality of the supper he had eaten the night before, and attributed the impression to that cause. At the same time he almost offered up a prayer of gratitude to his patron saint, that he had been allowed to indulge in the sin of gluttony the evening before. He now piously determined that by way of penance he would not again eat flesh until after he had confessed and been absolved. During the day he heard it reported, that a messenger to the Venetian ambassador had been stopped in the street the night before and robbed of a considerable sum of money, but that the police could not obtain the slightest clue to the offenders. For this also the don was grateful, and he hoped that the unhappy wretches might escape, and live to repent the sin of which they had been guilty.

Some days passed, and the don, hearing from time to time rumours that the police were still in search of the robbers, allowed his bag of gold to remain in its place in the chimney, and employed himself in making up the list of his sins for confession. Here his conscience was somewhat troubled. He knew perfectly well that on several occasions he had been guilty of the sin of gluttony, and that he had not fasted in Lent in the manner ordained by the Church. Still, he felt assured that by submitting to the penance ordered, he should obtain absolution. His possession of the bag of sequins, however, was a very different affair. At first he consoled himself with the idea that there being no one to own the money, it was as much his property as anyone else's. Imperfect as this reasoning was, it sufficed him till he heard that the money belonged to the Venetian ambassador, and then he knew that the only title he had to it had vanished. But to give up the gold was a virtuous action of such magnitude, that the don — humble as he was — could hardly think of performing it, and his mind continued much disturbed on the subject. He must now decidedly include it in the list of his sins at confession, or he should be guilty of the mortal sin of obtaining absolution while perfectly aware that he was doing so fraudulently — having concealed a great crime he had been guilty of.

But the don's troubles did not end here. One morning when at his office, a fellow-clerk told him that the police had succeeded in capturing three of the robbers who had attacked the messenger to the Venetian ambassador on the night of the robbery. They had also regained possession of all the money, with the exception of one bag containing five hundred sequins, which they asserted they had dropped in the street.

"He must be a lucky fellow who has found it," said a bystander. "I wish it had been my case."

"I am not sure that it might turn out particularly fortunate for you if it had," said another.

"Why?"

"Because the duke has ordered a very strict search to be made for it, and has threatened that if any man has found the bag, and does not deliver it up within a fortnight from this time, he shall be imprisoned for life and put to the torture."

The don almost fainted when he heard this remark, but recovered himself on reflecting that he had taken great caution, and had been very ingenious in the manner in which he had concealed the money. The conversation went on for some time longer — the don taking no part in it — when one of the bystanders inquired in what street the robbery had taken place; and, on its being named, one of the clerks said, "Why, Don Bucefalo, was not that the street you took when you went home after our last supper party?"

"Certainly not," said the don, hurriedly.

"But stop, my dear fellow," said a gentleman present, who had always been at the supper, "your memory somewhat fails you. Don't you remember that you were afraid to pass before the chapel with the souls in purgatory, and that I accompanied you to the corner of the street in which the robbery was committed? I also watched you till you were some little way down it."

The don perceived that the matter was getting serious, and that great presence of mind on his part was necessary to avert the danger which threatened him.

"Now you mention it," he said, "I remember I did pass down the street, but unfortunately for me I did not find the money. Not that I should for a moment have thought of retaining it as my own, — but no doubt I should have received a good reward for returning it to his excellency the ambassador. I always am unlucky. I dare say some rogue has it who will not think of returning it."

"I am afraid," said one of the don's associates, laughing, "if I had found the money I should have been rogue enough to have kept it. The money would have been a fortune to me, while the loss to the ambassador would have been but trifling."

The don shook his head, and put on a very serious expression, as if deprecating even the idea of jesting on such a subject, and the conversation terminated.

During the remainder of the day, the don had but little head for business; the whole affair now began to appear to him in so dangerous a light. When he reached home, his anxiety increased to such an extent, that he began seriously to entertain the idea of returning the money. He even went so far as to withdraw it from its hiding-place, but no sooner did he feel the gold in his hand, than all his virtuous resolutions vanished. He felt that it would be impossible to part with the money, and so, returning it to its place of concealment, he turned over in his mind how he could retain it without danger to himself. But, from whatever point of view he looked at it, the question was a very difficult one to answer. There was not only the certainty of a severe punishment from the authorities in case it should be proved that he had the money in his possession, but the idea of concealing it, and not admitting that he had done so in his confession, quite terrified him. After thinking over the matter, he at last hit upon a plan which he thought would not only relieve him from all danger of punishment, but also set his conscience at rest. To accomplish this, he resolved first to conceal the bag of sequins in his friend Padre Falcone's room, so that, if the money were found, the blame, as well as the punishment, would fall on the padre instead of himself.

This would relieve him from all temporal danger, and, to make himself perfectly safe in a spiritual point of view, he determined to visit the Innominato, and if possible obtain from him the power of forgetting everything that had occurred during the last week or ten days, on the condition, however, that his memory should return to him in six months time. He calculated that then the whole affair would have blown over, and he could again take his money, and nothing more would be said about it. He could easily invent a tale to deceive the astrologer, and if his request were granted, he could then go to confession with a clear conscience, as he would be able to give an honest account of all the sins he could remember to have committed.

Having now arranged everything to his satisfaction, he determined to commence operations at once. As it wanted fully an hour of nightfall, and knowing that the padre was in his room, he resolved to call on him without delay, and in the course of conversation to discover, if possible, in what spot he could conceal the bag without the danger of detection. The don accordingly left his own room and proceeded to that of the priest. He tapped gently at the door, and was requested to enter. As soon as the padre recognised his visitor, he rose from his chair, and with an expression of joy and satisfaction on his countenance, advanced to receive him.

"Caro Don Bucefalo," he said, tenderly embracing his visitor, "how kind of you to call on me! Frankly, I was afraid my rude behaviour to you the other evening had made you angry with me, and the thought of your displeasure has weighed heavily on my mind ever since. You have no idea how happy you have made me."

"I was labouring under the same impression, good father," said the don, with great courtesy. "I have ever since felt that I committed a grievous sin in being angry with you, and this evening I resolved to ask your pardon and blessing. Pray do not refuse them."

"They are both heartily at your service, my son," said the priest. "Now sit down, and let us talk amicably together."

Don Bucefalo, with many expressions of gratitude, accepted the padre's invitation, and they discoursed together for some time on ordinary subjects, the don meanwhile looking carefully around him for some spot where he could hide the bag without danger of the priest's finding it. He first thought of the chimney, but after a little while he relinquished the idea for another plan which he thought safer. The floor of the priest's room was paved with coarse tiles, and one of these, in a corner near the fire-place, seemed to rise somewhat higher than the rest, and therefore could be removed easily. He determined the next day, if he could find a good opportunity, to hide the money under that tile. Having now obtained what he was in search of, he rose to depart. As he was leaving the room, the padre said, —

"My son, I have a great favour to ask of you. I have this day received the sad intelligence that a dear friend of mine residing in Pavia, is seriously ill, and it is feared he will not recover. Early tomorrow morning I leave Milan to visit him, and very probably I may not return for three or four days. Might I rely on your kindness, should anyone call on me while you are at home, to inform him of my departure?"

"Certainly, reverend father, in that, as in any other case, it will be a pleasure to me to oblige you. I hope you will find your friend not so seriously indisposed as you have been led to believe."

"Many thanks, my son, for your good wishes. I sincerely hope that the accounts I have received may be exaggerated. It is most inconvenient for me to leave Milan at the present time, but I have a sacred duty to perform, and I must not flinch from it."

Now, nothing could have fallen in more thoroughly with Don Bucefalo's wishes. Not only would he have an opportunity of concealing the bag without the slightest difficulty or danger, but he would be able to visit the Innominato and return to Milan without the padre knowing anything about it. He kept awake during the whole of the night arranging his plans, and the dawn had scarcely broken before he heard the padre moving overhead, making preparations to start on his journey. Don Bucefalo hastily dressed himself, and when he hard the priest descending the stairs, he left his room, and not only wished his friend a fortunate journey, but carried his complaisance to such an extent as to accompany him to the town gates before he left him.

Being perfectly certain that the padre had started on his journey, Don Bucefalo returned home, and as soon as he had taken the bag from its hiding-place, he looked cautiously out of his door to see that no one observed him. Having assured himself of safety in this respect, he hurried up to the priest's room, and having opened the door, which he carefully closed after him, he proceeded to examine the tile under which he intended to place the money. To remove it, however, was a work of far greater difficulty than he had calculated, but at last, by the help of a stout knife which he had brought with him, he succeeded. After having covered the bag with dust, he carefully replaced the tile, and rubbing some dirt over it — of which there was an abundant supply in the padre's room — he obliterated all signs of his work. He now descended into his own apartment, and shortly afterwards left home for the office. A shock came over him as he passed the little chapel, for never did the figure in the painting appear so like him as it did that morning, or the expression of pain on its countenance more natural. He hurried past it as rapidly as he could, however, nor did he slacken his pace till he had arrived at the office. As he was somewhat before the usual time for commencing business, his employer had not yet arrived, much to the don's annoyance, for he wished to ask leave of absence for two or three days. Presently, however, the money-changer made his appearance on the Piazza, but he remained for some minutes (which to the don appeared as so many hours) in conversation with a friend before he entered the house. The don, putting on a most sorrowful expression of countenance, advanced towards him and said, —

"Pardon me, sir, if I ask a great favour of you, but I have this morning received intelligence that my poor sister at Brescia is on the point of death, and she wishes particularly to see me. It would be a great satisfaction to me if I could behold her once again, for a little misunderstanding has occurred between us, and it would be a delightful thing for me to be reconciled to her before we part for ever in this world. Would it be asking too much of you to allow me two or three days of absence?"

"Willingly, Don Bucefalo," said his employer, "and the more readily as business is not very brisk just now. Go, my good fellow, but be back again if possible in two days; for if you stay three, it would put me to some inconvenience. I hope you will find your sister better than you imagine."

Don Bucefalo, after having with great volubility heaped blessing after blessing upon his employer, left the office, and avoiding the little chapel, he proceeded to the house of a man who let out mules, and there he hired one of the strongest and swiftest he had. He now returned to his own home, and having changed his dress to one of a more ordinary description, and packed up a few necessities for his journey, he mounted his mule; and about three hours after the padre had started by the western gate of the city, Don Bucefalo passed through the eastern gate, from which the high road to Brescia. After he had advanced about a quarter of a mile, he abruptly quitted his easterly direction for one due north, which led directly to Lake Como. The reason for his taking this circuitous route was simply that in case he should be seen by any friends or acquaintances of his employer, they could testify that they had met him travelling on the road to Brescia. The don now urged his mule along as rapidly as possible. For years he had never shown the energy he did on that day; and although the weather was very hot, he seemed almost insensible to fatigue. He arrived at Ponte about three o'clock in the afternoon; and as it still wanted some hours to sunset, he determined to continue his journey, and if possible to see the Innominato that day. Fortunately, he found a good mule which had been well rested, and changing it for his own, he proceeded up the gorge of the mountains which led to the castle of the Innominato. At last he came in sight of the Hospice, but feeling exceedingly warm and overcome by fatigue, he resolved to rest himself a little, and to invent some tale that he might tell the Innominato as an excuse for the favour he was to ask him.

He left his mule at a cottage, and proceeded a short way up the path which led to the Hospice, when, finding a bank covered with soft grass in a shady nook, he seated himself on it, and leaning back, covered his face with the large hat he wore, that he might invent his tale with greater ease. Indeed so comfortable was he, that he felt strongly inclined to doze, but shaking off the feeling he resolutely continued his cogitations.

When he had arranged all to his own satisfaction, he began to think of the fortunate manner in which things had turned out, and, when he came to the trick he had played on the priest, he burst into such a fit of laughter as shook the whole of his unwieldy person. So great, indeed, were his convulsions that the hat fell from his face on the greensward beside him. But his laughter was hushed in a moment, for he saw standing beside him, and gazing at him with a look of startled surprise, no other that the Reverend Padre Falcone himself. The don raised himself to a sitting position, and, without speaking, gazed at the priest in stupefied amazement. The surprise of the padre was as great as that of his friend, but he was the first to regain his presence of mind.

"My dear son," he said, "this is indeed a joyful meeting. Little indeed did I expect to find my dear friend here."

"Reverend father," said the don, heaving a deep sigh of regret, "the happiness is on my part."

"I dare say, my dear son, you are surprised to see me here; possibly more so than I am to see you?"

"In truth, reverend father, it is certainly a pleasure I did not expect."

"Ah!" said the padre, "when I left you this morning, little did I calculate on what would take place before night. When I arrived at the house of my dear friend, I found him so terribly changed that it went to my heart to see him. The leech who attended him was there at the time, and I inquired whether there was any hope of my friend's recovery. 'There is but one,' said the leech. 'An astrologer, known as the Innominato, has a herb which could certainly cure him; but how to obtain it, I know not. He is after all, I understand, a very good man, and I should not hesitate to call on him myself; but I have many sick to attend, and it is impossible for me to leave them.' For a moment — and but a moment — I remained in doubt," continued the padre, "and I then resolved — let the danger be what it might — that I would visit the Innominato myself, and request him to give me some of the specific; and, as you see, here I am."

"It does great credit to your kindness of heart, reverend padre. It must have caused you great fatigue and exertion to have arrived here so rapidly, considering how many miles Pavia was out of your road."

"True, my son," said Padre Falcone, taking no notice of the slightly sarcastic tone of the don's voice; "but love conquers all things. Now you mention it, I must admit, that on any ordinary occasion it would have been almost impossible for me to have arrived here in so short a space of time; but my affection for my friend seemed to shorten the distance almost miraculously, and it has also supported me so well, that I hardly feel the slightest fatigue. But in your turn, dear Don Bucefalo, will you tell me by what happy chance I have the pleasure of meeting you in this spot?"

"Dear padre," said Don Bucefalo — who, during the time the priest had been speaking, was collecting his own thoughts — "I will tell you without hesitation, though with some little shame. You see the enormous size I am, and can easily imagine how much it would please me to be thinner. I have often heard that the astrologer possess a specific which can make people thin, and I have frequently thought of applying to him even at the risk of committing a sin in so doing. This morning, in arriving at the office, my employer kindly gave me leave of absence for two days (may Heaven reward him for it!). I then resolutely determined that I would delay no longer, but start off at once for the castle of the Innominato, and implore his assistance. You see, reverend padre, I have concealed nothing from you."

"As we are each here on a somewhat similar errand," said the padre, "let us continue our road together."

"With great pleasure," said the don, rising from his seat on the grass. "Can you tell me what formalities we must go through before we can see the Innominato, for I have made no inquiries on the subject?"

The padre cast a momentary glance with his falcon-like eye on the little don walking by his side, and then said, "My son, all I know about the matter is what I this morning heard from the leech at the bedside of my sick friend. He told me, that prior to being admitted into the castle, all strangers were to wait at the Hospice, which is some little distance from it. There they were to inform a person in attendance of the object of their visit; he would take the message to the castle, and bring back the Innominato's answer as to whether he would receive the visitor or not. We are now, I understand, on the road to the Hospice, and I have no doubt we shall shortly arrive there."

Little more conversation passed between the friends till they reached the Hospice. When there, a servant of the astrologer met them, and inquired their business.

"We have arrived on a mission somewhat similar," said the priest; "the principal motive of each being to consult his Excellency on some medical matters. I am the curate of St Pancrazio, in Milan; and my friend is Don Bucefalo, a money-changer in the Piazza de Mercanti."

"Do you wish to see his Excellency together or separately?" inquired the man.

The don and the priest looked at each other for some moments, neither liking to speak. The priest at last said — "Possibly it would be better if we saw him separately. What do you think, Don Bucefalo?"

"I perfectly agree with you, reverend padre," said the don, in a decided tone. "I told you the object of my mission, and it would be more agreeable to my feelings if I spoke with his Excellency alone on the subject, without the presence of a third person."

The messenger now departed for the castle, and in a short time returned, saying that the Innominato would have much pleasure in seeing one that evening, and the other next morning. In the meantime hospitality should be provided for both at the Hospice.

It now remained for them to decide which should go to the castle first. To say the truth, both felt a certain fear at the idea of meeting the Innominato, and each wanted the other to undergo the ordeal first, so that he might learn the particulars of the interview.

"Dear padre," said Don Bucefalo, "to you I cede the honour of first visiting the Innominato."

"A thousand thanks, my dear son," said the padre, "but I will not deprive you of that pleasure."

"But consider, father," said the don, "the illness of your friend, and your anxiety that he should take the medicine as soon as possible."

"True my son; but humility is a virtue strongly inculcated by our Church, and one which I greatly esteem. Let me also remind you that obedience is on your part equally imperative, and I must insist that you obey me in the present instance."

The don was upon the point of again refusing, when he remembered the request of his employer that he should be absent only two days; and if he put off his interview with the Innominato till the next morning, he might exceed the time allotted to him. He, therefore, determined to make a virtue of necessity, and in a tone of great respect told the padre, that much as it pained him to take precedence of his reverence, he would not disobey him. He was warmly complimented, in return, for his submission. The servant being in attendance to conduct whichever of the visitors might determine to see the Innominato that evening, now accompanied Don Bucefalo to the castle, and immediately afterwards he was ushered into the presence of the astrologer.

DON BUCEFALO AND THE CURATE - PART II

Although the Innominato received Don Bucefalo with great courtesy, the don was but ill at ease at the commencement of the interview. There was a certain venerable dignity about the astrologer, which, added to the air of mystery which reigned in the room, created a somewhat painful feeling of awe in the breast of the little man.

"You are somewhat later than I expected," said the Innominato to the don in a kind manner. "I thought you would have been here by midday, if not before it."

"I did not know that you were aware of my intention to visit you, learned sir," said the don, now fairly bewildered. "In fact, I had hardly determined on it myself two hours before I left Milan."

"Nevertheless, I was fully advised of your intention," said the Innominato; and then, noticing an expression of alarm on the countenance of the don, which possibly arose from the fear that more might be known of him than he desired, the Innominato continued, "but, understand me, I knew neither your name, nor address, nor business with me. Yesterday evening the stars told me I might expect two strangers to call at the Hospice to-day, for the purpose of consulting me on some subjects of importance; but who they were, and on what mission they were to come, of course I knew nothing. Now, tell me in what way I can serve you, for I suppose you have not taken the journey here without some personal motive."

"Learned sir," said Don Bucefalo — considerably more at ease now that he knew he was unknown to the astrologer — "I have called on you to ask a great favour at your hands. I have lately lost a dear sister" — here he attempted to assume an expression of intense sorrow, but hardly succeeded, certainly not to such a degree as to impose on the astrologer, — "at whose bedside I watched for more than a week before death released her from her sufferings. The effect it has had on my mind and spirits is, I need not assure you, inexpressibly painful. All day, when in my office, my mind is so occupied with my loss, that I am unable to attend to my duties properly, and at night my pillow is completely saturated with tears."

Here the don appeared so overwhelmed, that for the moment he was unable to proceed. The astrologer, with an expression of well-feigned pity, kindly came to his relief.

"My dear friend," he said, "your tale is a very sad one, and I sympathise with you for the affliction you are under, but candidly I do not see how I can assist you. It appears to me that your case is rather one for a priest than for a man of science. Why do you not apply to one? There are many in Milan whose consolations would have a greater effect in mitigating your sorrow than anything I could say or do."

"I have already spoken to more than one," said the don, "and they have done all in their power for me, but without the slightest good effect. Night and day the image of my poor sister is before my eyes. Even now I see her, and I should be unable to control my tears, but I have wept so much on my road hither, that I have none left."

"Still, my friend, I do not see how I can assist you. If you can suggest anything, pray do so."

"I thought," said Don Bucefalo, "that if your Excellency could take from me the remembrance of all that has passed during my poor sister's illness — say from midnight ten days since to the present time — I might be relieved from my sorrow, as I should not then have incessantly before my eyes the semblance of my poor sister dying."

"And are you are quite certain," said the astrologer, with great sternness in his tone, "that you have nothing to reproach yourself with in connexion with your sister's death? To tell you the real truth, I have great doubts on the subject."

If the astrologer had really entertained the doubts he spoke of, the behaviour of Don Bucefalo would have undeceived him. Leaping from his chair, and placing his hand on his heart, he swore, in a tone of perfect veracity, that neither directly nor indirectly, in thought nor deed, had he contributed in the slightest manner to the death of his poor sister. The astrologer was fain to believe him, and continued, —

"But although I am fully persuaded that you are perfectly innocent of the death of your sister, at the same time I must tell you, that your wish to forget her does you but little credit, savouring as it does of great moral cowardice. It seems to me inexplicable that anyone loving another so fondly as you did your late sister, should wish to lose for ever all remembrance of her."

"Pardon me, your Excellency," said Don Bucefalo, "but such is far from my thoughts. I do not know a greater misfortune than that would be to me. No, all I desire is to forget her for some time — say six months. By that time I should have become, to a certain extent, inured to her loss, and able to think of her with all the love I bore her when she was alive, without the overwhelming sorrow I now feel." All this he said in such a tone of perfect conviction, that it was impossible not to believe him; and the astrologer appeared to do so perfectly.

"I must say, that alters the matter considerably," he said, "and I have a great wish to assist you. At the same time I must look to my own safety. By granting you a power of this kind I might be suspected of sorcery should it ever become known."

"I assure your Excellency," said Don Bucefalo, with great earnestness, "that not a word on the subject of our interview shall ever pass my lips."

"I am perfectly ready to give you full credit," said the Innominato, "for meaning what you say. Still there is the danger of inadvertence on your part. But this I am willing to do if it will meet your views. I will take from you the memory of all that has passed since midnight ten days since; and I will give you the power of renewing your memory in six months' time, with the exception of your interview with me, which you will never remember again. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly, learned sir."

"Have you any other request to make me?" asked the astrologer.

Don Bucefalo hesitated for some moments, and something like a blush was visible on his countenance; then taking courage, he said, "I certainly have another request to make. You perceive I am inconveniently fat; can I by any possibility become thinner?"

"That is a far easier matter than the other," said the astrologer, "and I shall have much pleasure in assisting you. During the next six months you shall gradually become thinner. Is there anything else?"

"Nothing, learned sir. You have now made me perfectly happy and contented."

"I am much pleased to hear it," said the Innominato. "Take this lozenge with you to Milan, and swallow it at night on going to bed. The next morning you will have forgotten everything which has passed during the last ten days, and your figure will gradually become as slim as you could possibly wish it to be."

The interview with the astrologer over, the don was conducted by a servant to the Hospice, where he found Padre Falcone.

"My dear son," said his reverence, "how pleased I am to see you. I began to be quite anxious about you. How did your meeting go off?"

"Perfectly well," said the don. "I found the Innominato a most amiable man, and he entered with great interest into the particulars of my case. Indeed, I do not think he could have shown more heartfelt sympathy for me if he had been my mother."

"Does he think he can make you thinner?"

"He assures me that he is certain of it, if I but follow his prescription. I believe he is the greatest physician that ever lived. But excuse me, reverend father, if I leave you; I am much fatigued and I wish to go to bed, especially as I intend to start in the morning before daybreak." So saying, the don left his friend and sought his room.

Don Bucefalo started so early the next morning, and with such speed did he travel, that it still wanted three hours of sunset when he reached Milan. His first care on entering his house was to pay a visit to the chamber of the priest, and see that the tile under which he had deposited the money was secure in its place. Finding all in order, he remained quietly in his own room, turning over in his mind the sins he should confess; all of which, of course, he had perpetrated before the night he had found the bag of gold. Night came on, and having swallowed the lozenge which had been given him by the astrologer, he prepared for bed, and being sorely fatigued by his journey, soon fell fast asleep.

We must now return to Padre Falcone, whom we left at the Hospice, awaiting his interview with the Innominato. The few words which had passed between him and the don, before the latter left for Milan, were not altogether reassuring. True, the don had spoken in high terms of the astrologer, and his words were explicit so far as they went; the evil was that they did not go far enough. He could not quite understand why the Innominato should have been so much interested in the don's case that his sympathy for him should have risen to a maternal point. No, the don had certainly concealed something, and he was perplexed what that something could be. Could he have dealt him (the padre) any underhanded blow, and given the astrologer a hint of the real object of his visit? The wish to consult the astrologer on the subject of his friend's bodily health was not the principal object of the priest's visit, any more than that of the don was to procure a receipt for growing thinner.

The real object of the padre's visit to the castle of the Innominato was as follows. Like many of the priesthood in the Middle Ages, he was a firm believer in alchemy. He no more doubted the possibility of transmuting the baser metals into gold, or of fixing the flying bird (as the power of solidifying quicksilver was then termed in their pseudo-scientific jargon), than he doubted the truths of his religion. He had heard of the immense wealth of the Innominato. But as he possessed little landed property beyond his castle, which was of small pecuniary value comparatively, and as, although he had a great reputation for skill in medicine, he always practised gratuitously, how did he come by his gold if not by alchemy? This thought haunted the padre. If he could but make the acquaintance of the astrologer, he might possibly be able so to gain his confidence and good-will as to obtain the secret from him. Having resolved to make the attempt, the padre next set his brain to work to form some excuse for introducing himself. The best he could find was to pretend to be very ill, and, having once contrived to get a footing in the castle, he determined not to leave it again without having made every exertion to obtain the secret.

The priest's anxiety kept him from sleeping the whole of the night. When he arose in the morning, the troubled night he had passed, combined with the previous day's fatigue and his naturally thin pallid features, had given him so much the appearance of ill health, that the astrologer must have been hard-hearted and suspicious in the extreme if he had not believed his statement.

The time at last arrived for the padre to visit the castle, and a servant ushered him into the presence of the Innominato. He was received with so much courtesy, that the timidity he had felt when he entered the room soon vanished. After a short conversation on indifferent subjects, the Innominato asked his guest in what way he could serve him.

"My principal reason for calling on your Excellency," said the priest, "is to consult you on the state of my health. I assure you, I should not have troubled you; but I have consulted so many physicians and tried so many remedies without any beneficial effects, that I am almost in despair of ever recovering my health if you do not assist me."

"But why should you imagine that I am capable of curing you when so many other physicians have failed?" inquired the Innominato.

"From the wonderful reputation you have acquired, and the astonishing cures you are said to have performed," said the priest.

"I am afraid my reputation far exceeds my merits then," replied the Innominato. "At the same time, if I can be of any service to you, it will give me great pleasure. Of what do you complain?"

"Of most disturbing bodily weakness, your Excellency. I daily lose both flesh and strength; and am now, as you may perceive, almost as thin as a skeleton."

"Can you trace it to any cause?" inquired the Innominato.

"None, your Excellency, unless — " and here the padre stopped, as if unwilling to state the only cause to which he could attribute the infirm state of his health.

"But you should candidly tell me everything," said the Innominato, "if you expect me to benefit you." The priest assumed an expression of great modesty and self-denial, but still said nothing.

"If you will not tell me," said the Innominato, "I must guess it at the hazard of being wrong. If I am not mistaken, your weakness and excessive emaciation arises from the self-denying manner in which you perform your priestly duties. Constant attendance at the bedside of the sick and dying, relieving the poor, and similar duties, combined with the performance of the services of the Church, have had far more to do with your present infirm state of health, than any natural tendency to indisposition. Am I not right?"

"It hardly becomes me to admit the correctness of your judgment," said Padre Falcone, with great humility; "at the same time, I cannot deny that it may have had something to do with it. I would willingly exert myself less than I do, but my flock is an exceedingly poor one, and requires far more attention than I, with all my best wishes, am able to give."

"You must see many distressing scenes," remarked the Innominato.

"I do indeed, learned sir," said the priest; "and my inability to assist those of my flock who are in distress, render them doubly so."

"Do none of the wealthier classes reside near you?"

"None; I have only poor around me, and many of them are frequently starving."

"To relieve them effectually would require a large sum of money, I suppose," said the Innominato.

"It would indeed," said the priest; "far more than I am ever likely to have in my power to give them. I often think," he continued, smiling faintly, "what a blessing it would be if I knew the art of transmuting the other metals into gold. Ah! The good I would do with it, and the misery I could relieve!"

"But, charitably disposed as you may be at present, it is by no means certain that you might continue to be so if you became rich. Charity seldom keeps pace with the acquisition of wealth."

"I have no fear on that score," said the priest, with great conviction in his tone; "I have felt too often the luxury of being charitable, to fear becoming selfish even if I were rich. On the contrary, I am certain my exertions on behalf of the sick and needy would increase with the means I had at my disposal."

"You said you should like to know the art of making gold," said the astrologer. "Is not that a singular wish for a man of your profession?"

"Not if I wished to possess it for the benefit of others," said the priest.

"I am afraid the knowledge would not be acquired without trafficking with the powers of darkness," said the Innominato. "At least, so I have read, for I know very little of the matter myself."

The priest put as marked an expression of incredulity on his countenance as courtesy would allow, but said nothing. His behaviour did not pass unnoticed by the astrologer.

"I see you doubt me," he said; "I freely forgive you, however, for I am aware I possess the reputation of having discovered the philosopher's stone. But candidly, I do not consider the study of alchemy adapted to one of your profession, and to you especially. It requires long and anxious study, and to follow it would take you from the duties you now so honourably fulfill. Still I wish to assist you if I find you worthy. If I do not put you in the way of transmuting baser metals into gold, I can put you in the way of finding a treasure."

"If you would do so, worthy sir, you would not only have my prayers as long as I live, but also those of hundreds of the poor."

"But I must be frank with you, for I am not yet sufficiently acquainted with your temper and disposition to trust you with such a secret. Will you agree to fulfill every condition I place on you, assuming that they are not antagonistic to your duties as a priest?"

"Most willingly sir, I promise you."

"Well then, I will try you. If you follow my orders, not only will I put you in possession of a large sum of gold, but I will effect so great an improvement in your health that in a few months you shall become a hale and portly man. On the floor in a corner of your room you will find a tile somewhat looser [higher?] than the rest. You must search carefully for it, as it will be difficult to find. Under that tile you will see a leather bag containing five hundred sequins. Now the conditions I impose are the following. You will daily take only two sequins from the bag, which you will place in another bag you must provide for the purpose. Not one of these sequins may be spent till the leather bag in which they are now is empty. As you go on, you will daily gain flesh and strength. If, however, you dare to take more than two sequins a day, you will the same day die of apoplexy. If you spend one of them till the bag is empty, the whole will vanish, and you will again become as thin and weak as you now are. These conditions I impose on you are to bring out clearly whether you are a man to be trusted with money, and above yielding to the temptations under which most men fall. Do you accept my conditions?"

"Most willingly I do, and I swear to keep them to the letter."

"Then I need detain you no longer," said the astrologer, "for I see you are anxious to return to your flock."

Swiftly indeed did the reverend padre perform his homeward journey, but in spite of all his haste he did not arrive in Milan until midnight. By a singular coincidence, the position he found himself in when in his chamber strongly resembled that of his friend Don Bucefalo the night he found the bag of gold. Like him, he wished to obtain a light to behold his treasure, but was afraid of being seen by some inmate of the house. Moreover, he had no means of lighting his lamp, and to ask any of the neighbours to assist him would be dangerous. He then undressed in the dark, and threw himself on his bed, but could not close his eyes. Twice during the night he arose from his bed, and in the dark carefully felt with his foot in the part of the room indicated by the astrologer, for a tile somewhat higher than the rest. The first time he could discover nothing; but he was more fortunate on the second occasion. There was one tile almost imperceptibly higher than the rest. He stooped down and felt it with his hand, and was confirmed in his opinion. He attempted to insert his finger-nails — which were as hard as those of the bird of prey from which the name of his family was derived — between the tiles; but not succeeding in this he threw himself again on the bed, to await with patience, if possible, the light of day. But both sleep and patience had fled from him, and he tossed about in a state of feverish excitement till the dawn. As soon as he perceived its first faint rays, he arose from his bed, and, without stopping to dress, advanced to the tile to examine it more carefully; but the light was faint, and the tile being in the shadow, he could distinguish nothing very clearly. He contented himself therefore with cursing the tardiness of the sun's movements.

In Italy both dawn and sunset are of short duration, and Padre Falcone had not long to wait before the light was strong enough for him to proceed with his search, although in his impatient state of mind every minute appeared to him an hour. Having first clearly ascertained the position of the tile, and that he could not be mistaken in the spot, he carefully cleared away the dirt which covered it, and which his friend Don Bucefalo had put on purposely to hide it. That done, he attempted to raise the tile from its position. For some time he experienced considerable difficulty in moving it, but he at last succeeded. He now came to the thick layer of dust which had been placed there with so much care by the don. This he speedily removed, and then he beheld the bag containing the sequins. Padre Falcone's eyes no sooner glanced on the bag, than he seized it with his claw-like fingers; and drawing it from its hiding-place, he bore it to the table, and, after having with some difficulty unfastened the cord which was round it, he poured out the contents. Seeing the heap of shining gold before him, the priest's eye lighted up with pleasure. Although his faith in the astrologer was great, there had been, up to this moment, a slight sentiment of doubt mixed with it. But this now entirely vanished. There could be no mistake with respect to the gold, and it would be unjust in him to doubt the other promise of the astrologer — that he should get strong and portly.

The padre now occupied himself in making plans for the future. In the first place, where should he keep the bag of gold? There were few conveniences for concealment in his room; so he thought its original hiding-place beneath the tile would still be the best for it. He now remembered the injunction of the Innominato, to provide another bag into which he could place the two sequins he was daily to take, and also to find a hiding-place for it. At first he thought of putting it with the other under the tile, but afterwards he determined to keep it separate. He had a small ledge in his chimney, and there, after some deliberation, he decided to hide it. He next took the two sequins from the gold, resolving to purchase a bag for them during the day; and then concealing his treasure beneath the tile, with some difficulty he moved his bedstead over it, so as to hide it from observation. All being now arranged, he dressed himself and prepared to leave the house for the purpose of performing early mass. Before returning home he bought a little bag, in which he placed the two sequins, and afterwards hid it in his chimney. As he was entering the house, he met Don Bucefalo leaving it to go to his office.

"Dear padre," said the don, "it gives me much pleasure to see you, and looking so well too. I never saw you look better. I heard you moving about so early in your room this morning that I feared you might be indisposed."

"To tell you the truth, my son, I found my bed exceedingly uncomfortable last night, and I determined to put it nearer the window, and I did so. Doubtless it was that you heard, and I am sorry for having disturbed you; the more so as you do not seem to be very well this morning."

"I was never better in my life," said the don. "What makes you think I am ill?"

"Only that you are somewhat paler than usual. I trust that you did not over-fatigue yourself with your journey yesterday?"

"What journey?" inquired the don, in a tone of surprise.

The padre looked at him attentively for a few moments, and then said, — "Bravo, Don Bucefalo! bravo, prudent Don Bucefalo! I most sincerely compliment you."

"What in the name of fortune does your reverence mean?" said the don, in even greater surprise than before. "I took no journey yesterday."

"Bravo, don," said the priest, patting his friend on the ribs in a jocose way; "bravo, don! You have given me an excellent lesson, and I shall not forget it." And then bursting into a loud laugh, he left the don and proceeded to his own room.

"Is his reverence going mad?" thought the don, as he proceeded onwards to his office. "It certainly looks very like it."

Several days passed over without anything occurring particularly worthy of remark. The don went to confession, and received absolution. He candidly told all the sins he remembered to have committed, but his mind was not completely at rest. One thing especially worried him. On the night when he found the sequins, the chimes of midnight had pealed immediately after his foot had struck the bag. Now, although he had forgotten everything that had occurred from that night till the morning after he had swallowed the lozenge which the astrologer gave him, and although this circumstance had escaped his memory on his interview with the Innominato, it now started up before him, but without presenting to his mind what had followed it. He could not understand it, and it worried him incessantly. He was conscious that it led to something of importance, but of what he could form no idea. By degrees he began to think that he had committed some fault which was likely to bring him into trouble. The picture of the soul in purgatory on the little chapel also appeared to him to increase in its resemblance to himself, every time that he passed it. He fell off in health and temper, and became much thinner and excessively quarrelsome. The result was that he had no more invitations to the supper-parties, which had contributed to a considerable degree to keep up the rotundity of his figure.

In the meantime his friend, Padre Falcone, appeared to become stouter day by day, and was in better health. One thing in the priest's behaviour puzzled Don Bucefalo greatly. Although his reverence was on excellent terms with all the other tenants in the house, he now became in a marked manner curt and snappish to him. To such an extent did this go indeed, that one evening when the latter called, the priest told him that for the future he should prefer that their intimacy should cease. He said, that although he should always greatly respect his friend, their evening meetings had the effect of disturbing the current of his meditations, by which he lost much valuable time, which might be better employed. It should, however, be stated that, while the priest appeared to be on far more sociable terms with the other inmates of the house, he never by any chance invited one of them into his room. He even dispensed with the services of an old woman who used to make his bed and do other little offices for him; preferring, as he said, for the better practice of humility, to wait upon himself for the future.

Four months passed over, during which time the priest continued daily to abstract two sequins from the leather bag and to place them in his own; and great was his satisfaction at the weight the latter was now acquiring. Each day, with the greatest complacency, he would take it in his hand and calculate the time when he should have the right to consider all that it contained as his own. But with the increase of his wealth, divers anxieties, to which he had hitherto been a stranger, presented themselves.

Each time he took a couple of sequins from the leather bag, the temptation to take more came over him, and this increased as the number he accumulated became the greater. At the same time his obesity also increased daily. From being miserably attenuated he had become exceedingly corpulent, — indeed, most inconveniently so. He also became lethargic, and began to fear the possibility of apoplexy [a stroke]. Nor was his fear altogether without foundation; for one day when he had taken his two sequins, he was seized so powerfully with the temptation to take more, that he was unable to resist it, and he took a third. Immediately a dizziness came over him, so severe that he was in danger of falling, and it was more than an hour before he so far recovered from it as to gain full possession of his reasoning faculties. As soon as he understood his position he returned the third sequin to its place in the leather bag. But the dizziness did not entirely leave him the whole of that day. Great as was the temptation to disobey the Innominato, he never again gave way to it, but contented himself with abstracting only the limited number from the leather bag.

Don Bucefalo, on the contrary, became thinner and more ill-tempered day by day. The fear incessantly hung over him that a danger awaited him which he could not avert. The affair of the bag of sequins, notwithstanding the length of time which had elapsed since the robbery, still occupied the attention of the police; and, although the don had lost all memory on the subject, with the exception that on the night of the robbery he struck his foot against something which yielded a metallic sound, he could not divest himself of the idea, that he was in some way connected with it. True, a man had been arrested and accused of the robbery, which at first gave the don some solace; but this had been neutralised by the fact that the suspected person had been liberated as guiltless of the charge. To add to his annoyance, his friends continually reproached him in a playful manner with the decrease in his size, maintaining that it was occasioned by remorse for some crime which he had committed, and which weighed heavily on his conscience. Instead of treating these statements as he used to do, he now replied to them angrily; while his tormentors, finding the annoyance their remarks gave him, so increased their persecution that the poor little man was driven nearly beside himself.

Five months had passed since the priest and the don had visited the astrologer. Padre Falcone had become so enormously fat that he actually waddled as he walked. He began to be greatly alarmed at the increase in his size. “If I go on in this way,” he argued, “getting stouter every day, where will it end? I have as yet taken little more than half the number of sequins from the leather bag, and I have now so much flesh to carry that I can hardly move. If I go on increasing till the whole of the money is withdrawn, I must have a cart and a couple of bullocks to carry me to church. Possibly I may even become so stout that I shall be unable to descend the staircase, and be obliged to remain a prisoner in my own room.”

One day when the padre had just taken the two sequins from the bag, the thought occurred to him whether it would not be better to replace them, and try if by so doing he could get thinner. A fit of self-denial was on him at the moment, and he replaced the two sequins, and then consigned the bag to its place of concealment. The next day he fancied he felt lighter, and resolved to abstain from touching the leather bag for a week, contenting himself the while by caressing and counting the sequins he had already taken from it. He kept heroically to his resolution for four days, but during that time the temptation to look at the money-bag increased so greatly that he could oppose it no longer, and on the fifth day he again drew forth the bag and took out the two sequins. This done, before replacing the bag, he seated himself on his bed and began to think what steps he could take so as to continue taking the sequins from it, and at the same time not become any stouter than he was. He certainly felt lighter than he did a week before — still, there was no visible decrease in his bulk. In an instant the idea flashed across his mind that if he turned the whole contents of the leather bag out at once, and placed them in his own, he would cease to become stouter. He now felt some indignation at what he regarded the imposition the astrologer had practised upon him in putting money in his possession and rendering it utterly useless and unenjoyable by the conditions attached to it. The padre's anger at last reached such a pitch, that he quitted his bed and took the bag in his hand to pour out its contents on the table. So severe a fit of dizziness, however, came over him at this point, that the one he had formerly experienced was trifling compared to it. With considerable difficulty he staggered to his bed, and, as soon as he somewhat regained his senses, he began to be thankful that he had escaped committing the sin of suicide, which he might have done if he had emptied the bag after the warning he had formerly received. He once more approached the table, but this time it was to tie up the mouth of the bag. That being done, he replaced it under the tile, and shortly afterwards left the house.

Padre Falcone was slowly and somewhat painfully descending the staircase, when he net Don Bucefalo ascending it. The don glanced angrily at the priest, and continued to advance, although from the immense bulk of the latter it was impossible to pass him on the staircase.

"Pardon me, my son," said the priest, as soon as he saw the don, "but you would greatly oblige me if you would go back so as to allow me to pass. I would not trouble you, but it is no easy matter for a man so stout as I am, to turn round in a narrow staircase like this. It is shameful that the builders did not give more space when erecting these houses."

"My father," replied the don spitefully, "although I cannot admit your right to turn me back, yet to oblige you I will do so."

The don now descended to the landing-place. The padre, as he passed him, thanked him for his courtesy, telling him how much he envied his slim active figure, which enabled him without any difficulty to ascend a staircase, however steep or narrow. To the irritable imagination of the don, the remark of the priest seemed to conceal some sarcastic allusion.

"My father," he said, "do not be ungrateful. You wished formerly that you could have a portion of my fat, and now you have far more than ever I possessed, while I have become as thin as a reed."

"To hear you speak thus, my son," said the priest, attempting a joke, "one would think that you suspected me of robbing you of your fat."

"Well, I am not sure that you have not," said the don, snappishly. "There may be more of sorcery in the matter than is imagined. One thing is clear, that rapidly as I have become thinner, you have in like proportion become stouter."

"My son," said Padre Falcone, "we had better close the conversation. Sorcery is an ugly subject to jest upon." And he hurried downstairs as quickly as he could, his conscience probably at the moment somewhat troubling him.

The don now hurried upstairs, grumbling to himself as he went on. "The churl," he said, "I suspect he has robbed me after all, and by sorcery too, else how could he have become so fat and I so thin? Without sorcery, his miserable disposition would never have allowed him to accumulate an ounce of flesh. The niggard, who to save his lamp-oil proposed that we should talk in the dark!"

When the don entered his room, he seated himself on a stool, and, folding his arms, continued, in a sort of low growl, to vent his ill-humour on the heads of his employer and Padre Falcone. Against the former he was especially bitter, and for the following reason. Don Bucefalo, notwithstanding the change in his person, still continued to wear the same clothes; and, as may be conceived, he made a very ridiculous figure. So much so, indeed, that the little boys used to run after him in the streets and jeer him. Clients, too, when they came to the office, joked him on the absurd figure he made, and even mentioned the subject to his employer. The result was, that the money-changer on more than one occasion told him that he must provide himself with a new suit of clothes. This the don said he would do, but always failed to fulfill his promise. That morning he had been informed by the money-changer, that if he did not provide himself with a new and well-fitting suit of clothes before the end of a fortnight, he should no longer retain him in his office. As the don knew the determined character of the money-changer, he clearly saw that the matter could no longer be put off. He had therefore requested permission to leave the office at an early hour that afternoon, to purchase the cloth for a new suit of clothes. Permission had been given him, and, when he met the padre on the staircase, he was entering the house to take from his private purse money to buy the cloth for his new clothes.

Don Bucefalo sat still for some minutes, partly to rest himself after the fatigue of his walk, and partly because of his dislike to spend his money. He had accumulated about twenty sequins, and had concealed them in a sort of tiny cupboard with a sliding-door, which he had contrived to make in a massive piece of wood at the head of his bed. Here his treasure had remained for many months; he had not visited it in fact, although it had not been forgotten, since his interview with the Innominato. Suddenly remembering that he could gain nothing by delay, he rose from his seat, and, proceeding to his bedstead, commenced to take the pillows and clothes from it. Having reached the sliding door, it opened without difficulty, but then the don stood motionless, perfectly aghast with horror. Not a sequin of his money remained.

Gradually his senses somewhat returned to him, and he seated himself on his bed, to account if possible for his loss, and to contrive some means to recover the money. For more than an hour he thought in vain — no conclusion could he come to, when suddenly he heard the padre's heavy breathing as he ascended the staircase. The idea flashed across his mind that it was the padre who had stolen his money, and his suspicion was further confirmed when he reflected how stout the priest had lately become. "The thief," he said, "has been fattening himself with my money, while I have been starving myself till now I am as thin as a walking stick."

The padre had now arrived at the landing-place opposite Don Bucefalo's door.

"Enter, *padre infame*," he said, "enter. I want to have a moment's conversation with you." The priest, however — probably more alarmed at the expression of rage on the little man's face than irritated at the insulting manner in which he had been addressed — said nothing, but stood before the door.

"Do you hear me?" roared the don, in a voice of thunder. "Come in and explain your infamous behaviour if you can; or, at any rate, restore to me the money of which you have robbed me."

The padre's conscience at this became somewhat alarmed. Although he had stolen nothing from the don, a vague suspicion presented itself to him that the accusation related in some way to the bag of sequins.

"Calm yourself, my dear son," he said, in a soothing tone of voice, as he entered the room; "calm yourself. I do not know to what you allude."

"Restore my money to me," said the don. "You have robbed me, and you know it."

"Once more, my dear son, explain yourself," said the padre, slowly — so as to give himself time to collect his wits — "I will willingly assist you if I can."

"Hypocrite," cried the don; "do you mean to say that you have not taken from that spot in my bedstead the sum of twenty sequins I had placed there?"

The anxiety of the padre vanished in an instant. He saw the don was accusing him wrongfully, and that he did not allude to the bag of five hundred sequins; so he immediately assumed an air of injured innocence, and said, with great indignation, —

"Are you mad, you wretch, to accuse a son of the Church — a man whose life has been one course of unblemished honesty — of having robbed you? Are you aware that you have committed a sin little less than that of blasphemy? It is my duty to bring your infamous behaviour under the notice of the Church. To-morrow I shall call on the archbishop for that purpose. Terrible indeed will be your punishment, should he look on the matter as I believe he will do."

The don looked somewhat frightened at this, but the loss of his money had struck deep in his heart. "But who can have taken it if you have not?" he asked.

"Miserable man," said the padre, "will you still continue in your sin? Let me go," he continued — his courage rising in proportion as the don's fell. "To remain here longer would be unworthy of my holy calling. To-morrow you will, doubtless, hear from the archbishop's chancery, and then tremble at the punishment which awaits you, and which you so justly deserve."

The padre now left the room, followed by the don, who in a whining tone of voice tried to offer some excuse for the mistake it appeared he had made. "I am extremely sorry," he said, "to offend your reverence, but at the same time I am not altogether without some excuse for my conduct. I am a poor man, and somebody having robbed my of my savings, it is not to be wondered at if at first I have somewhat lost my head. I am extremely sorry for what I have done, and I hope you will forgive me."

His reverence would, however, promise nothing at first; but he did not wish the don to enter his room, and finding that he was following him upstairs, he at last told the don to leave him, and that, although he would make no promise, he would think the affair over, and not determine what steps to take till next morning. The don, finding he could obtain no better terms, descended to his own room, and during the whole of the evening brooded over his loss; fully believing that the padre had stolen his money, though he dared not accuse him of it — a fact which rendered his loss doubly painful.

Next morning, the padre, on descending the stairs to officiate at early mass, tapped at Don Bucefalo's door. "I am come to inform you," he said, with great dignity and severity of manner, "that out of pity for you, wretched man that you are, I shall not to-day bring your behaviour under the notice of the archbishop. Still I have a duty to perform, and I will go through it. In a few days a friend of mine — a priest now away on a journey — who is deeply learned in all legal questions concerning the Church, will return to Milan. I shall first put the matter before him, to see whether he considers your accusation to be blasphemous or not. If he does not, I will forgive you the insult, trusting you will repent of the injustice you have done me.

If, however, he should consider that your accusation is blasphemous, much as it will pain me, I must bring it under the notice of the archbishop. In the meantime, I must request that when we meet we look upon each other as utter strangers, as of course it would be out of the question for me to be even on speaking terms with a man who could so unjustly insult a person of my holy calling."

Without awaiting the don's answer — whose expression of countenance told too well the state of terror he was in — the padre, with great dignity, turned slowly round and left the room, totally unconscious of the maledictions the don was mentally heaping on his head as he descended the staircase.

When the don arrived at his office, he told his employer, with an air of the utmost self-satisfaction, that he had the day before purchased a magnificent piece of cloth (enormous lie!) for his new suit of clothes, and that he flattered himself when they were completed there would not be a smarter clerk in the Piazza. The money-changer complimented the don on having done what he had requested, and the conversation ended. The fortnight allowed for the completion of the don's new suit of clothes expired, but still no change in his costume had taken place.

"Have you forgotten," said his employer to him, sternly, "that the fortnight I gave you to furnish yourself with a new suit of clothes has expired, and that your still wear the same suit? Have you forgotten what I told you about quitting my employment?"

"I have not, sir," said the don, "but it has been no fault of mine. The tailor promised me that he would without fail send home my new clothes last night, but who can depend upon a man in his way of business? I assure you his conduct has annoyed me very much."

"Well, Don Bucefalo," said the money-changer, "I do not wish to be hard upon you; I will extend the time to this day [next] week; but remember, after that date I will take no excuse from you whatever."

The don was now fairly at his wits' end. He had not yet ordered the clothes, being unable to raise the money to pay for the cloth, and his appearance was such that no one would give him credit. He determined, however, as soon as office hours were over, to make another attempt, and see whether he could not find another draper more liberal than those he had hitherto applied to. His search was unsuccessful; no one would lend him money, or give him credit for the clothes, and he passed the whole week in a state of great despondency. When he presented himself at the office on the last day allowed him, his employer sternly asked him why he had not come in his new clothes. The don attempted to make an excuse, but he did it so clumsily, that the money-change easily saw through it. Placing on a table the money due to the don for his week's salary, he told him to leave the office, and never set foot in it again. He had made inquiries, he said, and found all the don had told him about ordering new clothes was untrue, and therefore he could not retain so great a liar in his service.

The don, utterly confounded, made no reply, but taking up the money, mournfully crept homewards. On entering the house he met the padre, who had not spoken to him since the morning after the loss of his money.

"I have just met my friend," said the padre. "He only returned to Milan this morning, and I regret to inform you that he considers it my duty to bring your behaviour under the notice of the archbishop. As, however, there yet remains one little point on which he is undecided, he will, at my request, give the matter further consideration, and in a week or ten days will let me know his conclusion. You see I wish, if possible, to act humanely by you, and I hope you will be grateful to me for it." So saying, he left the house, and the don ascended the staircase, too broken in spirit even to imagine any anathemas against the priest. During the next week Don Bucefalo wandered about Milan, making the little money he had received for his salary go as far as possible, and seeking for other employment, but unsuccessfully.

One afternoon, when he had returned home fatigued with his day's exertions, he seated himself on a stool, and was on the point of bursting into tears, when he suddenly leaped from his seat, and stared around with amazement. The six months agreed on with the Innominato had expired, and all that had taken place during the ten days of temporary forgetfulness now came to his remembrance. He now remembered that when he took the bag of sequins from his chimney to place it under the tile in the padre's apartment, he had for greater safety removed the twenty sequins from the bedstead into the hiding place in his chimney, and then, in common with everything which occurred during that week, had forgotten all about it till the moment when the six months expired. He now went to the chimney, and there found his money, which had remained untouched since he had placed it there. His next thought was how he could gain access to the padre's apartment, to see that the leather bag containing the five hundred sequins was still secure. He now determined to visit the padre in his room as soon as he should return home, candidly inform him that he had found his money, and earnestly implore him to forgive the insults he had offered him. By so doing, he should be able to see whether the tile was still in its place. He waited patiently till he heard the padre return to his room, and then, after delaying a few minutes to arrange as perfectly as he could the speech he intended to make, he mounted the staircase, and gently knocked at the padre's door. Receiving no answer, he opened it, and on looking in, saw the padre on his knees, in the act form rising under the bed (which had been placed over the tile), and holding the leather bag of sequins in his hand. Cautious as the padre generally was, and firm as he had made the fastenings of his door since he had been in possession of the money, he had on that afternoon forgotten to close it securely, and his head being at the time under the bed, he had not heard the don's knock. No sooner did the don perceive that the padre had the bag of sequins in his hand, the penitent speech he had composed vanished from his mind, and almost before the padre was fairly on his legs again, he seized him by the throat, exclaiming, —

"Padre diavolo, you are a thief, then, after all, and have stolen my money."

"I have not stolen your money," said the padre, getting frightened in his turn, but clutching the bag the tighter; "the money I have here is my own."

"How can you tell so infamous a lie?" said the don. "I myself saw you take the money from under that tile."

"And why should I not place my money under that tile if I please?" said the priest. "You didn't hide it there I suppose?"

The don for a moment winced at the remark, but collecting himself said, "No matter whether I did or not, that money is mine, and I will have it;" so saying, he caught hold of the bag, and a violent struggle ensued between them. For some time, it appeared doubtful on which side the victory would lie. The superior agility of the don was counterbalanced by the ponderosity of the priest. At last the priest, by a strong jerk, succeeded in releasing himself from the don, but in so doing a portion of the contents of the bag fell upon the floor. As the padre stooped to recover some of the dropped gold, the don made a violent snatch at the bag, but, in so doing, not only was the remainder of the gold spilt, but the bag itself turned inside out. In a moment, the don became quiet.

"Pardon, mio carissimo," he said to the priest; "a thousand pardons for my conduct. Sorrow, I believe, has turned my brain, and I do not know what I am about. The money, dear father, is yours. Take it and keep it, and pray pardon me for my conduct."

The padre looked at the don with astonishment for a moment, and noticing his eye turned upon the bag as it lay on the floor, his own eye mechanically turned to it also. In a moment, the priest became as quiet as the don.

"My dear son," he said, "make no apology; I alone was in error. Pray forgive me, and take the money and bag out of my room as quickly as possible."

"Indeed, reverend father, I cannot obey you. The money is yours, and I should only be robbing you of it."

"My son, it is yours, and I have no claim to it whatever."

Here they both stopped and gazed at the bag with a kind of fascination. And not without cause. Stamped on the inside of the bag was the seal of the Lion of St Mark of Venice. The don immediately perceived that it was the one after which the police had made such strict search. [Didn't the don know this already?] The padre was equally well aware of the fact, as he had been requested, in common with all the other priests, to advise any penitent who in the confessional might admit having it in his possession, to restore it immediately to the proper authorities. After considerable discussion between the two, Padre Falcone said, "My son, let us clearly understand each other. That bag belongs to the Venetian ambassador, and it ought to be restored to him."

"I perfectly agree with you, reverend father," said the don. "Let us replace the whole of the money, but first let us count it, to see that it is correct."

The padre, with a sigh, drew forth the sequins from the bag, and the don picked up the remainder, and placed them in a heap on the table. After they had counted it and found it correct, they tied up the mouth of the bag, and the don said to the priest, "Let us not lose a moment's time. I will myself take it to the police authorities at once."

So saying, he made a clutch at the bag, but he priest caught his hand.

"No, my son," he said, "the danger shall be mine. I will take it to the podesta, and say I found it on the street yesterday evening."

"My father," said the don, "it is impossible. If you make such a statement as that, you would commit a mortal sin."

"It would be equally heinous on your part," said the priest.

"True, my father," said the don, "but you, as a priest, could give me absolution for my sin; I, as a layman, could not absolve you for yours."

The padre and the don were both for a moment silent, the same idea filling both their minds. They were each considering whether they could not divide the money between them, and say nothing more on the subject. In a moment each came to the same conclusion, — that the other was a scoundrel and could not be trusted with a secret. At last it was resolved that they should go together to the podesta. When they were ushered into the office, the don told him, that as he and his friend were walking home the evening before, he own foot had struck against the bag, and on examining it that morning, they had found on the inside the stamp of the arms of Venice, and concluding that it might be the one for which so much search had been made, they had brought it to his Excellency to place it in his custody. The podesta complimented them on their integrity, and immediately forwarded the bag to the palace of the Venetian ambassador.

Beyond the fact, that the don was unable to obtain any other employment in Milan, and that the priest was dismissed by his bishop for negligence, nothing more was ever known of Don Bucefalo and The Curate.

THE END

THE PHYSICIAN'S DAUGHTER - PART I

Of the many eminent professors of whom the University of Pavia could boast in the early part of the fourteenth century, no one stood higher in the public estimation than Doctor Carlo Gaddi. Although a member of an aristocratic family much respected in Lombardy, Gaddi might have been termed a self-made man. He had been intended for the priesthood, but, when a divinity student in Pavia, he fell in love with a beautiful girl, somewhat lower in rank than himself. This girl he married, in spite of strong opposition from his relatives. Disowned by his family and utterly destitute of pecuniary resources, his fate promised to be a very hard one. Obliged by his marriage to abandon all idea of entering the Church, he had now to look around him for some honourable means of earning a subsistence. Notwithstanding his poverty he cherished an unworthy aversion to commerce; and only two professions remained open to him — the military and the medical. His wife would not hear of his entering the army, and he was therefore compelled to adopt medicine. He now sold whatever articles of luxury he possessed, thereby realizing sufficient money to enable his wife and himself to live with strict economy for a few months; and he trusted that before it was expended, Providence would point out to him some road to fortune, — determining that neither industry nor integrity should be wanting on his part to merit it.

Gaddi now hired a single room for himself and his wife to lodge in, and having furnished it very economically, he entered himself at the schools and commenced the study of medicine. For some weeks his life was far from agreeable. Had it not been for the love he began to entertain for the profession he had chosen, it is more than likely he would have sought some other occupation in order to escape from the annoyances which beset him. The young nobles at the University shunned his acquaintance because of the *mésalliance* he had made; the medical students looked upon him with suspicion — almost with aversion — mistaking his reserved manner for pride; whilst the clergy shunned him as an outcast, for having quitted their profession after he had once entertained the wish to enter it. Although Gaddi, who was very sensitive, felt keenly the treatment he received, he was not without consolation. After the studies and duties of the day were over, he would return home to his dear Erminia, and in her society he soon forgot the rebuffs and vexations to which he had been subjected. The wealthiest noble in the land might have envied the peace and happiness the young couple enjoyed in the humble room which served them for a home.

Time passed on, and the annoyances Gaddi suffered from, when he first entered as a medical student, gradually subsided. His fellow students now discovered that his habitual reserve arose from constitutional timidity, and was not in any way the effect of pride. They also greatly admired his perseverance. The professors also, being pleased with his assiduity, showed him great kindness, assuring him that if he continued his labours as indefatigably as he had done, there was no doubt he would rise to great eminence in his profession. But another change had taken place even more gratifying to him than the applause of the professors and the good fellowship of his brother students. The clergy again took him into their friendship. The immediate cause of this change was the great kindness and attention Carlo Gaddi showed to a poor man, who was suffering from a most painful complaint, and who resided about halfway between the city gate and the celebrated Certosa monastery. Gaddi daily visited him and dressed his wounds. The poor man was a tenant on the convent estates; and, in consequence, one of the brethren visited him twice or thrice a week to take him food and medical comforts, as well as to afford him spiritual consolation. The brother on whom this duty devolved was a man of great intelligence and humanity. He was much pleased with the attention Gaddi showed to the sick man, and the skill and neatness he displayed in dressing the wounds. The friar spoke so frequently, and with so much warmth, of the student's behaviour that at last the superior determined on visiting the invalid, for the double purpose of doing an act of kindness to an old tenant, and of meeting and complimenting the student on his skill and humanity. Fortunately, Gaddi had arrived at the cottage only a few minutes before the reverend father; and the latter had thus the opportunity of watching him dress the sick man's wounds. When Gaddi had finished, the superior said to him, not unkindly,

"Are you not the young man who deserted our Church and entered on the study of medicine?"

"I must plead guilty to that, reverend father," said Gaddi, "and must add, that I have great pleasure in my new avocations."

"If theology has been a loser by the change," said the superior, "humanity appears to have been the gainer; and I am not sure but you have done wisely. The care and solace of the sick is so nearly connected with religion, that it would be at once difficult and disadvantageous to separate them. If you have any spare time on your hands, there is a poor woman in whose welfare I am much interested, and whom I should like very much to place under your care. I will remunerate you for your services."

"But I am only a student, reverend father," said Gaddi, "and I dare not incur so great a responsibility as that."

"You will act under the orders of the leech of our convent, who is now somewhat infirm; and he will advise you as to all you do, so that you may the more readily accept my offer."

"Most gratefully I accept it then, reverend father," said Gaddi, "provided I am allowed time to follow my studies."

"That is perfectly reasonable; besides, I understand you are married. A few hours a day will be amply sufficient for the duty I want you to undertake."

Apart from his wish to please the superior of the convent, Gaddi soon began to feel a deep interest in the poor woman's case, and visited her daily. She was suffering from a chronic disease, which required constant attention, added to which her constitution was dilapidated in the extreme. Although the remuneration Gaddi received was far from liberal, it was a great assistance to him; and his wife being an excellent manager, they were now enabled to live in comparative ease and comfort.

But more good fortune was in store for Gaddi. Among the students attending the classes, there was one of a somewhat eccentric character. He was a tall, handsome man, some ten year's Gaddi's senior. He was reserved and taciturn in the extreme, and was reputed to be both wealthy and proud. It is not improbable, however, that his reputation for the latter arose rather from his avoiding the society of the students, who were generally much younger than himself, than from any other cause. That he was wealthy was certain, as he always had abundance of money, and at the same time was most generous with it. Although the generally repulsed any advances towards intimacy, he had on several occasions assisted such of his fellow-students as were really studious and in need. By his liberality he had succeeded in doing away with any ill-feeling the students might originally have entertained towards him, and they treated him with far greater respect than they were in the habit of showing to any save their own professors. Beyond the fact that he was evidently an Italian by birth, no one knew from whence he came, or to what family he belonged. His name, as entered upon the university books, was Villettri; but he was invariably spoken of as "the baron".

The only student with whom the baron attempted to form any intimacy was Gaddi. For some time, however, he [baron] only noticed him [Gaddi] when the classes were over. On these occasions their conversation was generally of the most ordinary description — on points connected with the lecture, or the cases which had been brought under their notice in the hospital. Gaddi had great pleasure in conversing with him, as he found that he was not only a man of great natural intelligence, but much his superior in the science of medicine. A circumstance, however, occurred which paved the way to a certain degree of intimacy between the baron and Gaddi, and which ultimately led to the advantage of the latter.

One fine morning, when Gaddi was on the point of leaving Pavia to attend to the patients belonging to the convent (for the superior, pleased with his assiduity, had now placed several under his care), the baron overtook him, and entering into conversation, asked him on what mission he was bent. Gaddi told him that he was about to visit some poor patients, and that if he (the baron) had no other occupation, he would do him a great favour if he would accompany him, and give him the benefit of his opinion. The baron willingly accepted the offer, and the friends made the round of the patients together. Gaddi was charmed with his companion, who not only entered with much interest into the different cases which came under his notice, but spoke of them with great judgment. Another feature in the baron's behaviour raised him still higher in Gaddi's estimation — he never left the house of a patient without making him a liberal present of money.

Their visits over, they returned to Pavia, conversing together in a very pleasant manner. One thing, however, particularly struck Gaddi in his companion. He conversed readily enough on Gaddi's private affairs, — not only listening attentively and with evident interest to the details given him, — but he never spoke of himself. On more than one occasion, indeed, when Gaddi put some question to him about his history or way of life, the baron, with great tact, gave a vague answer, and immediately changed the subject. At last they arrived at Pavia, and when they separated, their leave-taking was of the most friendly description.

The baron now frequently accompanied Gaddi in his visits to the convent patients, and on each occasion the good feeling between them seemed to increase. The baron, however, continued to maintain the same mysterious silence on all subjects connected with his private affairs; and at last Gaddi forbore to ask him any questions on the subject. But if Gaddi was satisfied with remaining in ignorance, not so his wife. Though a most amiable woman, she was a true daughter of Eve, and frequently pressed her husband to obtain some information respecting the baron. But this had little effect — Gaddi having resolved to let his friend maintain his incognito, and no arguments of the part of Erminia could induce him to alter his determination.

One day when Gaddi was in the university library, copying some manuscripts, the baron entered, and seeing his friend, immediately advanced to speak to him. Gaddi, having placed his pen on the table, turned partially round on his seat; and a pretty long conversation took place between them. Presently, and almost mechanically, while speaking on some other subject, the baron took up the parchment on which Gaddi had been writing, and having looked at it for a moment, he said —

"You write a beautiful hand, Gaddi; what are you copying?"

"I am translating some of the aphorisms of Hippocrates. I am glad you like my handwriting; to speak frankly, it is not the first time I have been complimented on it."

"Are you a good Greek scholar?" inquired the baron.

"On that point," said Gaddi, laughing, "I must refer you to the Professor of Greek. He will be a better authority on the matter than I could be."

"You would not refer me to the professor," said the baron, laughing, "were you not tolerably certain of his answer. With your knowledge of Greek, and your skill in writing, you might be of great service to me if you liked."

"You have only to command me," said Gaddi. "Anything I can do to serve you, I will do willingly."

"If you really mean it," said the baron, "call on me this evening, and we will talk over the matter together."

Although the baron and Gaddi had been on terms of considerable intimacy for some months past, neither had yet visited the other's lodgings. Gaddi had given the baron no invitation, Erminia having a sort of womanly objection to the rich stranger becoming acquainted with the poverty and scanty appointments of her home; while on the baron's part he appeared to have a dislike to mix in society, owing to his natural reserve of character. Although somewhat surprised at the invitation, Gaddi accepted it. About an hour after nightfall he called at the baron's lodgings. The reception he received was most courteous and cordial. Few who could have witnessed it would have believed that Gaddi's host was the proud and reserved man he appeared to be in his ordinary bearing towards his brother students. After a little friendly conversation on the general topics of the day, the baron rose, and, opening a chest, drew from it a number of Greek manuscripts on parchment and papyrus, most of them short, although a few were lengthy.

"I have here," said the baron, "a number of manuscripts which I collected during a tour I made in the East some years ago. They are on medical or general scientific subjects. I wish to have them arranged according to their several heads. Some of them, as you may perceive, are in a very dilapidated condition. I should like parchment copies made from them. I know of no one better qualified than you are for the task, but only on one condition will I give it to you. That condition is that you allow me to remunerate you for your services."

The baron here named a sum, which seemed to Gaddi so liberal, that for some time he declined to accept it. The baron, however, insisted so strongly that at last, with seeming reluctance, though with real joy in his heart, he gave way. The commission Gaddi had received was in every respect a godsend to him. What the baron had offered would be sufficient to maintain himself and his wife for the whole year. Added to this, the task was exactly to his taste. Gaddi was an excellent Greek scholar, and the subjects were full of interest to him. He now purchased parchment necessary to for the translations, and commenced his work with great diligence and care. The baron frequently visited him at his lodgings to see how the work was progressing. Erminia felt some annoyance at first, but after a few visits this wore off, and she was quite as pleased to see the baron as Gaddi himself. On more than one occasion she attempted to draw him into conversation about his own affairs, but without success. He either immediately changed the subject, or good humouredly answered her in such a manner, as soon taught her he was determined to keep his own secret. So she gave over further attempts.

For more than a year, things went on in a very satisfactory manner with Gaddi. His kindness to the poor sick tenants on the convent estates gained him the good-will of the superior and the brethren; his attention to his studies pleased the professors of the university; while the large sum the baron paid him for arranging and copying the manuscripts, set his mind at ease for the time being. His amiable manners appeared to win him general friendship and esteem.

One morning when the baron called, Gaddi noticed an expression of deep sorrow on his handsome face, but knowing his dislike to be questioned, he forbore making any remark on the subject. The baron seated himself on a chair, and remained silent for some time, merely answering in monosyllables any remarks made by Gaddi and his wife, when, suddenly rising from his chair, he said, with strong emotion,

"Gaddi, my friend, I am sorry to inform you that I am about to leave Pavia, and it is possible we may never meet again. I cannot tell you my reason for going, — that, and every other circumstance connected with my history, must remain unknown to you. I have only one regret on leaving Pavia, and that is the loss of your society and that of your amiable wife. At the same time, be assured that you will both be always dear to me. I shall never forget the happy hours we have passed together. Go on, Gaddi, in the manner you have done, and success will attend you through life. If you do not hear from me again, it is more than probable your fame will reach me, and to hear of your success will always be a source of the utmost pleasure to me."

"But, surely, you will tell us where we may hear of you," said Erminia, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke. "It will be unkind indeed if you do not."

"I cannot do that," said the baron. "I beg of you not to ask me, for it goes to my heart to refuse you. We *may* meet again, but it is hardly probable, and that must suffice. It will be useless for you to make any inquiries respecting me. The name by which I am known here is not my real one, and I shall never bear it again. One word more before I leave you. Without boasting, I may say, it is no merit of mine that I am rich — no discredit to you that you are poor. Although you will rise in the world, Gaddi, you will likely experience both difficulty and delay. Take that," he continued, placing a well-filled purse on the table, "as a proof of the esteem I have for you. Accept it as a gift, if you please. If, however, you are too proud to do so, you can repay me by giving the money to the poor at your own convenience. And now, farewell, for I cannot trust myself to say more," — and then, turning abruptly from them, the baron left the house.

It was long after the baron's departure ere Gaddi and his wife became used to his absence. Time, however, had its usual effect. Their sorrow gradually abated, although their esteem for their friend and benefactor never diminished. Gaddi continued his studies with great assiduity, and at last passed as a Doctor of the University of Pavia. His skill was great, but, owing to his modesty and retiring manners, he rose more slowly than his merits deserved. His practice was principally among the poor, though he had a few patients among the higher classes. His income, however, was sufficient to allow him and his wife to live in ease and comfort. Then again, he had more liking for the theoretical part of his profession than the practical, and his great ambition was to become one of the professors of the University. Year after year passed, and emoluments increased as he became better and better known. By degrees he was able to distribute among the poor the whole amount which had been lent him by his friend, to which he added a considerable sum of his own as interest. There was only one subject which gave him and his wife any sorrow — they had no children. But their disappointment in this respect was destined to be turned into joy. After they had been married about eight years, Erminia became the mother of a daughter, who was named Maria. There was no happier family in Pavia than was Gaddi's now. The baby throve and was the idol of both its parents. And when the fatigues of the day were over, Gaddi's great delight was to watch beside the cradle, and converse with his wife on their future prospects.

Years passed on, and Gaddi's career was one of unbroken prosperity. Not only did he realise his ambition of becoming one of the professors of the University, but his fame as a practitioner also spread through most of the towns of Lombardy, he being consulted by many of the highest families. Amongst these was that of the Duke of Milan, to whom he was private physician. Many were the journeys he took to that city to visit his illustrious patient. He also began to acquire wealth, though hardly to such an extent as his high reputation might have led one to imagine, for Gaddi was extremely liberal and charitable, bestowing no small portion of his income on the poor. He delighted also to render pecuniary and other assistance to those of the humbler class of students, whose attention to their studies merited his patronage.

Having no other child, the care and affection of both parents were lavished on their daughter, now fast approaching womanhood. And she was well worthy of the love they bestowed upon her, for she was at once beautiful and amiable. Her great natural intelligence was cultivated to the utmost; for her father had taken great care in her education. Apart from the beauty of her features, she had much sweetness and candour in her expression, which endeared her to all who saw her. She was somewhat above the middle height, and beautifully formed. As was to be expected, she had many admirers, but she showed a preference for none; though possibly this was to a certain extent due to her parents, who watched with the greatest jealousy over the acquaintances they allowed her to make. This was not from any desire that their daughter should not form a suitable matrimonial alliance, but they had resolved that they would not allow her to fix her affections on any one, until they had found a suitor whose character was such as to insure her an indulgent and affectionate husband.

It was not until the young Maria was entering on her eighteenth year that an acceptable suitor presented himself. Although Gaddi and his wife did not attempt to bias their daughter in her choice, they saw with evident satisfaction the marked preference she seemed to give this one. He was of a highly respectable and wealthy family, although not of noble birth. He had first formed the acquaintance of Maria when she was quite a child, he being then a student of law at the University. He had received the degree of Doctor of Laws about two years before he made an offer for Maria's hand. He was learned in his profession, and greatly esteemed by his teachers, not only for his studious habits, but also for his quiet manners and gentlemanly conduct. He was a handsome young fellow, dressed well, and was accomplished — especially in music.

Although he was now received as an accepted suitor, still there were several impediments in the way of their immediate union. In the first place, Gaddi did not wish the marriage to take place till the young couple should have had the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with each other; and, in the second, Benvenuto Pistrucci had received a commission from the Duke to attend as secretary on an embassy he was about to send, on some special mission, to the court of the King of France. Benvenuto, as soon as he found himself accepted as Maria's suitor, was desirous of relinquishing the appointment; but Gaddi justly considered, that if his future son-in-law fulfilled this engagement with credit to himself, it might prove the stepping-stone to preferment. Gaddi accordingly insisted on Benvenuto fulfilling his engagement before the marriage should take place. But there was a third reason, infinitely more serious than either of these. For some time the health of Maria's mother had been failing, and symptoms of rapid consumption now appeared.

Gaddi at first attempted to close his eyes to this sad fact, hoping against hope that his wife's health would improve; but not a week passed which did not more clearly prove to him that his beloved wife was in a most precarious position, her recovery being beyond the bounds of human skill. Gaddi, however, kept the truth both from his wife and daughter, leaving them to believe that the malady would pass away as soon as the invalid could obtain a little strength.

The time now arrived for Benvenuto's departure with the embassy, and long and sorrowful was the leave-taking with his betrothed and her family. The poor fellow had, however, one consolation, which somewhat assuaged the pangs of parting. Gaddi had promised him that immediately on his return from Paris the wedding should take place.

The sorrow of Maria at the temporary loss of her lover continued unabated for some weeks. A circumstance occurred, however, which diverted her grief into another channel. One afternoon, her mother was engaged in conversation, seated with her and Gaddi, when suddenly she fell on the floor in a fainting fit. Her husband, without delay, took her up in his arms, and bore her to a chamber where he placed her on a bed, while Maria hastily procured some restoratives. Animation was gradually restored, and shortly afterwards she fell into a sound sleep. Gaddi now left his wife in [the] charge of her daughter and went into his study, telling Maria to call him as soon as her mother should awake. It was some hours before her sleep was over, and Maria then went to call her father as he had bidden her. When she reached the door, which was closed, she heard a sound as if some one within were weeping. On entering, she saw her father on his knees as if in prayer, but weeping so bitterly that he was totally unconscious of his daughter's presence. Maria went up to him, and placing her arm round his neck without speaking, kissed him affectionately on his brow. Gaddi, thus recalled from his sorrow, rose up, and embracing his daughter tenderly, said to her,

"My dear child, I can no longer hide the truth from you. Your poor mother, although ignorant of the fact herself, is in a most dangerous condition, and I fear there is very little chance of her recovery. I have but one hope left, and if that fails me, it will be my duty to inform her of the state she is in. I have this morning received a message from the Duke to attend him at Como, where he is at present residing, as he is indisposed. I should have sent an excuse had I not been informed that in the mountains near Lecco there resides a learned physician, whose knowledge surpasses that of any in the Universities of Pavia and Padua. I will leave home this evening to join the Duke; and tomorrow, after I have had an interview with his Highness, I will visit this learned man, and obtain his opinion respecting your mother's health. I shall most probably return in three days; but take every care of your dear mother, as I leave her in your charge; and let your prayers follow me, that I may bring back good news."

About an hour after this conversation with his daughter, Gaddi started on his journey to Como, and the next morning visited the Duke, whom he found much better than he had anticipated. In the afternoon he left Como for the castle of the Innominato, and arrived at the Hospice before nightfall. His request for an interview was taken to the Innominato, who sent a reply that he should be most happy to receive the visit of the Doctor Gaddi.

The shades of evening were fast falling on the mountains when Gaddi was ushered into the presence of the astrologer. The room was relieved from its partial darkness by a lamp which hung in the centre, and whose light fell on the Innominato as he rose from his seat to receive his visitor. For some moments Gaddi gazed on him with speechless astonishment, for, although much changed from what he was when he had last seen him, he immediately recognised him as the so-called Baron Villettri.

"I am pleased to find you have not forgotten me," said the Innominato kindly, taking his friend's hand and conducting him to a seat. "It is pleasant to find that I have still a place in your memory, notwithstanding the many years which have passed over our heads since we parted."

"I should have been ungrateful indeed," said Gaddi, "had I forgotten you; for to your kindness I indirectly owe all my success in life. But by what lucky accident do I find you here?"

"The same mystery which formerly hung over me must still be maintained, my friend," said the Innominato smiling. "Ask me no questions regarding my actions, for I cannot answer them, and it would grieve me to deny you anything. But let me beg you to tell me the object of your visit, though I very much fear it is not unknown to me."

"It is a very sad one," said Gaddi. "My poor wife is seriously ill, and I greatly fear her malady will terminate fatally. Her case is far beyond the reach of my science. I have several times heard of your skill in medicine, without the slightest suspicion that you were the friend to whom I owe so much. Having to attend his Highness the Duke at Como, I determined on paying you a visit to consult you on what remedies I could use to save my poor wife."

Here Gaddi mentioned the symptoms, and the means he had already used, to all of which the Innominato listened with the greatest attention and interest. When Gaddi had finished, the Innominato said, with much sympathy in his tone and manner, —

"I am afraid, my friend, that your wife's case is a hopeless one. At least, it is in the power of Heaven alone to save her; science can do nothing more than you have done."

Gaddi's eyes filled with tears, and for some moments he remained silent. Then, raising his head and looking round the room, his glance rested on several astronomical instruments ranged on shelves on the walls. He had heard that the Innominato was reputed to be skilled in necromancy, and he wished to ask him whether, if his medical science were of no avail, he had not some occult power which he could have recourse to — but he had not the courage to ask the question. The astrologer relieved him from his embarrassment.

"I see," he said, "that my reputation as a magician has reached you, and that you wish to ask me whether I have not some other means than medicine to save your wife. Unfortunately, I have not, else most willingly would I use them. Over those whom Heaven resolves to take, my art has no power. I can assist in punishing the wicked, and I can occasionally save the oppressed from the oppressor, but over the lives of the good I am powerless. The stars will not even tell me the moment of their death, although from them I can learn many things. Submit without murmuring, my dear friend, to the decree of Heaven. Your wife's fate is in God's hands, and if she is taken from you, it will but be to exchange the uncertainties of this world for the certainty of eternal bliss. Now let us change the subject. You daughter is, I know, engaged to be married to an honourable man; let us hope that she may afford you some consolation for the heavy sorrow which now oppresses you."

Gaddi was so surprised at finding that the Innominato was aware of Maria's betrothal, that for a moment or two he did not speak.

"You see, Gaddi," continued the astrologer, "that I have watched over you without your being aware of it. I assure you, that your success in life has given me much pleasure. I also thank you for applying the money I lent you so judiciously. Never did gold yield a better interest than that I left in your hands. You have returned it to me through the hands of the poor a hundredfold."

The two friends continued in conversation till the evening was far advanced. A bed having been prepared for Gaddi, he remained all night at the castle. Early next morning he left his host, who accompanied him to the Hospice. On the way, the Innominato gave him advice as to the best remedies he could use to ease his wife, if they might nor cure her. He also requested Gaddi not to hesitate to apply to him in any difficulty in which he might be placed. He further desired Gaddi to give his best wishes to Maria, and to inform her that he hoped to make her acquaintance, and that of her future husband, and that they should always look upon him as a friend. The cordiality of the Innominato made a great impression on the heart of Gaddi, oppressed as it was with sorrow, and he took leave of his friend with many expressions of esteem and gratitude.

For some time after Gaddi had left the Innominato, he felt strangely depressed, the tears rolling rapidly down his cheeks as he rode along. As he neared his home, however, his sorrowful feeling gave place to one of anxiety, which increased the nearer he came to Pavia. It became so great indeed when he arrived at his own door, that he involuntarily pressed his hand on his heart to control its violent throbbing. He had scarcely entered the house when Maria met him, and welcomed him home with the joyful intelligence that her mother was evidently better than when he had left, and that she had no more fainting fits. Gaddi was greatly consoled at this intelligence, and proceeded without delay to his wife's room, where he found her seated in her chair occupied with some embroidery, which she threw aside the moment she perceived her husband. She attempted to rise to meet him, but Gaddi, placing his hand on her shoulder, gently prevented her.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, after kissing her affectionately; "sit still, and let me see your face. Yes, Maria said truly; you are better than when I left you."

Gaddi then seated himself beside his wife, and with Maria standing by her chair, they conversed together on what had occurred during Gaddi's absence, and the incidents of his journey. Gaddi told her that his journey would have been a most agreeable one had it not been for the anxiety he was in respecting her.

"I fear I frightened you with my fainting fit," she said, smiling. "I am sorry also that it contributed to mar the pleasure you would otherwise have had in your travels. You must forgive me," she continued, placing her hand in his. "I hope I shall never do such a thing again."

Gaddi was on the point of making a reply, but before the words had left his lips, his mind was occupied on another and most painful subject. He felt that the thin hand which he held in his was hot and feverish although pale, and that the beating of the arteries could be distinguished even in the fingers. He cast his eyes wistfully on his wife's face, and found that the flush of health which was upon it when he entered the room, was fast vanishing. It had been the pleasurable excitement of the moment alone that had called up the deceptive appearance of strength. The disease itself was as strong as ever. Fearing that his wife might guess from his expression the bitter disappointment he felt, he endeavoured to conceal his sorrow by conjuring up a smile; but so faint and sickly was it that it almost made more apparent the reality he attempted to conceal, and feigning some excuse he rose from his seat and left the room. Gaddi now gave up all hopes of his wife's recovery. He felt that, in a spiritual point of view, it would be unjust to conceal from her any longer the danger she was in. Actuated by this feeling, he requested his friend the superior of the Certosa convent to break the sad intelligence to her; and the reverend father, who, though he had but lately been elected to the office, had known and respected Gaddi for many years, accepted the duty. He experienced little difficulty in his task. The invalid had long been certain that her end was approaching, but she had tried to conceal her conviction from her husband and daughter.

All that now remained for Gaddi to do, was to employ his skill to render his wife's path to the grave as smooth and easy as possible. Everything that science could effect for that end was done. Frequently he or Maria was occupied at her bedside, attending to her and soothing her by their ministrations. Nor were they alone employed in the good work. The abbess of a convent near Chiavenna had for some years been suffering from a painful malady, which obstinately refused to yield to any of the many remedies which the Fra Gerolamo and other medical authorities in the neighbourhood of the lake, had employed for her cure. Having heard of the skill of the Doctor Gaddi, she had come, accompanied by the lay-sister Teresa — a middle-aged woman who had great skill in nursing the sick — to Pavia for the purpose of consulting him. Gaddi, after his first interview, felt certain that he could restore his patient to strength and health, and he perfectly succeeded. She had been for some months under his care before her cure was accomplished; and during that time she made the acquaintance of his wife, which resulted in a warm friendship. The abbess easily perceived the precarious condition her friend was in, and did all in her power to relieve and console her. Having now no further need herself for the attendance of the lay-sister, and being anxious to return to her convent, she made her over to the invalid, and valuable indeed were the services she rendered. The leave-taking between the abbess and her friend was a most affectionate one, and scarcely less so was that with Maria, for whom she had conceived a great affection.

The departure of the abbess had a most depressing effect on the sick woman, from which she never rallied. She lingered on for some weeks longer, and was attended in her last moments by her husband and daughter, whose grief at her loss was indeed poignant.

THE PHYSICIAN'S DAUGHTER - PART II

For some time after the death of his wife, Gaddi's sorrow totally incapacitated him from pursuing his profession. Thanks, however, to the unremitting attention of his daughter, and the spiritual consolation of the prior of the convent, he recovered sufficiently to see some of his patients. Gradually his intense grief abated, his love for his wife remaining as profound as ever. Here the peculiar nature of his profession came very greatly to his assistance, and instead of incessantly offering up prayers for support, he found his sorrow greatly alleviated by constant occupation in acts of kindness and charity. He spent several hours daily at the bedside of the sick and wounded, as well as in visiting the poor invalids on the convent estates. His mind at last became sufficiently restored to enable him to attend to his ordinary avocations.

Maria, also, gradually recovered her wonted placid and amiable temper. In this she was greatly assisted by Teresa, the lay-sister, who had continued to reside with them, and was a person of great natural intelligence, and of a kind and affectionate disposition.

Gaddi himself, no indifferent judge of human nature, had acquired a great respect for her [Teresa], and he considered that he was fortunate in having found, as a companion for his daughter, a person in whom he could place such implicit reliance. But another circumstance occurred, which, if it did not mitigate Maria's sorrow for her loss, to a certain extent diverted her attention from it — she received, for the first time since his departure, a letter from her lover. In it he told her the adventures of his journey, and his safe arrival in Paris. He informed her that, in consequence of the temporary absence of the King of France from his capital, the embassy had not yet been received, nor, indeed, could he state the precise time the king would return. He further added that it would not be possible to say when she should see him (Benvenuto), but that his Excellency the Ambassador had assured him, that if the mission had not terminated its labours at the end of a year, he would allow him to return to Italy, promising him, at the same time, that his absence should be no drawback to him in his profession as a lawyer, or in his advancement to any State appointment which might be open to him. The remainder of his letter was principally taken up with expressions of the strongest affection, and protestations of his constancy. Of Maria's reply it would be wrong to say more than that it conveyed the full assurance to Benvenuto that he was far from being forgotten by her. The portion relating to the death of her mother was plain and unaffected, but full of love and regret.

One day, about three months after the death of his wife, Gaddi, on arriving at his lecture-room, heard one of the pupils, who had that morning arrived from Milan, describe a case which had occurred the day before in the great hospital of that city, and which had puzzled the whole of the doctors in attendance. At first Gaddi paid but little attention to what the student was saying, being himself at the time engaged in conversation with a brother professor, but on hearing the symptoms of this strange case described, he immediately detected them to be the same as those of the plague, which had visited Constantinople a few years before, and had half depopulated that city. Fearful of exciting unnecessary alarm, Gaddi left the lecture-room to go into the library, that he might seek for a manuscript containing an account of that pestilence, that he might be perfectly aware of the symptoms attending it before he called the attention of his brother professors to the subject. To his horror he found that the manuscript detailed the very same symptoms as those described by the student as having attended the case in the hospital in Milan. Gaddi now returned to the lecture-room and questioned the student more particularly on the subject. The result was, that a meeting of all the medical professors was convened in the library next evening, for the purpose of determining what preliminary steps should be taken in case Gaddi's anticipations should prove correct. In the meanwhile, one of the senior pupils was immediately despatched to Milan, to make further inquiries into the case, with instructions to return if possible before the meeting was over that he might report the result of his mission.

When the professors met the next evening, the messenger had not returned, but he arrived just as they were on the point of adjourning the meeting. The serious expression of his countenance seemed to augur bad news, which turned out to be correct. Not only had the case mentioned by the student proved fatal, but four other persons had been attacked manifesting the same symptoms. One of them had expired before reaching the hospital, and another shortly after his arrival, while no hopes were held out for the recovery of the other two. He also reported that at a meeting of the medical officers held that morning in the hospital in Milan, they had unanimously come to the conclusion, that the pestilence which now seemed to threaten the city was no other than the plague.

This intelligence caused the meeting great alarm and anxiety, and it was some hours before the business in hand was concluded. Before the meeting dispersed, it was resolved that government should be requested to convene the town council for the purpose of taking steps to prevent the plague breaking out in Pavia; or, should it make its appearance in spite of all precautions, to take such measures for meeting it as should reduce the mischief as much as possible.

Gaddi's mind, as he walked home from the meeting, was occupied with a subject which gave him great anxiety. If the plague really were in Milan, there was every probability of its also reaching Pavia; and from the crowded state of many parts of the town, there was every chance of the visitation being a severe one. For himself he had no fear. He was not only resolute naturally, but he had seen death too often, and under too many different forms, to be in any dread of it. But there was one who was ten times dearer to him than his own life, and for her he was a very [true] coward. When he reached his home his anxiety was so strongly expressed on his countenance, that Maria noticed it, and asked him the cause. He answered her evasively, and in such a tone that she easily perceived he did not wish to be questioned, so she said nothing more on the subject, but employed herself in domestic duties. Long after he had sought his room, his daughter's danger continued to occupy his mind, and many were the plans he thought of adopting to shield her from danger, without being able to decide on any. At last, finding his mind getting somewhat confused, he resolved to think no more on the matter that night, but to take it into further consideration with a clear brain the next morning.

Gaddi was scarcely more advanced in his plans the next day than he had been the evening before. There was one alone which seemed practicable, but he avoided dwelling on it. It was to send Maria into the country, to some place where she would be out of danger; but the though of being separated from her was too painful for him to dwell upon.

At breakfast he was silent and reserved as he had been the previous evening, and as soon as the meal was over, he betook himself to the hospital to see his patients. He had hardly arrived at the building when he heard that there had been that morning a case, which showed symptoms of a most extraordinary and violent character. Gaddi immediately proceeded to the bedside of the patient, and at the first glance was convinced that the poor man was plague-stricken. Without a moment's hesitation, and even without waiting to prescribe for his patient, Gaddi left the hospital, and proceeded rapidly homewards. Short as was the road, and swift as was his pace, he had ample time to resolve what steps he would take with regard to Maria. He now decided to place her, if possible, in the convent at Chiavenna, under the care of the abbess, who had been his patient, until the plague should have disappeared. Before he reached home he had also determined on the manner in which she should perform the journey. He resolved that as soon as he had procured three stout mules — one for Maria, another for the sister Teresa, who was to accompany her, and the third for a trusty man-servant to escort them — they should leave Pavia. Much as he loved his daughter, the thought never for a moment crossed Gaddi's mind to go with her himself. He felt that his services as a physician would be greatly required in the coming emergency, and he was too resolute and honest a man to think of shunning his duty in a time of danger. His plan for Maria's journey was that she should sleep that night at the house of a friend some twelve miles on the road, and that the next day she should proceed to the castle of the Innominato, where she should remain till preparations had been made for her reception in the convent.

As may be easily imagined, Maria was greatly surprised on hearing that not only was the plague in Pavia, but that her father had resolved she should quit the city for a place of safety, while he himself should remain behind exposed to all the danger of the pestilence. She endeavoured, with all the persuasive eloquence she could command, to induce him to accompany her, but in vain — Gaddi was inflexible, and she had no alternative but to obey. While she and Sister Teresa were making their preparations for the journey, Gaddi left the house. In a short time he succeeded in obtaining excellent mules, and in the space of a couple of hours the party was ready to start. Before they left, Gaddi hurriedly wrote on a piece of parchment a few lines to his friend the Innominato, confiding his dear Maria to his care till she could be received into the convent. All now being in readiness, Gaddi accompanied the party to the city gates, and, after a sorrowful leave-taking, he returned to his duties in the hospital, feeling greatly relieved by the knowledge that his daughter was no longer in danger.

Maria and her escort arrived in safety at the house where they were to remain for the night. Although the visit was unexpected, they were received with great kindness and most hospitably entertained. The next morning they started at sunrise, and in the evening, although much fatigued by the journey, reached the Hospice. The news of Maria's arrival having been communicated to the Innominato, he immediately left the castle to meet her. The reception she received from him was of the kindest and most courteous description. He returned with her and the Sister Teresa to the castle, where they were to pass the night, the man who had accompanied them remaining at the Hospice. Seeing how exhausted his guests were, the Innominato conversed but little with them that night, and at an early hour they retired to the room which had been hastily prepared for them. The next morning, finding Maria greatly refreshed by her night's rest, the Innominato entered freely into conversation with her, and listened with great interest to the details she gave him of her father, her home, and her method of life. He also spoke to her of her lover Benvenuto, and asked many questions respecting him, all of which Maria answered with great candour and without the slightest reserve. She was too proud of him to conceal anything, and too innocent to feel abashed. In the course of the day the Innominato despatched a messenger to the convent to inquire whether the superior would receive Maria — a point on which he had really no doubt, but he did so rather as a mark of respect to the good lady, who, it was generally understood, was punctilious, and anxious that the dignity of her position should always be maintained. In two days the man returned with a message from the superior, that she would be most happy to receive Maria, and that the longer she remained with her, the greater the pleasure it would afford her.

The day fixed for Maria to leave the castle was bright and balmy. The mules were to carry them to Bellaggio, from whence they were to take the boat which would convey them to the Riva di Chiavenna. While the mules were being prepared for the journey, Maria strolled with the Innominato into his favourite garden, where for some time they examined and conversed on the beautiful flowers around them. Neither of them seemed really interested in the subject they were conversing on — their minds being pre-occupied with other subjects. Presently a servant joined them, and informed Maria that the mules were in readiness whenever it might please her to depart. The servant having left them, the Innominato was slowly turning from the garden, when he said to Maria,

"Before you leave me, my dear child, tell me if there is anything I can do for you."

Maria hesitated for a moment, as if she had a request she would like to make, but not sufficient courage to mention it. The Innominato appeared to understand her, and kindly encouraged her to explain what she wanted.

"Can you tell me," she at last said, "how I shall be able, when in the convent, to receive intelligence from Benvenuto? I am afraid my dear father will be too much occupied with the plague-stricken to pay any attention to other things, and what to do I know not."

"I am afraid, my poor child," said the Innominato, "that there is but little chance of your receiving either letter or message from Benvenuto."

"Why not?" inquired Maria, with great alarm in her tone.

"Because till the plague has subsided there will be little or no communication between Italy and France. Messengers from France will not have the courage to cross the Alps into the plague-stricken plains of Lombardy, nor will the Swiss allow the Italians to pass through their territory."

"What shall I do?" said Maria, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke. "Do assist me. People say you are very wise and have great power, and that you are very kind."

"I am afraid they flatter me," said the Innominato, smiling. "I will, however, readily assist you as far as my means will allow me. To invent any plan for you to receive intelligence direct from Benvenuto is beyond my power; but indirectly I may be more successful. Take this plant with you to the convent," he continued, as he selected a small one in a neatly made wooden box. "When you arrive, place it in the garden under a wall, taking great care, however, that it has a southern aspect. Visit the plant and tend it morning and evening, and it will convey to you a true though limited description of the state in which your lover is. If, after receiving due attention from your hands, the plant sickens, be assured that Benvenuto is sick or in trouble, and that if it dies, he is also dead. But if, on the other hand, the plant continues strong and healthy, you may be assured that he is in good health. Every fresh leaf it puts forth will be a sign to you that some piece of good fortune has befallen him, or that he has received some mark of patronage or of kindness, either from the King of France or from his Excellency the Ambassador. When you find a flower-bud forming on the plant, accept it as a sign that he is preparing to leave Paris to return to Italy, and when the bud is further developed, he will have started on his homeward journey. The nearer the bud comes to maturity, the nearer will your lover come to you; and the day that it bursts into blossom he will arrive, never more to part from you. Fortunately, I know a person who is on the eve of starting for Paris, and by him I will send word to Benvenuto that he will find you in the convent at Chiavenna. That is all I can promise you, and with that you must be content."

Maria was very grateful for the Innominato's kindness, and she expressed her feelings warmly.

A gardener was now called, and received orders to arrange the plant so that it might be carried with the least possible danger to itself, and in the most convenient manner for those who were to take charge of it. Shortly afterwards Maria took an affectionate leave of the Innominato, and started on her journey. She arrived safely at Bellaggio, where a boat with six strong rowers was awaiting her, and at a somewhat late hour the same evening she arrived at Chiavenna. The abbess received her with every mark of affection, and that night the plant was placed in Maria's cell, to be removed next morning to the garden of the convent.

We must now return to Gaddi, whom we left at Pavia. The evening of the day on which his daughter had left, he had every reason to be thankful that he had sent her to a place of safety. During the day no fewer than six plague-stricken patients were admitted into the hospital, five of whom died. The next morning the news that the pestilence was in the city became generally known, and great was the alarm it occasioned. All who had the means, instantly made preparations to depart, and in a few days none but the poor remained in the city. The pestilence gradually increased, and to such an extent as to wholly overtask the energies of the medical staff, — efficient and numerous though it was in Pavia. Several physicians themselves fell victims either to the malady or to over-fatigue, and not unfrequently both combined. Yet the courage of the doctors as well as of the priests remained unabated, and their labours were unceasing. Many of the monks from the Carthusian convent combined with their sacred office that of medical practitioner, and with unflinching constancy they laboured under the directions of the physicians. Thanks to the efficient precautions which were taken by the municipal and medical authorities, the course of the disease, after a few weeks, was arrested. Still it hung on with sufficient tenacity to prove the necessity of every precautionary measure being used to prevent its further spread. Strict guards were placed round the city to prevent strangers from entering, every house was daily visited, and any sick person it might contain taken to the public hospital. Cleanliness was rigorously enforced, and all who neglected to comply with the orders issued by the sanitary committee were severely punished. The disease, however, continued its hold during the summer and autumn. The return of winter was now anxiously looked for, in the hope that the cold weather might effectually stop the pestilence.

But sad as had been the effects of the plague in Pavia, they were trifling compared with its ravages in Milan. There, as in Pavia, the rich had left the city, and in too many cases had taken their medical attendants with them. The result was, that the physicians who remained were utterly incapable of doing a tithe of their duties efficiently. In their strait, they applied to the authorities of Pavia for assistance, and several doctors answered to their call, — Gaddi, at the especial request of the Duke, being named as their chief. But his skill and courage, aided as he was by his colleagues, were far from being equal to the emergency. He found the city totally disorganised — the municipal authorities having quitted it — and to the awful evils of the plague were now added those of famine and disorder. Bands of robbers infested the streets, plundering with impunity the provision shops, and selling what they stole at exorbitant prices; while others broke into the houses of the rich absentees, taking from them whatever valuable property they could find. The streets were filled with the sick and dying: the former receiving not the slightest care or attention, while the latter remained unheeded on the spot where they had breathed their last, infecting the air around them, and thus increasing the severity of the pestilence. It was no uncommon occurrence to see a poor mother perishing in the streets, and imploring the passers-by to take away the wretched infant which still clung to her breast in the vain hope of drawing sustenance; but so selfish and cruel had all become that no attention whatever would be paid to her request. Gaddi and his colleagues, assisted by the physicians who had remained in Milan, did all in their power to ameliorate the misery they saw around them, and with some success, although a vast amount of sickness still remained unaided.

In the meantime Maria remained in safety in the convent at Chiavenna. The abbess, terrified at the reports which occasionally reached her of the terrible violence of the plague, issued an order that no one should be allowed the enter the convent on any excuse whatever, with the exception of Fra Gerolamo, who, besides acting as father confessor of the nuns, was also their medical advisor. The convent gates were securely fastened, and the food and other necessities were drawn up in baskets from the outside, through a window. Thanks to these somewhat selfish precautions, not a case of sickness occurred among the nuns. If they took no open part in spreading consolation around them, the abbess endeavoured, by the continued prayers and fastings of the sisterhood, to mitigate the pestilence of which she had heard so much.

Although Maria attended most of the religious services of the nuns, she still continued to watch, with the utmost solicitude, the plant which had been given her by the Innominato. There was little to attract in its appearance; it was small, with but few branches, and each of these bore some darkish-green leaves, considerably larger than those of a rose, but much smaller than the laurel. She had, however, unlimited faith in its virtues, fully believing all that the Innominato had told her respecting it. According to his instruction she had placed it under the northern wall of the garden, so that the rays of the sun might fall on it, and she watched it frequently, taking all the care of it in her power. For some time there was no visible change in it, though the journey did not appear to have injured it. By degrees, however, it gathered strength, and its leaves assumed a more glossy hue. One morning, on looking at it, she discovered that a small green leaf was beginning to make its appearance. Maria remembered the words of the astrologer, and gratefully accepted this as a sign that Benvenuto had met with some piece of good fortune. That evening, on watering the plant, she could easily perceive that the leaf had gained considerably, both in size and strength.

Early next morning, Maria again visited the plant, but a remarkable change for the worse had come over it during the night. Not only had the new leaf withered and died, but the old ones looked drooping and sickly. Nor did there seem to be the slightest cause for the change. The night had been calm and warm, and the spot in which, according to the astrologer's directions, the plant had been placed, was sheltered from the north wind by the high garden wall, so that had an alteration in the temperature occurred during the night, it could not have affected the plant. Maria could only account for the sickly state of the flower, by supposing either that some misfortune had befallen Benvenuto, or that he was suffering from ill-health. That day, when the nuns were assembled in the chapel at prayer, in which petitions were offered up for the abatement of the pestilence, the prayers of Maria referred to a totally different subject. She implored Heaven to remove the misfortune or sickness under which her lover might be suffering. It is even to be feared, that the prayer she was daily in the habit of using that her dear father might be protected from harm, was not unmixed with some thoughts of Benvenuto. In the evening when she visited the plant, the only consolation she could obtain, was that it did not appear more sickly than in the morning; but with the utmost wish to find it looking better, she could not deceive herself into the agreeable idea that there was the slightest improvement.

That night was one continued vigil for Maria — she did not even attempt to sleep. Next morning she rose at day-break and went into the garden, but still no improvement was visible in the plant. Nearly a week passed over without the slightest appearance of recovery; but a decided change for the better then came over it.

Gradually the leaves resumed their healthy and glossy appearance, and shortly afterwards a new leaf showed itself, and then came a second and a third. The plant itself was evidently gaining strength daily. Maria's fears on her lover's behalf were now completely dissipated. She joined her prayers to those of the other nuns for the abatement of the pestilence, and she did not fail to remember her petition for the welfare of her dear father, from whom she occasionally received, through Fra Gerolamo, most satisfactory accounts. Altogether Maria's life in the convent passed as placidly and happily as, under the circumstances, could have been desired.

About two months after the temporary sickening of the plant, Fra Gerolamo called at the convent, bringing with him not only a message from Gaddi to his daughter, but also a long letter written on parchment from Benvenuto. No sooner had Maria received it from his hands, than she rushed with it to her cell, that she might there read it undisturbed. But for some time the task was impossible, so greatly excited was she. Over and over again she attempted to make herself mistress of the contents of the letter, but without success. Gradually her mind became calmer, and she at last succeeded in gathering the purport of the epistle. He described to her clearly and succinctly all that had occurred to him since he had last written to her: how the King of France after a long absence had returned to Paris, and the manner in which he had received the embassy; and how the mission showed every prospect of terminating favourably, although it was not then possible to say with certainty when he would be able to leave Paris. He trusted, however, that his departure would not be delayed more than two or three months at the longest. He also told her that the King had treated him with marked kindness and consideration, having made him several handsome presents, among which was a ring of great value. This he proposed to give to his beloved Maria on her wedding day. His health, with one exception, had been excellent; but that exception had caused him not a little annoyance. The day on which the King returned to Paris, the embassy had been introduced to him, on which occasion he had greatly distinguished Benvenuto, and had invited him to be present at a grand hunting match which was to take place the next day. The same evening he (Benvenuto) was seized with a severe attack of fever, which not only prevented him from being present at the hunt, but obliged him to keep his bed for several days afterwards. Fortunately the fever passed off without any unpleasant results remaining; on the contrary, when after his recovery he presented himself at court, his Majesty received him with great kindness, expressing sympathy with him on his illness. In conclusion, Benvenuto told Maria that he would if possible write to her again before he left Paris; though in consequence of the plague which was then raging in Lombardy, it might very difficult to find a messenger. In a postscript, he added that he had been much pleased to hear that she had taken up her residence at the convent, and trusted she would not leave it till his return.

As soon as Maria had somewhat recovered from the excitement occasioned by the reading of Benvenuto's letter, she compared the date of his illness with the singular change which had taken place in her plant, and found that the time corresponded exactly. Had she ever entertained the slightest doubt of the promise made to her by the Innominato, it would now have vanished. Her faith in him, which was always strong, was, if possible, increased. She now felt an additional interest in tending the plant, which continued to thrive, frequently putting out new and healthy leaves. She watched anxiously for the formation of a flower-bud, but for some weeks without success. At last, to her intense joy, she discovered one in process of formation. Very anxiously did she watch it for some days, fearing that after all it might only be a group of new leaves. But it continued to increase till she became quite certain that it was a fine healthy flower-bud. She now felt sure that if Benvenuto had not already left Paris, he was at least making preparations for his departure; and often and earnestly did she pray for his safe and speedy arrival.

The bud continued to increase in size — slowly, it is true, but still so perceptibly as to prove to Maria that her lover was on his homeward journey; while the flourishing condition of the plant, and the glossy appearance of the leaves, assured her that he was in good health.

Autumn had now commenced, and the plague in Pavia had almost disappeared. In Milan also it had greatly abated in violence, and to such an extent, that Gaddi began to entertain the desire to visit his dear daughter. During her absence he had frequently received news of her, and these were always of a satisfactory description. His mind being thus at ease on the score of her health, he supported her absence with resignation, knowing full well that she was in a place of safety. But as his duties diminished in severity, his wish to see Maria increased in proportion, and he now resolved that if the pestilence continued to abate for another month or six weeks, he would pay her a visit, calling on his friend the Innominato on his way,

The flower had now increased in size so rapidly that Maria felt persuaded Benvenuto would soon arrive; and she became so anxious that she could not help rushing to the convent door each time a visitor came, in the hope that it might be a message from her lover. But not a word did she hear from him. The month of September arrived, and there was still the same silence. But Maria was consoled by the fact that not only was the plant in a healthy and flourishing condition, but also that the flower-bud had increased to such a size, that it seemed each day to promise that it would burst into bloom next morning. So far towards maturity had it advanced, that she could distinguish between the interstices of the external leaves, the closely-folded petals of a beautiful white flower.

One evening on visiting her plant, Maria found the flower in so forward a state, that it must of a certainty burst into bloom during the night; and she also felt certain that Benvenuto would join her the next day. She now looked at the plant with such intensity, that she almost fancied she could perceive the petals opening. As night came on and darkness spread over the mountains, rendering indistinct all objects around her, she bent over her flower to watch its opening, when a voice said to her: "My child, the abbess has sent me to request you will come in doors, as she fears you will catch cold if you remain any longer in the rain."

Then, and for the first time, Maria noticed that big heavy drops of rain were falling at intervals, but she had been so absorbed in watching her flower that she had not remarked them. She told the sister Teresa, who had spoken to her, that she would obey the order of the superior, when casting her eyes upwards she perceived the heavens were covered with heavy black clouds, which greatly increased the darkness. Seeing that a storm was coming on, and fearing that the flower might be injured, Maria requested the lay-sister to help her remove the plant to another position under a slight shed which was erected near them. Sister Teresa willingly gave the desired assistance, and as soon as they had accomplished their task, they returned rapidly to the convent building, as the rain was now falling in torrents.

Sister Teresa and Maria had not entered the convent a moment too soon. A violent thunderstorm now burst over them, and in a few minutes the whole courtyard and the cloister were deluged with water. So rapid and vivid was the lightning that the mountains around were lighted up almost as brightly as in daylight. Although thunderstorms were common in the locality, Sister Eudosia, who was the oldest resident in the convent, declared she never remembered such a one. So fearfully was the storm then raging, that the abbess and the nuns became so terrified that they sought the chapel, and there on their knees before the altar, prayed that it might pass over without injury, either to their own community, or to the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood.

The nuns remained in the chapel till past midnight, and then — although the storm still raged with fearful violence — they retired to their dormitories. When alone in her cell, and her immediate alarm somewhat over, Maria congratulated herself on the precaution she had taken as to her plant. She thought, too, of Benvenuto, but without any feeling of anxiety, as she was fully persuaded that he must be at Pavia, if not at Como, and that in the course of the next day, or at latest, on the following one, she should see him, never more to be separated from him.

Hour after hour passed, but the violence of the storm did not abate till daybreak, and even then the rain continued to pour down in torrents. At last the bell rang for the nuns to assemble in the chapel for matins, where Maria joined them. Shortly after prayers were over, the rain ceased, and Maria made preparations for visiting her flower. As she was on the point of leaving the building to proceed to the garden, she met at the door one of the lay-sisters, who bore in her arms the box containing the flower. But the plant was broken off at the stem, close to the roots. The violence of the storm had destroyed the frail covering under which it had been placed for shelter, and in falling in it had destroyed the plant. For some moments Maria gazed with a stupefied look on the ruined flower, and then uttering a loud scream, she fell senseless on the ground. She was immediately carried to her cell, where she was tended by the abbess and Sister Teresa. Notwithstanding all their remedies, it was some time before the poor girl was restored to consciousness; and when they at last succeeded, she burst into a flood of tears and remained inconsolable. The abbess now became very much alarmed, and despatched a messenger to Fra Gerolamo to request his immediate attendance. It was late the next evening, however, before he arrived, for although the messenger had little difficulty in reaching the monk's convent, it was a far more difficult affair to return. In consequence of the vast quantity of rain that had fallen, the torrent was so swollen and the current so strong at the point where it entered the lake, that the rowers could hardly make head against it.

The arrival of Fra Gerolamo was hailed with great satisfaction by the abbess and Sister Teresa, for Maria's state caused them no little anxiety. She had had a succession of fainting fits, and in the intervals had suffered from such a depression of spirits as to be insensible to all their efforts to console her. The presence of the monk somewhat calmed her, although she by no means admitted the force of his arguments, which tended to prove that the destruction of the flower was a perfectly natural accident, and portended no misfortune whatever. He remained with her for more than an hour, and then left the convent for the lodging he usually occupied in Chiavenna, promising to call again to see Maria the next morning.

The news having spread that Fra Gerolamo was in the town, he had many visitors, and several patients to prescribe for. When all had been attended to, and he was on the point of leaving the house to visit the convent, a woman accosted him and begged that he would visit a poor man who lay, desperately wounded, in a cottage about three leagues up the mountains. She told Fra Gerolamo that the morning after the terrible storm he was found insensible, stretched beside the torrent. He had become partly conscious when she had left home to procure aid the evening before.

Without the slightest hesitation the monk accompanied the woman, and about noon they arrived at the cottage where the wounded man was. Fra Gerolamo found him fearfully bruised, but with no bones broken, and he had now, moreover, fully recovered his senses. In answer to the inquiries of the monk, the man told him that he was the servant of a gentleman who was returning to Italy from France. That as his master wished to visit some friend in Chiavenna, he had resolved to cross the Splugen mountain, partly to avoid the plague-infested districts of Pavia and Milan. Their journey had passed without any accident until the night of the storm, which had overtaken them as they descended the mountain. When they had arrived at Campo Dolcino, his master was strongly advised to remain there for the night, as it was already getting dark, and to continue his journey would incur great danger. His master, however, being impatient to proceed, would not listen to reason, and they continued their journey, although their mules were greatly fatigued, and stumbled incessantly. When they had arrived at a somewhat narrow part of the mountains, the darkness was so profound, that they could not see the heads of the mules on which they rode, except by the glare of the lightning, while the torrent roared fearfully beside them. Suddenly the path seemed to give way beneath them, and in a moment they were precipitated into the torrent. He soon lost all consciousness, nor did he recover his senses till he found himself on the bed in the cottage.

Fra Gerolamo was forced to the conclusion that the man's master was no other than Benvenuto. He made inquiries of the villagers if they had seen anything of him, but he could obtain no information. He now told the owner of the cottage what they had better do for the wounded man, and further advised them to conduct him to Chiavenna as soon as he could be removed, as he could take him under his own care there.

Fra Gerolamo with saddened spirits now bent his way towards Chiavenna, inquiring of every person he met, whether they had heard any tidings of Benvenuto; but for some time without success. At last, when almost within sight of the town, he saw a group of peasants standing by the side of the torrent, and on joining them he found that they had collected round the carcase [carcass] of a dead mule, which had been thrown on a rock. They had already taken off some of its harness, and had opened a valise which was fastened behind the saddle. This valise contained some articles of fine clothing, besides jewels of great value. Here was a further proof that Benvenuto had been drowned, as the mule was evidently the one he had ridden. He told the peasants to carry the valise and its contents to his lodgings; and after giving them strict instructions to search for the body of Benvenuto, and inform him if they found it, he left them and proceeded to his house.

The worthy monk was now completely puzzled as to what further steps he should take. He did not like the idea of proceeding to the convent without some certain intelligence of Benvenuto; and to remain away seemed both unkind and cowardly. Strangely enough, considering his usual decision of manner, Fra Gerolamo remained inactive in his room for more than two hours; nor would he then have thought of quitting it, had he not been aroused by the arrival of several peasants bearing in their arms the dead body of a man. The corpse having been placed on the bed, Fra Gerolamo proceeded to examine it with great care. The deceased appeared to have been a well-made young man, but his features were so disfigured by striking against the rocks, that they could hardly be distinguished. He was well dressed, and evidently belonged to the upper class. On his hand he wore a ring of great value, and a purse of gold was in a pouch which hung by his side. For some time they could discover nothing to prove his identity, but at last the monk found a parchment-letter in the breast of his tunic. On examining this, he found it was one which had been sent by Maria to Benvenuto while he was in Paris. There was now no longer any doubt in the mind of the monk — the dead body before him was certainly that of Maria's lover.

Fra Gerolamo now placed the ring and the letter in his wallet, and, taking up his staff, he left the house for the purpose of visiting the convent, to break, in the most cautious and delicate manner possible, the sad news of which he was the bearer. The task was both a difficult and painful one. How to commence it he could not determine. He had not even come to any conclusion when he reached the convent gates. On entering, he saw the abbess, and, drawing her aside, informed her of the death of Benvenuto, and showed her the ring and Maria's letter, asking her advice as to how he should break the intelligence to the poor girl. After a short consultation, the abbess conducted the monk into her private sitting-room, and she then sent a lay-sister to request Maria's attendance. A few minutes afterwards, she entered, accompanied by Sister Teresa.

Finding Fra Gerolamo and the abbess seated in the room, Maria cast an anxious glance on them, and then waited for one or the other of them to speak. Neither, however, appeared to have the courage. The silence was an intensely painful one, and it was rendered more so by the anxiety expressed on the poor girl's countenance, as she looked from one to the other. Presently she noticed Fra Gerolamo's eyes fill with tears, and in an instant she understood all. She uttered no cry, but gradually sinking on her knees beside the chair on which the abbess was seated, she placed her hands together, and bending her head, remained motionless for some minutes, evidently engaged in prayer. During this time, both the abbess and the monk remained perfectly silent.

Presently her prayer ceased, and, without rising from her knees, she buried her face in the lap of the abbess, and burst into an uncontrollable flood of tears. The abbess kindly bent over, and attempted to soothe and console her, and Fra Gerolamo advanced towards her for the same purpose. He begged her to be resigned to the will of Providence, and reminded her how short was human life, and how long was eternity, in which she would again be joined by him she had loved — never again to be separated from him. That she had listened to him was certain, for she raised her head for a moment and said, with the tears still streaming from her eyes, "Father, it will be but a very short time before we meet again, for I feel it is impossible for me to survive him long."

As soon as the first burst of grief was somewhat subsided, Fra Gerolamo gave Maria the ring he had taken from Benvenuto's hand. She immediately understood that it was the one her lover had promised her, and placing it on her finger she said, "My dear love, I accept it as my wedding-ring. It shall never leave my hand during the short time I have to live." Then addressing the abbess, she continued, "Dear mother, promise me that when I die it shall be buried with me, on my finger, as it is now."

To calm her, the abbess promised what she asked; and, as soon as Maria's grief was a little lessened, she conducted her into her own bedroom, where she remained with her, consoling her to the best of her power.

Fra Gerolamo now left the convent to find someone he could send to Gaddi, to inform him of Benvenuto's death, and the dangerous state in which Maria was, and to urge him to visit her without delay. He afterwards occupied himself in making preparations for having Benvenuto interred early the next morning. His reason for this haste was that he dreaded Maria, after her first burst of sorrow, might ask to see the body of her lover, which was so disfigured from bruises that the sight would certainly have increased the pain. And this precaution was by no means a useless one. After the body had been interred in the little cemetery attached to the town, he visited the convent, and found Maria alone in the sitting-room of the abbess. Her first words were a request that he would take her to see the body of Benvenuto. Very thankful was the monk that he was unable to comply with her wish.

As soon as he received the monk's message, Gaddi determined on relinquishing his profession, for a time at least. He could do so the more easily now that the plague had subsided both in Milan and Pavia. He returned therefore with the messenger to Chiavenna, where he heard from the lips of Fra Gerolamo himself all that had taken place since the night of the thunderstorm.

"I am very glad you have arrived," added the monk, "for I am most anxious respecting your daughter's health. There is a singular depression of tone in her mind, and evident sinking of bodily strength, such as my humble skill could ill cope with. I sincerely hope you will not return to Pavia until a favourable change takes place." Gaddi thereupon told the monk that he did not intend to leave Chiavenna till his daughter was sufficiently recovered to accompany him. It was then arranged that he should occupy the room which had been used by Fra Gerolamo, who proposed to return to his convent that same evening.

It is almost needless to say that the meeting between Gaddi and his daughter was a painful one to both. At their first interview, sorrow prevented their holding their much conversation, but after a little time they became more communicative. Maria told her father that her wish was to enter the convent as a novice. She considered herself the widow of Benvenuto, who, as she understood, had at his death sent her the promised wedding ring, which she showed to her father on her finger. At first, Gaddi endeavoured to induce his daughter to alter her resolution as to entering a convent, but she seemed so bent on doing so that he gave up the attempt, resolving to reason with her again, when time should have somewhat soothed down her sorrow.

A month passed, during which time Gaddi was a daily visitor at the convent. He had now become exceedingly anxious on account of his daughter's health. The symptoms gradually assumed a more dangerous appearance; and he perceived that it was imperatively necessary she should be removed to a warmer climate. He spoke seriously to her about passing the winter in Naples or Sicily. Maria, however, still objected, and Gaddi was obliged to call in the assistance of the abbess and Fra Gerolamo. Maria offered no further objection, although she only gave way on condition that next spring she should be allowed to return to the convent, and that she should be allowed to become a novice. To these conditions Gaddi offered no open opposition; devoutly hoping that Maria would change her mind before the time arrived for them to leave Naples.

Preparations were now made for their departure, and the day was fixed for Maria to leave the convent. A circumstance occurred, however, which in a moment spoiled all their plans. Three days before they were to start on their journey, Maria broke a blood-vessel, and one of such importance that for some weeks her life was despaired of. Thanks to the skill of her father and the kind nursing of Sister Teresa, she somewhat recovered. But Gaddi could easily perceive that her case was a hopeless one. The season was now too far advanced to think of removing her, even if her strength would have allowed it; and it was decided that she should remain in the convent for the winter. During the cold weather she never quitted her room. From the care and attention she received, the progress of the disease was somewhat stayed; still, there was enough to confirm the worst fears of her father that her case was a fatal one.

Spring now came on, and Maria experienced one of those delusive changes for the better which so frequently occur in cases of consumption. [This does not mean that Maria was sick with consumption.] She gained strength considerably, and was even able to leave her bed and remain for several hours in the private sitting-room of the abbess. The warm weather set in, and with it there seemed to come an increase of Maria's strength. One fine morning, Sister Teresa asked her whether she would not take a short turn with her in the convent garden, thinking that the balmy air might be beneficial to her. Maria readily accepted the invitation, and, leaning on the arm of the sister, they left the house. The warm sunshine seemed to have a most exhilarating effect on the invalid, and she talked readily with her companion, evidently taking a great interest in the spring flowers which she saw around her. Suddenly, and with great energy, she dragged the sister forward to a part of the garden near the wall. Her eye had lighted on the small box which had contained the flower given her by the astrologer, and in which a new and healthy plant had now sprung up out of the roots of the old one. Both Maria and Sister Teresa gazed at it for some moments in speechless wonder. At last Maria said, "See the warning that Heaven has sent me. I shall soon meet him." She then stooped down and examined the plant more carefully in search of a blossom, but she could find none. "No matter," she said; "I am sure one will soon come, and when it opens, his spirit will conduct mine to heaven, and we shall never more be parted."

A singular phenomenon in her malady now manifested itself. The disease gained ground so rapidly that none who beheld the poor girl could doubt that her death was approaching; still her mind seemed wonderfully to support her physical powers, and her strength did not fall off. Each day she visited the flower to mark the progress it had made; and afterwards she always entered the chapel, and there earnestly prayed that she might soon be joined to her lover. One morning as she was leaving the convent to visit the plant, a singular sensation came over her, that some person was by her side, and advancing with her. She had first thought it must be Teresa who had joined her, but on looking round she saw that no one was near her. She now walked on, the spirit — for she felt assured it was one — steadily accompanying her. A profound feeling of awe came over her, but totally unmixed with fear; on the contrary, the feeling was decidedly a pleasurable one. She arrived at the plant, and as she stooped to examine it, she felt sure at the time that the spirit still stood at her side watching over her. Suddenly she gave a low cry of satisfaction. Amidst a group of leaves she had discovered a small, but perfectly-formed flower-bud. She gazed at it for some moments with delight, and then leaving the spot, sought the chapel. There, on her knees, she fervently prayed that no accident might occur to check the development of the flower. While she prayed, she was seized with the idea that the spirit at her side was an angel, and she confided her prayer to its meditation. She now left the chapel and entered the abbess's private sitting-room, where she found her father.

She embraced him affectionately, and entered into conversation with great vivacity and cheerfulness. Her father could easily perceive that the disease was advancing rapidly, and he turned away his face from her to conceal his tears. They remained together for some time, but weakness at length overcame Maria, and she sought her cell, and her father with a sorrowful heart returned to his lodging.

Day after day passed, and Maria's health was perceptibly declining, though her energy remained the same. In a spiritual point of view, the abbess became exceedingly alarmed respecting her, as Teresa had informed her of Maria's belief, that she was watched over by the spirit of her lover, who never quitted her, but waited for her death in order to conduct her spirit to Heaven. After some conversation, the abbess resolved to consult the bishop on the matter. She accordingly sent a messenger to Como for his advice, but before he returned Maria's earthly existence had terminated. One evening she determined to visit the flower to see what progress it had made during the day, and feeling exceedingly weak, she had requested Sister Teresa to accompany her. They found the bud on the point of bursting. Maria regarded it with an expression of intense satisfaction. "My sister," she said, "I shall soon relieve you from any further fatigue or anxiety on my account. A thousand blessings on you for the affection you have shown to me and my poor mother. Let us go back, for I am so weak I can hardly stand."

They now entered the convent together. The sister accompanied Maria to her cell, and assisted her to prepare for bed. Early next morning Teresa awoke, and feeling anxious about Maria, went to her cell. But to her great surprise no one was in it. Greatly alarmed she aroused the other nuns, and the abbess ordered a search to be made for the missing girl. They examined the whole building, but without success, and where to search further they knew not. The doors were securely bolted on the inside, so that it appeared impossible that she could have passed out. Nevertheless they determined to seek for her in the garden, and there, before the flower, which was now in full blossom, was stretched the dead body of Maria. How she came there has ever remained a mystery.

Little more remains to be told. Maria was buried by the side of her lover in the cemetery, Benvenuto's ring — as the abbess had promised — being left upon her finger. It had never been taken off since the day Fra Gerolamo had given it to her. Gaddi returned to Pavia, and, having sold all that he possessed, entered Fra Gerolamo's convent as a monk of the order. During the remainder of his life he occupied himself in solacing the sick poor in the neighbourhood of the Lakes, by all of whom he was much beloved and respected.

THE END

THE TWO LOVERS [BEPPO AND CARLO]

About halfway between Como and Lecco stands the town of Bovisio. Although now a somewhat populous locality, it was, at the time of our narrative, only a small village consisting of about a dozen houses, with a humble parish church in the centre. It was a purely agricultural village, the culture of the silkworm being then included in all farming operations in Italy, whether on large or small estates. As it was somewhat out of the direct path to Como, few strangers were seen there, and the inhabitants being perfectly contented with the state of civilization and comfort they enjoyed, it may easily be imagined that they formed a very simple and primitive community.

There were two magnates in Bovisio. One was his Reverence Don Pietro, the parish priest. He was a kind-hearted, quiet-going ecclesiastic, much liked by his parishioners for his easy absolutions, light penances, and amiable manners. Besides being spiritual confessor, he was the temporal friend and confidant of all his flock. The housewife, the peasant, and the farmer — all consulted him on their domestic affairs with the utmost freedom, and thankfully received his advice, even if they did not follow it.

The other magnate was Pietro Grassi, the most substantial farmer in Bovisio, and for several miles round it. He possessed a great many mules, horses, and cows. He had a comfortable, well-built house, two large barns, a stable and cow-house, and an enclosed yard for pigs and poultry. He was also the owner of several fertile fields, which raised good Indian corn, some excellent meadows for grazing, and a great many mulberry-trees, which annually yielded a considerable quantity of silk. But what, more than all these, raised him in the respect of the unmarried men in the village was the fact, that he had an only child, a very beautiful girl of about sixteen years of age, named Guiseppina. To obtain this damsel's hand was the ambition of most of the young men in the locality. Apart from her beauty and her wealth she was in every way worthy of the admiration bestowed upon her. She was kind, amiable, and industrious. In her position, and being so much complimented, there would have been much excuse for her had she been somewhat of a flirt; but no excuse was needed, for she was really a modest and innocent young girl. Moreover, she was admirably adapted, by her education, to make a good farmer's wife. She was an excellent manager, and had kept her father's house since her mother's death, which had taken place about two years before. She understood the management of the silkworm; her butter and cheese were of the finest quality; and if she could neither read nor write, she was not on that account any less accomplished than half the ladies of rank in Milan.

Although she was young, it would be folly to suppose that with all these attractions she could want admirers. To say the truth, there were too many of these to please her father. But although not of an unimpressionable temperament, Guiseppina gave encouragement to none. There were, however, two among them, fine handsome young fellows, and cousins to each other, who paid her particular attention. They were, moreover, in her father's employment. Now, had there been only one of them, some effect might have been produced on her heart; but each seemed to neutralize the other in her good graces. If she had the slightest preference, it was for the younger, Beppo, who was a quiet, hardworking youth. The elder, Carlo, was less industrious, and of an impetuous temper, which frequently brought him into collision with his acquaintances, and produced unseemly brawls.

Possibly Grassi himself began to suspect that in time his daughter's affections might be entrapped by one or other of these young men; and although he entertained a kindly feeling for both, neither was exactly the sort of man he would have himself chosen as a husband for her. They were both poor, and he had resolved that no one should have Guiseppina's hand who had not at least sufficient means to furnish a house for her, as well as to assist in stocking a small farm. Besides, he considered his daughter too young to marry, and he wished — reasonably enough — that she should at least be a year older before she entertained any matrimonial proposal. Neither of the youths had yet openly declared himself, and Grassi felt some delicacy in being the first to speak on the subject. At last, a circumstance came to his ears which determined him to delay no longer. A friend told him that a violent dispute had arisen between the young men, each imagining that the other stood higher than himself in the damsel's estimation. It had ended in Carlo making a violent assault on Beppo, greatly to the scandal of the neighbourhood.

Grassi now determined that on the first favourable opportunity he would consult his friend the parish priest, as to what he should do. He had but a short time to wait. Two days after he had come to this determination, the village was threatened by a violent storm. Thunder clouds rolled over the plain, and seemed each moment as if they would burst as they moved slowly along. As it was the season when the silkworms were feeding — when a storm of the kind would do great injury — the church-bell was rung to call the parishioners together, in order that they might pray that the storm might pass over their village. As soon as the sound of the bell reached the ears of the parishioners, they immediately gathered round the reverend father, who stood outside the church-door, ready to begin his petition as soon as his flock had assembled. On a word from the priest they all knelt down and earnestly prayed that the storm might pass over them.

Onward the clouds rolled, till they were directly overhead, and then with eyes turned upwards they earnestly watched the dense black masses as they passed along; their supplications becoming more fervent, and not ceasing till the danger was over, and the sky above them once more comparatively cloudless. Then all rose from their knees and congratulated one another on the superior sanctity of their priest, whose prayers had evidently saved them from the peril that threatened them.

Grassi waited quietly till the congregation had dispersed, and he then requested Don Pietro to walk to his house with him, as he wished to ask his advice on a subject which interested him greatly.

"I am in great embarrassment, my father," said Grassi, "about my daughter Guiseppina. She is now no longer a child, and yet not old enough to be called a young woman. She is, in fact, just at that age when a girl most requires some one to guide her; and, unfortunately, since the death of my poor wife, I have no one in whom I can confide. Two young men, Beppo and Carlo, are evidently desirous of gaining her affections, but neither is in a position to maintain a wife. I consider my daughter too young to marry, and would soon put a stop to the matter, but I do not wish to act unkindly. I like them both, and, as you know, they are distantly related to me; but, as I said before, I will not at present allow my daughter's affections to be entrapped by either."

"I am glad to find that your attention has been called to this circumstance," said the priest. "Candidly, I have several times thought of bringing it under your notice myself. Although I am certain that a more innocent girl than Guiseppina does not exist, still she is unsuspecting and confiding in the extreme, and I am perfectly sure that both the young fellows are in love with her, and are attempting to make themselves agreeable in her eyes. I also quite agree with you, that at present she is too young to marry. Against the young men themselves I have nothing to say. I am, if anything, in favour of Beppo, the younger, as he is far the steadier of the two, and, moreover, he was formerly a pupil of mine. I should think you would do well, in case they continued their attentions, to dismiss them from your service, at least for a time. Let them try their fortunes elsewhere, and then afterwards — say in a year — if either still loves the girl and can show that he has been able to make his way in the world, and has contrived to earn sufficient money, you can entertain his proposition if you approve of it, and Guiseppina herself offers no objection."

"But suppose they both continue their attachment to her, how would you then advise me to act?"

"Let Guiseppina take her choice, if she likes either of them, and if not send both away. A good girl like your daughter will never lack admirers. You should also bear in mind that it is probable you may do the young men themselves a service by sending them away."

"How so?"

"If they really love the girl, they will work hard to gain her, and so learn habits of prudence and industry. It is probable, too, that, by being separated from Guiseppina for so long, one or both of them may see somebody else they like better, and she may thus be open to receive a more suitable offer, while you will be able to judge from the amount of money each has saved which is the steadier man."

The conversation between Grassi and the priest did not end till they had arrived at the farm, where Guiseppina, who had hurried on before, was waiting to received them. She had prepared supper, and a very sociable repast it was, nor did it terminate till they heard the bell toll for vespers, when they left the table and accompanied the priest to the church.

A very few days after this conversation, chance threw in Grassi's way an opportunity of bringing matters to a climax. One morning, on going round his farm, he heard the voices of two men in violent altercation. So interested were they in their dispute, that they did not see him approach till he was within a few yards of them. The disputants were Beppo and Carlo, and the subject of their quarrel — Guiseppina. Grassi stopped for a few moments to listen, and then, on hearing Carlo threaten to kill Beppo if he ever found him speaking to Guiseppina again, he stepped forward, and placing himself between them he inquired what they meant by impertinently making his daughter the object of the their disputes.

For some moments the two youths stood in speechless astonishment at the sudden appearance of Grassi. At last Carlo found words —

"I did not wish to speak disrespectfully either of your daughter or yourself, but I have a right to be angry with Beppo for all that."

"How so?" inquired Grassi.

"Because he is always trying to speak to Guiseppina, and I won't allow that."

"I have as much right as you, at any rate," said Beppo. "I am certain she likes me as well as she does you, if not better."

"Oh, that needs to be proved," said Carlo.

"When did she ever give you a flower, I should like to know?" asked Beppo.

So they continued their recriminations for some time, Grassi listening attentively all the while. At last he came to the conclusion that it was high time for him to adopt some decided course. He felt convinced that Guiseppina was not smitten with either, but he know she had at the same time shown some slight preference for Beppo, and if he (Grassi) did not use great vigilance, this might in time ripen into a deeper feeling. Folding his arms, and assuming as much of a dictatorial air as he could summon to his aid, he said —

"It does not seem to have struck either of you that I am entitled to some little voice in the matter; but so it appears to me, and more than that, I intend to prove it. What right," he continued, "have you to make my child the subject of your disputes, or to speak of engaging her affections, without consulting me about it? Are either of you capable of keeping a wife? You know perfectly well you could neither of you maintain one even for a month's time; and do you think I will allow my daughter to marry any one who cannot afford to keep her? Certainly not, even if there were not other things to be considered. Now I intend to put a stop to all this. You will both immediately leave my service. But I do not wish to quarrel with you, or to act harshly or unjustly; for I admit that I have no right to be angry with you for admiring my daughter. It is a compliment, although I may not accept it as such. You stand in the light of relatives to me, although the relationship is distant, and to show my kind feeling towards you, I will make this proposition. You must leave Bovisio to-morrow. Next Sunday is the Feast of the Ascension, and if on that day next year you are still in the same mind, you can return. If I find that during your absence you have been industriously and respectably employed, and have earned sufficient money to furnish a house, I will allow the one my daughter selects (assuming she will choose either) to become her suitor, and I will assist him to stock his farm. Now you understand my determination."

"But will you order Beppo not to attempt to see her if I do not?" said Carlo.

"I am glad you have mentioned that," said Grassi. "If I find that either attempts to speak to my daughter, to see her, or even to send a message to her during the time, He shall never have Guiseppina."

"But," said Beppo, "how will it be possible for us while we are away to earn sufficient money to furnish a house? For my own part I am acquainted with no one out of Bovisio; and who will employ a stranger?"

"It is only just," said the farmer, "that I should assist you, if you accept my terms. You, Beppo, I will recommend to the merchant in Milan who yearly purchases my silk. He is a kind-hearted and liberal man, and I am sure he will do anything he can to oblige me. You can read and write well, and may be of great use to him in his business. You, Carlo, I will recommend to the Count della Spada, who has enormous estates between Lecco and Bergamo. His steward is a cousin of mine, and I am sure he will give you employment. You well understand the manner of breaking-in horses. His Excellency owns a magnificent stud, and I am sure will reward you liberally if you merit it. Now you each have an equal chance. There is a crown apiece to pay your journeys to Milan and Lecco; and if you do not change your minds with respect to my daughter during your absence, I shall expect to see you before high-mass on Ascension Day next year, and then, as I said before, if I find you have conducted yourselves honourably, and earned sufficient to furnish a house, I will allow the one my daughter chooses (always, as I said before, assuming she will accept either of you) to become the suitor for her hand."

As the young men knew perfectly well that Grassi was not a man to change his mind, they had no alternative but to accept his offer, and they determined the next morning, without even bidding adieu to Guiseppina, to leave Bovisio — the one for Lecco, the other for Milan.

Grassi said nothing to his daughter about the departure of Beppo and Carlo till the day after they had gone. Guiseppina was evidently much surprised at the intelligence. She said nothing however; but from the expression of her countenance it was not difficult for her father to see that she was anything but pleased. To say the truth, Grassi had not resolved on obliging the young men to leave the locality at all too soon. Almost unknown to herself, Guiseppina had began to form an attachment for Beppo. For more than a week she was low-spirited, and frequently burst into tears without any apparent cause. Gradually, however, her melancholy subsided, and she resumed her domestic duties with her accustomed cheerfulness, greatly to the satisfaction of her father, who was beginning to blame himself for not having sooner interfered in the matter.

We will now leave Grassi and his daughter in the farm, and follow the fortunes of Carlo and Beppo. As the latter was sincerely attached to Guiseppina, it may be easily imagined that his spirits were very low when he left Bovisio. His feelings fairly overcame him as the passed the house of his beloved, and he felt so dizzy that he was nearly fainting. He contrived, however, to stagger on for some little distance, and then, still in sight of the house, he seated himself on a bank, and burst into tears. Suddenly he made a vigorous attempt to rouse himself, and, dashing the tears from his eyes, he rose from the bank. Casting one long look at the house, as if expecting some sign or token from Guiseppina, he shouldered his pack and resolutely started on his road to Milan. He did not stop again so long as the church steeple of Bovisio was visible.

But having got well beyond this, he halted and took from his wallet some bread and fruit, and while eating he began to turn over in his mind the position he was in and his future prospects. To one not so deeply in love they might have appeared somewhat gloomy; but he had a valuable prize to gain, and was not dismayed at the difficulties in the way of obtaining it. Everything depended on the reception he should received from the silk merchant in Milan, to whom he bore the recommendation from Grassi. If the merchant received him favourably and took him into his employment, there was every probability of his doing well, as he determined that there should be no lack of industry on his part.

Young as he was, and little as he had seen of the world, he could perceive that there were grave chances against him. The merchant might not want any person; Grassi might even had formed an erroneous opinion of his willingness to oblige him, and he (Beppo) might not be sufficiently expert in the value of silk and the mode of traffic to be of much use to him. True, he understood the culture of the worm, and the method of winding the silk from the cocoons; but there his knowledge of the business ended. Finding that he could come to no definite conclusion, he resolved to put off all further consideration of the matter till he should arrive in Milan. Turning his thoughts on his mistress, he replaced the remainder of his bread and fruit in his wallet and started off so manfully on his road that he arrived safely at his destination before nightfall.

When Beppo reached Milan he took a lodging in a small inn near the cathedral. It was with some difficulty he persuaded the host to receive him, so crowded it was with persons from the country who had flocked to the city, in order to be present at the religious ceremonies which were to take place on the Feast of the Ascension. Although somewhat confused with the noise and bustle, Beppo contrived to make some inquiries as to the character of the merchant Cortese, to whom he was recommended. To his great satisfaction he heard him spoken of by all as a kind-hearted, liberal, and wealthy man.

Next day Beppo called at the warehouse to seek an interview with Cortese. When he arrived, he was questioned by the porter as to the nature of his errand, and on being informed that it was to ask employment, the man said,

"I am afraid, my poor fellow, you will be disappointed. Our master has ten times as many persons applying for employment as he can take on, and unless your recommendation comes from a person of influence, you will be merely wasting your time by waiting."

Beppo told him he had been recommended by the farmer Grassi of Bovisio. The porter smiled and said, "I suspect that will hardly be sufficient, but you can try. Go into the warehouse and you will there find the Signor Cortese, but I very much fear you will gain little for your trouble."

Beppo, undismayed at the observations of the porter, entered the warehouse. No sooner was he inside, than he saw the merchant in earnest and apparently angry conversation with several persons evidently employed in his business, who had gathered around him, and were endeavouring to explain away some irregularity which had occurred in the establishment. Thinking it would be wrong in him to intrude himself till the conversation was over, Beppo stood aside, awaiting a convenient opportunity to address the merchant.

Suddenly the latter, apparently in wrath, broke from those who had gathered around him, and accidentally perceiving Beppo. asked him somewhat sharply what he wanted. Beppo respectfully told his errand.

"I am sorry I cannot oblige my friend Grassi, for I have no opening at present." —Then, abruptly stopping, he looked fixedly in Beppo's face as if struck with his intelligent expression, — "But first tell me," he continued, "what you can do. Can you read and write, and do you understand anything of the business?"

"I understand little of the business," said Beppo, "beyond knowing good silk from bad; but I can read and write. My poor mother wished me to be brought up for the priesthood, and the priest of Bovisio, to oblige her, gave me some little education. After her death I had no one to help me, and I have since worked on Signor Grassi's farm."

The merchant immediately gave Beppo a letter, which he had in his hand, and told him to read it. Beppo did so fluently and distinctly.

"That is very well," said the merchant. "Now come with me, and let me see how you can write." So saying, he conducted him into a small room which he used as an office, and placing a piece of parchment before him, told him to write from his dictation. Beppo somewhat nervously obeyed him.

"That is not so very well done," said the merchant, looking at the sheet. "But with care you will no doubt be able to do better. I am much inclined to give you a trial. I have just been obliged to discharge one of my people for a gross dishonesty, and possibly you may be able to supply his place. If you choose, you can come for a week; then I will see what you can do, and if you please me, I may perhaps take you on permanently. I will not say what salary I shall give you till I have tested your capabilities. Now are you content with the arrangement?"

Beppo accepted the offer with gratitude, and was immediately placed under the manager, with orders to obey him in every respect.

During the probationary week, Beppo used every means in his power to please the manager, and in this he succeeded. The result was, that he was taken into the merchant's service at a very moderate salary, but with the promise of an increase if he gave satisfaction. He was also permitted to have a small room over the warehouse, which, as it did away with the necessity of hiring a lodging, enabled him to live within his income, — small as it was — and also to set aside something weekly.

We must now return to Beppo's rival. Carlo had even less difficulty in finding remunerative employment than Beppo. The evening of the day on which he had received his discharge, a friend of Grassi, who lived near Lecco, had occasion to pass through Bovisio on his way home. A message was sent by him to the steward of the nobleman's estates, to the effect that Carlo would arrive there in a day or two, and that he (Grassi) hoped he would be received at once into the count's service. Carlo left Bovisio about an hour after Beppo. He also had to pass by the farmer's house, but, although both the lovers had pledged themselves not to attempt to obtain an interview with Guiseppina previous to their departure, Carlo, unlike his rival, hung about the house, hoping to have a few parting words, if not an avowal of affection, before he left. But as Guiseppina was in utter ignorance of the departure of her two suitors, she slept quietly on, little dreaming that she would not see either of them again for a whole year. After having vainly watched outside the house for some time, Carlo became more daring, and advancing to the door, tapped at it gently. No notice, however, was taken, and he repeated his tap somewhat louder than before. He was upon the point of knocking a third time, when he heard the wooden bolt within softly withdrawn, and the door opened. But instead of the figure of his beloved, that of her father, in somewhat careless costume, stood before him. With simulated courtesy he asked Carlo in what way he could serve him. At first Carlo had some little difficulty in answering, so much was he startled at Grassi's unexpected appearance; but, quickly recovering himself, he replied, in a tone as polite as that in which he was addressed, that he had merely called to thank his much venerated friend and patron, Signor Grassi, for all the trouble he had taken on his behalf, and to wish him health and happiness during his absence.

Although Grassi easily perceived the young fellow's disappointment, and could hardly help smiling, he replied with great gravity, that he sincerely thanked Carlo for his good wishes, and then, after confiding him to the especial protection of all the saints and wishing him a prosperous journey, he closed the door, and Carlo, assuming a rueful countenance, which appeared in the present instance a perfectly natural one, continued his journey.

By degrees, as he marched on, his sorrowful feelings somewhat abated, or rather gave place to angry ones. He cursed Grassi in such terms, that if the farmer could have heard only the tenth part, Carlo's chance of ever receiving Guiseppina's hand would have been irrevocably gone. At last his anger having spent itself, he continued on his road, beguiling the way sometimes by singing, sometimes by thinking of Guiseppina, and occasionally speculating on the reception he should receive from the steward, till at length he arrived safely at his place of destination.

By the steward, who had been expecting him, he was received in a very friendly manner. After providing him with a good supper, he noticed the fatigued expression on the face of his guest, and showed him to the place where a bed had been improvised for him, saying that they would talk of business next day. The following morning the steward conducted Carlo round a portion of the estate, especially that which was to be principally under his management. He also showed him the Count's stud of horses, and the stables, with the cottage beside them which was to be his residence. The steward, who was a very shrewd man, listened with great attention to Carlo's remarks concerning the horses, and soon came to the conclusion that he was precisely the man required. All being agreed on, Carlo at once entered on his duties.

The year of probation passed on successfully enough for both of Guiseppina's suitors. Beppo continued in his situation, and gave great satisfaction to the merchant, having risen by degrees in the establishment. He was first made an under-clerk, and then, by successive grades, he became Signor Cortese's confidential man of business, and with each rise obtained a corresponding increase of salary. During the whole of the time, he lived most economically, and carefully set aside the principal portion of his salary, till at last he had accumulated a considerable sum of money. It is not to be supposed that the handsome, steady young fellow did not meet with many Milanese damsels who would not have objected to have received attentions from him, and more than one in a far superior position to his own. But never for one moment did his affections wander from his beloved Guiseppina. She was to him the idol of his existence, and he would have thought it a sin, scarcely less than blasphemy itself, not to keep true to the girl he so fondly loved.

Carlo was also very much liked by his employers. A few months after his appointment, the Count with his wife and her sister — a handsome but very proud woman — visited his estate. He was much pleased with the admirable condition in which he found it, and complimented Carlo on his care and attention. The Count had a great love for horses, and no nobleman in Lombardy had finer. Day after day he visited the stables, and on each occasion he was attended by Carlo. The Countess and her sister, who was an excellent horsewoman, all expressed their admiration at the fine condition of the stud. The Countess' sister went so far as to request Carlo to break-in for her a magnificent young horse she wished to ride herself. Carlo, who greatly admired the lady, was delighted with the commission, and took great pains in training the horse well. The lady herself took great interest in the progress he made, and with great condescension, would frequently watch him and converse with him while engaged in the task.

At last he pronounced the horse perfectly ready for her ladyship, and the Count and Countess attended to witness her first essay. The experiment succeeded admirably. The horse, though quite docile, was sufficiently high-spirited to show off her ladyship's skill to the greatest advantage. So pleased was she with Carlo, that when she left the estate, she made him a present of a purse containing five sequins, to which the Count added a similar sum.

Although Carlo had a handsome salary and could have saved more money than Beppo, he was naturally of a careless and extravagant disposition, and spent almost as rapidly as he earned. Still, he contrived to set apart a considerable sum to take with him to Bovisio at the close of the year. He was stimulated to do this quite as much from jealousy of Beppo, of whose advancement he had indirectly heard, as from love to Guiseppina. To say the truth, his ardour had considerably abated, possibly from his great admiration of the Countess' sister. Not that he had for a moment entertained the idea that she could ever be his wife, yet, in spite of himself he could not drive her from his thoughts, and her image incessantly haunted him, notwithstanding that he had not ceased to think of Guiseppina.

At the farm, all passed off smoothly enough during the year. More than one young fellow, it is true, had attempted to make himself agreeable to Grassi's daughter, but without the slightest success. The girl herself gave no encouragement to any one, and even if she had, her father was too much of a man of honour not to keep his word to Carlo and Beppo. During the year, he had made frequent inquiries as to the conduct of both, and had always received most satisfactory answers. He was somewhat puzzled as to which of the two ought to be chosen for his son-in-law. He greatly admired the steady qualities of Beppo, but strange to say, his great success in the house of business gave him some little anxiety. He began to feel that Beppo was better adapted for a town than a country life, and Grassi did not like the idea of his daughter leaving him to live in Milan. On the other hand, although the reports he had received of Carlo were on the whole satisfactory, he also heard that he was somewhat of a careless and thoughtless disposition — negative qualities which were highly distasteful to the farmer — still, he admitted that when married and settled, Carlo might become more steady, and make his daughter a good husband after all. Having turned the matter over and over again in his mind, he at last determined to wait till the arrival of the two suitors, and then choose the one he considered would make the best match for Guiseppina.

It now wanted but two days to the Feast of the Ascension, and both suitors made preparations to visit Bovisio. In anticipation of his visit Beppo had purchased a new and becoming suit of clothes, in which he looked remarkably well. He then counted his savings and found they amounted to thirty-two sequins. Thirty of these he placed in a handsome purse, and the other two he expended in the purchase of a necklace for Guiseppina, and all being in readiness, he waited with as much patience as he could conjure up, for the morning of Ascension Day, when he proposed to leave Milan at daybreak, and stroll quietly along without fatiguing himself or disarranging his fine clothes, so that when he presented himself at the farmer's house, he would make the best appearance possible.

Carlo, too, had made extensive preparations for his visit. He had also purchased a new suit of clothes, but they were hardly in so good taste as those of Beppo, possibly from the fact that the latter had the choice of the best tailors in Milan, while his rival had been obliged to content himself with a tailor who resided in Lecco. Nevertheless he looked well in them, and he knew it. He had not saved as much money as Beppo; in fact he had only ten sequins in gold in his purse, and these he was doomed to lose before he started on his journey.

On the Friday evening before Ascension Day, a company of soldiers arrived at the Count's castle, whom the steward was ordered to make welcome, and to accommodate as well as he could. He called in Carlo to assist him, and fully carried out the instructions he had received. They prepared an excellent supper for the soldiers, with plenty of wine, to which both hosts and guests did full justice. When supper was over, the captain of the soldiers took from his pocket a couple of dice, and challenged any of the company to play with him. The steward, overcome with wine, had fallen asleep, but Carlo, among whose failings was a strong love of gambling, accepted the Captain's invitation. They played for some time with varying luck, but as the game progressed, Carlo continued to drink, the captain encouraging him although he drank little himself. The result was, that before Carlo sought his bed, he had lost the whole of the sequins he had proposed to take with him to Bovisio.

When Carlo awoke next morning, he had a racking headache. Being still in a sort of stupor, he turned his head on the pillow, and attempted to go to sleep again. He had almost succeeded in this, when suddenly he started up to a sitting posture, clasped his hands on his forehead, and tried to recall the events of the previous evening. His thoughts at first assumed something of the form of a disturbed, uneasy dream, but gradually the stern realities of his position came before him. He now clearly remembered his beginning to gamble with the captain, but could not remember how it terminated. He rose from his bed, his headache dispelled by his great anxiety. He examined his purse, in which he found only two coins — a silver one of small value, and another of brass, worth scarcely more than a penny.

Carlo was overwhelmed with sorrow at his loss. His first idea was to seek the captain, and accuse him of having cheated him; but after a moment's consideration he remembered that he had not the slightest proof of unfair play having been indulged in. What to do he knew not; but he clearly saw that immediate action was necessary. The next day was the Feast of the Ascension, and he was then to present himself to Grassi with at least sufficient money to furnish a house, else his chance of Guiseppina's hand would be irrecoverably lost to him, and, added to this mortification, there would be the vexation of his rival Beppo triumphing over him. Almost distracted in mind, he walked backwards and forwards in the room, undecided what course to adopt. To quit the field without making a trial he felt would be cowardly but at the same time to enter it against Beppo without some chance of success would simply be to expose himself to ridicule. At last the idea suggested itself that he should apply for help to the Innominato, who was well known to him by reputation as being a kind-hearted man, always willing to help a person in distress. The thought had hardly occurred when he resolved to put it into execution. There was no time to be lost. It was now Saturday morning, and before high-mass the next day, he would have to present himself to Guiseppina's father.

He hurriedly dressed himself in his new clothes, and without stopping to take leave of his good friend the steward, or saying a word to the captain, whom he began to dislike very thoroughly, he started off for Lecco, and there fortunately found a small bark belonging to a friend of his which was about to proceed up the lake. The sailor agreed to put him ashore at a short distance from the castle of the Innominato. As soon as Carlo had landed he started at a run up the mountain. It was barely midday when, breathless from exertion, he arrived at the Hospice. After he had with some difficulty made his errand understood — for he was at the moment quite exhausted with the violent exertions he had made — the messenger was despatched to the castle. In a few minutes he returned with the intelligence that the Innominato was willing to receive Carlo. Now, and perhaps for the first time in his life, he was overcome with fear. Like most others acquainted with the astrologer's reputation, he believed that he had not only the power to do good, but also to punish. Carlo began to have some qualms as to whether his errand was altogether a justifiable one. Not that his conscience troubled him very much, but he feared that the Innominato might detect him; and of this there was the more danger as he had not yet very clearly arranged in his mind what story he should tell, and before he had settled one to his satisfaction, he was ushered into the presence of the magician.

Carlo at first felt nervous and abashed on finding himself face to face with a man of so much learning. But the Innominato, by his kind and courteous manner, soon set his guest at ease.

"As I see that you are somewhat bashful and are doubtful about telling me the nature of your errand," he said good-humouredly, "I suspect it is some love affair you are mixed up in. Am I not right?"

"Well, partly, your Excellency," said Carlo, stammering and looking remarkably confused and foolish, "and partly, I thought, you might charitably assist me to recover some money I have lost, and without which it will be impossible for me to obtain the hand of the girl I am in love with."

"How is that?" asked the Innominato.

"Because her father will not allow her to marry any one who is not possessed of sufficient means to furnish a house for his daughter to reside in."

"But why not earn it then?" said the astrologer. "You are young and active, and have plenty of time before you."

"Alas, your Excellency! that is the very point," said Carlo; "I have not the time. To-morrow, before high-mass, I must present myself at the house of Guiseppina's father at Bovisio, with the money in my purse, or all chance will be lost."

"And how long," the Innominato asked, "did the girl's father give you to procure the money?"

"Twelve months," replied Carlo.

"And you have not obtained it? I am afraid you are lazily inclined," remarked the astrologer, with some severity in his tone.

"Pardon me, learned sir, but I did earn more money than enough for the purpose," said Carlo; "but, unfortunately, when going home last night I was robbed of it by some thieves who attacked me."

"That is indeed, very sad," said the Innominato, pretending that he was quite unsuspicious that any lie had been told him. "If your statement be true, you deserve to be assisted."

Then opening the large chest which stood in his study, he drew from it a coarse linen bag. It was some eighteen or twenty inches square, with a band connecting the two uppermost corners, and long enough for a person to wear it over the shoulder. "Take this bag," he continued, "and plain though it appears, it is of immense value. It will bring you a far greater amount of gold than you have lost; that is to say, if you implicitly follow the directions I shall give you. But remember, it is only a loan; I do not give it to you, and therefore I must have some pledge that you will faithfully return it to me. What money have you about you?"

"Very little, your Excellency," said Carlo — this time truthfully enough. "This is all I have;" and he produced from his pocket the silver coin and the brass one.

"If that is all you have, you are certainly ill off," said the Innominato; "but the brass coin will do for me, more especially that it is much defaced, and can be easily recognised by this mark in the rim. Now, remember, when you receive this coin, it will be a sign that I wish again to possess the bag, and you will incur no little personal danger if you attempt to retain it. And now let me explain how you are to use the bag. You must wear it slung across your shoulders, and you can put it on at once, as I have but a few more minutes to spare with you. So, that will do. Now, as you descend the mountain, take the road to Como, which will be the nearest way if you are going to Bovisio. When you come to the rivulet near the mill, stoop down and pick the smallest pebble you can find from the water, and put it into your bag. Then continue your journey, and when you see another pebble in your path at least twice the size of the former, pick it up and put it in your bag also. Do this again, and as often as you choose, taking care that each time the pebble you pick up is at least twice the size of the last one. You can, if you please, go on in this manner until midnight, but not later. When you go to sleep you must make the bag with the stones in it your pillow. To-morrow morning open the bag, and you will find that the first pebble you put in is changed into a gold sequin; the second, which was twice the size of the first, into two sequins; the third, into four; the fourth into eight, and so on. But you must not fail to bear in mind this condition — that none of the stones you have picked up are lost, or the bag injured. All the magic power will vanish from the bag if this is so. When I send you the coin you have placed in my hands, you must return me the bag. Now, that there may be no mistake, tell me if you clearly understand me in every particular?"

Carlo said that he understood perfectly, and would obey the instructions to the letter. Shortly afterwards the Innominato allowed him to depart.

Carlo, in high spirits, and completely recovered from his fatigue, rapidly descended the hill and soon arrived at the mill, where he took from the stream a remarkably small pebble, certainly not larger than a pea, which he put into his bag. Again he started on his journey, his eyes fixed on the path before him, that he might find a pebble, about double the size of the one he had already taken. In a short time he found one, and having placed it in his bag, he continued his road, watching for a third. This he found, and a fourth and fifth, all of which he put carefully into the bag. He walked briskly on for some miles, picking up the pebbles he met with in his path, and taking care that each should be twice the size of the former.

At last the bag became very heavy, and Carlo being tired, he seated himself on the bank by the roadside, and beguiled the time by considering how he should pass the night. Having decided to sleep at the house of a friend, who resided about half a mile from Bovisio, and who, he was certain, would give him a hearty welcome, he started again, feeling very much refreshed by his rest. As he went along he gathered other pebbles and placed them in his bag, which, by the time he had nearly reached his friend's house, had become more than three parts full, and somewhat difficult to carry.

Just as Carlo increased his pebbles, his ambition grew, and his love for Guiseppina lessened. At last he began to consider the number of sequins he should be in possession of next morning, and how he would invest them. To number them was somewhat difficult, and he several times went mentally over the sum without being certain that after all the product was right. No matter, he was convinced that they amounted to many hundreds, and he already considered himself a man of fortune. To determine how he would invest the money, caused him even more difficulty than calculating its amount. He thought over the different farms he would be able to purchase, but he concluded at last that none of them would suit him. They were all too insignificant. If he purchased a farm at all, he should like one with some extensive meadows attached to it, in which he could rear a fine stud of horses. But there was not one near Bovisio suited for such a purpose; nor, in fact, could he remember such a one for many miles round. Singularly enough, he thought but little of Guiseppina, and when he did he felt cold and indifferent. Had he analysed his feelings he would have found, in fact, that his love for her had almost, if not entirely, vanished.

He now suddenly came within sight of his friend's house, where he proposed to pass the night, and at the same moment he saw on the path a fine round pebble, about twice the size of the last he had placed in his bag. He immediately took it up, but found some difficulty in placing it with the others, his bag had become so full. At last he succeeded, and was on the point of continuing his way towards his friend's house, when there suddenly flashed across his fancy the superb figure of the Countess' sister. The next moment it occurred to him, that as he was now a man of great wealth, he might make a suitable match for her! She had shown him great attention, and had complimented him highly. He was a handsome young fellow, and if he were only dressed in the rich clothes of a noble, he should be able to pass muster with any of them. He was not engaged to Guiseppina, who was after all but the daughter of an ignorant small farmer. Even his jealousy entirely vanished, and he argued that it would be better for Guiseppina to marry Beppo, for whom she would make a far more suitable wife than for a man of wealth and position. So rapidly did this train of thought pass across his mind, that he determined, fatigued as he was, not to sleep at the house of his friend, but to proceed onward to Milan, leaving Guiseppina for Beppo.

The shades of night were fast falling around him as he left Bovisio behind. He was fearfully fatigued, though he did not appear to feel to such extent as might have been expected the weight of his bag of pebbles. He attempted to beguile the way by thinking of the Countess' sister. He was puzzled as to what costume he should wear when he presented himself to her, and the manner in which he could best conceal himself until his new dresses were made. But in spite of all his attempts he could not disguise from himself the state of utter exhaustion he was in. When he was nearly on the point of fainting from fatigue, he saw a light a short distance before him. He summoned up fresh courage, and advanced towards it, when he perceived that it proceeded from a wine-shop. He now resolved on taking a good supper, and drawing his purse from his pocket, he took out the silver coin. When he had reached the place, he told the landlord to bring him some wine, bread, and meat; and then seated himself before a table outside the door till the meal should be ready. The landlord did not keep him long waiting, and Carlo thoroughly enjoyed the repast set before him. When he had finished his supper, instead of proceeding on his journey, he sat for some time longer conversing with the landlord, and drinking freely, until at last he had expended the whole of the change which remained of the silver coin after he had paid for his supper. When he arose to depart he was so thoroughly intoxicated, that the landlord had to help him on with his bag, which he had placed on the ground during supper. "If all that was gold," said the landlord, "you would be a very wealthy man."

Carlo was on the point of informing him that next morning the weight he carried would be changed into gold, and that he should be one of the richest men in Lombardy; but the idea had hardly been formed when it vanished from his mind, — so intoxicated was he.

He now started again on his road, but from his drunken condition he could hardly keep on his legs. He continued to stagger onward with difficulty, talking to himself in vague, disjointed sentences as he went. One moment he determined on being a baron, the next a count. Then he thought of Guiseppina and her father, and burst into a loud laugh at their insane presumption in thinking that a man of his social position would marry into the family of a miserable little farmer. Then he determined to become a prince — there were many less wealthy than he was. He would be a prince, if only that he might make the lady he intended to marry, a princess. He continued on in this manner until he suddenly struck his foot against something with such force, that he fell on the ground.

When he had somewhat recovered from the shock, he felt with his hand, and found that he had struck against a pebble at least twice as large as the last he had picked up. He now thanked his good fortune for throwing in his way a prize of such value. He then with difficulty succeeded in getting on his legs, and, taking up the stone, attempted to place it with the others in the bag, but could not accomplish it. He took the bag from his shoulder, and, putting it on the ground, endeavoured to place the stone in it, but it was already so full that it could not enter. He now opened the mouth of the bag, and placing the stone upon the others, ineffectually tried to shake it in. Thoroughly enraged at last, he seized the two uppermost corners of the bag, and placing his foot on the stone, attempted with all his force to thrust it in. Suddenly the bag yielded to the pressure, and, on raising it up, he found there was nothing in it. The force he had used had burst the bottom of the bag, and all the pebbles had fallen on the ground. Owing to his inebriated state he was unaware of the disaster, and thought that the stones had fallen out by some accident. He now tried to fill the bag again, but finding his efforts useless, he threw it away, and searching for the largest stone — which, from the darkness of the night, he had some difficulty in finding — he took off his coat and, wrapping it round the pebble, continued on his road for a few paces further, when he suddenly stopped. He then placed his coat, with the pebble in it, on the ground to serve as a pillow, and laying his head upon it, he soon fell asleep, being complete overcome by fatigue and wine.

It was broad day before Carlo awoke from his drunken slumbers. As soon as he had somewhat succeeded in collecting his scattered senses, he began to turn over in his mind the adventures of the previous day. He looked around him for his bag, but it was nowhere to be seen. He then remembered that he had placed the stone in his coat, but on feeling for it found that it had gone. He took his coat from the ground and was unfolding it, when something dropped at his feet — it was the battered brass coin which he had left with the Innominato the day before.

His disaster now came before him with all its force. He retraced his steps with but little hope of finding the bag. It had disappeared, though the pebbles, now useless, were scattered on the ground, just where he had left them the evening before. What to do he knew not. To go on to Milan would be useless, for he knew no one there. To go to Bovisio without a coin in his pocket and his clothes soiled, would simply be to make himself ridiculous. At last he decided on returning to the steward. On his way he met the captain who had won his money. The soldier accosted him in a very friendly manner, and in conversation, drew from Carlo that he had lost everything. The captain hereupon began to extol the pleasures of a soldier's life, and advised Carlo to join his company, which, after a little demur, he did. He marched off with the soldiers to the wars, and was never more heard of.

Beppo was true to his appointment, and was received by Grassi in a very friendly manner. A short time afterwards he was accepted by Guiseppina as her suitor, and ultimately became her husband. He still continued in the house of business, and Grassi, having sold his farm at Bovisio, took another near Milan, so that he could see his daughter daily. Beppo continued to prosper, and at last was taken into partnership. He became in time one of the wealthiest merchants in Lombardy.

THE END

THE STRANGER

At the close of our tale, "The Physician's Daughter," — it was mentioned that the Doctor Gaddi, after the death of his child, retired to the convent in which Fra Gerolamo was a monk, and that he remained there till his death, which took place about ten years after he had been admitted into the order under the name of brother Anselmo. Similarity of taste and disposition brought about an intimacy between Anselmo and Fra Gerolamo, which afterwards ripened into a strong friendship. This was at first a source of some little jealousy among the other monks, which it required all the authority of the superior to keep within bounds. But it gradually subsided, and in the end they all worked amicably together. The admission of Brother Anselmo contributed greatly, not only to the renown of the convent, but also to its pecuniary advantage, for he had endowed it with the whole of his savings; and the superior, — a man of great tact and experience, — did all in his power to keep among them one whose fame was not only spread all over Lombardy, but who was also looked upon by all the medical authorities in Italy, as a man of the highest skill and learning.

But Gerolamo and Anselmo were not only endeared to each other by the similarity of their tastes and dispositions; they were also, in their several capacities, a mutual help and solace. Fra Gerolamo, as already stated, found the occupation of attending and comforting the sick, the most congenial to him; and although his knowledge of the healing art was much superior to that of the other monks, he frequently had cases brought under his notice far beyond his skill. In Anselmo, he had now a coadjutor whose knowledge was not only greatly in advance of his own, but who took an equal interest in all charitable works. Fra Gerolamo was now able to call in the opinion of the most celebrated doctor of Pavia to aid him in such cases.

On Anselmo's side, the advantage he gained by Gerolamo's friendship was likewise great. Although Anselmo had always entertained a great respect for religion and its ministers, he had hitherto paid comparatively little attention to its observances, quieting his conscience by the practice of good works. Now that he had retired from the world and entered on the quiet duties of a monastic life, he had far greater scope and opportunity for meditation. He found himself, in all theological points, far behind where he ought to have been; and his ignorance caused him great anxiety. A false feeling of shame for some time kept him from making a confidant of any one. In fact there were few of the brethren whose abilities he held in sufficient respect to induce him to select a teacher from among them. He [Anselmo] had a great veneration for the superior, but his [superior's] time was always so fully occupied in superintending the affairs of the convent, that he [Anselmo] would have felt it wrong to encroach upon it.

Although his confidence in Fra Gerolamo was very great, he at first regarded him purely as a man of science like himself. Gradually, however, he had reason to change his opinion. In the conversations on pious subjects, which occasionally took place between them when engaged on missions together to different parts of the Lake district, he began to entertain a strong respect for the religious opinions of Gerolamo, and little by little he opened his mind to him, and sought his advice. Fra Gerolamo, nothing loth, gave Anselmo all the religious instruction and consolation in his power, and the result was, that the physician became far easier in his mind, while his respect and affection for his teacher became unbounded.

As they grew better acquainted with each other, Fra Gerolamo frequently questioned his friend as to the character of the Innominato. The answers he received, however, hardly satisfied the worthy monk. There not only seemed a suspicious amount of mystery about them, but he could also perceive that the subject was not agreeable to Anselmo, and that he invariably took the first opportunity to change the conversation. At last, when Anselmo returned from a visit of some days, which, with the superior's permission, he had made to the castle, he was evidently so low-spirited, that Gerolamo (who, finding the subject disagreeable to his friend, had determined not to speak of the Innominato again) suddenly changed his resolution, and bluntly asked him if anything had occurred to annoy him during his absence.

"Certainly not," said Anselmo; "why do you ask me?"

"Because I can easily perceive you are exceedingly low-spirited, and I feared something might have occurred to give you pain."

"Well, to speak frankly, that is the case," said Anselmo. "My friend, who is known here as the Innominato, is exceedingly ill, and I am afraid will never recover."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," said Fra Gerolamo, "for if you consider his case hopeless, the can be but little chance of his recovery. What ails him?"

"That I no more know than you do. When I last saw him, which you will remember is scarcely two months since, he was in robust health. He has now dwindled to a shadow of what he then was. He has lost all appetite, and is extremely debilitated. I questioned him as to his malady, but he told me he had none. He said he had neither pain nor disease, but felt that he was rapidly sinking into the grave, and that he had not the slightest wish to live. I reminded him, that if such was his conviction, he ought not to neglect to prepare himself for the change which awaited him, and I asked whether I should send any one from the convent to converse with him and give him spiritual consolation."

'Not at present,' he said, 'I may speak to you again on the subject at a later time.'

"I inquired whether he would like us to offer up prayers for his recovery."

'No,' he said, 'for that would be useless. I am certain that I am about to die, and that nothing can avert my doom. Go back to the convent, and in a few days you may hear from me. Ask me no more questions now, for conversation fatigues me, and, as you may perceive, I have no strength to lose.'

"Knowing his determined character, I immediately prepared to obey him. When I was taking leave, he placed in my hands a heavy purse of gold, which is now in the possession of the superior."

'Take that purse,' he said, 'and expend its contents in solacing the sick and needy. I know you will do so with discretion. Unfortunately for the poor, I shall soon be unable to befriend them further; for my means of benefiting them will cease with my life.'

"He appears to be a very extraordinary character," said Fra Gerolamo. "Do you know his history?"

"Very little of it," said Anselmo, "and yet perhaps there is not another individual who knows as much [as I do]. I am aware you are anxious that I should tell you more of him than I have hitherto done," he continued, smiling, "and that you have been somewhat vexed at what you consider my unnecessary secrecy. I will now tell you candidly how I first became acquainted with him, and how that acquaintance ripened into the friendship which now exists between us."

Anselmo then shortly narrated how, when a poor student in Pavia, he had first made the acquaintance of the Innominato; how he had received great personal kindness and pecuniary assistance from him; and how the Innominato had suddenly left Pavia, and had been lost sight of by him for many years, but at last he had found him again in the castle at Lecco. He also explained how, on more than one occasion, he had tried to learn something of his personal history, but always without success.

When Anselmo had finished, Fra Gerolamo remained silent for some moments, evidently thinking deeply. Then, turning somewhat suddenly on his friend, he inquired whether he did not think the Innominato was a necromancer, who effected all the wonders he performed by the agency of evil spirits.

"I am unable," said Anselmo, "to form any conclusion on that subject, so antagonistic are his qualities. His powers — even if half we hear of them be true — are certainly not those of a mere mortal; and yet no one accuses him of exercising those powers otherwise than for the benefit of mankind, which would hardly be the case, did he work with the aid of evil spirits. He has evidently unlimited wealth at his command, and no one knows from what source he receives it. Yet the use he makes of it could not possibly be more consistent with the purest principles of Christianity. He spends but little on himself, and gives with the greatest liberality to the poor. Since I have been a humble brother of your order he has contributed a larger sum to the coffers of the convent than the whole of the nobility and landowners around us. It will be a sad day for the poor when he is taken from us."

"That I most readily grant," said Fra Gerolamo; "a better friend our poor never had, and it will be a sorrowful day indeed for them when they lose him. I also grant that it is difficult, if not uncharitable to hold, that, because we are unable to ascertain from what source he receives his wealth and his power, it must therefore be from the Evil One. At the same time, should the state of his health be as infirm as you believe, is it not a duty incumbent on you to impress upon him the necessity of taking thought on the subject of the terrible change which must shortly come over him?"

"I perfectly agree with you as to that," said Anselmo. "If I do not receive a message from him in the course of to-morrow or next day, requesting my attendance, I shall ask permission of the superior to visit him again; then, setting all other considerations aside, I shall insist upon his acknowledging himself a true son of the Church, and of his submitting to those observances and rites which she has ordained to be used in cases of mortal sickness."

Fra Gerolamo perfectly agreed with him in this conclusion, and their conversation on the subject dropped.

On the evening of the second day after Anselmo's return from his visit to the castle, the convent porter informed him that a messenger from the Innominato had arrived, who wished to speak with him immediately, and on a subject of great importance. Anselmo, without delay, accompanied the porter to the reception room, and on his way he met Fra Gerolamo, whom he invited to be present at the interview. The messenger turned out to be Pietro, the confidential servant of the astrologer. From the expression of the man's face, the monks concluded at once that some terrible accident had befallen either himself or his master, so pallid and terror-stricken was it. The monks endeavoured to draw from him the object of his mission, but it was some time before Pietro could collect his senses sufficiently to allow him to speak on the subject. Then, before he began, he requested that the hall-door should be securely fastened, and that the porter would allow no one to enter while he delivered his message.

Being assured that no one should disturb them till he had finished, Pietro, with tolerable distinctness, told the two monks that his master was seriously ill, and in all probability could only live — unless by a miracle — a few days longer; and that he particularly wished to see the reverend brothers Anselmo and Gerolamo the next day. That there might be no delay in their departure, he had brought with him a bark and six stout rowers, which would enable them to start early next morning.

Pietro had hardly concluded his message when the porter entered the hall. He informed them that the six boatmen had arrived at the convent gate, and earnestly begged for admittance, and on their being informed that he had orders not to allow any one to enter, they had requested him to inform the superior, that if they were not admitted and lodging provided them for the night, they would, without further delay, take the boat back with them to Lecco. Pietro, on hearing the boatmen's message, requested that they might be admitted, but on no account to allow any one else to enter with them. The request was granted, and the boatmen, whose countenances wore the expression of men who had just escaped some imminent peril, entered the hall, in which several of the other monks had now gathered. On asking Pietro the reason of the scared appearance of the boatmen, he said that they had been followed from Lecco by a mysterious person who had haunted the environs of the castle for some weeks past, and whom they took to be an evil spirit. Fra Gerolamo then asked when it had first been seen, and whether the Innominato was acquainted with him.

"Reverend father, that is the most mysterious point of all," said Pietro. "You are perhaps aware that my illustrious master will not grant an interview to any one without first being acquainted with his name, and the object of his visit. On this subject his orders are most peremptory, and any one who disobeys them is immediately sent from the castle, and never allowed to return to it. One morning, a few weeks ago, when in attendance on my master, he ordered me to give a message from him on some insignificant subject to the castle porter. I immediately left the room for that purpose, and, after having given the message, I returned. Although I could hardly have been a minute absent, on my return I found a stranger in the room with my master. He was apparently about thirty years of age, of singularly pallid countenance, deep-seated eyes, and rather delicate features, which would have been handsome had it not been for the exceedingly stern expression they wore. It was impossible to tell from his dress what was his position in life. It was such as a student belonging to a good family might have worn some sixty years since; but it appeared to be new and fitted him well. I cannot tell if any conversation had passed between my master and him; but, if any, it could only have been during the short time I was absent, and therefore but a very few words. What struck me most, was the extraordinary change which his presence seemed to have caused on my master's appearance. When I left the room he was in ordinary health; but when I returned, he was as pale as marble. The expression of his countenance alone had not changed; it was as placid and grave as it had been before."

"Struck by my master's altered appearance, I turned round, if possible to ascertain the cause from the stranger; but he was no longer present. How he had left the room I know not, but he must have done so instantaneously."

"And you have frequently seen him since?" inquired Fra Gerolamo.

"We have, reverend father," answered Pietro, "but never in the castle; although it is possible that he may have seen my master."

"Why do you think it possible without some one in the castle having seen him?"

"Because whenever he may appear, no one ever sees him come or go. He appears and disappears suddenly. Wherever he may stand, he is never seen to approach the spot, and how he quits it is equally mysterious. To-day as I was embarking he stood near the boat, and made signs to us to remain. We pushed off from the land, and when we had arrived near the jutting point close to Bellaggio, we saw him standing on the shore making signs to us to return. But we continued on without paying any attention to his gestures. The night came on, and the moon rose over the mountains, but as there was a thick mist on the lake, we had some little difficulty in distinguishing the point on which we were to land. At last however we found it, and the first object I saw when I put my foot on shore, was the stranger. The boatmen became alarmed, as they knew that he could not have crossed the lake and arrived at the spot on which we found him by any ordinary means, and they were on the point of returning, when I managed to persuade them to stop."

"Have you seen the stranger since Pietro left you?" inquired Anselmo of the boatmen.

"He has never quitted us, reverend father," said one of them. "If you do not give us shelter for the night, and take us under your protection, we will at once return to Lecco."

"And did the stranger speak to you?" inquired Fra Gerolamo of Pietro.

"He did not, reverend father, nor have I ever heard him utter a word."

"Was he near the castle when I last visited your master?" said Anselmo.

"Doubtless he was, reverend father, though you may not have seen him, for occasionally he does not appear for two or three days together."

It was now arranged that the boatmen and Pietro should be accommodated for the night in the hall, where an excellent supper was provided for them. At an early hour the next morning it was agreed, permission having been obtained from the superior, that Fra Gerolamo and Anselmo, accompanied by Pietro, should leave the convent to visit the Innominato.

During the journey the two monks conversed with Pietro concerning his master, but in a tone sufficiently low as not to attract the attention of the boatmen. They inquired how long he had been in the Innominato's service, and what knew of his history.

In reply Pietro informed them that he had been only a few years in service at the castle, but that his father had, till his death, been the Innominato's confidential servant. Pietro also said that he had frequently questioned his father on the Innominato's history, but all the information he could obtain, was that he had been hired by him when the castle was first being prepared for his reception. No one knew whence he came, or what had been his previous history. He was then a handsome man, and although not above thirty years of age, his habits and conversation were as grave and strict as at the present time. Ever since he had inhabited the castle he had been kind and condescending to all; at the same time, he would allow no disobedience of orders or any irregularity in the behaviour of those who were in his service.

Fra Gerolamo also questioned Pietro as to the connexion between the stranger and the astrologer, and what reason he had for believing that the present infirm state of his master's health was caused by his visit.

"I am totally unable to give your reverence any information on that point," said Pietro, "beyond the fact than an extraordinary change for the worse took place in my master's appearance during the few moments I was absent the day I first saw the stranger, and that on every occasion he has been seen in the vicinity of the castle, my master's illness has on that day increased."

"Has your master never made any mention of the stranger to you?"

"Never in a single instance. From his behaviour I should have been led to believe that he did not see him, but his reserved habits and self-control make it impossible to form any proper conclusion on the subject."

"Have you seen the stranger this morning?" inquired Anselmo.

"No, reverend father, I have not, nor have any of the boatmen."

"Should you see him do not fail to point him out to us immediately."

The boat now proceeded swiftly on its way, and had advanced up the Lecco branch of the lake to the point of disembarkation without anything occurring worthy of notice. But no sooner had they landed than Pietro touched Fra Gerolamo on the arm, and pointed to the figure of a man standing on a small eminence near, and apparently watching them attentively. Although Pietro said nothing, Fra Gerolamo had no difficulty in perceiving that this was the stranger whose mysterious visits in and about the castle had caused so much excitement. He was a graceful man, not more than thirty years of age, and though dressed in the style of the previous generation, had something very attractive about his appearance. His pale countenance was eminently handsome, though far from pleasing; the beauty of his features being marred by their cold stern expression. He made neither gesture nor movement, but, standing motionless as a statue, watched the two monks and Pietro as they moved along, the bark having pushed off from the shore and now pursuing its way to Lecco.

After gazing at the figure for a few moments, Fra Gerolamo turned partially round to call his companion's attention to it. But quick as the movement was, the figure had disappeared. Even Pietro, whose gaze had not quitted the place, could not describe the manner of its disappearance. Fra Gerolamo then told Anselmo what he had seen, and that while calling his attention to the figure, it had vanished; and the monks, after reverently crossing themselves and uttering a short exorcism against evil spirits, continued on their way to the Hospice. A messenger was immediately sent to the castle notifying their arrival. He quickly returned with an order from the Innominato to admit them, as he earnestly wished to see them.

The monks found the astrologer propped up with pillows on a couch, which had been prepared for him, in his study. Short as had been the time since Fra Anselmo had last seen him, the change in his appearance was great indeed. The two monks had no difficulty in perceiving that the Innominato had but a short time to live. Though evidently very weak, he received them with great courtesy; and, as soon as they were seated, he addressed them.

"Pardon me, reverend fathers," he began; "if I speak to you on my own matters without delay, as I feel I have but a short time to live. For many years I have lived without religion; but, before my death, I earnestly desire to be reconciled to the Church. I have the greatest confidence and respect for both of you, and I felt assured, from your zeal for the Church, as well as your personal friendship for me, you would not refuse me your advice and assistance in my present strait."

Both the monks assured him of their willingness to assist him, and urged him not to despair, as the mercy of Heaven was unbounded, and had never been refused to a repentant sinner.

"But my case is perhaps different from any you have ever met with," said the Innominato. "My wish to be again admitted into the Church arises from conscience alone. I know full well the necessity of repentance; and yet, without your aid, I feel I cannot repent. I ought in my present condition to fear death, but I confess I have not the slightest dread of it. I know the terrible danger I am in, and I trust you will make it apparent to me in its true colours. If you do not assist me, I know that my soul will be lost. The only subject that really afflicts me is my ingratitude to God; that does weigh heavily on my conscience, though at the same time I feel cheered by the hope, that through your means and the mediation of the saints, I may be yet brought into a fitting state of mind to meet the awful change I am so soon to undergo."

Fra Gerolamo, as the more profound theologian of the two monks, now addressed the Innominato with great feeling. He pointed out to him the danger he was in, and the terrible fate which awaited him should he fail to make his peace with Heaven before his death. He impressed upon him the necessity of repentance and a full acknowledgement of his sins, and he volunteered to hear his confession, which was necessary in the first place before he could advise him on the subject, or afford him absolution.

"Before I was aware that my death was so near," the Innominato went on, "I frequently felt the wish to be reconciled to the Church, and knowing full well that before I could be so, it would be necessary for me to confess, I employed myself in drawing up a short sketch of my life, narrating honestly the principal events connected with my story. I did this under a double motive. First, that by my example a warning might be given to others that the possession of wealth and power, even when accompanied by good works, is valueless and unsatisfying without religion; and secondly, that in case I should again become a Christian, it might serve as a written basis for my confession. I now place it in your hands," he continued, giving Fra Gerolamo a folded and sealed parchment. "I wish you and your brother Anselmo to read it. If you would accept it as part of my confession it would save me fatigue, for I feel so weak it is with difficulty I can now converse with you. After you have finished it I will give you any further explanation you may require. You may be assured, that as a confession it is a candid one, with but a solitary exception. I have concealed my real name in it. Should you consider it necessary to be known, I will afterwards give it you under the seal of confession."

The two monks conversed apart for a few moments, and then Fra Gerolamo, turning to the Innominato, said,

"My son, although our Church as a rule discourages written confessions, it allows them in certain cases. My reverend brother agrees with me, that your case may be considered one in point. As we may have to consult together as we read on, it would perhaps be better if we did so in a chamber by ourselves. We could then speak more unreservedly on the subject, and it would also allow you to take some rest before I hear your further confession."

The Innominato at once agreed to the proposition, and Pietro having been summoned, the two monks were conducted into a private chamber, where by the light of a lamp, for it was now almost dark, they broke the seals which fastened the parchment, and read the written confession of the Innominato.

THE END

THE INNOMINATO'S CONFESSION - PART I

It must not be imagined, that by concealing my name I have any wish to escape the opprobrium justly due to me for my sins. I would willingly have stated it, but by so doing I should cause great grief to my relatives, and also cast a stain on one of the most honourable names in Italy. I am a younger son of a noble family, celebrated not only celebrated for its high position and great learning, but for its attachment to our Holy Church. But though of a high lineage, my fortune was so small, that while amply sufficient to enable me to dress in accordance with my position, and to supply me with the means of subsistence, it was too limited to enable me to meet on an equal footing, those in my own grade of society, and I had too much pride to mix with them while unable to indulge in an expenditure equal to theirs. To say the truth, however, this grieved me little. The want of means prevented me from indulging in the gaieties and amusements of the young nobles of my acquaintance. I remained principally at my father's castle, some twenty leagues [sixty miles] from —, in which there was an excellent library which had formerly belonged to a cardinal, a member of our family, who, at his death, had bequeathed it to my father. Besides his great piety, the cardinal had an intense love for science, and had collected many works of great rarity, especially on astronomy and chemistry. I was studiously disposed naturally, and, having no other occupation, I found great delight in perusing works in these sciences, and at last got so passionately fond of them, that I was never happy unless I had a volume open before me.

I remained in the castle till I was nearly twenty years of age, indulging unrestrainedly in the study of my favourite sciences. Not only from taste, but almost from necessity did I pursue the study of them, for I had no amusements, nor had I any associates. The only person of any education who resided within a league of me was a priest; and he was so infirm that he could hardly manage to reach his church, which was only a few yards distant from his house; and he was also so deaf that when I visited him it was with difficulty that I could make him understand what I said.

On the day after I had entered my twenty-first year, to my great surprise, my father arrived at the castle. Although I had not seen him for some years (he having been appointed ambassador to some foreign court), the meeting between us was an exceedingly cool one. To say the truth, I had a certain dread of my father — why, I know not, for although he was always cold and taciturn, he had never treated me with harshness or unkindness. Still he evidently bore me but little love. It was late in the afternoon when he arrived, and as he pleaded fatigue, little conversation took place between us. He told me that his visit to the castle was solely on my account, but that in consequence of the lateness of the hour he would not that night enter upon the subject, but would defer it till the next morning.

I felt somewhat surprised at the intelligence, and felt no little curiosity as to the purport of his visit; but as it would have been indiscreet to have pressed him, I made no remark, determining to wait with what patience I could, till he should fully explain his meaning the following day. He retired at an early hour, and in the morning sent for me to come into his study. After receiving me with more affection than was his wont, he said, in a kindly tone,

"My son, the subject on which I wish to speak to you is one of great importance, and you must give all your attention to it. You have now reached that age at which it is necessary for a young man to choose a profession. Although it is no fault of yours, yet you ought to have done so two or three years ago. Without doubt you have already given the subject some consideration, and may possibly have chosen what profession you would like. If so, tell me, and should it be in my power, I will assist you to follow it."

I told my father that I had certainly considered the subject, but had hitherto be unable to decide.

"But, my son," said my father, "you have now no time to lose; therefore let us talk coolly and reasonably on the subject. There is the diplomatic service; should you like to enter it? Possibly I could assist you in that."

"Well, dear father," I replied, "I have so little knowledge of the subject, that I am unable to answer you; but, from what I know of it, I should hardly think it suited either to my taste or my means."

"Would you prefer the army?" asked my father.

Although I flattered myself that I was not a coward, and could face death with tolerable coolness, I had little of that animal courage which induces an individual to incur unnecessary risks. I had, besides, a strong dislike to quarrels of any description, as well as to the horrors of war and the misery it entails. I therefore told my father that a soldier's life was not to my taste, and that I should prefer some other profession. I noticed that at this a slight sneer passed over my father's face.

"Perhaps you would prefer the law," he said. "Quarrels are fought out solely by words there, and danger rarely follows them."

I felt indignant at the sarcasm contained in the words, and I was on the point of answering with some severity, but remembering the respect due from a child to a parent, I restrained myself, and merely replied in a cold and somewhat abrupt tone, that "I did not like the law, and would not follow it as a profession."

"You are somewhat hard to please, my son," said my father. "I know of only two other professions open to you: one is the Church — the other, medicine. The latter, I presume you would not follow — persons in our position rarely entering it. The Church offers no impediment of the kind. So what say you to entering holy orders?"

Before giving my father an answer, I took a moment to reflect. I then told him, that as I had no aristocratic prejudices to contend with, I should prefer the medical profession; for, although I had great respect for religion and its ministers, I was exceedingly fond of scientific study.

"But though you may have no aristocratic prejudices," said my father, smiling, "I have, and I positively object to your following medicine as a profession. You should bear in mind, too, that by entering holy orders, you by no means close the door to scientific studies. On the contrary, many of our most celebrated Churchmen have attained a great proficiency in that department. Your great-uncle, the cardinal, who bequeathed me his books, was celebrated for his skill in alchemy; indeed so much so, that had it not been for his dignified position in the Church, he might have laid himself open to a prosecution for witchcraft. What say you, then? Will you enter holy orders? If you will do so, I will give you a letter of introduction to the superior of the priests' seminary in Milan, who, I am sure, will receive you kindly and afford you all the protection and assistance in his power."

I was silent for some moments after my father had ceased speaking. The idea of entering holy orders rather pleased me, but still I did not like to accept his proposal without giving the subject fuller consideration. At last I told my father that I should not like to decide without reflecting well upon the step I was about to take, and I begged that he would allow me till next morning before I should give a definite answer. He approved of my prudence, and the conversation terminated.

I saw nothing more of my father that day, as he was occupied with his intendant in receiving reports as to the condition of his estate, and similar matters connected with it; and I shut myself up in the library, there to reflect undisturbed on my father's proposition. The idea was an attractive one, but many difficulties presented themselves, which I had, one by one, to clear away. In the first place, I resolved that if I did enter the priesthood I would perform its duties conscientiously. I could not disguise from myself, however, that I had in my temperament many defects which would prove obstacles in my way. My habits were sedentary and studious, and the active duties to be performed by a zealous priest were little to my taste. Again, although I had profound respect for religion and sound faith in its truths, the qualifications were more according to instinct than to reason. Theology I did not care for as a study, while I had a great love for science. At last my father's argument came before me — that if I entered the priesthood, it would be no impediment in the way of my studying other subjects. It now occurred to me that a wide door was thrown open to me for investigation as to the affinity between religion and science, and an opportunity to prove, if possible, that the latter might be brought forward in support of the former. The more I thought over this the more beautiful the theory appeared to me, and at last I resolved that I would enter the seminary in Milan and become a priest.

Next morning I informed my father of my resolution, and he complimented me on my decision. He now spoke of the allowance that he would make me during the curriculum of study, and he also assured me that when I should be ordained, he would use every interest at his command to ensure my advancement in the profession. The last offer had small attraction for me, however, for I had little ambition, and the allowance he proposed to make me was amply sufficient for all my wants. I thanked him for his liberality, and for his interest in me.

In a few days all preliminaries were arranged, and I started for Milan. Thanks to the letter of introduction to the superior of the seminary with which my father had furnished me, I was received in a very friendly manner, and duly entered as a student.

During the first year of my residence in the seminary, nothing special occurred. I was attentive to the rules, respectful to my superiors, and diligent in my studies. Without vanity I may say I was a favourite with all. I persevered in my studies with considerable assiduity; but I must confess that the sciences were constantly tempting me off the beaten track. As, however, I was careful not to allow them to interfere with the routine of study pursued in the seminary, the professors of theology not only offered no opposition, but complimented me on my assiduity, and advised me to persevere.

During Lent, in the second year of my student-ship, I confessed and received absolution; and from that day to the present I have never repeated it. And now occurred the most serious event of my life. One day, a short time after Easter, I had received permission from the superior to spend the evening, in company with a fellow-student of divinity, at the lodging of his cousin, who was a professor of law at the University of Pavia, but then on a visit to Milan for a few days. The professor received us very kindly, and introduced us to two friends whom he had invited to meet us — one being a physician of eminence, the other a gentleman of the name of Malatesta, whose profession was not mentioned, but who was evidently a learned man. I was afterwards told that he had an ample fortune. As the name of this person will frequently appear in the course of my confession, I will describe him minutely. He was a man about thirty years of age, of middle height, slender and graceful. His dress, though somewhat antiquated, fitted him well. Singularly enough, it did not appear anything remarkable that a man so young in years should wear a costume which had been in vogue in the days of his father; it appeared to arise from some peculiarity on his part, rather than from ignorance of the fashions of the day. Though his face was pallid, his features were exceedingly handsome, but at the some time, far from pleasing; for although the expression was one of great intelligence, it was greatly marred by a strong mixture of pride. He was affable in his conversation, though exceedingly sarcastic, and taking but little pains to conceal it. The first impression he made on me was so profound, that although it is now more than forty years since I first met him, his appearance and conversation that morning have remained indelibly stamped upon my memory.

Notwithstanding my first feeling of dislike for Malatesta, there was a certain fascination in his conversation which attracted me to him, and we talked pleasantly together a considerable portion of the evening. Our conversation turned chiefly on scientific subjects, and although we were only able to dwell a short time on each, I had no difficulty in perceiving that my companion was a learned man, especially familiar with those branches which had the greatest attraction for me, and I felt a strong desire to become better acquainted with him, while he, as far as his habitually reserved manner would allow him, expressed great satisfaction at having met me, and hoped that I would visit him and inspect his laboratory and library. I promised that I would do so, and we parted in the most friendly manner.

On my way home I inquired of my companion if he knew anything of Malatesta. He told me in reply, that he had only once before been in his company, but that he understood he was a man of great learning, and very rich. No one he had met with, however, knew anything of his family, country, or antecedents. He had resided more than a year at Milan, but during that time he had made few acquaintances, and those mostly men of science, no ecclesiastic being among the number. My companion was somewhat surprised, he said, at noticing him converse so freely with me, seeing that I wore at the time my dress as divinity student.

"You will, doubtless, find him an agreeable companion," said my friend, "but I would advise you not to become too intimate with him, for, to speak frankly, he is little liked either by the professors or by the clergy in general, the cardinal archbishop included. Although no proof of his dealing in necromancy has been brought home to him — possibly from his great cunning — he is under strong suspicion, and you will not advance your interests with our superior if he finds out that you bear any warm friendship for Malatesta."

I told my companion of the invitation I had received to visit his laboratory and library. "Go, by all means," was his reply; "you are well able to take care of yourself, and you understand what is due to the Church. I would willingly accompany you, but as he did not invite me, it would perhaps be hardly civil to intrude myself. Do not omit, however, to give me a faithful account of all that you see." I promised that I would do so, and shortly afterwards we arrived at the seminary.

The next afternoon I paid my first visit to Malatesta. I had some difficulty in finding his house, it being situated outside the walls of the town, and it was approached by a lane so narrow that two persons would hardly have been able to walk abreast in it. The house itself, though not large, was of handsome elevation, and was evidently the residence of a man of substance. Malatesta received me in a very friendly manner, and with an amount of good-humoured joviality which contrasted strongly with his reserve the evening before.

"My dear friend," he said, "I was half afraid that you would not keep your word. I know I am little liked by your professors, and I thought it probable that they might have set you against me. How is that they have let you come? Did you not tell them of your proposed visit? I am certain that if you had done so they would have warned you against me. I hope, however," he continued, laughing, "that you have not trusted yourself within these walls without having some potent charm or relic about you, to protect you from any of the evil spirits who do my bidding."

"I trust," I replied, with as much gravity I could assume, for I could hardly help smiling myself at these words, "that my religious principles are two well secured to fear any such attack."

"I congratulate you," he said, with the slightest possible touch of sarcasm. "Nothing conduces more to a man's strength than reliance in his own powers. Still take care that you are fully armed, for your principles will receive some severe shocks from your visit, though what earthly use I can make of your principles when once I have conquered them, I know not. Now let me show you over my house, that you may see all you have to cope with, for I am too honourable an adversary to take any unfair advantage."

Although I was somewhat nettled at these remarks, his tone was so good-humoured that I had not the inclination to retort, and I accompanied him over the house. The front part, which was used as the dwelling-house for himself and servants, was magnificently furnished. Indeed I had never before been in a house where so much was visible. The rear was divided into three stories, each being one large room. He first conducted me to that on the ground floor, which was fitted up as a laboratory with furnaces, crucibles, retorts, and other apparatus, while round the room were shelves, on which were arranged bottles, each having on it a different cabalistic sign or mark.

Malatesta seemed to divine my thoughts instinctively. "I see," he said, "you are somewhat puzzled with those mysterious marks on the boxes and bottles which contain my drugs and chemicals. Well, they certainly are mysterious, and are designed to be so, but they are perfectly innocent for all that. I have simply invented the greater number as a security against the curious and indiscreet, who, if they understood the meaning of the symbols, might appropriate as their own the discoveries which have cost me years of study and labour. At the same time, that you may be perfectly at ease on the subject, I will explain to you the meaning of any of the symbols you please."

I thanked him for his courteous offer, but declined to ask him any questions; and we then left the laboratory and proceeded upstairs to the library. Here, indeed, I found ample scope for envy. I was fond of books, and a finer or more curious collection than now surrounded me, it would not have been easy to find. There were works on every scientific subject, and in every known language. Several, I noticed, savoured deeply of astrology and necromancy. Seeing my gaze attracted to them, Malatesta drew two or three volumes from the shelves, and opened them.

"I believe," he said, "that these works are objected to by divines, for what reason I know not. I have read them, and I candidly say that I found nothing in them to merit the opprobrium they receive. Still, understand me, I do not say that there are not portions of them which might be objected to by those who are guided in their studies by theological professors. If any such could be pointed out to me, I would have them erased. If," he continued, smiling, "you have sufficient interest in my spiritual welfare to point them out to me, you would do me a great favour. I will leave word with the porter to admit you whenever you call, and you can examine any of these books at your leisure. The more you consider yourself at home in this house, the greater will be the favour you confer on me."

Malatesta now conducted me to the third floor, which he had converted into an observatory. There were several astronomical instruments in it, all apparently in perfect order. "This is my principal observatory, for it is not the only one I have," said Malatesta. "In the mountains near Lecco, I have another, where I prefer studying in the heat of the summer. I shall shortly leave Milan for that, and shall then be absent for some months. I hope you will visit me there, and if you have as much taste for the sciences as I think you have, we can study together. Remember that during my absence everything in this house is at your service, and pray use my books and instruments as if they were your own."

I thanked him for his kindness, and promised to visit him in the mountains if I could obtain permission from the superior. We then talked on different subjects, especially on astronomy, and its relation to astrology. Malatesta answered all my questions with great candour. He told me there was a strong affinity between the two studies, as he himself could prove, but that he considered astrology the more attractive science of the two. "A man," he said, "who can read the stars has reached to a very high point of wisdom. Secrets are told him which are totally concealed from other mortals, and he is able to judge of character, and to foretell events, which occasionally places immense power in his hands."

Prompted perhaps by a selfish curiosity, I asked Malatesta if he were able to calculate my nativity with certitude, and whether he would do so to oblige me.

"My dear friend," he replied, "do you think I should have invited you to become my intimate, if I had not already drawn from the stars your character, history, and to a certain degree the events of your future career?"

"Would you object to telling me what you learned concerning me?" I inquired, endeavouring to appear as if the subject but slightly interested me, while at the moment I was almost breathless from curiosity.

"Perhaps it would be wiser if you remained in ignorance," said Malatesta, smiling. "The stars are strictly truthful in all they say, and never flatter."

"Still," I replied, "I should like to know the truth, even if it did not please me."

"I will tell you, if you wish it," said Malatesta. "They say you have talents of a superior order to the general run, and might possess, if you pleased, almost unlimited power. I must, however, tell you that your future is exceedingly obscure."

"From what cause?" I inquired.

"I cannot answer your question so fully as I could wish. As well as I can understand, it is doubtful whether you have the necessary courage to rise to power and affluence, although you possess the ability and energy to do so. You see I disguise nothing from you."

"You pain me exceedingly," I said. "I know that I am neither quarrelsome nor rash, but I trust I am no coward. To obtain the end I desire, the danger must be great indeed that would deter me."

"If that be really the case," said Malatesta, "your career may be a very brilliant one. No philosopher would be able to equal you in wisdom, and no king in power."

"I perceive," I said, "that you are concealing something from me."

"Of all that I am certain," he replied, "I have concealed nothing. But I admit that I have hardly studied the question so profoundly as I might have done. I was contented as soon as I found that you were a man with whom I should have pleasure to be on terms of intimacy. I will study your horoscope again, and with closer attention. When it is completed I will inform you of the result."

I remained in conversation with Malatesta till it was time for me to return home, and I then left him, much pleased with my visit.

That night I slept little, my mind being too much occupied with the events of the day. Although I could not disguise from myself that Malatesta's principles were not such as the Church would approve, still his society had a great charm for me. And it is but justice to him to state, that not an expression did he make use of to which the most rigid moralist could have objected; and when I spoke of the affinity which I believed existed between theological and scientific studies, he did not in the slightest manner attempt to oppose my theory. On the contrary, the few words he had spoken on the subject, rather supported my views than otherwise. By his astrological studies, he certainly seemed to be treading on dangerous ground, but after all many of the priesthood secretly upheld them. Even my great uncle the cardinal pursued them, and had collected many works on the subject. It was hardly to have been expected that he could have done so, had the Church considered the study a pernicious one. The imperfect information Malatesta had obtained relative to my career in life, had interested me immensely. In what manner was it possible for me, a humble divinity student, to arrive at the power and eminence that he believed were in store for me? Nothing could be less promising than my prospects. Let my courage be as great as it might, in what manner could I use it so as to acquire the celebrity he believed I might attain? At last I fell asleep, the idea still haunting me, and when I awoke in the morning, it was the first thing that presented itself to my mind. Occasionally I thought of consulting one of the professors on the subject, but the fear that he might prohibit me from continuing my acquaintance with Malatesta restrained me. At length I came to the resolution that I would cultivate his friendship without mentioning it to anyone, and that I would press him to calculate my nativity with greater precision, so that I might know what good fortune was really in store for me.

A few days later I again called on Malatesta, who gave me as warm a reception as on the former occasion.

"I am thankful," he said, "that you have as yet received no prohibition to visit me. I almost feared the contrary."

I told him that I had not mentioned to anyone the visit I was then paying him, although I had no reason to believe that any objection would have been raised had I done so.

"You do not know them as well as I do, nor the narrow bigotry which actuates them," said Malatesta. "But I shall soon relieve them from all anxiety on my account. To-morrow I leave Milan, nor shall I return to it again for many months."

I inquired what had induced him to change his mind, as on my former visit he had no intention to leave so soon.

"I cannot give you my reasons," said Malatesta, "as the secrets of others are connected with my departure. Suffice it to say that I am obliged to leave Italy for a month or six weeks. When I return, I shall remain till winter at my observatory in the mountains. I will take steps to let you know when I am there, and I trust that you will visit me and be my guest for some time. We can then pursue our studies together. I have not forgotten the promise I made about your horoscope; I have been working at it since I last saw you, but the same obscurity still hangs over you. That you are capable of becoming a most learned and powerful man is certain, if you have courage to follow the path open to you, but on that point I am still unable to come to any definite conclusion. I ought, however, to state that some of my instruments necessary to make a perfect calculation are at my observatory in the mountains. As soon as I have an opportunity, I will go more carefully into the matter, and when we next meet I trust I shall be able to give you a more satisfactory account than I can do at present."

I expressed my regret that I should be without his society for so long a time, and hoped that circumstances might occur that would make our next meeting less distant than he imagined it would be.

"It would give me great pleasure to be able to shorten my absence or delay my departure," said Malatesta, "but it is impossible. I must leave Milan tomorrow. Two of my confidential servants travel with me, the others I shall discharge to-night. The house will to all appearance be closed, but I shall leave the key under the stone step as you enter. Take charge of it for me and visit it whenever you please; you may in fact consider yourself master of all it contains. All my books and instruments are at your service. The books I requested you would examine for me, and point out any passages you may think are antagonistic to religion, are on the table in the library. I trust to your friendship to take that trouble for me. And now let us pass an hour or two together sociably. It is always pleasant to remember that the last hours we have passed with an intimate friend were agreeable."

We remained together for some time in conversation, and when it was time for me to depart, our leave-taking was a sorrowful one. I had conceived a great esteem for Malatesta, and he, in return, appeared to be much pleased with my society. So sorry was I at losing him, that my disappointment was plainly visible on my countenance, so much so, that when I returned to the seminary, more than one of my fellow-students asked what had happened to me. I made some excuse, and by way of avoiding them, I pleaded that I felt somewhat indisposed. Having obtained permission to be absent from evening prayers, I entered my cell.

The next day I was not able to leave the seminary, but on the second, I took the opportunity of visiting Malatesta's house. I found the key of the door in the spot he had named, and without difficulty entered the building. I first went into the laboratory, but as I could understand little of the objects around me, I soon left it for the library. Here I found on the table the books Malatesta had mentioned, and opening one of them I was soon absorbed in its contents. It was a rudimentary work on astrology. It was written in plain, simple language, without any technicalities. It interested me exceedingly, indeed so firm a hold did it take on my imagination, that I quite forgot Malatesta's request to note whatever objectionable passages I should find, and read on without stopping. Hour after hour passed in this manner, and it was not till the shades of evening began to fall, that I remembered I had outstayed the allotted time. I now hurriedly closed the book, carefully marking where I had left off, and, after quitting the house and putting the key in my pocket, I returned in haste to the seminary. It was dark night before I arrived, and the next morning I was severely reprimanded by the superior for disobedience of orders, and, as a punishment, I was desired not to leave the seminary for a week. I obeyed the order, but with a very bad grace, and for the first time a rebellious spirit was awakened in me.

My term of punishment over, I took the first opportunity to return to Malatesta's house. I was soon once more absorbed in the work on astrology. As on the previous occasion, I took no thought whatever of the theological tendency of the work, but read on, and became greatly pleased with the science. Fortunately I returned this time at an early hour to the seminary, and was not questioned as to the manner in which I had passed my time during my absence.

I now took every opportunity to visit Malatesta's house, for the deeper I went into the study of astrology, the more I became interested in it. I must admit, too, that without my being aware of it at the time, my interest in my theological studies fell off in the same proportion as my love for astrology increased. Not that I, even for a moment, doubted the truth of the doctrines of the Church, but I felt lukewarm, and their study was irksome to me.

For some weeks I continued my investigation of the books Malatesta had advised me to read, without, as I thought, creating any suspicion in the minds of the professors as to how my time was passed when absent from the seminary. But I was in error. One morning after the theological class was over, a messenger told me that the superior wished to speak with me in his study. A certain feeling of anxiety came over me at first, as I feared that he had got a hint of my visits to Malatesta's house; but after a moment's consideration it vanished. I reflected that I had in no way disobeyed either the rules of the seminary or the orders of the professors, and therefore I had nothing to fear from the interview. So, without the slightest hesitation or timidity, I entered the room where the superior was seated.

He received me kindly and courteously, but from his serious expression I could easily perceive that the subject upon which he was about to speak was one of great importance.

"My son," he said, "it is my duty to inquire in what way you have lately passed your time when absent from the seminary. I will not disguise from you my reason for making this inquiry. It is on one point alone that I wish for information. I am told that you have contracted an intimacy with a man, who, although his antecedents are little known to us, is not without reason suspected of practising necromancy. I need hardly tell you that the individual to whom I allude is the Signore Malatesta. Now you must tell me candidly how often you have met him and when you last saw him."

I easily saw the possibility of putting the superior on a wrong scent, or at any rate of my being able to conceal, to a great extent, a good deal of what I did not wish him to know. Putting as much ingenuousness into my countenance as I could assume, I told the superior that I had only met Malatesta on three occasions, the last time was some weeks since.

He looked both surprised and hurt when he heard my answer, as though he suspected my veracity.

"Am I to take this as your answer, my son?" he said. "If so, I have been greatly misinformed."

"Whoever has said anything to the contrary, reverend father," said I, assuming an indignant tone, "has told an untruth. I repeat that I have only been three times in Malatesta's company, and that the last occasion was some weeks ago. On either point I challenge the severest investigation."

"Can you tell me where he is at present?" inquired the superior.

"I cannot do that, reverend father. When I last saw him he told me that he intended to leave Italy, and should not return to Milan for many months. When I asked him whither he was going, he told me he was not at liberty to say, as the secrets of others were bound up with it, and that it would be wrong of him to reveal them."

"And on your faith as a Christian, and your honour as a member of a noble family, you have answered my questions truthfully?"

"I have, reverend father," I said, "to the letter."

"I will not doubt your word," he replied. "But take my advice. Should Malatesta return to Milan, avoid his society. Studies similar to those he is supposed to be engaged in, are dangerous to all, but especially to the young. They can, after all, do little good, and may do a great deal of harm."

Although I had kept up a bold front during my interview with the superior, I breathed with far greater freedom after I had left the room. During the time I was with him, I was in dread lest he should inquire as to the nature of Malatesta's studies and how he occupied his time; and if he had done so, my answers would hardly have pleased the reverend father, but all danger I thought was now over, if I only used moderate caution in future.

I now abstained for several days from visiting Malatesta's house, and should have done so for a longer period, had not the temptation to return appeared to increase in power the longer I remained away. By degrees I again became a frequent visitor, using, however, much greater caution than I had hitherto done, and no suspicion seemed to be awakened in the minds of any as to the manner in which I occupied myself when absent from the seminary.

One evening, after I had been for some hours engaged over a work on astrology in Malatesta's house, I felt, as I walked homewards, a sensation of lassitude of so depressing a character that I had no little difficulty in continuing on my road. The feeling gave me some uneasiness, as I had not taken any exercise in the course of the day of a kind to cause it. The lassitude increased till I had reached the gates of the seminary, when it became insupportable, and I had hardly strength to drag myself to my cell when, dressed as I was, I threw myself on my couch, and shortly afterwards fell into a disturbed slumber.

I awoke while it was still dark night. I was in a violent shivering fit, and I hastily threw the coverlid over me to warm me, but without effect. I lay in this manner, half sleeping, half waking, till dawn, when without any object, I arose and descended into the court-yard, and remained there till the bell should ring to arouse the other students. I went with them into the chapel mechanically, where I remained till service was over. One of the professors then advanced towards me, and asked the reason why I had not been present in the chapel the evening before. I was on the point of answering him, when he looked anxiously into my face, and hurriedly asked me if I did not feel ill. I commenced to tell him that I felt no pain, but that I had had a very disturbed night. At this point I suddenly stopped, and without any assignable cause, burst into a flood of tears. "My son," he said in a kind tone, "you are evidently much indisposed. Go at once into your cell, and I will immediately send for a physician to see you."

I followed his advice, and shortly after the doctor arrived. He pronounced me to be in a high fever. He prescribed medicines for me, and insisted that I should be carefully looked after. The same evening delirium had set in, and I remained for some weeks hanging between life and death. At last, thanks to a good constitution, the fever subsided and I was restored to my senses. The disease, however, had left me in a lamentable state of weakness. I recovered strength slowly, and then I heard of the terrible danger I had been in. The superior also paid me a visit, and congratulated me on what he, as well as the others who so kindly attended me, considered my escape from certain death.

"I have much to question you about, my son," he continued, "but in your present weak state it would hardly be advisable to do so. I may tell you, however, that during your delirium you made use of expressions, and uttered sentiments which gave us all the greatest uneasiness concerning your spiritual welfare. I know you will urge that you are not accountable for words made use of when you were not in you right senses. All that may be true, but there was certainly sufficient connexion in your raving to lead us to suspect that similar ideas may have passed through your mind when you were in health. At present I will say no more on the subject, but defer it to another opportunity. We must now take into consideration what had better be done for you in your present weakly condition. If you have no objection, I would propose that you leave Milan for some weeks; in fact till your strength is perfectly restored. I will give you a letter to an aged priest of my acquaintance, who has a small cure on the slope of the mountains overlooking the Pian d'Erba. With him you can remain, and his housekeeper, who is a very discreet and clever woman, will, I am sure, pay you great attention. What think you of that proposition?"

I sincerely thanked the superior for the offer, and gladly accepted it. A few days afterwards, the physicians pronounced that I might now undertake the journey; and having packed up my luggage, and taken with me the key of Malatesta's house, I left Milan one morning at daybreak, and, without any impediment, arrived at my destination at a somewhat late hour the same evening, and received a very friendly welcome from the old priest.

It would hardly be possible to imagine a locality better adapted for the convalescence of a fever patient than that where I now found myself. Without being at a fatiguing height on the mountains, it was sufficiently elevated to remove me from the intense heat below. The air was pure, refreshing, and invigorating, and I began to feel its beneficial effects the very morning after my arrival. The view from my chamber-window was exquisitely beautiful. A short distance from the mountain there was a small clear lake, and beyond it, green, round, undulating hills stretched, gradually diminishing in size till they were lost in the plain. At the back of the house the mountains rose very high; indeed their tops seemed almost lost in the clouds. I had long wished, as I viewed those lofty mountains from Milan, to visit them. There was to me something almost unearthly in their beauty; their very indistinctness as seen from a distance had thrown over them a charming sort of mystery. I had now an opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with them, and I determined to profit by it as soon as my strength would allow me to go and roam among them.

Of my kind host and his housekeeper, I have but little to say, but that little is of the most complimentary description. Although old and infirm, the priest did all in his power to please me, and the attention I received from his housekeeper was kind and unremitting.

Strength now rapidly returned to me, and I made good use of it. I wandered daily among the mountains, enjoying the fresh air and revelling in the beauty of the scenery. So great were its attractions for me, that I never once descended into the plain, though the desire frequently presented itself to stroll by the clear placid lake. I often thought of Malatesta, and purposed trying to find out his observatory, which I knew was situated in the mountains, but I had not yet the courage to leave the charming locality I found myself in. As my strength increased, my rambles gradually became longer. I would be frequently absent for hours without a thought of returning home.

One day I wandered so far that fatigue overcame me, and I seated myself on a singular-looking stone which chanced to be near. In shape it somewhat resembled a seat, or rather a rude throne. An arch was hollowed out of the mountain-side above it, and the part which might be used for a seat was smooth and polished. The locality was romantic and fantastic in the extreme. It formed and amphitheatre, perhaps a hundred yards across, and it was surrounded on all sides by high rocky mountains on which grew not the slightest verdure, differing in that respect from the other mountains around, which were covered with herbs, grass, and trees to an elevation of several hundred feet. The floor of this amphitheatre also rose gradually from the seat till it reached the mountains on the other side. A more weird scene than was presented by this combination, it would be difficult to imagine. Its very approach added to its mysterious aspect. It burst suddenly upon one — the locality, in fact, could not be seen till it was entered — and there did not appear to be any means of quitting it, although I afterwards found a narrow passage leading from it, opposite the side at which I had entered. I remained for some time, leaning with my brow on the palm of my hand, thinking of Malatesta, and speculating as to whether his observatory might be in that locality. Of course, I could come to no conclusion on that matter. I at length arose to return home, when to my great surprise I saw Malatesta standing before me.

"Welcome to the mountains, my dear friend," he said. "I have been very fortunate to find you. I only returned to my observatory last night, and you are the first person I have met this morning."

"Do you reside near this?" I inquired, as soon as I had recovered from surprise sufficiently to collect my thoughts.

"About three leagues further in the mountains," he said; "but you must come and see me. I have a great deal that I wish to converse with you about. I see you are too fatigued to-day, but to-morrow, if you have no objection, I will meet you here, and conduct you to my dwelling. I will bring with me a strong mule, as after your illness it would not be advisable that you should tire yourself."

"How did you know of my illness?" I inquired.

"That is my secret," he said, smiling. "Perhaps I will tell you at some future time. Suffice it to say, that if you wished I could narrate to you everything that has occurred since we parted. Tomorrow I will meet you here, but come at an earlier hour than today. I would call for you at the priest's house, but, all things considered, it is better that you should not be seen in my company. Remember what the superior told you when he gave you permission to visit the mountains. Be assured the priest, with whom you are now living, will tell him everything he sees you do."

I promised Malatesta that I would meet him at the same spot three hours after sunrise on the morrow; and after a little more conversation we parted, and I returned home much pleased at having met my friend.

Next morning, on arriving at the appointed place, I found Malatesta seated on the same stone that I had occupied the day before. He was accompanied by a serving-man who stood by holding a stout mule by the bridle.

"You see I have come prepared for you," he said, rising from the stone; "and if you are not too fatigued I would advise you to mount at once, so that we arrive as speedily as possible."

As I was not much fatigued, I did as he desired, and we immediately left the spot.

"That stout stone should always mark the boundary of our respective domains," he said. "I will always meet you here, and accompany you back to it again on your way home; or should we wish only a little conversation, this spot will be equally convenient for that purpose."

I spoke of the singular formation of the stone, and my doubts as to whether its shape was natural or artificial.

"Perhaps it is something of both," said Malatesta. "That stone seat is a great favourite of mine, and I frequently sit on it and meditate for hours together. You may understand how great a favourite it is with me when I tell you that it was the first spot I visited after my return, and where, to my great joy, I found you."

I then inquired of Malatesta if there were any traditions concerning the stone. He hesitated for a moment as if meditating what reply he would make me, and then said, with a carelessness somewhat affected, "Yes, there are certainly one or two extant, but they are uninteresting in the extreme. Their general purport is, that it was carved from the rock by some evil spirits, and that they occasionally hold their meetings here, the stone itself serving as the throne for the chief among them."

We now continued our way, conversing familiarly together till we arrived at Malatesta's house, which was situated on the northern side of the mountain. It commanded a magnificent view of the lake and surrounding scenery. The ruins of an ancient castle were near it; and I may here state that the latter afterwards became my abode, and his house the present Hospice. Although I felt a strong desire to visit the castle at once, I was too much fatigued by my journey to do so, and Malatesta proposed that we should defer it till another opportunity. "The building," he said, "though not large, is very interesting in many ways, and to examine it thoroughly would occupy you a considerable time. I am so pleased with it myself that I have several times thought of having it put in repair, and residing in it; for, although it is much out of order, it is by no means in the dilapidated condition you might at first sight be led to believe."

"To whom does the castle belong?" I inquired.

"It is my own property," he replied. "I purchased this and the land around it many years since — not on account of its value, for it yields nothing, but for the charming view it commands, and the perfect solitude which surrounds it. It would be scarcely possible to find a more fitting abode for a philosopher."

Malatesta now conducted me into his observatory and library, which contained many valuable books and astronomical instruments, with the values and uses of which I was not then acquainted.

I asked him if he had yet completed my horoscope.

"Not entirely," he said. "But I begin to think that I have been in error in concluding that your natural want of courage was an impediment in the way of your advancement. It is your intention to enter the priesthood which at present forms the difficulty. I wish I could persuade you to quit it, and apply yourself solely to the study of the sciences."

"Never!" I replied. "I have enrolled myself as on of the soldiers of the Church, and have too much courage to quit it. If I cannot combine religion with science, I shall certainly give up the latter, and keep only to the former."

"I am sorry for that," said Malatesta, "for I can very easily see, that not only science, but humanity at large will lose immensely by your determination. I trust some person may be found whose influence over you may be greater than mine."

"That can never be, Malatesta," I replied. "No one will be able to induce me to quit the profession I have entered."

Malatesta made no reply, but a certain satirical expression passed over his countenance, which annoyed me very much. However, I made no remark, and we continued to converse together amicably till it was time for me to return home. The mule was again saddled, and Malatesta insisted on accompanying me to the place where we met in the morning. On our road thither our conversation turned principally on the beauty of the scenery. Malatesta inquired whether I had visited the neighbourhood of the small lake which was visible from the windows of the house where I was lodging. I told him that I had not done so.

"Do so, then, without delay," he said, "for it will repay the trouble to so ardent a lover of the beautiful as you are. The view of the mountains from the lake is even more beautiful than the view of the lake from the mountains. Let me sketch out a small journey for you. When you have descended from your house to the plain, turn to the right, and continue on your course till you arrive at the western end of the lake. Then, on your turning round, the whole range of the mountains will be visible to you. Anything grander than the prospect which will then present itself would be difficult indeed to describe."

I promised that I would follow his advice next day, and we shortly afterwards arrived at the stone seat, where Malatesta took leave of me, and I continued my journey homewards.

I cannot say that I was pleased with my visit. True, Malatesta had received me in a most friendly manner, and I had every reason to believe his friendship was sincere, but at the same time he seemed to consider that he had a certain power over me, which I was not content to admit. The satirical smile I had noticed on his countenance, after I had expressed my determination not to give up my profession, haunted me very strangely. Judging from it, he seemed to doubt my resolution, or rather to be convinced that I should change my mind. "He is in error," I said to myself, "and I will prove it to him. If, as I suspect, he imagines that I am a mere puppet in his hands, he will find himself mistaken. If anything could have occurred to weaken my resolution, his doubt will only have the effect of strengthening it. I am my own master, and will remain so."

Next morning I determined to visit the lake, and to enjoy, if possible, the magnificent view Malatesta had said that I should find. I took the path he had pointed out to me, and followed it till I had nearly reached the western extremity of the small lake, when the weather, which had been fine all morning, suddenly changed, and heavy rain-drops fell to the earth. I looked at the heavens and perceived that a dark thunder-cloud, which was nearly over my head, would soon reach me. I began to look about me for some place of shelter from the coming storm, but none could I find. I hurried onwards, and at last came in sight of a substantially-built cottage, evidently belonging to some small farmer.

Without hesitation I advanced towards it, intending to ask for shelter till the storm should be over. The door being open, I entered, and found in it only one occupant, a young girl of extraordinary beauty, and apparently about eighteen years of age, engaged in winding some silk from a wheel.

I was so struck by surprise at the lovely figure I saw before me, that for the moment I completely forgot the errand on which I had come, and stood speechless before her. She appeared scarcely less surprised than I was. At last, somewhat recovering myself, I told her that I had been overtaken by the storm, and requested permission to remain till it was over. She said that I was welcome, and rising from her seat at the wheel, she cleared some silk from a stool and requested me to sit down. I willingly accepted the invitation, and after she had again taken her place at the wheel, a conversation was begun, somewhat formal at first, but gradually we became more at our ease. I am afraid that my gaze must have caused her some embarrassment, but I could not keep my eyes from her, so lovely did she appear to me. I learnt from her that she was an only child, her father being a small farmer, and that her mother had died some years since. She managed the house entirely, for they were too poor to keep a servant. She told me they had but few acquaintances, and that she seldom left home, except on Sunday to attend a mass at a church about a league distant. Her father, she said, was then absent, having gone to the market at Lecco, but she hoped he would return before I left the cottage. We conversed on other subjects, also; and the more she spoke, the more I admired her. She had a remarkably sweet tone of voice, and spoke most sensibly on every subject we touched upon. I remained with her till the storm was over; and when I left the house, I told her to thank her father when he returned, for the shelter his roof had afforded me; and then bidding her a somewhat lengthened farewell, I left the cottage and proceeded homewards, utterly forgetting to look for the magnificent scenery I had come to find.

That night I slept but little. My imagination was disturbed by the remembrance of the beautiful girl whose acquaintance I had made in the morning; and when sleep came over me, she was still present in my dreams. The next day my thoughts were as completely occupied with her as they had been the evening before. I felt I was passionately in love with her. I then attempted to reason with myself on the danger I was running, seeing that I was destined for the priesthood and a life of celibacy. Malatesta's hope that some one more influential than he was, might induce me to quit all idea of entering the priesthood, then came to my mind again. The satirical smile on his face came also before me, and I began to suspect that his recommendation to visit the western end of the lake, that I might see the beautiful landscape, was a mere trick to throw me into the society of this charming girl, so that I might be induced to marry her. The thought annoyed me very much, and I resolved not to visit the cottage again. I did not succeed, however, in driving the maiden from my thoughts, though I consciously attempted it.

The next day was Sunday. Without any premeditated determination, I paid far more attention to my dress when I arose than I was wont, and I avoided in it, as much as possible, the look of a divinity student. After breakfast, the old priest, my host, asked me if I would accompany him to mass. I excused myself, saying that I intended to go to the church at the foot of the mountain. I might have added that it was the beautiful girl I had seen two days before whom I worshipped, and that the hope of meeting her there had made me decline his offer. In the church not a thought of the mass entered my mind. The first object I saw was the girl I loved, and during the whole celebration I saw no other. When mass was over, and the congregation were leaving the church, I found she was accompanied by an elderly man, her father. Love gave me courage, and without hesitation I advanced and spoke to her. She seemed pleased to see me, and introduced me to her father, and I accompanied them back to their cottage, where I remained in conversation with them till it was time to leave for vespers.

I will not dwell on the history of my love for Marta — for that was her name — or on the manner hers for me developed itself, till it gradually became, if not as ardent, certainly as sincere, as my own. Her father gave his consent to our union, but on the sensible condition, that I should prove that I was able to maintain a wife. The allowance my father made me was amply sufficient for the purpose, but I felt assured that the moment he heard of my intended marriage he would withdraw it, not only from an objection to my quitting the profession I had chosen, but far more from a repugnance to my forming a matrimonial alliance with a person whose social position was so far inferior to my own. There was another subject which caused me great anxiety. Marta, though she loved me well, was very piously inclined; and had she known that I had been intended for the priesthood, she would immediately have broken off the match, great as her affection for me might be, rather than have it on her conscience, that she had been the means of drawing me from the Church. I was therefore obliged to conceal carefully from her that I was a divinity student, nor did she ever discover it.

I now resolved to quit the seminary and find some occupation sufficiently remunerative to allow me to marry Marta; but where to find this was a difficult problem indeed to solve. Night after night did I pass without closing my eyes, but no satisfactory conclusion could I come to.

At last, in my despair, I resolved to consult Malatesta, much as it went against my pride to do it. For this purpose I rose early one morning, and took the road to his observatory. As I went I turned over in my mind the manner in which I should broach the subject to him, fearing, however, that as I had not recently heard of him he might be absent, or have quitted Italy again. On the last point I was undeceived sooner than I had anticipated. On arriving at the spot he had named as our place of meeting, I found him seated on the stone as though waiting for me.

"So your anger has passed away at last," he said, in a jovial tone. "It is very fortunate that I happen to be of a forgiving temper. To be frank, your behaviour gave me much cause for displeasure. But all that is over now, as you may judge by my having met you halfway on your road."

"Did you expect me then?" I inquired, much surprised.

"Expect you? Certainly," he replied. "I know perfectly well the errand on which you have come. Since we last met, you have fallen desperately in love with a very beautiful girl, but her father will not allow you to marry her unless you can prove to his satisfaction you are in a position to maintain a wife. Now you cannot marry the girl without giving up your intention of entering the priesthood; and if you were to do so, you know very well that your father would not continue your allowance, and that you would be penniless. In your embarrassment you have come to me that I may advise and assist you. Angry as you were with me, you have no other friend in whom you could confide on such a matter. Now, although your desire to be reconciled arises from a cause not particularly complimentary to me, I am nevertheless so pleased with it, that in return I will do all I can to assist you, and I may say that I think I can do it effectually. I would advise you to return to Milan to-morrow. The next day go to my house (you still have the key), and you will find what will prove to you the sincerity of my friendship for you. You can afterwards take what steps you please to quit the seminary; or perhaps you may quit it without informing them of your intention. That plan would certainly save trouble, and you would then avoid all disagreeable questions. If I were you, I would change my name, as that course would render it more difficult for them to find you. You have not made yourself so many friends among the professors, that you need think of their taking much trouble about you. I must now leave you, but let me say one word more before we part. You will not see me again for some time. To-morrow I shall start on a distant journey, and it is uncertain when I shall return. I shall leave only one servant in my mountain observatory, and he will have orders to consider you as his master during my absence. If you and your wife should like to take up your residence at the observatory, pray do so. In that case, my warmest wish is that you may be happy there."

I endeavoured to obtain from Malatesta more particular instructions on many of the different points he had mentioned. But it was quite useless: he would say nothing more, and I left him. I paid Marta a visit that evening, and told her that it was my intention to leave her for some days, and that I hoped, on my return, to obtain her father's consent to our wedding taking place speedily. The next morning I started for Milan, and arriving there took lodging for the night in a quiet street, at such a distance from the seminary that it was unlikely I should meet any of my acquaintance.

THE INNOMINATO'S CONFESSION - PART II

Next day, I went in a state of anxious curiosity to Malatesta's house. So far as I could judge from its outward appearance, there was no sign of anyone having visited it since I left it on the night I was seized with fever. The door opened easily, and I entered, carefully closing it after me. Somehow or other, a strange feeling of fear came over me, together with an oppressive and stifling sensation. The almost unearthly quietude of the place weighed upon my spirits. I did all I could to shake off this feeling, and I opened the door of the laboratory and entered it. Here the cause of the oppression I had felt was visible enough. By the obscure light of the imperfectly closed shutters, I saw stretched on the ground, near one of the furnaces, the dead body of a man. I then partially opened the shutters, and a bright beam of sunshine fell right upon the dead body, which was dressed in the very same costume as Malatesta wore the day before. A horrible fascination drew me towards the corpse, and I stooped over it to examine it more closely. When I moved the head a little, I saw that the features closely resembled those of Malatesta. They were so disfigured, however, by some explosion, which had apparently taken place while he was engaged in an experiment, that I could not be certain it was he.

My first impulse was to leave the house and give notice to the guard. As I was moving towards the door, however, the idea struck me that I might be accused of murder. Bewildered, and not liking to remain in the room with the dead body, I rushed upstairs into the library. Seating myself on a chair near the table, I endeavoured to collect my thoughts so that I might decide on some plan of action. After a great deal of thought, I could determine on nothing better than calling in the guard. I was just on the point of rising for that purpose, when I noticed that the three books Malatesta had placed on the table for me to read were no longer there, but that in their place was a piece of parchment. I took it up, and found upon it the following lines addressed to myself —

"I have turned into gold all that was valuable in the house. You will find the proceeds in the oak coffer near the door. Take all it contains; it is yours. Close up the house and leave it to its fate; there is nothing left in it worth having. May you be happy with Martha."

"MALATESTA."

I immediately went and opened the coffer, and found in it a heavy bag of gold, sufficient to last Marta and myself all our lives. I now looked round the room and found that the greater portion of the books had been removed, and, on examining a little further, saw that those remaining were of small value. I visited the observatory, and found that all the most valuable instruments were gone like-wise. The rich furniture in the dwelling-rooms, too, had been removed, and that which was now in its place was of the commonest description. I again entered the library, and sat down to consider whether it would be prudent for me to accept Malatesta's legacy.

I was not long in coming to a decision. At first my conscience suggested to me that Malatesta was an evil spirit; that in accepting his gold, I was trafficking with the enemy of souls; and that, therefore, it would be better for me to reject it. I had no sooner formed this resolution than the figure of Marta stood before my imagination so distinctly, that I sprang from my seat to receive her, but only, of course, to clasp the empty air.

Without further hesitation I took up the purse, and, concealing it as well as I could under my cloak, left the house, closing the door after me. As I passed the canal, I threw the door-key into it, thus carrying out Malatesta's advice, that the house should be left to its fate. In the after part of the day, I purchased two new suits of apparel, a good mule, and some handsome jewels for Marta. Before daybreak next morning I quitted Milan.

Marta received me with evident pleasure, and her father welcomed me back with great friendship and cordiality. I told him that I was now well able to prove that I had means enough to maintain a wife, and I thereupon showed him a portion of the gold I had brought with me. He was quite satisfied, and without the slightest hesitation gave his consent to my marriage with his daughter. I did not go to the old priest's house, being desirous he should remain unacquainted with my return. I took up my abode at a small farm about a league distant from Marta, where I proposed to remain till our wedding. It was arranged that we should live at her father's. He was now far advanced in years and somewhat infirm, and dreaded very much his daughter leaving him. The wedding took place about a month after I had left Milan, and I was happy in the possession of a beautiful, amiable, and in every respect, excellent wife.

The next year was the happiest of my existence, although I was somewhat disappointed that Marta gave no promise of becoming a mother. Her father, who still lived with us, was amiable, and we were always on the best of terms, but his health was rapidly declining. In fact, there was every indication that he would not live long. My wife tended him with the utmost solicitude, doing everything in her power to smooth his path to the grave. In this she certainly succeeded. At the end of the year I began to feel the want of some congenial occupation very much. I could take no interest in the farm, and the only book the cottage contained was a prayer-book, which, I regret to say, had no charm for me. To speak the truth, though I regularly attended mass with my wife whenever her father's health enabled her to leave home, I did so only to please her; as to religion itself, I had become almost indifferent to it. More than once the idea presented itself to me, that if I visited Malatesta's observatory, I should find some books that would interest me. But at the same time I had a sort of dread — which I could explain no further than that it seemed like a repugnance to take anything further that belonged to him. Still the desire increased, so that it became almost impossible for me to bear it. At last I resolved to go on the first convenient opportunity. My intention, however, was to keep it a secret from my wife, who knew nothing whatever of my former acquaintance with Malatesta.

I was soon able to carry this into execution. My father-in-law had some business to do in Lecco on a certain day, but when it came he was too ill to attend to it, and I volunteered to go in his place. I started early, and the little business I had undertaken was completed by noon. I now hired a boat to carry me to the point nearest the castle. Having landed there, I easily made my way to it on foot. As I had to pass the castle on my way to the observatory, I entered it, and inspected it carefully. As Malatesta had informed me, I found that its dilapidation was by no means so great as its outward appearance had led me to believe. All the rooms, with a little care, could easily be placed in a habitable condition. The view from it pleased me greatly — indeed, anything more lovely it would have been hard to imagine. I remained in the building for some hours, and then left it much interested with all that I had seen.

I now proceeded to the observatory. The windows and door were closed, and at first sight I believed it to be uninhabited; but on my knocking for some time, it was at last opened by an old serving-man, who asked in a surly tone what I wanted. I told him I was a friend of Malatesta, and that he had given me permission to visit the observatory at my pleasure, and to make use of any of the books and instruments I found in it.

The old man's manner immediately changed into one of profound respect. "Walk in, sir," he said; "you are doubtless the gentleman I have been expecting for more than a year. My master told me I was to consider myself your servant, and to obey you in every respect the same as though the place were your own."

He then led me into the sitting-room, and inquired how he could serve me. I informed him I merely wished to inspect the books and instruments; and after having shown me where I could find them, I told him I should not for the present require his further attendance. He then conducted into a large upper room, in which there were many hundred volumes arranged on shelves, besides several astronomical instruments, apparently in good order. In the centre of the room was a table with three books on it, and a large chair before it. As soon as the old man had left me, I sat down in the chair, and, taking up one of the volumes, found, to my great surprise, that it was the same one as Malatesta had requested me, when in Milan, to read. Even the strip of parchment I had inserted to mark the place I had left off reading, was still there. I took up the other books and found that they were the same as I had seen on the library table in Milan,

I again opened the first book, and was soon absorbed in it. I continued reading till the evening was so far advanced that I could see no longer. Still I was unwilling to leave the book. So taking it and the two others from the table, I carried then down-stairs, and told the old man to tie them together, as I intended to take them home with me. He obeyed, and after bidding him farewell, I left the house and bent my steps homewards.

Then, and for the first time, I began to think of the long walk before me, the late hour it would be before I arrived at my home, and the anxiety of Marta at my prolonged absence. Night was now fast closing around me, but the rising moon somewhat lightened up my path. I continued on my way, the moon shining out clearer and clearer, till I had nearly reached the rocky amphitheatre. By this time the mountains were almost as distinctly seen as in the daytime. I entered the amphitheatre, and a most singular sight met my eye. The beams of the moon fell full on the side where the stone seat was, leaving the whole space opposite in deep shadow, into which, however, the reflex light from the rocks partially penetrated, giving it the appearance of great depth as well as mystery. Altogether, there was something magical about the scene, which possibly might have had something to do with the idea which seized my mind — that in the darkness there was a crowd of spirits intently watching me. Turning round, if possible to throw off the feeling, I gazed into the obscurity. Neither form nor movement could I see to warrant the idea, but I could not divest myself of the impression that spirits were near me. With a feeling strongly approaching to fear, I turned to continue my path, when, on casting my eyes on the mountain-side lit up by the rays of the moon, I discovered Malatesta seated on the throne-shaped stone, watching me attentively. How he came there I know not. Certainly he was not there when I entered the amphitheatre. My surprise rendered me motionless, and I gazed at him in speechless astonishment. Although he seemed to be aware that I saw him, he made no attempt to rise, but sat with as much dignity as if he had been a monarch on a throne, and I his subject.

"You have done well today," he said, "and I commend you for it. The life you have led for the last year has been little to your credit. With abilities and opportunities sufficient to raise you to a higher rank in the sciences than mortal has yet attained to, you have passed your time in uxorious idleness. That you have every reason to be happy in the possession of such an amiable and beautiful wife, is true; but your happiness would have been none the less had you combined some study with it. And it is not you alone who have lost by this idleness; humanity itself has been a loser. The benefits which might have accrued to mankind in consequence of the advance you might have made in science, have been lost. You have done wisely in taking those books with you. Study them carefully, and your labour will yield an abundant harvest. They will light up in you an ambition which at present you are far from possessing, and which I can perceive will stimulate you to such deeds as will lead you to power, celebrity, and boundless wealth. When you have read through those books you have taken with you, you will wish to consult me on the steps you should take to reach the proud eminence which is in store for you. At full moon you will always find me here, and I will do all in my power to assist you."

I was on the point of speaking, when, to my utter astonishment, Malatesta was no longer visible. His disappearance must have been instantaneous. I looked around me to see whether he was in any other part of the amphitheatre, but he was nowhere to be seen, and nothing was left for me but to continue on my path. Dawn was breaking when I arrived at my home, where I found my wife standing at the door in a state of great anxiety, looking eagerly into the gloom in hope of seeing me. She embraced me tenderly, and was too much overjoyed at my return to question me on the cause of my absence. The next day I invented a plausible story, which she, incapable of falsehood herself, accepted as true, and nothing more was said on the subject.

Some months passed, during which time the health of my father-in-law sank gradually but perceptibly. It became clear at last that there was no chance of his recovery, and that his end was fast approaching. Marta continued to attend him with great care and solicitude, assisted by a discreet woman whom I had engaged to relieve her, as her own health was beginning to suffer from incessant watching in the sick-room. I occupied myself during the time in assiduously studying the books I had brought home with me. They had great attraction for me, and every available moment was devoted to them. One was on the power of human reason, another on chemistry and natural philosophy, and the third on astrology and the occult sciences. I now began to seriously entertain an idea of Malatesta's — that philosophers were too apt to enter deeply into one science only, to the neglect of others, instead of acquiring a broad, comprehensive view of each, studying the affinity between them, endeavouring to concentrate them into one point, and from that to trace them to their different ramifications. Could a man succeed in accomplishing such a task, what immense power he would be able to acquire! The more I though on the point, the more attractive it appeared to me. Frequently I would pursue the train of thought till my brain became dizzy, and a sensation came over me resembling that of a man who, having climbed to a great height, views a profound abyss beneath him. Even my dear wife, absorbed as she generally was in nursing her father, noticed this, and would frequently insist on my putting the books aside and conversing with her. On more than one occasion she attempted to read them herself, to ascertain in what their peculiar fascination consisted; but in a few moments she relinquished them, expressing her wonder that subjects so abstruse could rivet my attention as they did.

Death now relieved my father-in-law from his sufferings. Marta tended him to the last with untiring devotion. It was some weeks before her grief had sufficiently subsided to allow her to resume her domestic duties, and even then her sorrow continued to such an extent, as to give me reason to dread that it would have a prejudicial effect on her health.

I did all in my power to soothe her, but without any good result, and I began to consider whether it would not be advisable to leave our house and take another in some distant part, so as to remove her from scenes so closely connected with her father's memory. I must also admit that I had another motive. I had long wished to remove to the house near the ruined castle in which Malatesta had established his observatory, and I already had his full permission to do so. There I should not only have all the instruments necessary to pursue my studies, but also an excellent library. Grave doubts would occasionally present themselves as to how far I should be justified in taking my dear wife to live in a dwelling of the kind. That Malatesta was a spirit — and a powerful one too — I had now good proof. I had no great dread of him myself, but I did not like the idea of placing Marta any way in his power. But, again, I reflected that Malatesta had always spoken of Marta in terms of high respect; that, in fact, it was directly through his agency that she became my wife, and that therefore she had now nothing to fear from him. This argument weighed heavily with me, and carried such conviction with it that I resolved to remove to the observatory, if I should find (for I had not yet examined it thoroughly) that it had sufficient accommodation for us. I did not mention the subject to my wife, but, making the excuse that I had some business connected with my late father-in-law's affairs to attend to in Lecco, I left her one morning at daybreak, promising to return the same evening. It was not full moon, and therefore it would have been useless to have attempted to meet Malatesta.

As soon as I arrived at Lecco, I took a boat as I had done before, and landed at the point nearest the castle. As I passed it, the desire to make it my residence seized me very strongly; but I did not enter it, and continued on till I had reached the observatory. The door was opened by the old man, who, as soon as he had recognised me, said, "Welcome sir. My master, who has been expecting you, is now waiting for you in the room overhead."

Breathless with astonishment, I rushed upstairs, and in the room in which the old man had mentioned I found Malatesta. He was seated by the table, on which lay a large volume, closed with gold clasps. He did not rise to receive me, but, in a dignified tone, told me I was welcome.

"You have come to examine the house," he continued, "to see if it can be made into a suitable dwelling-place. I believe its smallness renders that impossible. With little difficulty, however, the castle might be put in good condition, and I would readily place it at your disposal; but until you have taken a step further, I cannot."

I asked him what it was he alluded to.

"You are not yet altogether freed from the trammels of the Church," he replied. "It is true you have given up all intention of entering the priesthood, and have for a long time been indifferent to all forms of religion. More, however, remains to be done before you can obtain the eminence you might reach."

I asked him what further was required of me.

"Formally to abjure your religion. Wisdom you must regard as the only deity worthy of being worshipped. When you have done the former, I will place in your hands a power such as no mortal ever possessed."

"You ask me to abjure my religion," I answered, "but do you include in that the practice of good works?"

"Certainly not," he said; "you may indulge in them to any extent you please."

"And what form do you require me to go through?" I asked.

"Nothing that is either terrible or difficult," was his reply. "You must place your hand on that book, and repeat a short formula which I will dictate to you."

"And what will be the result?" I inquired.

"Unlimited power, and wealth, which to a certain extent is the representative of power," he replied. "I will also place the castle in your possession; and although I have the means of at once putting it in a habitable condition for you, it would perhaps be better that this should be done by human agency, even at the cost of some little time. You need take no trouble about it, as I will see it done. The castle shall be yours for life; but at your death I must reclaim it. Will you accept my offer?"

I remained silent for some moments, doubtful what answer I should make. The temptation, however, was too strong for me, and I replied, "I cannot refuse your offer, and am willing to do whatever you require of me."

Malatesta then rose, and told me to place my right hand on the closed book before me. I obeyed, and he slowly distinctly dictated a short form, — which I forbear repeating, — I following him, word by word, as he went on. When I had ended, he said to me, "All is now accomplished; but let me show you a proof of your present power. You will want money for carrying out the good works you intend to practice. Open that coffer, and in it you will find a purse of gold. It is yours. When you want more, on looking there you will find it. Do not be afraid to take it, for your resources are inexhaustible."

I turned from him and opened the coffer. It was empty, save that there was a large purse at the bottom of it. I took it in my hand, and by its weight knew that it contained gold. Singularly enough I experienced no satisfaction in the possession of it, but placed it in my pouch. I turned round to speak to Malatesta. He was no longer present, but my wife, in all her beauty, was now in his place. She spoke not, but regarded me with an expression of intense affection.

I felt neither joy nor surprise at seeing her, and returned her gaze with one almost of indifference. As I looked, the appearance of health gradually vanished from her countenance, and one of mortal pallor supplied its place. Still I felt no surprise. Another change then came over her. A heavenly expression beamed from her features, and she was arrayed in the white robes of an angel. Her form then gradually became indistinct, till at length it melted into air, and I was alone in the room.

Although I felt that the phantom had evidently been sent to warn me of the approaching death of my wife, I experienced not the slightest sorrow, but left the room to visit the castle before my return home

During the time I was examining the castle, I had the same feeling of apathy. I arranged in my mind in what manner I would like the alterations carried out, but felt no real interest in them. I mounted the wall and gazed on the magnificent view before me, which on my former visit had so fascinated me. Now, however, I took not the slightest pleasure in it. I quitted the castle and turned my steps homewards. When I came to the rocky amphitheatre, I passed through it almost without noticing it, and, continuing my road, reached home about nightfall.

The woman whom I had engaged as a companion to my wife, met me at the door with an expression of great alarm on her face. She told me that Marta was seriously ill, and that she did not know what to do to comfort her. Here was a partial confirmation of my presentiment of the morning, but now it gave me no sorrow. I entered my wife's room, and found her stretched on the bed, evidently in deep pain. She smiled when she saw me, and placed her hot feverish hand in mine. I stooped over her and kissed her brow, but without the slightest feeling or sympathy when I did so. I sat up with her the whole of that night, willingly rendering her all the assistance in my power. But in this I was actuated by a mere feeling of duty, which would have led me to aid any fellow-creature in distress, and not from love to my wife.

Without taking a moment's rest, I started next morning for Lecco to seek for a leech, and having found one, I returned with him. During my absence, my wife's malady had greatly increased. I could easily judge from the expression on the leech's countenance, that her illness would terminate fatally, but I felt no sorrow. After the leech had satisfied himself as to the state his patient was in, he drew me aside, and, with great feeling in his tone, told me there was not the slightest hope of her recovery, and that I had better send for a priest to administer the last offices of religion. He said she might last a few days longer, but it was equally probable that she might die in a few hours, and it was better to be prepared. I immediately went for the priest, and returned with him. He confessed my wife, and after remaining with her for some time, affording all the spiritual consolation he could, he administered extreme unction, and then left us.

The leech remained for the night, and on quitting the house next morning he promised to return on the following day, although he hardly hoped to find my wife alive.

Marta lingered on for ten days from the time she had been struck with sickness. She remained sensible to the last, submitting with wonderful resignation, and never uttering a complaint. It is but justice to myself to say that I was unremitting in my attentions to her, never quitting her bedside night or day. I never felt fatigued, and I had no wish for sleep. Still I experienced neither love nor sorrow. I was performing a good work, although I had little personal interest in the individual I was assisting. Had Marta been a perfect stranger, I should have felt quite as much interested in her.

I followed Marta to the grave. All there seemed greatly affected — I alone was unmoved. Not only did my wife's companion shed tears, but the priest who had known her from a child, and the very leech who had attended her wept also. My eyes alone remained dry. The ceremony over, I returned home, and in the evening, without any feeling of disrespect to my wife's memory, I mechanically took up one of my books, and was soon absorbed in the subject.

Next morning the slight impression the events of the previous day had made upon me vanished. I began to think coolly over my plans for the future. I had resolved on leaving that part of Italy till the castle should be in readiness for me. Where to go, however, puzzled me extremely. Wherever I went it was necessary that I should find some subject to occupy my mind. But a singular apathy oppressed me, and I had great difficulty in coming to a resolution. The study of medicine seemed at last to offer some attractions, and the more I reflected on these the more they grew in force. My wife's sickness also assisted me. I thought if I could attain eminence in medicine, I might be of immense use to my fellow-creatures. Besides, I considered that it offered greater facilities for the performance of good works than any other profession.

Having made up my mind, I dismissed my wife's companion, giving her a liberal reward; and having abandoned my house, I visited the different universities in the south of Italy, collecting recipes and making notes of all I thought might be useful. I then visited Constantinople and Greece, and after an absence of several months I returned to Italy.

Although I had now visited many places of interest, I felt no pleasure in anything I saw. On the other hand, I experienced neither sorrow nor anger at any disappointment I met with. I flatter myself that I did many good works, and elicited much gratitude from those I had benefited, but I felt no satisfaction in them myself. They were a source of occupation to me, and nothing more.

One day as I reflected on the irksomeness of my life, the idea struck me that this was to a certain degree due to my researches in one study alone, and to my isolation from all educated society; and that if I remained for some time in one of the universities, I might not only form friendly ties with men of education, but be enabled to apply myself to other studies besides that of medicine. I was the more induced to adopt this view from the fact that, during my travels in the East, I had collected many valuable manuscripts treating of medicine and the occult sciences, more especially astrology. These I had not yet thoroughly read. In one of the principal universities in the north of Italy I could likewise procure astronomical instruments to assist me. I now began to think what university I should choose, and at last I decided on Pavia.

As soon as I arrived in that city, I entered myself on the books of the university under a false name, and pursued the study of medicine. I had informed the professors that my studies were solely for my own amusement, and they gave me permission to attend or absent myself from the classes, as I might think fit. I formed the acquaintance of many men of eminence in the different sciences; and although I received much valuable information in their society, I felt little pleasure in it. My favourite occupation — if indeed it could be said that my apathy allowed me to have any — was in attending upon the sick poor, and in doing works of charity, in which I trust I was not idle.

I now began to feel that there was hardly scope enough for me in and around Pavia to exercise all my powers. True, I had made great progress in my studies, and I possessed many valuable recipes; but medical professors abounded in Pavia, and the churches, being richly endowed, contributed alms in abundance to the poor. I also thought, that if I could but obtain a wider field for practice, I should feel more interested in it, and thus be able to throw off the terrible apathy which oppressed me. I remained undecided what to do, however, till one day a circumstance occurred which made me resolve to quit Pavia.

I had paid my last visit to a patient whom I had cured, and who had for some weeks hung between life and death. The man and his family expressed themselves most grateful for the benefits I had rendered them, but their thanks gave me no pleasure, nor did I feel any satisfaction at having restored the man to health. I left his house, and was returning to the city, when I heard the cry of a child which was evidently in great pain. I hurried to the spot the cry proceeded from, and there saw a child in a woman's lap. She was carefully examining its hand, which appeared to have been wounded. I approached still nearer, and saw the woman draw a large thorn from the child's hand. Immediately after she had extracted it the child ceased crying, and the woman, pleased with her success, almost smothered it with caresses. The woman showed so much joy at this, that I asked her whether she were the child's mother. "I know nothing about him," she replied; "I never saw him before; but it is always a pleasure to relieve anyone in pain."

I now continued my road, reflecting on the difference between that poor woman and myself. I, who had just snatched a man from the jaws of death and restored him to his family, had experienced no pleasure from the doing of it; while this woman, who had rendered a small service to a child, evidently felt immense satisfaction at the trifling good she had done. The poor woman and the child were present to my imagination for several days following. I attempted to analyse the reason for the difference between the woman's and my own apathy. The only plausible conclusion I could arrive at was, that from the frequent cures I had performed, the novelty had worn off, and I could only experience pleasure by doing some great work of charity. Just at this time a war was raging between Venice and Tuscany, and I heard that a great battle was imminent.

I now resolved on being present at the battle, and on assisting the wounded. I left Pavia and reached the seat of the war. Next day the battle was fought. It was long and terrible, and did not end till evening. I was on the field during the whole day attending to the wounded, but with night came my principal call to labour. The field was strewn with the wounded, the dying, and the dead. I saved many a poor fellow's life that night by bandaging up wounds, and stanching bleeding arteries. Great gratitude was shown me by those I had assisted — but still I felt no pleasure in the consciousness of their gratitude. The next day hospitals were established, and, without having taken so much as an hour's rest, I assisted in the work. For many weeks I remained there, rendering all the assistance in my power; and it was not till the hospitals were empty and the wounded had gone to their homes, that I left the locality and returned to Pavia. During the whole of the time I had been employed in tending the wounded, and numerous as were the blessings bestowed upon me, I never experienced the slightest satisfaction.

I now determined to quit Pavia, and to question Malatesta as to the cause of my peculiar state of mine. I was also curious to see the alterations which had been made in the castle, and which I calculated must now be completed. I accordingly had the whole of my books and effects packed up and forwarded to Lecco, where they were to await my arrival. I told no one of my intended departure, but as soon as all was ready I bade farewell to one or two of my most intimate acquaintances, and left Pavia never to return to it. At Lecco I hired a bark, and my effects having been placed in it, I reached the landing-place without difficulty. Leaving my luggage in charge of the boatmen, I hurried up to the castle. Great indeed were the alterations which had been made in it since I was there. Instead of the half-ruinous appearance it then presented, all now seemed in perfect repair. I knocked at the gates, which were opened by the aged serving-man I had seen at the observatory. He bade me welcome, and conducted me upstairs into the study, which was prepared to receive me.

Around the walls, the books which had been taken from the deserted observatory were ranged in regular order. The astronomical instruments I had seen in it were also here, as well as the furniture. The coffer was standing by the wall, and as my funds were almost exhausted I lifted the lid, and saw that at the bottom there lay a purse of gold. Of this I took possession. The old man then conducted me into the other rooms, all of which were in perfect order.

I now determined to remain in the castle, at least till I should have an opportunity of seeing Malatesta. The books which I had brought with me from Pavia I caused to be ranged with the others on the walls, and I applied myself sedulously to study. The current of my life, if not happy, ran smoothly enough.

I saw nothing of Malatesta during my stay in the castle; and as I could only meet him at the rocky amphitheatre at full moon, I was obliged to wait for nearly three weeks. Night after night I watched for the increase of the moon; and the evening on which she arrived at the full I left the castle to go and meet Malatesta. The night, though calm, threatened a storm. The heavens were overspread with heavy black clouds, which moved lazily along before a light breeze. From time to time the moon burst through, but the next moment she was hidden from sight again. I continued my walk, occasionally with great difficulty, owing to the darkness which reigned around me. At last I arrived at the place of rendezvous, but the darkness was so great that I could only see a few paces before me. I advanced cautiously towards the stone seat, and when I had almost reached it, the rays of the moon broke through the clouds, and I saw Malatesta before me. He made no movement, neither did the speak. I felt not the slightest fear at his presence — indeed I was now insensible to fear as well as to all other sensations — but I boldly addressed him.

"Malatesta!" I said, "I have sought you in order to obtain from you some explanation of the extraordinary state of mind in which I am, and which I can only attribute to your machinations."

"Do you consider, then," he said, "that you have any ground for complaint against me?"

"I do," I said.

"From what cause?" he inquired. "Have I not faithfully kept every promise to you, and what can you require more?"

"That you have kept your promises, I admit," replied I; "but why did you take from me all sensation of mental pleasure or pain? You said nothing of that when I accepted your offer."

"You are in error," he returned; "I did not deprive you of the feeling of mental pleasure, and if I did take from you the power of feeling mental pain, you ought to feel grateful to me. I can restore both to you if you desire it, or, what would please me better the former only. But other conditions must be attached to that, which, if you wish, I can explain to you."

"I do wish it," I replied.

"Then," said he, "you must enlist yourself in the cause I serve, and I can assure you that the present apathy you complain of will no longer oppress you, and that your life for the future will be one of intense pleasurable excitement."

"But what cause do you serve?" I inquired.

"Be not astonished when I mention the word, but hear me to the end before making reply. There are, as you must be aware, two great powers in this world always at war — those of good and of evil. The master I serve is the prince of the latter. Make common cause with me, and you will feel such an enthusiasm in it as you have never yet experienced."

"You are then a soldier of the devil," I said, "an emissary from the prince of darkness."

"Call me so if it pleases you; your doing so will not offend me. But how foolishly you argue! You have abjured all religion, and attempted to practice good works without it. That you have succeeded is true, but you experience no pleasure in any good work you do, — and more, let me tell you, you never will. Accept service under my master, and he will amply repay you. Every action you do in his cause will afford you immense pleasure and satisfaction."

"And you expect me to accept your offer?"

"Yes, you certainly must do so, or continue to bear your apathy. You are inevitably bound to us, and will not be able to get off your bargain. You are now incapable of repentance, and without it the Church will not receive you. So it will be better that you accept my offer. Will you do so?"

"Never," I replied. "I may feel no satisfaction in the practice of good works, but I will never knowingly work evil."

"So that is your final answer to my offer?" he said. "Follow my advice and take time before you decide."

"That is my deliberate answer," I replied, "and nothing shall induce me to swerve from it. I may not be able to escape from the contract I have made with you, else I would do so, but nothing shall induce me to go beyond it. Like a traitor, you hid from me your real character when you made my acquaintance, else you would never have been able to acquire such power over me."

Malatesta now rose, and, with an expression of intense severity on his countenance, was on the point of addressing me, when he suddenly vanished. The moon the instant afterwards was so over-clouded, that every object was hidden from me. Suddenly a strong sensation told me that I was not alone. Instinctively I knew that it was not Malatesta, but some friendly spirit. I remained rooted to the spot, and by degrees I felt more and more assured that I was in the company of an angel, and that this angel was my dear wife. As soon as I was fully assured of this fact, I left the spot, and bent my steps homewards. I felt that the spirit was accompanying me; and when I entered the castle she was still with me. Notwithstanding all my sins, I firmly believe she has continued to watch over me.

I now took up my abode in the castle, and have never since left it. I have done what good I could, and never willingly worked evil. But in my practice of good works I have never felt the slightest pleasure. I have discovered (but alas! too late) that the satisfaction experienced in the performance of good works is an earthly reward, and that, without God's blessing, all good works are utterly tasteless and profitless to the doer.

THE END

CONCLUSION

After they had read the written confession of the Innominato, the two monks remained for some time in consultation. When this was over, Fra Gerolamo, taking upon himself the office of confessor, went into the Innominato's room to pray for him, help awaken in him the spirit of repentance, and then to formally receive his confession. But, on opening the door, his gaze fell on the lifeless form of the astrologer, whose cold, emaciated countenance, on closer inspection, seemed frozen in a mask of resigned anguish.

The Innominato's body was buried in a spot near the castle and, as soon as the interment was over, the two monks proceeded without delay to the convent and informed the superior of all that had taken place. After due consideration it was determined that next day all the monks should visit the castle, and with exorcisms drive all the evil spirits from it. With some little difficulty, a sufficient number of barks were collected to transport the brethren across the lake. They left the convent at daybreak next morning, and arrived safely at the landing place. A procession was then formed, and with great reverence they proceeded to the castle, chanting appropriate psalms as they went. Great indeed was their surprise when they reached it. The whole place had entirely changed since the day before when the two monks had quitted it. Not a vestige now remained to show that the Innominato had recently inhabited it. There was not a servant to be seen. The walls were covered with ivy, the entrance gates were no longer there, and not a single article of furniture, nor a book, nor philosophical instrument remained. The whole building was in ruins.

After the exorcism had been completed, the monks returned in the procession to their barks. None of them ever visited castle or the locality around it afterwards. The memory of the Innominato and his deeds gradually faded away, till at last all that remained of them were some obscure traditions; and of these, the few worthy of credence were so mixed up with fiction as to render them, in a historical point of view, utterly valueless.

THE END

END OF SECOND VOLUME