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 **FORDHAM MORRIS**

THE
B R A V O :

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE SPY," "THE RED ROVER,"
"THE WATER-WITCH," &c.

Giustizia in palazzo, e pane in piazza.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

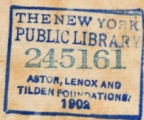
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STEREOTYPED BY J. HOWE.

PREFACE.

It is to be regretted the world does not discriminate more justly in its use of political terms. Governments are usually called either monarchies or republics. The former class embraces equally those institutions in which the sovereign is worshipped as a God, and those in which he performs the humble office of a mannikin. In the latter we find aristocracies and democracies blended in the same generic appellation. The consequence of a generalization so wide is an utter confusion, on the subject of the polity of states.

The author has endeavored to give his countrymen, in this book, a picture of the social system of one of the *soi-disant* republics of the other hemisphere. There has been no attempt to portray historical characters, only too fictitious in their graver dress, but simply to set forth the familiar operations of Venetian policy. For the justification of his likeness, after allowing for the defects of execution, he refers to the well-known work of M. Daru.

A history of the progress of political liberty, written purely in the interests of humanity, is still a desideratum in literature. In nations which have made a false commencement, it would be found that the citizen, or rather the subject, has extorted immunity after immunity, as his growing intelligence and importance have both instructed and required him to defend those particular rights which were necessary to his well-being. A certain accumulation of these immunities constitutes, with a solitary and recent exception in Switzerland, the essence of European liberty, even at this hour. It is scarcely necessary to tell the reader that this freedom, be it more or less, depends on a principle entirely different from our own. Here the immunities do not proceed from, but they are granted to, the government, being, in other words, concessions of natural rights made by the people to the state, for the benefits of social protection. So long as this vital difference exist between ourselves and other nations, it will be vain to think of finding analogies in their institutions. It is true that, in an age like this, public opinion is itself a charter, and that the most despotic government which exists within the pale of

Christendom, must, in some degree, respect its influence. The mildest and justest governments in Europe are, at this moment, theoretically despotisms. The character of both prince and people enter largely into the consideration of so extraordinary results, and it should never be forgotten that, though the character of the latter be sufficiently secure, that of the former is liable to change. But, admitting every benefit which can possibly flow from a just administration, with wise and humane princes, a government which is not properly based on the people, possesses an unavoidable and oppressive evil of the first magnitude, in the necessity of supporting itself by physical force and onerous impositions, against the natural action of the majority.

Were we to characterize a republic, we should say it was a state in which power, both theoretically and practically, is derived from the nation, with a constant responsibility of the agents of the public to the people; a responsibility that is neither to be evaded nor denied. That such a system is better on a large than on a small scale, though contrary to brilliant theories which have been written to uphold different institutions,

must be evident on the smallest reflection, since the danger of all popular governments is from popular mistakes, and a people of diversified interests and extended territorial possessions, are much less likely to be the subjects of sinister passions, than the inhabitants of a single town, or county. If to this definition we should add, as an infallible test of the genius, that a true republic is a government of which all others are jealous and vituperative, on the instinct of self-preservation, we believe there would be no mistaking the class. How far Venice would have been obnoxious to this proof, the reader is left to judge for himself.

THE BRAVO.

CHAPTER I.

"I stood in Venice on the Bridge of Sighs,
A palace and a prison on each hand;
I saw from out the wave her structures rise,
As from the stroke of the enchanter's wand:
A thousand years their cloudy wings expand
Around me, and a dying glory smiles
O'er the far times, when many a subject land
Look'd to the winged lions' marble piles,
Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles."
BYRON.

THE sun had disappeared behind the summits of the Tyrolean Alps, and the moon was already risen above the low barrier of the Lido. Hundreds of pedestrians were pouring out of the narrow streets of Venice into the square of St. Mark, like water gushing through some strait aqueduct, into a broad and bubbling basin. Gallant cavalieri and grave cittadini; soldiers of Dalmatia, and seamen of the galleys; dames of the city, and females of lighter manners; jewellers of the Rialto, and traders from the Levant; Jew, Turk, and Christian; traveller, adventurer, podestà, valet, avvocato and gondolier, held their way alike to the common centre of amusement. The hurried air and careless eye; the measured step and jealous glance; the jest and laugh; the song of the cantatrice, and the melody of the flute; the grimace of the buffoon, and the tragic frown of the improvisatore; the pyramid of the grotesque, the compelled and melancholy smile of the harpist, cries of water-sellers, cowls of monks, plumage of warriors, hum of voices, and the universal movement and bustle, added to the more perma-

ment objects of the place, rendered the scene the most remarkable of Christendom.

On the very confines of that line which separates western from eastern Europe, and in constant communication with the latter, Venice possessed a greater admixture of character and costume, than any other of the numerous ports of that region. A portion of this peculiarity is still to be observed, under the fallen fortunes of the place; but at the period of our tale, the city of the isles, though no longer mistress of the Mediterranean, nor even of the Adriatic, was still rich and powerful. Her influence was felt in the councils of the civilized world, and her commerce, though waning, was yet sufficient to uphold the vast possessions of those families, whose ancestors had become rich in the day of her prosperity. Men lived among her islands in that state of incipient lethargy, which marks the progress of a downward course, whether the decline be of a moral or of a physical decay.

At the hour we have named, the vast parallelogram of the piazza was filling fast, the cafés and casinos within the porticoes, which surround three of its sides, being already thronged with company. While all beneath the arches was gay and brilliant with the flare of torch and lamp, the noble range of edifices called the Procuratories, the massive pile of the Ducal Palace, the most ancient Christian church, the granite columns of the piazzetta, the triumphal masts of the great square, and the giddy tower of the campanile, were slumbering in the more mellow glow of the moon.

Facing the wide area of the great square stood the quaint and venerable cathedral of San Marco. A temple of trophies, and one equally proclaiming the prowess and the piety of its founders, this remarkable structure presided over the other fixtures of the place, like a monument of the republic's antiquity

and greatness. Its Saracenic architecture, the rows of precious but useless little columns that load its front, the low Asiatic domes which rest upon its walls in the repose of a thousand years, the rude and gaudy mosaics, and above all the captured horses of Corinth which start from out the sombre mass in the glory of Grecian art, received from the solemn and appropriate light, a character of melancholy and mystery, that well comported with the thick recollections which crowd the mind as the eye gazes at this rare relic of the past.

As fit companions to this edifice, the other peculiar ornaments of the place stood at hand. The base of the campanile lay in shadow, but a hundred feet of its gray summit received the full rays of the moon along its eastern face. The masts destined to bear the conquered ensigns of Candia, Constantinople, and the Morea, cut the air by its side, in dark and fairy lines, while at the extremity of the smaller square, and near the margin of the sea, the forms of the winged lion and the patron saint of the city, each on his column of African granite, were distinctly traced against the back-ground of the azure sky.

It was near the base of the former of these massive blocks of stone, that one stood who seemed to gaze at the animated and striking scene, with the listlessness and indifference of satiety. A multitude, some in masques and others careless of being known, had poured along the quay into the piazzetta, on their way to the principal square, while this individual had scarce turned a glance aside, or changed a limb in weariness. His attitude was that of patient, practised, and obedient waiting on another's pleasure. With folded arms, a body poised on one leg, and a vacant though good-humored eye, he appeared to attend some beck of authority ere he quitted the spot. A silken jacket, in whose tissue flowers of

the gayest colors were interwoven, the falling collar of scarlet, the bright velvet cap with armorial bearings embroidered on its front, proclaimed him to be a gondolier in private service.

Wearied at length with the antics of a distant group of tumblers, whose pile of human bodies had for a time arrested his look, this individual turned away, and faced the light air from the water. Recognition and pleasure shot into his countenance, and in a moment his arms were interlocked with those of a swarthy mariner, who wore the loose attire and Phrygian cap of men of his calling. The gondolier was the first to speak, the words flowing from him in the soft accents of his native islands.

"Is it thou, Stefano! They said thou hadst fallen into the gripe of the devils of Barbary, and that thou wast planting flowers for an infidel with thy hands, and watering them with thy tears!"

The answer was in the harsher dialect of Calabria, and it was given with the rough familiarity of a seaman.

"La Bella Sorrentina is no housekeeper of a curato! She is not a damsel to take a siesta with a Tunisian rover prowling about in her neighborhood. Hadst ever been beyond the Lido, thou wouldst have known the difference between chasing the felucca and catching her."

"Kneel down, and thank San Teodoro for his care. There was much praying on thy decks that hour, caro Stefano, though none is bolder among the mountains of Calabria when thy felucca is once safely drawn upon the beach!"

The mariner cast a half-comic, half-serious glance upward at the image of the patron saint, ere he replied.

"There was more need of the wings of thy lion than of the favor of thy saint. I never come fur-

ther north for aid than San Gennaro, even when it blows a hurricane."

"So much the worse for thee, caro, since the good bishop is better at stopping the lava than at quieting the winds. But there was danger, then, of losing the felucca and her brave people among the Turks?"

"There was, in truth, a Tunis-man prowling about, between Stromboli and Sicily; but, Ali di San Michele! he might better have chased the cloud above the volcano, than run after the felucca in a sirocco!"

"Thou wast chicken-hearted, Stefano?"

"I!—I was more like thy lion, here, with some small additions of chains and muzzles."

"As was seen by thy felucca's speed?"

"Cospetto! I wished myself a knight of San Giovanni a thousand times during the chase, and La Bella Sorrentina a brave Maltese galley, if it were only for the cause of Christian honor! The miscreant hung upon my quarter for the better part of three glasses; so near, that I could tell which of the knaves wore dirty cloth in his turban, and which clean. It was a sore sight to a Christian, Stefano, to see the right thus borne upon by an infidel."

"And thy feet warmed with the thought of the bastinado, caro mio?"

"I have run too often barefoot over our Calabrian mountains, to tingle at the sole with every fancy of that sort."

"Every man has his weak spot, and I know thine to be dread of a Turk's arm. Thy native hills have their soft as well as their hard ground, but it is said the Tunisian chooses a board knotty as his own heart, when he amuses himself with the wailings of a Christian."

"Well, the happiest of us all must take such as fortune brings. If my soles are to be shod with

blows, the honest priest of Sant' Agata will be cheated of a penitent. I have bargained with the good curato, that all such accidental calamities shall go in the general account of penance. But how fares the world of Venice?—and what dost thou among the canals at this season, to keep the flowers of thy jacket from wilting?”

“To-day as yesterday, and to-morrow will be as to-day. I row the gondola from the Rialto to the Guidecca; from San Giorgio to San Marco; from San Marco to the Lido, and from the Lido home. There are no Tunis-men by the way, to chill the heart or warm the feet.”

“Enough of friendship. And is there nothing stirring in the republic?—no young noble drowned, nor any Jew hanged?”

“Nothing of that much interest—except the calamity which befell Pietro. Thou rememberest Pietrillo? he who crossed into Dalmatia with thee once, as a supernumerary, the time he was suspected of having aided the young Frenchman in running away with a senator's daughter?”

“Do I remember the last famine? The rogue did nothing but eat maccaroni, and swallow the lachrymæ christi, which the Dalmatian count had on freight.”

“Poverino! His gondola has been run down by an Ancona man, who passed over the boat, as if it were a senator stepping on a fly.”

“So much for little fish coming into deep water.”

“The honest fellow was crossing the Guidecca, with a stranger who had occasion to say his prayers at the Redentore, when the brig hit him in the canopy, and broke up the gondola as if it had been a bubble left by the Bucentaur.”

“The padrone should have been too generous to complain of Pietro's clumsiness, since it met with its own punishment.”

“Madre di Dio! He went to sea that hour, or he might be feeding the fishes of the Lagunes! There is not a gondolier in Venice who did not feel the wrong at his heart; and we know how to obtain justice for an insult, as well as our masters.”

“Well, a gondola is mortal, as well as a felucca, and both have their time; better die by the prow of a brig, than fall into the gripe of a Turk.—How is thy young master, Gino? and is he likely to obtain his claims of the senate?”

“He cools himself in the Giudecca in the morning; and if thou would'st know what he does at evening, thou hast only to look among the nobles in the Broglio.”

As the gondolier spoke, he glanced an eye aside, at a group of patrician rank, who paced the gloomy arcades which supported the superior walls of the doge's palace, a spot sacred, at times, to the uses of the privileged.

“I am no stranger to the habit thy Venetian nobles have of coming to that low colonnade at this hour, but I never before heard of their preferring the waters of the Giudecca for their baths.”

“Were even the doge to throw himself out of a gondola, he must sink or swim, like a meaner Christian.”

“Acqua dell' Adriatico! Was the young duca going to the Redentore, too, to say his prayers?”

“He was coming back after having—but what matters it in what canal a young noble sighs away the night! We happened to be near when the Ancona-man performed his feat: while Giorgio and I were boiling with rage at the awkwardness of the stranger, my master, who never had much taste or knowledge in gondolas, went into the water to save the young lady from sharing the fate of her uncle.”

“Diavolo! This is the first syllable thou hast ut-

tered concerning any young lady, or of the death of her uncle!"

"Thou wert thinking of thy Tunis-man, and hast forgotten. I must have told thee how near the beautiful signora was to sharing the fate of the gondola, and how the loss of the Roman marchese weighs, in addition, on the soul of the padrone."

"Santo Padre! That a Christian should die the death of a hunted dog by the carelessness of a gondolier!"

"It may have been lucky for the Ancona-man that it so fell out, for they say the Roman was one of influence enough to make a senator cross the Bridge of Sighs, at need."

"The devil take all careless watermen, say I!—And what became of the awkward rogue?"

"I tell thee he went outside the Lido, that very hour, or—"

"Pietrello?"

"He was brought up by the oar of Giorgio, for both of us were active in saving the cushions and other valuables."

"Could'st thou do nothing for the poor Roman? Ill luck may follow that brig on account of his death!"

"Ill luck follow her, say I, till she lays her bones on some rock that is harder than the heart of her padrone. As for the stranger, we could do no more than offer up a prayer to San Teodoro, since he never rose after the blow. But what has brought thee to Venice, caro mio? for thy ill-fortune with the oranges, in the last vcyage, caused thee to denounce the place."

The Calabrian laid a finger on one cheek, and drew the skin down, in a manner to give a droll expression to his dark, comic eye, while the whole of his really fine Grecian face was charged with an expression of coarse humor.

"Look you, Gino—thy master sometimes calls for his gondola between sunset and morning?"

"An owl is not more wakeful than he has been of late. This head of mine has not been on a pillow before the sun has come above the Lido, since the snows melted from Monselice."

"And when the sun of thy master's countenance sets in his own palazzo, thou hastenest off to the bridge of the Rialto, among the jewellers and butchers, to proclaim the manner in which he passed the night?"

"Diamine! 'T would be the last night I served the Duca di Sant' Agata, were my tongue so limber! The gondolier and the confessor are the two privy-councillors of a noble, Master Stefano, with this small difference—that the last only knows what the sinner wishes to reveal, while the first sometimes knows more. I can find a safer, if not a more honest employment, than to be running about with my master's secrets in the air."

"And I am wiser than to let every Jew broker in San Marco, here, have a peep into my charter-party."

"Nay, old acquaintance, there is some difference between our occupations, after all. A padrone of a felucca cannot, in justice, be compared to the most confidential gondolier of a Neapolitan duke, who has an unsettled right to be admitted to the council of three hundred."

"Just the difference between smooth water and rough—you ruffle the surface of a canal with a lazy oar, while I run the channel of Piombino in a mistral, shoot the Faro of Messina in a white squall, double Santa Maria de Leuca in a breathing Levanter, and come skimming up the Adriatic, before a sirocco that is hot enough to cook my macaroni, and which sets the whole sea boiling worse than the caldrons of Scylla."

"Hist!" eagerly interrupted the gondolier, who had indulged, with Italian humor, in the controversy for pre-eminence, though without any real feeling; "here comes one who may think, else, we shall have need of his hand to settle the dispute—Eccolo!"

The Calabrian recoiled apace, in silence, and stood regarding the individual who had caused this hurried remark, with a gloomy but steady air. The stranger moved slowly past. His years were under thirty, though the calm gravity of his countenance imparted to it a character of more mature age. The cheeks were bloodless, but they betrayed rather the pallid hue of mental than of bodily disease. The perfect condition of the physical man was sufficiently exhibited in the muscular fullness of a body which, though light and active, gave every indication of strength. His step was firm, assured, and even; his carriage erect and easy, and his whole mien was strongly characterized by a self-possession that could scarcely escape observation. And yet his attire was that of an inferior class. A doublet of common velvet, a dark Montero cap, such as was then much used in the southern countries of Europe, with other vestments of a similar fashion, composed his dress. The face was melancholy rather than sombre, and its perfect repose accorded well with the striking calmness of the body. The lineaments of the former, however, were bold and even noble, exhibiting that strong and manly outline which is so characteristic of the finer class of the Italian countenance. Out of this striking array of features gleamed an eye, that was full of brilliancy, meaning, and passion.

As the stranger passed, his glittering organs rolled over the persons of the gondolier and his companion, but the look, though searching, was entirely without interest. 'Twas the wandering but wary

glance, which men, who have much reason to distrust, habitually cast on a multitude. It turned, with the same jealous keenness, on the face of the next it encountered, and by the time the steady and well-balanced form was lost in the crowd, that quick and glowing eye had gleamed, in the same rapid and uneasy manner, on twenty others.

Neither the gondolier nor the mariner of Calabria spoke, until their riveted gazes after the retiring figure, became useless. Then the former simply ejaculated, with a strong respiration—

“Jacopo!”

His companion raised three of his fingers, with an occult meaning, towards the palace of the doges.

“Do they let him take the air, even in San Marco?” he asked, in unfeigned surprise.

“It is not easy, caro amico, to make water run up stream, or to stop the downward current. It is said that most of the senators would sooner lose their hopes of the horned bonnet, than lose him. Jacopo! He knows more family secrets than the good Priore of San Marco himself, and he, poor man, is half his time in the confessional.”

“Ay, they are afraid to put him in an iron jacket, lest awkward secrets should be squeezed out.”

“Corpo di Bacco! there would be little peace in Venice, if the Council of Three should take it into their heads to loosen the tongue of yonder man in that rude manner.”

“But they say, Gino, that thy Council of Three has a fashion of feeding the fishes of the Lagunes, which might throw the suspicion of his death on some unhappy Ancona-man, were the body ever to come up again.”

“Well, no need of bawling it aloud, as if thou wert hailing a Sicilian through thy trumpet, though the fact should be so. To say the truth, there are few men in business who are thought to have more

custom than he who has just gone up the piazzetta."

"Two sequins!" rejoined the Calabrian, enforcing his meaning by a significant grimace.

"Santa Madonna! Thou forgettest, Stefano, that not even the confessor has any trouble with a job in which he has been employed. Not a caratano less than a hundred will buy a stroke of his art. Your blows, for two sequins, leave a man leisure to tell tales, or even to say his prayers half the time."

"Jacopo!" ejaculated the other, with an emphasis which seemed to be a sort of summing up of all his aversion and horror.

The gondolier shrugged his shoulders, with quite as much meaning as a man born on the shores of the Baltic could have conveyed by words; but he, too, appeared to think the matter exhausted.

"Stefano Milano," he added, after a moment of pause, "there are things in Venice which he, who would eat his macaroni in peace, would do well to forget. Let thy errand in port be what it may, thou art in good season to witness the regatta which will be given by the state, itself, to-morrow."

"Hast thou an oar for that race?"

"Giorgio's, or mine, under the patronage of San Teodoro. The prize will be a silver gondola to him who is lucky or skilful enough to win; and then we shall have the nuptials with the Adriatic."

"Thy nobles had best woo the bride well, for there are heretics who lay claim to her good-will. I met a rover of strange rig and miraculous fleetness, in rounding the headlands of Otranto, who seemed to have half a mind to follow the felucca in her path towards the Lagunes."

"Did the sight warm thee at the soles of thy feet, Gino dear?"

"There was not a turbaned head on his deck, but

every sea-cap set upon a well-covered poll and a shorn chin. Thy Bucentaur is no longer the bravest craft that floats between Dalmatia and the islands, though her gilding may glitter brightest. There are men beyond the pillars of Hercules who are not satisfied with doing all that can be done on their own coasts, but who are pretending to do much of that which can be done on ours."

"The republic is a little aged, caro, and years need rest. The joints of the Bucentaur are racked by time and many voyages to the Lido. I have heard my master say that the leap of the winged lion is not as far as it was, even in his young days."

"Don Camillo has t' e reputation of talking boldly of the foundation of this city of pil' , when he has the roof of old Sant' Agata safely over his head. Were he to speak more reverently of the horned bonnet, and of the Council of Three, his pretensions to succeed to the rights of his forefathers might seem juster in the eyes of his judges. But distance is a great mellowing of colors, and softener of fears. My own opinion of the speed of the felucca, and of the merits of a Turk, undergo changes of this sort between port and the open sea; and I have known thee, good Gino, forget San Teodoro, and bawl as lustily to San Gennaro, when at Naples, as if thou really fancied thyself in danger from the mountain."

"One must speak to those at hand, in order to be quickest heard," rejoined the gondolier, casting a glance that was partly humorous, and not without superstition, upwards at the image which crowned the granite column against whose pedestal he still leaned. "A truth which warns us to be prudent, for yonder Jew cast a look this way, as if he felt a conscientious scruple in letting any irreverend remark of ours go without reporting. The bearded old rogue is said to have other dealings with the Three Hundred besides asking for the moneys he

has lent to their sons. And so, Stefano, thou think est the republic will never plant another mast of triumph in San Marco, or bring more trophies to the venerable church?"

"Napoli herself, with her constant change of masters, is as likely to do a great act on the sea, as thy winged beast, just now! Thou art well enough to row a gondola in the canals, Gino, or to follow thy master to his Calabrian castle; but if thou would'st know what passes in the wide world, thou must be content to listen to mariners of the long course. The day of San Marco has gone by, and that of the heretics more north has come."

"Thou hast been much, of late, among the lying Genoese, Stefano, that thou comest hither with these idle tales of what a heretic can do. Genova la Superba! What has a city of walls to compare with one of canals and islands, like this?—and what has that Apennine republic performed, to be put in comparison with the great deeds of the Queen of the Adriatic? Thou forgettest that Venezia has been—"

"Zitto, zitto! that *has* been, caro mio, is a great word with all Italy. Thou art as proud of the past, as a Roman of the Trastevere."

"And the Roman of the Trastevere is right. Is it nothing, Stefano Milano, to be descended from a great and victorious people?"

"It is better, Gino Monaldi, to be one of a people which is great and victorious just now. The enjoyment of the past is like the pleasure of the fool who dreams of the wine he drank yesterday."

"This is well for a Neapolitan, whose country never was a nation," returned the gondolier, angrily. "I have heard Don Camillo, who is one educated as well as born in the land, often say that half of the people of Europe have ridden the horse of Sicily, and used the legs of thy Napoli, except those who had the best right to the services of both."

“Even so; and yet the figs are as sweet as ever, and the beccafichi as tender! The ashes of the volcano cover all!”

“Gino,” said a voice of authority, near the gondolier.

“Signore.”

He who interrupted the dialogue pointed to the boat, without saying more.

“A rivederti,” hastily muttered the gondolier. His friend squeezed his hand in perfect amity—for, in truth, they were countrymen by birth, though chance had trained the former on the canals—and, at the next instant, Gino was arranging the cushions for his master, having first aroused his subordinate brother of the oar from a profound sleep.

CHAPTER II.

Hast ever swam in a gondola at Venice?

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN Don Camillo Monforte entered the gondola, he did not take his seat in the pavilion. With an arm leaning on the top of the canopy, and his cloak thrown loosely over one shoulder, the young noble stood, in a musing attitude, until his dexterous servants had extricated the boat from the little fleet which crowded the quay, and had urged it into open water. This duty performed, Gino touched his scarlet cap, and looked at his master, as if to inquire the direction in which they were to proceed. He was answered by a silent gesture, that indicated the route of the great canal.

“Thou hast an ambition, Gino, to show thy skill in the regatta?” Don Camillo observed, when they had made a little progress. “The motive merits

success. Thou wast speaking to a stranger, when I summoned thee to the gondola?"

"I was asking the news of our Calabrian hills from one who has come into port with his felucca, though the man took the name of San Gennaro to witness that his former luckless voyage should be the last."

"How does he call his felucca, and what is the name of the padrone?"

"La Bella Sorrentina, commanded by a certain Stefano Milano, son of an ancient servant of Sant' Agata. The bark is none of the worst for speed, and it has some reputation for beauty. It ought to be of happy fortune, too, for the good curato recommended it, with many a devout prayer, to the Virgin and to San Francesco."

The noble appeared to lend more attention to the discourse, which, until now, on his part, had been commenced in the listless manner with which a superior encourages an indulged dependant.

"La Bella Sorrentina! Have I not reason to know the bark?"

"Nothing more true, Signore. Her padrone has relations at Sant' Agata, as I have told your eccellenza, and his vessel has lain on the beach, near the castle, many a bleak winter."

"What brings him to Venice?"

"That is what I would give my newest jacket of your eccellenza's colors to know, Signore. I have as little wish to inquire into other people's affairs as any one, and I very well know that discretion is the chief virtue of a gondolier. I ventured, however, a deadly hint concerning his errand, such as ancient neighborhood would warrant, but he was as cautious of his answers as if he were freighted with the confessions of fifty Christians. Now, if your eccellenza should see fit to give me authority to question him, in your name, the deuce is in't if,

between respect for his lord, and good management, we could not draw something more than a false bill of lading from him."

"Thou wilt take thy choice of my gondolas for the regatta, Gino," observed the Duke of Sant' Agata, entering the pavilion, and throwing himself on the glossy black leathern cushions, without adverting to the suggestion of his servant.

The gondola continued its noiseless course, with the sprite-like movement peculiar to that description of boat. Gino, who, as superior over his fellow, stood perched on the little arched deck in the stern, pushed his oar with accustomed readiness and skill, now causing the light vessel to sheer to the right, and now to the left, as it glided among the multitude of crafts, of all sizes and uses, which it met in its passage. Palace after palace had been passed, and more than one of the principle canals, which diverged towards the different spectacles, or the other places of resort frequented by his master, were left behind, without Don Camillo giving any new direction. At length the boat arrived opposite to a building, which seemed to excite more than common expectation. Giorgio worked his oar with a single hand, looking over his shoulder at Gino, and Gino permitted his blade fairly to trail on the water. Both seemed to await new orders, manifesting something like that species of instinctive sympathy with him they served, which a long practised horse is apt to show when he draws near a gate, that is seldom passed unvisited by his driver.

The edifice which caused this hesitation in the two gondoliers, was one of those residences of Venice, which are quite as remarkable for their external riches and ornaments, as for their singular situation amid the waters. A massive rustic basement of marble was seated as solidly in the element, as if it grew from a living rock, while story was seem-

ingly raised on story, in the wanton observance of the most capricious rules of meretricious architecture, until the pile reached an altitude that is little known, except in the dwellings of princes. Colonnades, medallions, and massive cornices, overhung the canal, as if the art of man had taken pride in loading the superstructure in a manner to mock the unstable element which concealed its base. A flight of steps, on which each gentle undulation produced by the passage of the barge washed a wave, conducted to a vast vestibule, that answered many of the purposes of a court. Two or three gondolas were moored near, but the absence of their people showed they were for the use of those who dwelt within. The boats were protected from rough collision with the passing craft, by piles driven obliquely into the bottom. Similar spars, with painted and ornamented heads, that sometimes bore the colors and arms of the proprietor, formed a sort of little haven for the gondolas of the household, before the door of every dwelling of mark.

"Where is it the pleasure of your *eccellenza* to be rowed?" asked Gino, when he found his sympathetic delay had produced no order.

"To the Palazzo."

Giorgio threw a glance of surprise back at his comrade, but the obedient gondola shot by the gloomy, though rich abode, as if the little bark had suddenly obeyed an inward impulse. In a moment more, it whirled aside, and the hollow sound, caused by the splash of water between high walls, announced its entrance into a narrower canal. With shortened oars, the men still urged the boat ahead, now turning short into some new channel, now glancing beneath a low bridge, and now uttering, in the sweet shrill tones of the country and their craft, the well-known warning to those who were darting in an opposite direction. A back-stroke of Gino's oar,

however, soon brought the side of the arrested boat to a flight of steps.

"Thou wilt follow me," said Don Camillo, as he placed his foot, with the customary caution, on the moist stone, and laid a hand on the shoulder of Gino; "I have need of thee."

Neither the vestibule, nor the entrance, nor the other visible accessories of the dwelling, were so indicative of luxury and wealth as that of the palace on the great canal. Still, they were all such as denoted the residence of a noble of consideration.

"Thou wilt do wisely, Gino, to trust thy fortunes to the new gondola," said the master, as he mounted the heavy stone stairs, to an upper floor, pointing as he spoke to a new and beautiful boat, which lay in a corner of the large vestibule, as carriages are seen standing in the courts of houses built on more solid ground. "He who would find favor with Jupiter must put his own shoulder to the wheel, thou knowest, my friend."

The eye of Gino brightened, and he was voluble in his expression of thanks. They had ascended to the first floor, and were already deep in a suit of gloomy apartments, before the gratitude and professional pride of the gondolier were exhausted.

"Aided by a powerful arm and a fleet gondola, thy chance will be as good as another's, Gino," said Don Camillo, closing the door of his cabinet on his servant; "at present, thou mayest give some proof of zeal in my service, in another manner. Is the face of a man called Jacopo Frontoni known to thee?"

"Eccellenza!" exclaimed the gondolier, gasping for breath.

"I ask thee if thou knowest the countenance of one named Frontoni?"

"His countenance, Signore!"

"By what else would'st thou distinguish a man?"

"A man, Signor' Don Camillo!"

"Art thou mocking thy master, Gino? I have asked thee if thou art acquainted with the person of a certain Jacopo Frontoni; a dweller here in Venice?"

"Eccellenza, yes."

"He I mean has been long remarked by the misfortunes of his family, the father being now in exile on the Dalmatian coast, or elsewhere."

"Eccellenza, yes."

"There are many of the name of Frontoni, and it is important that thou should'st not mistake the man. Jacopo, of that family, is a youth of some five-and-twenty, of an active frame and melancholy visage, and of less vivacity of temperament, than is wont, at his years."

"Eccellenza, yes."

"One who resorts but little with his fellows, and who is rather noted for the silence and industry with which he attends to his concerns, than for any of the usual pleasantries and trifling of men of his cast. A certain Jacopo Frontoni, that hath his abode somewhere near the arsenal?"

"Cospetto! Signor' Duca, the man is as well known to us gondoliers, as the bridge of the Rialto! Your eccellenza has no need to trouble yourself to describe him."

Don Camillo Monforte was searching among the papers of a secretary. He raised his eyes in some little amazement, at the sally of his dependant, and then he quietly resumed his occupation.

"If thou knowest the man, it is enough."

"Eccellenza, yes. And what is your pleasure with this accursed Jacopo?"

The Duke of Sant' Agata seemed to recollect himself. He replaced the papers which had been deranged, and he closed the secretary.

"Gino," he said, in a tone of confidence and ami-

ty, "thou wert born on my estates, though so long trained here to the oar in Venice, and thou hast passed thy life in my service."

"Eccellenza, yes."

"It is my desire that thou should'st end thy days where they began. I have had much confidence in thy discretion, hitherto, and I have satisfaction in saying it has never failed thee, notwithstanding thou hast necessarily been a witness of some exploits of youth, which might have drawn embarrassment on thy master, were thy tongue less disposed to silence."

"Eccellenza, yes."

Don Camillo smiled; but the gleam of humor gave way to a look of grave and anxious thought.

"As thou knowest the person of him I have named, our affair is simple. Take this packet," he continued, placing a sealed letter of more than usual size into the hand of the gondolier, and drawing from his finger a signet ring, "with this token of thy authority. Within that arch of the Doge's palace, which leads to the canal of San Marco, beneath the Bridge of Sighs, thou wilt find Jacopo. Give him the packet; and should he demand it, withhold not the ring. Wait his bidding, and return with the answer."

Gino received this commission with profound respect, but with an awe he could not conceal. Habitual deference to his master appeared to struggle with deep distaste for the office he was required to perform; and there was even some manifestation of a more principled reluctance, in his hesitating yet humble manner. If Don Camillo noted the air and countenance of his menial at all, he effectually concealed it.

"At the arched passage of the palace, beneath the Bridge of Sighs," he coolly added; "and let

thy arrival there be timed, as near as may be, to the first hour of the night."

"I would, Signore, that you had been pleased to command Giorgio and me to row you to Padua!"

"The way is long. Why this sudden wish to weary thyself?"

"Because there is no Doge's palace, nor any Bridge of Sighs, nor any dog of Jacopo Frontoni, among the meadows."

"Thou hast little relish for this duty; but thou must know that what the master commands, it is the duty of a faithful follower to perform. Thou wert born my vassal, Gino Monaldi, and though trained from boyhood in this occupation of a gondolier, thou art properly a being of my fiefs, in Napoli."

"St. Gennaro make me grateful for the honor, Signore! But there is not a water-seller in the streets of Venice, nor a mariner on her canals, who does not wish this Jacopo anywhere but in the bosom of Abraham. He is the terror of every young lover, and of all the urgent creditors on the islands."

"Thou seest, silly babbler, there is one of the former, at least, who does not hold him in dread. Thou wilt seek him beneath the Bridge of Sighs, and, showing the signet, deliver the package according to my instructions."

"It is certain loss of character to be seen speaking with the miscreant! So lately as yesterday, I heard Annina, the pretty daughter of the old wine-seller on the Lido, declare, that to be seen once in company with Jacopo Frontoni was as bad as to be caught twice bringing old rope from the arsenal, as befell Roderigo, her mother's cousin."

"Thy distinctions savor of the morals of the Lido. Remember to exhibit the ring, lest he distrust thy errand."

"Could not your eccellenza set me about clipping

the wings of the lion, or painting a better picture than Tiziano di Vecelli? I have a mortal dislike even to pass the mere compliments of the day with one of your cut-throats. Were any of our gondoliers to see me in discourse with the man, it might exceed your eccellenza's influence to get me a place in the regatta."

"If he detain thee, Gino, thou wilt wait his pleasure; and if he dismiss thee at once, return hither with all expedition, that I may know the result."

"I very well know, Signor Don Camillo, that the honor of a noble is more tender of reproach than that of his followers, and that the stain upon the silken robe of a senator is seen farther than the spot upon a velvet jacket. If any one unworthy of your eccellenza's notice has dared to offend, here are Giorgio and I, ready, at any time, to show how deeply we can feel an indignity which touches our master's credit; but a hireling of two, or ten, or even of a hundred sequins!"

"I thank thee for the hint, Gino. Go thou and sleep in thy gondola, and bid Giorgio come into my cabinet."

"Signore!"

"Art thou resolute to do none of my biddings?"

"Is it your eccellenza's pleasure that I go to the Bridge of Sighs by the footways of the streets, or by the canals?"

"There may be need of a gondola—thou wilt go with the oar."

"A tumbler shall not have time to turn round before the answer of Jacopo shall be here."

With this sudden change of purpose, the gondolier quitted the room; for the reluctance of Gino disappeared the moment he found the confidential duty assigned him by his master was likely to be performed by another. Descending rapidly, by a secret stairs, instead of entering the vestibule, where

half-a-dozen menials of different employments were in waiting, he passed by one of the narrow corridors of the palace into an inner court, and thence by a low and unimportant gate into an obscure alley, which communicated with the nearest street.

Though the age is one of so great activity and intelligence, and the Atlantic is no longer a barrier even to the ordinary amusements of life, a great majority of Americans have never had an opportunity of personally examining the remarkable features of a region, of which the town that Gino now threaded with so much diligence, is not the least worthy of observation. Those who have been so fortunate as to have visited Italy, therefore, will excuse us if we make a brief, but what we believe useful, digression, for the benefit of those who have not had that advantage.

The city of Venice stands on a cluster of low, sandy islands. It is probable that the country which lies nearest to the gulf, if not the whole of the immense plain of Lombardy itself, is of alluvial formation. Whatever may have been the origin of that wide and fertile kingdom, the causes which have given to the Lagoon their existence, and to Venice its unique and picturesque foundation, are too apparent to be mistaken. Several torrents, which flow from the valleys of the Alps, pour their tribute into the Adriatic at this point. Their waters come charged with the débris of the mountains, pulverized nearly to their original elements. Released from the violence of the stream, these particles have necessarily been deposited in the gulf, at the spot where they have first become subjected to the power of the sea. Under the influence of counteracting currents, eddies, and waves, the sands have been thrown into submarine piles, until some of the banks have arisen above the surface, forming islands, whose elevation has been gradually augmented by

the decay of vegetation. A glance at the map will show that, while the Gulf of Venice is not literally, it is, practically, considered with reference to the effect produced by the south-east wind called the *Sirocco*, at the head of the Adriatic. This accidental circumstance is probably the reason why the *Lagunes* have a more determined character at the mouths of the minor streams that empty themselves here, than at the mouths of most of the other rivers, which equally flow from the Alps or the Apennines, into the same shallow sea.

The natural consequence of a current of a river meeting the waters of any broad basin, and where there is no base of rock, is the formation, at or near the spot where the opposing actions are neutralized, of a bank, which is technically called a *bar*. The coast of the Union furnishes constant evidence of the truth of this theory, every river having its *bar*, with channels that are often shifted, or cleared, by the freshets, the gales, or the tides. The constant and powerful operation of the south-eastern winds on one side, with the periodical increase of the Alpine streams on the other, have converted this *bar* at the entrance of the Venetian *Lagunes*, into a succession of long, low, sandy islands, which extend in a direct line, nearly across the mouth of the gulf. The waters of the rivers have necessarily cut a few channels for their passage, or, what is now a *lagune*, would long since have become a lake. Another thousand years may so far change the character of this extraordinary estuary, as to convert the channels of the bay into rivers, and the muddy banks into marshes and meadows, resembling those that are now seen for so many leagues inland.

The low margin of sand that, in truth, gives all its maritime security to the port of Venice and the *Lagunes*, is called the *Lido di Palestrino*. It has been artificially connected and secured, in many

places, and the wall of the Lido (literally the beach), though incomplete, like most of the great and vaunted works of the other hemisphere, and more particularly of Italy, ranks with the mole of Ancona, and the sea-wall of Cherbourg. The hundred little islands which now contain the ruins of what, during the middle ages, was the mart of the Mediterranean, are grouped together within cannon-shot of the natural barrier. Art has united with nature to turn the whole to good account; and, apart from the influence of moral causes, the rivalry of a neighboring town, which has been fostered by political care, and the gradual filling up of the waters, by the constant deposit of the streams, it would be difficult to imagine a more commodious, or a safer haven when entered, than that which Venice affords, even to this hour.

As all the deeper channels of the Lagunes have been preserved, the city is intersected, in every direction, by passages, which, from their appearance, are called canals, but which, in truth, are no more than so many small natural branches of the sea. On the margin of these passages, the walls of the dwellings arise literally from out of the water, since economy of room has caused their owners to extend their possessions to the very verge of the channel, in the manner that quays and wharfs are pushed into the streams in our own country. In many instances the islands themselves were no more than banks, which were periodically bare, and on all, the use of piles has been necessary to support the superincumbent loads of palaces, churches, and public monuments, under which, in the course of ages, the humble spits of sand have been made to groan.

The great frequency of the canals, and perhaps some attention to economy of labor, has given to by far the greater part of the buildings the facility

of an approach by water. But, while nearly every dwelling has one of its fronts on a canal, there are always communications by the rear with the interior passages of the town. It is a fault in most descriptions, that while the stranger hears so much of the canals of Venice, but little is said of her streets: still, narrow, paved, commodious, and noiseless passages, of this description, intersect all the islands, which communicate with each other by means of a countless number of bridges. Though the hoof of a horse, or the rumbling of a wheel is never heard in these strait avenues, they are of great resort for all the purposes of ordinary intercourse.

Gino issued into one of these thoroughfares, when he quitted the private passage which communicated with the palace of his master. He threaded the throng by which it was crowded, with a dexterity that resembled the windings of an eel, among the weeds of the Lagunes. To the numerous greetings of his fellows, he replied only by nods; nor did he once arrest his footsteps, until they had led him through the door of a low and dark dwelling, that stood in a quarter of the place which was inhabited by people of an inferior condition. Groping his way among casks, cordage, and rubbish of all descriptions, the gondolier succeeded in finding an inner and retired door, that opened into a small room, whose only light came from a species of well, that descended between the walls of the adjacent houses and that in which he was.

“Blessed St. Anne! Is it thou, Gino Monaldi!” exclaimed a smart Venetian grisette, whose tones and manner betrayed as much of coquetry as of surprise. “On foot, and by the secret door; is this an hour to come on any of thy errands?”

“Truly, Annina, it is not the season for affairs with thy father, and it is something early for a visit

to thee. But there is less time for words than for action, just now. For the sake of San Teodoro, and that of a constant and silly young man, who, if not thy slave, is at least thy dog, bring forth the jacket I wore when we went together to see the merry-making at Fusina."

"I know nothing of thy errand, Gino, nor of thy reason for wishing to change thy master's livery for the dress of a common boatman. Thou art far more comely with those silken flowers, than in this faded velveteen; and if I have ever said aught in commendation of its appearance, it was because we were bent on merry-making, and being one of the party, it would have been churlish to have withheld a word of praise to a companion, who, as thou knowest, does not dislike a civil speech in his own praise."

"Zitto, zitto! here is no merry-making and companions, but a matter of gravity, and one that must be performed off-hand. The jacket, if thou lovest me!"

Annina, who had not neglected essentials while she moralized on motives, threw the garment on a stool, that stood within reach of the gondolier's hand, as he made this strong appeal, in a way to show that she was not to be surprised out of a confession of this sort, even in the most unguarded moment.

"If I love thee, truly! Thou hast the jacket, Gino, and thou mayest search in its pockets for an answer to thy letter, for which I do not thank thee for having got the duca's secretary to indite. A maiden should be discreet in affairs of this sort, for one never knows but he may make a confidant of a rival."

"Every word of it as true as if the devil himself had done the office for me, girl," muttered Gino, uncasing himself from his flowery vestment, and as

rapidly assuming the plainer garment he had sought. "The cap, Annina, and the mask?"

"One who wears so false a face, in common, has little need of a bit of silk to conceal his countenance," she answered, throwing him, notwithstanding, both the articles he required.

"This is well—Father Battista himself, who boasts he can tell a sinner from a penitent merely by the savor of his presence, would never suspect a servitor of Don Camillo Monforte in this dress! Cospetto! but I have half a mind to visit that knave of a Jew, who has got thy golden chain in pledge, and give him a hint of what may be the consequences, should he insist on demanding double the rate of interest we agreed on."

"'Twould be Christian justice! but what would become of thy matter of gravity the while, Gino, and of thy haste to enter on its performance?"

"Thou sayest truly, girl. Duty, above all other things; though to frighten a grasping Hebrew may be as much of a duty as other matters. Are all thy father's gondolas in the water?"

"How else could he be gone to the Lido, and my brother Luigi to Fusini, and the two serving-men on the usual business to the islands, or how else should I be alone?"

"Diavolo! is there no boat in the canal?"

"Thou art in unwonted haste, Gino, now thou hast a mask and a jacket of velvet! I know not that I should suffer one to enter my father's house, when I am in it alone, and take such disguises to go abroad, at this hour. Thou wilt tell me thy errand, that I may judge of the propriety of what I do."

"Better ask the Three Hundred to open the leaves of their book of doom! Give me the key of the outer door, girl, that I may go my way."

"Not till I know whether this business is likely to

draw down upon my father the displeasure of the senate. Thou knowest, Gino, that I am—”

“Diamine! There goes the clock of San Marco, and I tarry past my hour. If I am too late, the fault will rest with thee!”

“’Twill not be the first of thy oversights, which it has been my business to excuse. Here thou art, and here shalt thou remain, until I know the errand which calls for a mask and jacket, and all about this matter of gravity.”

“This is talking like a jealous wife, instead of a reasonable girl, Annina. I have told thee that I am on business of the last importance, and that delay may bring heavy calamities.”

“On whom?—What is thy business? Why art thou, whom in general it is necessary to warn from this house by words many times repeated, now in such a haste to leave it?”

“Have I not told thee, girl, ’tis an errand of great concern to six noble families, and if I fail to be in season, there may be a strife—ay, between the Florentine and the republic!”

“Thou hast said nothing of the sort, nor do I put faith in thy being an ambassador of San Marco. Speak truth for once, Gino Monaldi, or lay aside the mask and jacket, and take up thy flowers of Sant’ Agata.”

“Well, then, as we are friends, and I have faith in thy discretion, Annina, thou shalt know the truth to the extremity, for I find the bell has only tolled the quarters, which leaves me yet a moment for confidence.”

“Thou lookest at the wall, Gino, and art consulting thy wits for some plausible lie!”

“I look at the wall because conscience tells me that too much weakness for thee is about to draw me astray from duty. What thou takest for deceit is only shame and modesty.”

"Of that we shall judge, when the tale is told."

"Then listen. Thou hast heard of the affair between my master and the niece of the Roman Marchese, who was drowned in the Giudecca, by the carelessness of an Ancona-man, who passed over the gondola of Pietro as if his felucca had been a galley of state?"

"Who has been upon the Lido, the month past, without hearing the tale repeated, with every variation of a gondolier's anger?"

"Well, the matter is likely to come to a conclusion this night; my master is about to do, as I fear, a very foolish thing!"

"He will be married?"

"Or worse;—I am sent, in all haste and secrecy, in search of a priest."

Annina manifested strong interest in the fiction of the gondolier. Either from a distrustful temperament, long habit, or great familiarity with the character of her companion, however, she did not listen to his explanation without betraying some doubts of its truth.

"This will be a sudden bridal feast!" she said, after a moment of pause.—"'Tis well that few are invited, or its savor might be spoiled by the Three Hundred! To what convent art thou sent?"

"My errand is not particular. The first that may be found, provided he be a Franciscan, and a priest likely to have bowels for lovers in haste."

"Don Camillo Monforte, the heir of an ancient and great line, does not wive with so little caution. Thy false tongue has been trying to deceive me, Gino; but long use should have taught thee the folly of the effort. Unless thou sayest truth, not only shalt thou not go to thy errand, but here art thou prisoner at my pleasure."

"I may have told thee what I expect will shortly happen, rather than what has happened. But Don

Camillo keeps me so much upon the water of late, that I do little beside dream, when not at the oar."

"It is vain to attempt deceiving me, Gino, for thine eye speaketh truth, let thy tongue and brains wander where they will. Drink of this cup, and disburthen thy conscience, like a man."

"I would that thy father would make the acquaintance of Stefano Milano!" resumed the gondolier, taking a long breath, after a still longer draught. "'Tis a padrone of Calabria, who oftentimes brings into the port excellent liquors of his country, and who would pass a cask of the red lachrymæ christi through the Broglio itself, and not a noble of them all should see it. The man is here at present, and, if thou wilt, he shall not be long without coming into terms with thee for a few skins."

"I doubt if he have better liquors than this which hath ripened upon the sands of the Lido. Take another draught, for the second taste is thought to be better than the first."

"If the wine improve in this manner, thy father should be heavy-hearted at the sight of the lees. 'T would be no more than charity to bring him and Stefano acquainted."

"Why not do it, immediately? His felucca is in the port, thou sayest, and thou canst lead him hither by the secret door and the lanes."

"Thou forgettest my errand. Don Camillo is not used to be served the second. Cospetto! 'T were a pity that any other got the liquor which I am certain the Calabrian has in secret."

"This errand can be no matter of a moment, like that of being sure of wine of the quality thou namest; or, if it be, thou canst first dispatch thy master's business, and then to the port, in quest of Stefano. That the purchase may not fail, I will take a mask and be thy companion, to see

the Calabrian. Thou knowest my father hath much confidence in my judgment in matters like this."

While Gino stood half stupified, and half delighted at this proposition, the ready and wily Annina made some slight change in her outer garments, placed a silken mask before her face, applied a key to the door, and beckoned to the gondolier to follow.

The canal, with which the dwelling of the wine-dealer communicated, was narrow, gloomy, and little frequented. A gondola of the plainest description was fastened near, and the girl entered it, without appearing to think any further arrangement necessary. The servant of Don Camillo hesitated a single instant, but having seen that his half-meditated project of escaping by the use of another boat, could not be accomplished for want of means, he took his wonted place in the stern, and began to ply the oar with mechanical readiness.

CHAPTER III.

What well-appointed leader fronts us here ?

King Henry VI.

THE presence of Annina was a grave embarrassment to Gino. He had his secret wishes and limited ambition, like other men, and among the strongest of the former, was the desire to stand well in the favor of the wine-seller's daughter. But the artful girl, in catering to his palate with a liquor that was scarcely less celebrated among people of his class for its strength than its flavor, had caused a momentary confusion in the brain of Gino, that required time to disperse. The boat was in the grand canal, and far on its way to the place of its destina-

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tion, before this happy purification of the intellects of the gondolier had been sufficiently effected. By that time, however, the exercise of rowing, the fresh air of the evening, and the sight of so many accustomed objects, restored his faculties to the necessary degree of coolness and forethought. As the boat approached the end of the canal, he began to cast his eyes about him in quest of the well-known felucca of the Calabrian.

Though the glory of Venice had departed, the trade of the city was not then at its present low ebb. The port was still crowded with vessels from many distant havens, and the flags of most of the maritime states of Europe were seen, at intervals, within the barrier of the Lido. The moon was now sufficiently high to cast its soft light on the whole of the glittering basin, and a forest, composed of latten yards, of the slender masts of polaccas, and of the more massive and heavy hamper of regularly rigged ships, was to be seen rising above the tranquil element.

"Thou art no judge of a vessel's beauty, Annina," said the gondolier, who was deeply housed in the pavilion of the boat, "else should I tell thee to look at this stranger from Candia. 'Tis said that a fairer model has never entered within the Lido than that same Greek!"

"Our errand is not with the Candian trader, Gino; therefore, ply thy oar, for time presses."

"There's plenty of rough Greek wine in his hold; but, as thou sayest, we have naught with him. Yon tall ship, which is moored without the smaller craft of our seas, is the vessel of a Lutheran, from the islands of Inghilterra. 'Twas a sad day for the republic, girl, when it first permitted the stranger to come into the waters of the Adriatic!"

"Is it certain, Gino, that the arm of St. Mark was strong enough to keep him out?"

"Body of Diana! I would rather thou didst not ask that question in a place where so many gondolas are in motion! Here are Ragusan, Maltese, Sicilians, and Tuscans, without number; and a little fleet of French lie near each other, there, at the entrance of the Giudecca. They are a people who get together, afloat or ashore, for the benefit of the tongue. Here we are, at the end of our journey."

The oar of Gino gave a backward sweep, and the gondola was at rest, by the side of a felucca.

"A happy night to the Bella Sorrentina and her worthy padrone!" was the greeting of the gondolier, as he put his foot on the deck of the vessel. "Is the honest Stefano Milano on board the swift felucca?"

The Calabrian was not slow to answer; and in a few moments the padrone and his two visitors were in close and secret conference.

"I have brought one, here, who will be likely to put good Venetian sequins into thy pocket, caro," observed the gondolier, when the preliminaries of discourse had been properly observed. "She is the daughter of a most conscientious wine-dealer, who is quite as ready at transplanting your Sicilian grapes into the islands, as he is willing and able to pay for them."

"And one, no doubt, as handsome as she is ready," said the mariner, with blunt gallantry, "were the black cloud but fairly driven from before her face."

"A mask is of little consequence in a bargain, provided the money be forthcoming. We are always in the Carnival at Venice; and he who would buy, or he who would sell, has the same right to hide his face as to hide his thoughts. What hast thou in the way of forbidden liquors, Stefano, that my companion may not lose the night in idle words?"

“Per Diana! Master Gino, thou puttest thy questions with little ceremony. The hold of the felucca is empty, as thou mayest see by stepping to the hatches; and as for any liquor, we are perishing for a drop to warm the blood.”

“And so far from coming to seek it here,” said Annina, “we should have done better to have gone into the cathedral, and said an Ave, for thy safe voyage home. And now that our wit is spent, we will quit thee, friend Stefano, for some other less skilful in answers.”

“Cospetto! thou knowest not what thou sayest,” whispered Gino, when he found that the wary Annina was not disposed to remain. “The man never enters the meanest creek in Italy, without having something useful secreted in the felucca, on his own account. One purchase of him would settle the question between the quality of thy father’s wines and those of Battista. There is not a gondolier in Venice but will resort to thy shop, if the intercourse with this fellow can be fairly settled.”

Annina hesitated; long practised in the small, but secret, and exceedingly hazardous commerce, which her father, notwithstanding the vigilance and severity of the Venetian police, had thus far successively driven, she neither liked to risk an exposure of her views to an utter stranger, nor to abandon a bargain that promised to be lucrative. That Gino trifled with her, as to his true errand, needed no confirmation, since a servant of the Duke of Sant’ Agata was not likely to need a disguise to search a priest; but she knew his zeal for her personal welfare too well, to distrust his faith in a matter that concerned her own safety.

“If thou distrust that any here are the spies of the authorities,” she observed to the padrone, with a manner that readily betrayed her wishes, “it will be in Gino’s power to undeceive thee.—Thou wilt testi-

fy, Gino, that I am not to be suspected of treachery in an affair like this."

"Leave me to put a word into the private ear of the Calabrian," said the gondolier, significantly.— "Stefano Milano, if thou love me," he continued, when they were a little apart, "keep the girl in parley, and treat with her, fairly, for thy adventure."

"Shall I sell the vintage of Don Camillo, or that of the Viceroy of Sicily, caro? There is as much wine of each on board the *Bella Sorrentina*, as would float the fleet of the republic."

"If, in truth, thou art dry, then feign that thou hast it, and differ in thy prices. Entertain her, but a minute, with fair words, while I can get, unseen, into my gondola; and then, for the sake of an old and tried friend, put her tenderly on the quay, in the best manner thou art able."

"I begin to see into the nature of the trade," returned the pliant padrone, placing a finger on the side of his nose. "I will discourse the woman by the hour, about the flavor of the liquor, or if thou wilt, of her own beauty; but to squeeze a drop of anything better than the water of the Lagunes out of the ribs of the felucca, would be a miracle worthy of San Teodoro."

"There is but little need to touch on aught but the quality of thy wine. The girl is not like most of her sex, and she takes sudden offence when there is question of her appearance. Indeed, the mask she wears is as much to hide a face that has little to tempt the eye, as from any wish at concealment."

"Since Gino has entered frankly into the matter," resumed the quick-witted Calabrian, cheerfully, and with an air of sudden confidence, to the expectant Annina, "I begin to see more probability of our understanding each other's meaning. Deign, bella donna, to go into my poor cabin, where we will

“speak more at our ease, and something more to our mutual profit, and mutual security.”

Annina was not without secret doubts, but she suffered the padrone to lead her to the stairs of the cabin, as if she were disposed to descend. Her back was no sooner turned, than Gino slid into the gondola, which one shove of his vigorous arm sent far beyond the leap of man. The action was sudden, rapid, and noiseless; but the jealous eye of Annina detected the escape of the gondolier, though not in time to prevent it. Without betraying uneasiness, she submitted to be led below, as if the whole were done by previous concert.

“Gino has said that you have a boat which will do the friendly office to put me on the quay, when our conference is over,” she remarked, with a presence of mind that luckily met the expedient of her late companion.

“The felucca itself should do that much, were there want of other means,” gallantly returned the mariner when they disappeared in the cabin.

Free to discharge his duty, Gino now plied his task with redoubled zeal. The light boat glided among the vessels, inclining, by the skilful management of his single oar, in a manner to avoid all collision, until it entered the narrow canal which separates the palace of the Doge from the more beautiful and classic structure that contains the prisons of the republic. The bridge, which continues the communication of the quays, was first passed, and then he was stealing beneath that far-famed arch which supports a covered gallery leading from the upper story of the palace into that of the prisons, and which, from its being appropriated to the passage of the accused from their cells to the presence of their judges, has been so poetically, and, it may be added, so pathetically called the Bridge of Sighs.

The oar of Gino now relaxed its efforts, and the

gondola approached a flight of steps, over which, as usual, the water cast its little waves. Stepping on the lowest flag, he thrust a small iron spike, to which a cord was attached, into a crevice between two of the stones, and left his boat to the security of this characteristic fastening. When this little precaution was observed, the gondolier passed up lightly beneath the massive arch of the water-gate of the palace, and entered its large but gloomy court.

At that hour, and with the temptation of the gay scene which offered in the adjoining square, the place was nearly deserted. A single female water-carrier was at the well, waiting for the element to filter into its basin, in order to fill her buckets, while her ear listened in dull attention to the hum of the moving crowd without. A halberdier paced the open gallery at the head of the Giant's Stairs, and, here and there, the footfall of other sentinels might be heard among the hollow and ponderous arches of the long corridors. No light was shed from the windows; but the entire building presented a fit emblem of that mysterious power which was known to preside over the fortunes of Venice and her citizens. Ere Gino trusted himself without the shadow of the passage by which he had entered, two or three curious faces had appeared at the opposite entrance of the court, where they paused a moment to gaze at the melancholy and imposing air of the dreaded palace, before they vanished in the throng which trifled in the immediate proximity of that secret and ruthless tribunal, as man riots in security even on the verge of an endless and unforeseen future.

Disappointed in his expectation of meeting him he sought, on the instant, the gondolier advanced, and taking courage by the possibility of his escaping altogether from the interview, he ventured to furnish

audible evidence of his presence by a loud hem. At that instant a figure glided into the court from the side of the quay, and walked swiftly towards its centre. The heart of Gino beat violently, but he mustered resolution to meet the stranger. As they drew near each other, it became evident, by the light of the moon, which penetrated even to that gloomy spot, that the latter was also masked.

"San Teodoro and San Marco have you in mind!" commenced the gondolier. "If I mistake not, you are the man I am sent to meet."

The stranger started, and first manifesting an intention to pass on quickly, he suddenly arrested the movement to reply.

"This may be so, or not. Unmask, that I may judge by thy countenance if what thou sayest be true."

"By your good leave, most worthy and honorable Signore, and if it be equally agreeable to you and my master, I would choose to keep off the evening air by this bit of pasteboard and silk."

"Here are none to betray thee, wert thou naked as at thy birth. Unless certain of thy character, in what manner may I confide in thy honesty?"

"I have no distrust of the virtues of an undisguised face, Signore, and therefore do I invite you, yourself, to exhibit what nature has done for you in the way of features, that I, who am to make the confidence, be sure it be to the right person."

"This is well, and gives assurance of thy prudence. I may not unmask, however; and as there seemeth little probability of our coming to an understanding, I will go my way. A most happy night to thee."

"Cospetto!—Signore, you are far too quick in your ideas and movements for one little used to negotiations of this sort. Here is a ring whose signet may help us to understand each other."

The stranger took the jewel, and holding the stone in a manner to receive the light of the moon, he started in a manner to betray both surprise and pleasure.

"This is the falcon crest of the Neapolitan—he that is the lord of Sant' Agata!"

"And of many other fiefs, good Signore, to say nothing of the honors he claims in Venice. Am I right in supposing my errand with you?"

"Thou hast found one whose present business has no other object than Don Camillo Monforte. But thy errand was not solely to exhibit the signet?"

"So little so, that I have a packet here which waits only for a certainty of the person with whom I speak, to be placed into his hands."

The stranger mused a moment; then glancing a look about him, he answered hurriedly—

"This is no place to unmask, friend, even though we only wear our disguises in pleasantry. Tarry here, and at my return I will conduct thee to a more fitting spot."

The words were scarcely uttered when Gino found himself standing in the middle of the court alone. The masked stranger had passed swiftly on, and was at the bottom of the Giant's Stairs, ere the gondolier had time for reflection. He ascended with a light and rapid step, and without regarding the halberdier, he approached the first of three or four orifices which opened into the wall of the palace, and which, from the heads of the animal being carved in relief around them, had become famous as the receptacles of secret accusations, under the name of the Lion's Mouths. Something he dropped into the grinning aperture of the marble, though what, the distance and the obscurity of the gallery prevented Gino from perceiving; and then his form was seen gliding like a phantom down the flight of massive steps.

Gino had retired towards the arch of the water-gate, in expectation that the stranger would rejoin him within its shadows; but, to his great alarm, he saw the form darting through the outer portal of the palace into the square of St. Mark. It was not a moment ere Gino, breathless with haste, was in chase. On reaching the bright and gay scene of the piazza, which contrasted with the gloomy court he had just quitted, like morning with night, he saw the utter fruitlessness of further pursuit. Frightened at the loss of his master's signet, however, the indiscreet but well-intentioned gondolier rushed into the crowd, and tried in vain to select the delinquent from among a thousand masks.

"Harkee, Signore," uttered the half-distracted gondolier to one, who, having first examined his person with distrust, evidently betrayed a wish to avoid him; "if thou hast sufficiently pleased thy finger with my master's signet, the occasion offers to return it."

"I know thee not," returned a voice, in which Gino's ear could detect no familiar sound.

"It may not be well to trifle with the displeasure of a noble as powerful as him you know;" he whispered at the elbow of another, who had come under his suspicions. "The signet, if thou pleasest, and the affair need go no further."

"He who would meddle in it, with or without that gage, would do well to pause."

The gondolier again turned away disappointed.

"The ring is not suited to thy masquerade, friend of mine," he essayed with a third; "and it would be wise not to trouble the podestà about such a rifle."

"Then name it not, lest he hear thee." The answer proved, like all the others, unsatisfactory and bootless.

Gino now ceased to question any; but he thread-

ed the throng with an active and eager eye. Fifty times was he tempted to speak, but as often did some difference in stature or dress, some laugh, or trifle uttered in levity, warn him of his mistake. He penetrated to the very head of the piazza, and, returning by the opposite side, he found his way through the throng of the porticoes, looking into every coffee-house, and examining each figure that floated by, until he again issued into the piazzetta, without success. A slight jerk at the elbow of his jacket arrested his steps, and he turned to look at the person who had detained him. A female attired like a contadina addressed him in the feigned voice common to all.

“Whither so fast, and what hast thou lost in this merry crowd? If a heart, ’twill be wise to use diligence, for many here may be willing to wear the jewel!”

“Corpo di Bacco!” exclaimed the disappointed gondolier; “any who find such a bauble of mine under foot, are welcome to their luck! Hast thou seen a domino of a size like that of any other man, with a gait that might pass for the step of a senator, padre, or Jew, and a mask that looks as much like a thousand of these in the square as one-side of the campanile is like the other?”

“Thy picture is so well drawn, that one cannot fail to know the original. He stands beside thee.”

Gino wheeled suddenly, and saw that a grinning harlequin was playing his antics in the place where he had expected to find the stranger.

“And thy eyes, bella contadina, are as dull as a mole’s.”

He ceased speaking, for, deceived in his person, she who had saluted him was no longer visible. In this manner did the disappointed gondolier thread his way toward the water, now answering to the boisterous salute of some clown, and now repelling

the advances of females less disguised than the pretended contadina, until he gained a space near the quays, where there was more room for observation. Here he paused, undetermined whether to return and confess his indiscretion to his master, or whether he should make still another effort to regain the ring which had been so sillily lost. The vacant space between the two granite columns was left to the quiet possession of himself and one other, who stood near the base of that which sustained the Lion of St. Mark, as motionless as if he too were merely a form of stone. Two or three stragglers, either led by idle curiosity, or expecting to meet one appointed to await their coming, drew near this immovable man, but all glided away, as if there were repulsion in his marble-like countenance. Gino had witnessed several instances of this evident dislike to remain near the unknown figure, ere he felt induced to cross the space between them in order to inquire into its cause. A slow movement, at the sound of his footsteps, brought the rays of the moon full upon the calm countenance and searching eye of the very man he sought.

The first impulse of the gondolier, like that of all the others he had seen approach the spot, was to retreat; but the recollection of his errand and his loss came in season to prevent such an exhibition of his disgust and alarm. Still he did not speak; but he met the riveted gaze of the Bravo with a look that denoted, equally, confusion of intellect and a half-settled purpose.

“Would'st thou aught with me?” demanded Jacopo, when the gaze of each had continued beyond the term of accidental glances.

“My master's signet?”

“I know thee not.”

“That image of San Teodoro could testify that this is holy truth, if it would but speak! I have not

the honor of your friendship, Signor Jacopo; but one may have affairs even with a stranger. If you met a peaceable and innocent gondolier, in the court of the palace, since the clock of the piazza told the last quarter, and got from him a ring, which can be of but little use to any but its rightful owner, one so generous will not hesitate to return it."

"Dost thou take me for a jeweller of the Rialto, that thou speakest to me of rings?"

"I take you for one well known and much valued by many of name and quality, here in Venice, as witness my errand from my own master."

"Remove thy mask. Men of fair dealing need not hide the features which Nature has given them."

"You speak nothing but truths, Signor Frontoni, which is little remarkable, considering thy opportunities of looking into the motives of men. There is little in my face to pay you for the trouble of casting a glance at it. I would as lief do as others in this gay season, if it be equally agreeable to you."

"Do as thou wilt; but I pray thee to give me the same permission."

"There are few so bold as to dispute thy pleasure, Signore,"

"It is, to be alone."

"Cospetto! There is not a man in Venice who would more gladly consult it, if my master's errand were fairly done!" muttered Gino, between his teeth.—"I have, here, a packet which it is my duty to put into your hands, Signore, and into those of no other."

"I know thee not—thou hast a name?"

"Not in the sense in which you speak, Signore. As to that sort of reputation, I am as nameless as a foundling."

"If thy master is of no more note than thyself, the packet may be returned."

E

"There are few within the dominions of St. Mark of better lineage, or of fairer hopes, than the Duke of Sant' Agata."

The cold expression of the Bravo's countenance changed.

"If thou comest from Don Camillo Monforte, why dost thou hesitate to proclaim it?—Where are his requests?"

"I know not whether it is his pleasure, or that of another, which this paper contains, but such as it is, Signor Jacopo, my duty commands me to deliver it to thee."

The packet was received calmly, though the organ which glanced at its seal and its superscription, gleamed with an expression which the credulous gondolier fancied to resemble that of the tiger at the sight of blood.

"Thou said'st something of a ring. Dost thou bear thy master's signet? I am much accustomed to see pledges, ere I give faith."

"Blessed San Teodoro grant that I did! Were it as heavy as a skin of wine, I would willingly bear the load; but one that I mistook for you, Master Jacopo, has it on his own light finger, I fear."

"This is an affair that thou wilt settle with thy master," returned the Bravo, coldly, again examining the impression of the seal.

"If you are acquainted with the writing of my master," hurriedly remarked Gino, who trembled for the fate of the packet, "you will see his skill in the turn of those letters. There are few nobles in Venice, or indeed in the Sicilies, who have a more scholarly hand, with a quill, than Don Camillo Monforte; I could not do the thing half so well myself."

"I am no clerk," observed the Bravo, without betraying shame at the confession. "The art of deciphering a scroll, like this, was never taught me."

If thou art so expert in the skill of a penman, tell me the name the packet bears."

"I would little become me to breathe a syllable concerning any of my master's secrets," returned the gondolier, drawing himself up in sudden reserve. "It is enough that he bid me deliver the letter; after which I should think it presumption even to whisper more."

The dark eye of the Bravo was seen rolling over the person of his companion, by the light of the moon, in a manner that caused the blood of the latter to steal towards his heart.

"I bid thee read to me aloud the name the paper bears," said Jacopo, sternly. "Here is none but the lion and the saint above our heads to listen."

"Just San Marco! who can tell what ear is open, or what ear is shut in Venice? If you please, Signor Frontoni, we will postpone the examination to a more suitable occasion."

"Friend, I do not play the fool! The name, or show me some gage that thou art sent by him thou hast named, else take back the packet; 'tis no affair for my hand."

"Reflect a single moment on the consequences, Signor Jacopo, before you come to a determination so hasty."

"I know no consequences which can befall a man who refuses to receive a message like this."

"Per Diana! Signore; the Duca will not be likely to leave me an ear to hear the good advice of Father Battista."

"Then will the Duca save the public executioner some trouble."

As he spoke, the Bravo cast the packet at the feet of the gondolier, and began to walk calmly up the piazzetta. Gino seized the letter, and, with his brain in a whirl, with the effort to recall some one of his master's acquaintances to whom he would be likely

to address an epistle on such an occasion, he followed.

"I wonder, Signor Jacopo, that a man of your sagacity has not remembered that a packet to be delivered to himself, should bear his own name."

The Bravo took the paper, and held the superscription again to the light.

"That is not so. Though unlearned, necessity has taught me to know when I am meant."

"Diamine! That is just my own case, Signore. Were the letter for me, now, the old should not know its young, quicker than I would come at the truth."

"Then thou canst not read?"

"I never pretended to the art. The little said was merely about writing. Learning, as you well understand, Master Jacopo, is divided into reading, writing, and figures; and a man may well understand one, without knowing a word of the others. It is not absolutely necessary to be a bishop to have a shaved head, or a Jew to wear a beard."

"Thou would'st have done better to have said this at once; go, I will think of the matter."

Gino gladly turned away, but he had not left the other many paces, before he saw a female form gliding behind the pedestal of one of the granite columns. Moving swiftly in a direction to uncover this seeming spy, he saw at once that Annina had been a witness of his interview with the Bravo.

CHAPTER IV.

'T will make me think
The world is full of rubs, and that my fortune
Runs 'gainst the bias.

Richard the Second.

THOUGH Venice at that hour was so gay in her squares, the rest of the town was silent as the grave. A city in which the hoof of horse or the rolling of wheels is never heard, necessarily possesses a character of its own; but the peculiar form of the government, and the long training of the people in habits of caution, weighed on the spirits of the gay. There were times and places, it is true, when the buoyancy of youthful blood, and the levity of the thoughtless, found occasion for their display; nor were they rare; but when men found themselves removed from the temptation, and perhaps from the support of society, they appeared to imbibe the character of their sombre city.

Such was the state of most of the town, while the scene described in the previous chapter was exhibited in the lively piazza of San Marco. The moon had risen so high that its light fell between the range of walls, here and there touching the surface of the water, to which it imparted a quivering brightness, while the domes and towers rested beneath its light in a solemn but grand repose. Occasionally the front of a palace received the rays on its heavy cornices and labored columns, the gloomy stillness of the interior of the edifice furnishing, in every such instance, a striking contrast to the richness and architectural beauty without. Our narrative now leads us to one of these patrician abodes of the first class.

A heavy magnificence pervaded the style of the

dwelling. The vestibule was vast, vaulted, and massive. The stairs, rich in marbles, heavy and grand. The apartments were imposing in their gildings and sculpture, while the walls sustained countless works on which the highest geniuses of Italy had lavishly diffused their power. Among these relics of an age more happy in this respect than that of which we write, the connoisseur would readily have known the pencils of Titian, Paul Veronese, and Tintoretto—the three great names in which the subjects of St. Mark so justly prided themselves. Among these works of the higher masters were mingled others by the pencils of Bellino, and Montegna, and Palma Vecchio—artists who were secondary only to the more renowned colorists of the Venetian school. Vast sheets of mirrors lined the walls, wherever the still more precious paintings had no place; while the ordinary hangings of velvet and silk became objects of secondary admiration, in a scene of nearly royal magnificence. The cool and beautiful floors, made of a composition in which all the prized marbles of Italy and of the East, polished to the last degree of art, were curiously embedded, formed a suitable finish to a style so gorgeous, and in which luxury and taste were blended in equal profusion.

The building, which, on two of its sides, literally rose from out the water, was, as usual, erected around a dark court. Following its different faces, the eye might penetrate, by many a door, open at that hour for the passage of the air from off the sea, through long suites of rooms, furnished and fitted in the manner described, all lighted by shaded lamps that spread a soft and gentle glow around. Passing, without notice, ranges of reception and sleeping rooms—the latter of a magnificence to mock the ordinary wants of the body—we shall at once

introduce the reader into the part of the palace where the business of the tale conducts us.

At the angle of the dwelling, on the side of the smaller of the two canals, and most remote from the principal water-avenue of the city on which the edifice fronted, there was a suite of apartments, which, while it exhibited the same style of luxury and magnificence as those first mentioned in its general character, discovered greater attention in its details to the wants of ordinary life. The hangings were of the richest velvets or of glossy silks, the mirrors were large and of exquisite truth, the floors of the same gay and pleasing colors, and the walls were adorned with their appropriate works of art. But the whole was softened down to a picture of domestic comfort. The tapestries and curtains hung in careless folds, the beds admitted of sleep, and the pictures were delicate copies by the pencil of some youthful amateur, whose leisure had been exercised in this gentle and feminine employment.

The fair being herself, whose early instruction had given birth to so many skilful imitations of the divine expression of Raphael, or to the vivid tints of Titian, was at that hour in her privacy, discoursing with her ghostly adviser, and one of her own sex, who had long discharged the joint trusts of instructor and parent. The years of the lady of the palace were so tender that, in a more northern region, she would scarcely have been deemed past the period of childhood, though, in her native land, the justness and maturity of her form, and the expression of a dark, eloquent eye, indicated both the growth and the intelligence of womanhood.

“For this good counsel, I thank you, my father; and my excellent Donna Florinda will thank you still more, for your opinions are so like her own, that I sometimes admire at the secret means, by which experience enables the wise and the good to

think so much alike, on a matter of so little personal interest."

A slight but furtive smile struggled around the mortified mouth of the Carmelite, as he listened to the naïve observation of his ingenuous pupil.

"Thou wilt learn, my child," he answered, "as time heaps wisdom on thy head, that it is in concerns which touch our passions and interests least, we are most apt to decide with discretion and impartiality. Though Donna Florinda is not yet past the age when the heart is finally subdued, and there is still so much to bind her to the world, she will assure thee of this truth, or I greatly mistake the excellence of that mind, which hath, hitherto, led her so far blameless, in this erring pilgrimage to which we are all doomed."

Though the cowl was over the head of the speaker, who was evidently preparing to depart, and his deeply-seated eye never varied from its friendly look at the fair face of her he instructed, the blood stole into the pale cheeks of the maternal companion, and her whole countenance betrayed some such reflection of feeling at his praise, as a wintry sky exhibits at a sudden gleam from the setting sun.

"I trust that Violetta does not now hear this for the first time," observed Donna Florinda, in a voice so meek and tremulous, as to be observed.

"Little that can be profitably told one of my inexperience has been left untaught," quickly answered the pupil, unconscious herself that she reached her hand towards that of her constant monitor, though too intent on her object, to change her look from the features of the Carmelite. "But why this desire in the Senate, to dispose of a girl who would be satisfied to live for ever, as she is now, happy in her youth, and contented with the privacy which becomes her sex?"

“The relentless years will not stay their advance, that even one innocent as thou, may never know the unhappiness and trials of a more mature age. This life is one of imperious, and, oftentimes, of tyrannical duties. Thou art not ignorant of the policy that rules a state, which hath made its name so illustrious by high deeds in arms, its riches, and its widely-spread influence. There is a law in Venice, which commandeth that none claiming an interest in its affairs shall so bind himself to the stranger, as to endanger the devotion all owe to the republic. Thus may not the patrician of St. Mark be a lord in other lands, nor may the heiress of a name, great and valued as thine, be given in marriage, to any of note, in a foreign state, without counsel and consent from those who are appointed to watch over the interests of all.”

“Had Providence cast my lot in an humbler class, this would not have been. Methinks it ill comports with the happiness of woman, to be the especial care of the Council of Ten!”

“There is indiscretion, and I lament to say, impiety in thy words. Our duty bids us submit to earthly laws, and more than duty, reverence teaches us not to repine at the will of Providence. But I do not see the weight of this grievance, against which thou murmurest, daughter. Thou art youthful, wealthy beyond the indulgence of all healthful desires, of a lineage to excite an unwholesome worldly pride, and fair enough to render thee the most dangerous of thine own enemies—and thou repinest at a lot, to which all of thy sex and station are, of necessity, subject!”

“For the offence against Providence I am already a penitent,” returned the Donna Violetta. “But surely it would be less embarrassing to a girl of sixteen, were the fathers of the state so much occu-

pied with more weighty affairs, as to forget her birth and years, and haply her wealth?"

"There would be little merit in being content with a world fashioned after our own caprices, though it may be questioned if we should be happier, by having all things as we desire, than by being compelled to submit to them as they are. The interest taken by the republic in thy particular welfare, daughter, is the price thou payest for the ease and magnificence with which thou art encircled. One more obscure, and less endowed by fortune, might have greater freedom of will, but it would be accompanied by none of the pomp which adorns the dwelling of thy fathers."

"I would there were less of luxury and more of liberty within its walls."

"Time will enable thee to see differently. At thy age all is viewed in colors of gold, or life is rendered bootless, because we are thwarted in our ill-digested wishes. I deny not, however, that thy fortune is tempered by some peculiar passages. Venice is ruled by a policy that is often calculating, and haply some deem it remorseless." Though the voice of the Carmelite had fallen, he paused and glanced an uneasy look from beneath his cowl, ere he continued. "The caution of the senate teaches it to preclude, as far as in it lies, the union of interests, that may not only oppose each other, but which may endanger those of the state. Thus, as I have said, none of senatorial rank may hold lands without the limits of the republic, nor may any of account connect themselves, by the ties of marriage, with strangers of dangerous influence, without the consent and supervision of the republic. The latter is thy situation, for of the several foreign lords who seek thy hand, the council see none to whom the favor may be extended, without the apprehension of creating an influence here, in the centre of the

canals, which ought not to be given to a stranger. Don Camillo Monforte, the cavalier to whom thou art indebted for thy life, and of whom thou hast so lately spoken with gratitude, has far more cause to complain of these hard decrees, than thou mayest have, in any reason."

"'Twould make my griefs still heavier, did I know that one who has shown so much courage in my behalf, has equal reason to feel their justice," returned Violetta, quickly. "What is the affair that, so fortunately for me, hath brought the Lord of Sant' Agata to Venice, if a grateful girl may, without indiscretion, inquire?"

"Thy interest in his behalf is both natural and commendable," answered the Carmelite, with a simplicity which did more credit to his cowl than to his observation. "He is young, and, doubtless, he is tempted by the gifts of fortune, and the passions of his years, to divers acts of weakness. Remember him, daughter, in thy prayers, that part of the debt of gratitude may be repaid. His worldly interest here is one of general notoriety, and I can ascribe thy ignorance of it only to a retired manner of life."

"My charge hath other matters to occupy her thoughts than the concerns of a young stranger, who cometh to Venice for affairs," mildly observed Donna Florinda.

"But if I am to remember him in my prayers, Father, it might enlighten my petition to know in what the young noble is most wanting."

"I would have thee remember his spiritual necessities only. He wanteth, of a truth, little in temporalities that the world can offer, though the desires of life often lead him who hath most in quest of more. It would seem that an ancestor of Don Camillo was anciently a senator of Venice, when the death of a relation brought many Calabrian

signories into his possession. The younger of his sons, by an especial decree, which favored a family that had well served the state, took these estates, while the elder transmitted the senatorial rank and the Venetian fortunes to his posterity. Time hath extinguished the elder branch; and Don Camillo hath for years besieged the council, to be restored to those rights which his predecessor renounced."

"Can they refuse him?"

"His demand involves a departure from established laws. Were he to renounce the Calabrian lordships, the Neapolitan might lose more than he would gain; and to keep both is to infringe a law that is rarely suffered to be dormant. I know little, daughter, of the interests of life; but there are enemies of the republic who say that its servitude is not easy, and that it seldom bestows favors of this sort, without seeking an ample equivalent."

"Is this as it should be? If Don Camillo Monforte has claims in Venice, whether it be to palaces on the canals, or to lands on the main; to honors in the state, or voice in the senate; justice should be rendered without delay, lest it be said the republic vaunts more of the sacred quality than it practises."

"Thou speakest as a guileless nature prompts. It is the frailty of man, my daughter, to separate his public acts from the fearful responsibility of his private deeds; as if God, in endowing his being with reason and the glorious hopes of Christianity, had also endowed him with two souls, of which only one was to be cared for."

"Are there not those, Father, who believe that, while the evil we commit as individuals is visited on our own persons, that which is done by states, falls on the nation?"

"The pride of human reason has invented divers subtleties to satisfy its own longings, but it can

never feed itself on a delusion more fatal than this! The crime which involves others in its guilt, or consequences, is doubly a crime, and though it be a property of sin to entail its own punishment, even in our present life, he trusts to a vain hope who thinks the magnitude of the offence will ever be its apology. The chief security of our nature is to remove it beyond temptation, and he is safest from the allurements of the world, who is farthest removed from its vices. Though I would wish justice done to the noble Neapolitan, it may be for his everlasting peace, that the additional wealth he seeks should be withheld."

"I am unwilling to believe, Father, that a cavalier, who has shown himself so ready to assist the distressed, will easily abuse the gifts of fortune."

The Carmelite fastened an uneasy look on the bright features of the young Venetian. Parental solicitude and prophetic foresight were in his glance, but the expression was relieved by the charity of a chastened spirit.

"Gratitude to the preserver of thy life becomes thy station and sex; it is a duty. Cherish the feeling, for it is akin to the holy obligation of man to his Creator."

"Is it enough to feel grateful?" demanded Violetta. "One of my name and alliances might do more. We can move the patricians of my family, in behalf of the stranger, that his pretracted suit may come to a more speedy end."

"Daughter, beware; the intercession of one in whom St. Mark feels so lively an interest, may raise up enemies to Don Camillo, instead of friends."

Donna Violetta was silent, while the monk and Donna Florinda both regarded her with affectionate concern. The former then adjusted his cowl, and prepared to depart. The noble maiden approached the Carmelite, and looking into his face with ingenu-

ous confidence, and habitual reverence, she besought his blessing. When the solemn and customary office was performed, the monk turned towards the companion of his spiritual charge. Donna Florinda permitted the silk, on which her needle had been busy, to fall into her lap, and she sat in meek silence, while the Carmelite raised his open palms towards her bended head. His lips moved, but the words of benediction were inaudible. Had the ardent being, intrusted to their joint care, been less occupied with her own feelings, or more practised in the interests of that world, into which she was about to enter, it is probable she would have detected some evidence of that deep, but smothered sympathy, which so often betrayed itself, in the silent intelligence of her ghostly father and her female Mentor.

"Thou wilt not forget us, Father?" said Violetta, with winning earnestness. "An orphan girl, in whose fate the sages of the republic so seriously busy themselves, has need of every friend in whom she can confide."

"Blessed be thy intercessor," said the monk, "and the peace of the innocent be with thee."

Once more he waved his hand, and, turning, he slowly quitted the room. The eye of Donna Florinda followed the white robes of the Carmelite while they were visible; and when it fell again upon the silk, it was for a moment closed, as if looking at the movements of the rebuked spirit within. The young mistress of the palace summoned a menial, and bade him do honor to her confessor, by seeing him to his gondola. She then moved to the open balcony. A long pause succeeded: it was such a silence, breathing, thoughtful, and luxurious with the repose of Italy, as suited the city and the hour. Suddenly, Violetta receded from the open window, and withdrew a step, in alarm.

"Is there a boat beneath?" demanded her com-

panion, whose glance was unavoidably attracted to the movement.

"The water was never more quiet. But thou hearest those strains of the hautboys?"

"Are they so rare on the canals, that they drive thee from the balcony?"

"There are cavaliers beneath the windows of the Mentoni palace; doubtless, they compliment our friend, Olivia."

"Even that gallantry is common. Thou knowest that Olivia is shortly to be united to her kinsman, and he takes the usual means to show his admiration."

"Dost thou not find this public announcement of a passion painful? Were I to be wooed, I could wish it might only be to my own ear?"

"That is an unhappy sentiment for one whose hand is in the gift of the senate! I fear that a maiden of thy rank must be content to hear her beauty extolled and her merits sung, if not exaggerated, even by hirelings beneath a balcony."

"I would that they were done!" exclaimed Violetta, stopping her ears. "None know the excellence of our friend better than I; but this open exposure of thoughts, that ought to be so private, must wound her."

"Thou mayest go again into the balcony; the music ceases."

"There are gondoliers singing near the Rialto: these are sounds I love! Sweet in themselves, they do no violence to our sacred feelings. Art thou for the water to-night, my Florinda?"

"Whither would'st thou?"

"I know not—but the evening is brilliant, and I pine to mingle with the splendor and pleasure without."

"While thousands on the canals pine to mingle with the splendor and pleasure within!—Thus is it

ever with life: that which is possessed is little valued, and that which we have not is without price."

"I owe my duty to my guardian," said Violetta. "we will row to his palace."

Though Donna Florinda had uttered so grave a moral, she spoke without severity. Casting aside her work, she prepared to gratify the desire of her charge. It was the usual hour for the high in rank and the secluded to go abroad; and neither Venice, with its gay throngs, nor Italy, with its soft climate, ever offered greater temptation to seek the open air.

The groom of the chambers was called, the gondoliers were summoned, and the ladies, cloaking and taking their masks, were quickly in the boat.

CHAPTER V.

If your master

Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him
That majesty, to keep decorum, must
No less beg than a kingdom.

Antony and Cleopatra.

THE silent movement of the hearse-like gondola soon brought the fair Venetian and her female Mentor to the water-gate of the noble, who had been intrusted, by the senate, with the especial guardianship of the person of the heiress. It was a residence of more than common gloom, possessing all the solemn but stately magnificence which then characterized the private dwellings of the patricians in that city of riches and pride. Its magnitude and architecture, though rather less imposing than those which distinguished the palace of the Donna Violetta, placed it among the private edifices of the first order, and all its external decorations showed it to be

the habitation of one of high importance. Within, the noiseless steps and the air of silent distrust among the domestics, added to the gloomy grandeur of the apartments, rendered the abode no bad type of the republic itself.

As neither of his present visitors was a stranger beneath the roof of the Signor Gradenigo—for so the proprietor of the palace was called—they ascended its massive stairs, without pausing to consider any of those novelties of construction that would attract the eye of one unaccustomed to such a dwelling. The rank and the known consequence of the Donna Violetta assured her of a ready reception; and while she was ushered to the suite of rooms above, by a crowd of bowing menials, one had gone, with becoming speed, to announce her approach to his master. When in the ante-chamber, however, the ward stopped, declining to proceed any further, in deference to the convenience and privacy of her guardian. The delay was short; for no sooner was the old senator apprized of her presence, than he hastened from his closet to do her honor, with a zeal that did credit to his fitness for the trust he filled. The countenance of the old patrician—a face in which thought and care had drawn as many lines as time—lighted with unequivocal satisfaction as he pressed forward to receive his beautiful ward. To her half-uttered apologies for the intrusion, he would not listen; but as he led her within, he gallantly professed his pleasure at being honored with her visits even at moments that, to her scrupulous delicacy, might appear the most ill-timed.

“Thou canst never come amiss, child as thou art of my ancient friend, and the especial care of the state!” he added. “The gates of the Gradenigo palace would open of themselves, at the latest period of the night, to receive such a guest. Besides,

the hour is most suited to the convenience of one of thy quality who would breathe the fresh evening air on the canals. Were I to limit thee to hours and minutes, some truant wish of the moment—some innocent caprice of thy sex and years, might go ungratified.—Ah! Donna Florinda, we may well pray that all our affection—not to call it weakness—for this persuasive girl, shall not in the end lead to her own disadvantage!”

“For the indulgence of both, I am grateful,” returned Violetta; “I only fear to urge my little requests at moments when your precious time is more worthily occupied in behalf of the state.”

“Thou overratest my consequence. I sometimes visit the Council of Three Hundred; but my years and infirmities preclude me now from serving the republic as I could wish.—Praise be to St. Mark, our patron! its affairs are not unprosperous for our declining fortunes. We have dealt bravely with the infidel of late; the treaty with the Emperor is not to our wrong; and the anger of the church, for the late seeming breach of confidence on our part, has been diverted. We owe something in the latter affair to a young Neapolitan, who sojourns here at Venice, and who is not without interest at the Holy See, by reason of his uncle, the Cardinal Secretary. Much good is done by the influence of friends, properly employed. ’Tis the secret of our success in the actual condition of Venice; for that which power cannot achieve must be trusted to favor and a wise moderation.”

“Your declarations encourage me to become, once more, a suitor; for I will confess that, in addition to the desire of doing you honor, I have come, equally with the wish, to urge your great influence, in behalf of an earnest suit, I have.”

“What now! Our young charge, Donna Florinda, has inherited, with the fortunes of her family,

its ancient habits of patronage and protection! But we will not discourage the feeling, for it has a worthy origin, and, used with discretion, it fortifies the noble and powerful in their stations."

"And may we not say," mildly observed Donna Florinda, "that when the affluent and happy employ themselves with the cares of the less fortunate, they not only discharge a duty, but they cultivate a wholesome and useful state of mind?"

"Doubt it not. Nothing can be more useful than to give to each class in society, a proper sense of its obligations, and a just sentiment of its duties. These are opinions I greatly approve, and which I desire my ward may thoroughly understand."

"She is happy in possessing instructors so able and so willing to teach all she should know," rejoined Violetta. "With this admission, may I ask the Signor Gradenigo to give ear to my petition?"

"Thy little requests are ever welcome. I would merely observe, that generous and ardent temperaments sometimes regard a distant object so steadily, as to overlook others that are not only nearer, and perhaps of still more urgent importance, but more attainable. In doing a benefit to one, we should be wary not to do injury to many. The relative of some one of thy household may have thoughtlessly enlisted for the wars?"

"Should it be so, I trust the recruit will have the manhood not to quit his colors."

"Thy nurse, who is one little likely to forget the service she did thy infancy, urges the claim of some kinsman, to an employment in the customs?"

"I believe all of that family are long since placed," said Violetta laughing, "unless we might establish the good mother herself, in some station of honor. I have naught to ask in their behalf."

"She who hath reared thee, to this goodly and healthful beauty, would prefer a well-supported suit,

but still is she better, as she is, indolent, and, I fear, pampered by thy liberality. Thy private purse is drained by demands on thy charity;—or, perhaps, the waywardness of a female taste hath cost thee dear, of late?"

"Neither.—I have little need of gold, for one of my years cannot properly maintain the magnificence of her condition. I come, guardian, with a far graver solicitation than any of these."

"I hope none, in thy favor, have been indiscreet of speech!" exclaimed the Signor Gradenigo, casting a hasty and suspicious look at his ward.

"If any have been so thoughtless, let them abide the punishment of their fault."

"I commend thy justice. In this age of novel opinions, innovations of all descriptions cannot be too severely checked. Were the senate to shut its ears to all the wild theories that are uttered by the unthinking and vain, their language would soon penetrate to the ill-regulated minds of the ignorant and idle. Ask me, if thou wilt, for purses in scores, but do not move me to forgetfulness of the guilt of the disturber of the public peace!"

"Not a sequin.—My errand is of nobler quality."

"Speak without riddle, that I may know its object."

Now that nothing stood between her wish to speak, and her own manner of making known the request, Donna Violetta appeared to shrink from expressing it. Her color went and came, and she sought support from the eye of her attentive and wondering companion. As the latter was ignorant of her intention, however, she could do no more than encourage the supplicant, by such an expression of sympathy as woman rarely refuses to her sex, in any trial that involves their peculiar and distinctive feelings. Violetta struggled with her diffi-

dence, and then laughing at her own want of self-possession, she continued—

“ You know, Signor Gradenigo,” she said, with a loftiness that was not less puzzling, though far more intelligible, than the agitation which, a moment before, had embarrassed her manner, “that I am the last of a line, eminent for centuries, in the state of Venice.”

“ So sayeth our history.”

“ That I bear a name long known, and which it becomes me to shield from all imputation of discredit, in my own person.”

“ This is so true, that it scarce needed so clear an exposure;” drily returned the senator.

“ And that, though thus gifted by the accidents of fortune and birth, I have received a boon that remains still unrequited, in a manner to do no honor to the house of Thiépolo.”

“ This becometh serious! Donna Florinda, our ward is more earnest than intelligible, and I must ask an explanation at your hands. It becometh her not to receive boons of this nature from any.”

“ Though unprepared for this request,” mildly replied the companion, “ I think she speaks of the boon of life.”

The Signor Gradenigo’s countenance assumed a dark expression.

“ I understand you,” he said, coldly. “ It is true that the Neapolitan was ready to rescue thee, when the calamity befell thy uncle of Florence, but Don Camillo Monforte is not a common diver of the Lido, to be rewarded like him who finds a bauble dropped from a gondola. Thou hast thanked the cavalier; I trust that a noble maiden can do no more, in a case like this.”

“ That I have thanked him, and thanked him from my soul, is true!” fervently exclaimed Violetta. “ When I forget the service, Maria Santissima, and the good saints, forget me!”

"I doubt, Signora Florinda, that your charge hath spent more hours among the light works of her late father's library, and less time with her missal, than becomes her birth?"

The eye of Violetta kindled, and she folded an arm around the form of her shrinking companion, who drew down her veil at this reproof, though she forbore to answer.

"Signor Gradenigo," said the young heiress, "I may have done discredit to my instructors, but if the pupil has been idle, the fault should not be visited on the innocent. It is some evidence that the commands of holy church have not been neglected, that I now come to entreat favor in behalf of one, to whom I owe my life. Don Camillo Monforte has long pursued, without success, a claim so just, that were there no other motive to concede it, the character of Venice should teach the senators the danger of delay."

"My ward has spent her leisure with the doctors of Padua! The republic hath its laws, and none who have right of their side appeal to them in vain. Thy gratitude is not to be censured; it is rather worthy of thy origin and hopes; still, Donna Violetta, we should remember how difficult it is to winnow the truth from the chaff of imposition and legal subtlety, and, most of all, should a judge be certain, before he gives his decree, that, in confirming the claims of one applicant, he does not defeat those of another."

"They tamper with his rights! Being born in a foreign realm, he is required to renounce more in the land of the stranger, than he will gain within the limits of the republic. He wastes life and youth in pursuing a phantom! You are of weight in the senate, my guardian, and were you to lend him the support of your powerful voice and great instruction, a wronged noble would have justice, and

Venice, though she might lose a trifle from her stores, would better deserve the character of which she is so jealous."

"Thou art a persuasive advocate, and I will think of what thou urgest," said the Signor Gradenigo, changing the frown, which had been gathering about his brow, to a look of indulgence, with a facility that betrayed much practice in adapting the expression of his features to his policy. "I ought only to hearken to the Neapolitan, in my public character of a judge; but his service to thee, and my weakness in thy behalf, extorts that thou would'st have."

Donna Violetta received the promise, with a bright and guileless smile. She kissed the hand he extended, as a pledge of his faith, with a fervor that gave her attentive guardian serious uneasiness.

"Thou art too winning, even to be resisted by one wearied with rebutting plausible pretensions," he added. "The young and the generous, Donna Florinda, believe all to be as their own wishes and simplicity would have them. As for this right of Don Camillo—but no matter—thou wilt have it so, and it shall be examined with that blindness which is said to be the failing of justice."

"I have understood the metaphor to mean blind to favor, but not insensible to the right."

"I fear that is a sense which might defeat our hopes—but we will look into it. My son has been mindful of his duty and respect of late, Donna Violetta, as I would have him? The boy wants little urging, I know, to lead him to do honor to my ward, and the fairest of Venice. Thou wilt receive him with friendship, for the love thou bearest his father?"

Donna Violetta curtsied, but it was with womanly reserve.

"The door of my palace is never shut on the Signor Giacomo, on all proper occasions," she said,

coldly. "Signore, the son of my guardian could hardly be other than an honored visitor."

"I would have the boy attentive—and even more, I would have him prove some little of that great esteem,—but we live in a jealous city, Donna Florinda, and one in which prudence is a virtue of the highest price. If the youth is less urgent than I could wish, believe me, it is from the apprehension of giving premature alarm to those who interest themselves in the fortunes of our charge."

Both the ladies bowed, and by the manner in which they drew their cloaks about them, they made evident their wish to retire. Donna Violetta craved a blessing, and after the usual compliments, and a short dialogue of courtesy, she and her companion withdrew to their boat.

The Signor Gradenigo paced the room, in which he had received his ward, for several minutes in silence. Not a sound of any sort was audible throughout the whole of the vast abode, the stillness and cautious tread of those within, answering to the quiet town without; but a young man, in whose countenance and air were to be seen most of the usual signs of a well-bred profligacy, sauntering along the suite of chambers, at length caught the eye of the senator, who beckoned him to approach.

"Thou art unhappy, as of wont, Giacomo," he said, in a tone between paternal indulgence and reproach. "The Donna Violetta has, but a minute since, departed, and thou wert absent. Some unworthy intrigue with the daughter of a jeweller, or some more injurious bargain of thy hopes, with the father, hath occupied the time that might have been devoted more honorably, and to far better profit."

"You do me little justice," returned the youth. "Neither Jew, nor Jewess, hath this day greeted my eye."

"The calendar should mark the time, for its sin-

gularity! I would know, Giacomo, if thou turnest to a right advantage the occasion of my guardianship, and if thou thinkest, with sufficient gravity, of the importance of what I urge?"

"Doubt it not, father. He who hath so much suffered for the want of that which the Donna Violetta possesses in so great profusion, needeth little prompting on such a subject. By refusing to supply my wants, you have made certain of my consent. There is not a fool in Venice who sighs more loudly beneath his mistress's window, than I utter my pathetic wishes to the lady—when there is opportunity, and I am in the humor."

"Thou knowest the danger of alarming the senate?"

"Fear me not. My progress is by secret and gradual means. Neither my countenance nor my mind is unused to a mask,—thanks to necessity! My spirits have been too buoyant not to have made me acquainted with duplicity!"

"Thou speakest, ungrateful boy, as if I denied thy youth the usual indulgences of thy years and rank. It is thy excesses, and not thy spirits, I would check. But I would not, now, harden thee with reproof. Giacomo, thou hast a rival in the stranger. His act in the Giudecca has won upon the fancy of the girl, and like all of generous and ardent natures, ignorant as she is of his merits, she supplies his character with all necessary qualities by her own ingenuity."

"I would she did the same by me!"

"With thee, Sirrah, my ward might be required to forget, rather than invent. Hast thou bethought thee of turning the eyes of the council on the danger which besets their heiress?"

"I have."

"And the means?"

"The plainest and the most certain—the Lion's mouth."

"Ha!—that, indeed, is a bold adventure."

"And, like all bold adventures, it is the more likely to succeed. For once Fortune hath not been a niggard with me.—I have given them the Neapolitan's signet by way of proof."

"Giacomo! dost thou know the hazard of thy temerity? I hope there is no clue left in the handwriting, or by any other means taken to obtain the ring?"

"Father, though I may have overlooked thy instruction in less weighty matters, not an admonition which touches the policy of Venice hath been forgotten. The Neapolitan stands accused, and if thy Council is faithful, he will be a suspected, if not a banished, man."

"That the Council of Three will perform its trust is beyond dispute. I would I were as certain that thy indiscreet zeal may not lead to some unpleasant exposure!"

The shameless son stared at the father a moment in doubt, and then he passed into the more private parts of the palace, like one too much accustomed to double-dealing, to lend it a second, or a serious thought. The senator remained. His silent walk was now manifestly disturbed by great uneasiness; and he frequently passed a hand across his brow, as if he mused in pain. While thus occupied, a figure stole through the long suite of ante-chambers, and stopped near the door of the room he occupied. The intruder was aged; his face was tawny by exposure, and his hair thinned and whitened by time. His dress was that of a fisherman, being both scanty and of the meanest materials. Still there was a naturally noble and frank intelligence in his bold eye and prominent features, while the bare arms and naked legs exhibited a muscle and proportion, which proved that nature was rather at a stand than in the decline. He had been many moments dangling his

cap, in habitual but unembarrassed respect, before his presence was observed.

"Ha! thou here, Antonio!" exclaimed the senator, when their eyes met. "Why this visit?"

"Signore, my heart is heavy."

"Hath the calendar no saint—the fisherman no patron? I suppose the sirocco hath been tossing the waters of the bay, and thy nets are empty.—Hold! thou art my foster-brother, and thou must not want."

The fisherman drew back with dignity, refusing the gift simply, but decidedly, by the act.

"Signore, we have lived from childhood to old age since we drew our milk from the same breast; in all that time, have you ever known me a beggar?"

"Thou art not wont to ask these boons, Antonio, it is true; but age conquers our pride with our strength. If it be not sequins that thou seekest, what would'st thou?"

"There are other wants than those of the body, Signore, and other sufferings beside hunger."

The countenance of the senator lowered. He cast a sharp glance at his foster-brother, and ere he answered he closed the door which communicated with the outer chamber.

"Thy words forebode disaffection, as of wont. Thou art accustomed to comment on measures and interests that are beyond thy limited reason, and thou knowest that thy opinions have already drawn displeasure on thee. The ignorant and the low are, to the state, as children, whose duty it is to obey, and not to cavil.—Thy errand?"

"I am not the man you think me, Signore. I am used to poverty and want, and little satisfies my wishes. The senate is my master, and as such I honor it; but a fisherman hath his feelings as well as the doge!"

"Again!—These feelings of thine, Antonio, are

most exacting. Thou namest them on all occasions, as if they were the engrossing concerns of life."

"Signore, are they not to me? Though I think mostly of my own concerns, still I can have a thought for the distress of those I honor. When the beautiful and youthful lady, your eccellenza's daughter, was called away to the company of the saints, I felt the blow as if it had been the death of my own child; and it has pleased God, as you very well know, Signore, not to leave me unacquainted with the anguish of such a loss."

"Thou art a good fellow, Antonio," returned the senator, covertly removing the moisture from his eyes; "an honest and a proud man, for thy condition!"

"She, from whom we both drew our first nourishment, Signore, often told me that, next to my own kin, it was my duty to love the noble race she had helped to support. I make no merit of natural feeling, which is a gift from Heaven, and the greater is the reason that the state should not deal lightly with such affections."

"Once more the state!—Name thy errand."

"Your eccellenza knows the history of my humble life. I need not tell you, Signore, of the sons which God, by the intercession of the Virgin and blessed St. Anthony, was pleased to bestow on me, or of the manner in which he hath seen proper to take them, one by one, away."

"Thou hast known sorrow, poor Antonio; I well remember thou hast suffered, too."

"Signore, I have. The deaths of five manly and honest sons is a blow to bring a groan from a rock. But I have known how to bless God, and be thankful!"

"Worthy fisherman, the doge himself might envy this resignation. It is often easier to endure the loss than the life of a child, Antonio!"

"Signore, no boy of mine ever caused me grief, but the hour in which he died. And even then," the old man turned aside, to conceal the working of his features—"I struggled to remember, from how much pain, and toil, and suffering they were removed, to enjoy a more blessed state."

The lip of the Signor Gradenigo quivered, and he moved to and fro with a quicker step.

"I think, Antonio," he said, "I think, honest Antonio, I had masses said for the souls of them all?"

"Signore, you had; St. Anthony remember the kindness in your own extremity! I was wrong in saying that the youths never gave me sorrow but in dying, for there is a pain the rich cannot know, in being too poor to buy a prayer for a dead child!"

"Wilt thou have more masses? Son of thine shall never want a voice with the saints, for the ease of his soul!"

"I thank you, eccellenza, but I have faith in what has been done, and, more than all, in the mercy of God. My errand now is in behalf of the living."

The sympathy of the senator was suddenly checked, and he already listened with a doubting and suspicious air.

"Thy errand?" he simply repeated.

"Is to beg your interest, Signore, to obtain the release of my grandson from the galleys. They have seized the lad in his fourteenth year, and condemned him to the wars with the Infidels, without thought of his tender years, without thought of evil example, without thought of my age and loneliness, and without justice; for his father died in the last battle given to the Turk."

As he ceased, the fisherman riveted his look on the marble countenance of his auditor, wistfully endeavoring to trace the effect of his words. But all there was cold, unanswering, and void of human sympathy. The soulless, practised, and specious

reasoning of the state, had long since deadened all feeling in the senator, on any subject that touched an interest so vital as the maritime power of the republic. He saw the hazard of innovation in the slightest approach to interests so delicate, and his mind was drilled by policy into an apathy that no charity could disturb, when there was question of the right of St. Mark to the services of his people.

"I would thou hadst come to beg masses, or gold, or aught but this, Antonio!" he answered, after a moment of delay. "Thou hast had the company of the boy, if I remember, from his birth, already?"

"Signore, I have had that satisfaction, for he was an orphan born; and I would wish to have it until the child is fit to go into the world, armed with an honesty and faith that shall keep him from harm. Were my own brave son here, he would ask no other fortune for the lad, than such counsel and aid as a poor man has a right to bestow on his own flesh and blood."

"He fareth no worse than others; and thou knowest that the republic hath need of every arm."

"Eccellenza, I saw the Signor Giacomo land from his gondola, as I entered the palace."

"Out upon thee, fellow! dost thou make no distinction between the son of a fisherman, one trained to the oar and toil, and the heir of an ancient house? Go to, presuming man, and remember thy condition, and the difference that God hath made between our children."

"Mine never gave me sorrow but the hour in which they died," said the fisherman, uttering a severe but mild reproof.

The Signor Gradenigo felt the sting of this retort, which in no degree aided the cause of his indiscreet foster-brother. After pacing the room in agitation

for some time, he so far conquered his resentment, as to answer more mildly, as became his rank.

“Antonio,” he said, “thy disposition and boldness are not strangers to me—If thou would'st have masses for the dead, or gold for the living, they are thine; but in asking for my interest with the general of the galleys, thou askest that which, at a moment so critical, could not be yielded to the son of the doge, were the doge—”

“A fisherman,” continued Antonio, observing that he hesitated—“Signore, adieu; I would not part in anger with my foster-brother, and I pray the saints to bless you and your house. May you never know the grief of losing a child by a fate far worse than death—that of destruction by vice.”

As Antonio ceased, he made his reverence and departed by the way he had entered. He retired unnoticed, for the senator averted his eyes, with a secret consciousness of the force of what the other, in his simplicity, had uttered; and it was some time before the latter knew he was alone. Another step, however, soon diverted his attention. The door reopened, and a menial appeared. He announced that one without sought a private audience.

“Let him enter,” answered the ready senator, smoothing his features to the customary cautious and distrustful expression.

The servant withdrew, when one masked, and wearing a cloak, quickly entered the room. When the latter instrument of disguise was thrown upon an arm, and the visor was removed, the form and face of the dreaded Jacopo became visible.

CHAPTER VI.

Cæsar himself has work, and our oppression
Exceeds what we expected.

SHAKSPEARE.

"DIDST thou note him that left me?" eagerly demanded the Signor Gradenigo.

"I did."

"Enough so to recognize form and countenance?"

"'Twas a fisherman of the Lagunes, named Antonio."

The senator dropped the extended limb, and regarded the Bravo, with a look, in which surprise and admiration were equally blended. He resumed his course up and down the room, while his companion stood waiting his pleasure, in an attitude so calm as to be dignified. A few minutes were wasted in this abstraction.

"Thou art quick of sight, Jacopo!" continued the patrician, breaking the pause—"Hast thou had dealings with the man?"

"Never."

"Thou art certain it is—"

"Your excellenza's foster-brother."

"I did not inquire into thy knowledge of his infancy and origin, but of his present state;" returned the Signor Gradenigo, turning away to conceal his countenance from the glowing eye of Jacopo—"Has he been named to thee by any in authority?"

"He has not—my mission does not lie with fishermen."

"Duty may lead us into still humbler society, young man. They who are charged with the grievous burthen of the state, must not consider the quality of the load they carry. In what manner hath this Antonio come to thy knowledge?"

"I have known him as one esteemed by his fellows—a man skilful in his craft, and long practised in the mystery of the Lagunes."

"He is a defrauder of the revenue, thou would'st be understood to say?"

"I would not. He toils too late and early to have other means of support than labor."

"Thou knowest, Jacopo, the severity of our laws in matters that concern the public moneys?"

"I know that the judgment of St. Mark, Signore, is never light when its own interest is touched."

"Thou art not required to utter opinions beyond the present question. This man hath a habit of courting the good-will of his associates, and of making his voice heard concerning affairs of which none but his superiors may discreetly judge."

"Signore, he is old, and the tongue grows loose with years."

"This is not the character of Antonio. Nature hath not treated him unkindly; had his birth and education been equal to his mind, the senate might have been glad to listen—as it is, I fear he speaks in a sense to endanger his own interests."

"Surely, if he speaks to offend the ear of St. Mark."

There was a quick suspicious glance from the senator to the Bravo, as if to read the true meaning of the latter's words. Finding, however, the same expression of self-possession in the quiet features he scrutinized, the latter continued as if distrust had not been awakened.

"If, as thou sayest, he so speaks as to injure the republic, his years have not brought discretion. I love the man, Jacopo, for it is usual to regard, with some partiality, those who have drawn nourishment from the same breast with ourselves."

"Signore, it is."

"And feeling this weakness, in his favor, I would

have him admonished to be prudent. Thou art acquainted, doubtless, with his opinions concerning the recent necessity of the state, to command the services of all the youths on the Lagunes in her fleets?"

"I know that the press has taken from him the boy who toiled in his company."

"To toil honorably, and perhaps gainfully, in behalf of the republic!"

"Signore, perhaps!"

"Thou art brief in thy speech to-night, Jacopo! —But if thou knowest the fisherman, give him counsel of discretion. St. Mark will not tolerate such free opinions of his wisdom. This is the third occasion in which there has been need to repress that fisherman's speech; for the paternal care of the senate cannot see discontent planted in the bosom of a class, it is their duty and pleasure to render happy. Seek opportunities to let him hear this wholesome truth, for in good sooth, I would not willingly see a misfortune light upon the head of a son of my ancient nurse, and that, too, in the decline of his days."

The Bravo bent his body in acquiescence, while the Signor Gradenigo paced the room, in a manner to show that he really felt concern.

"Thou hast had advice of the judgment, in the matter of the Genoese?" resumed the latter, when another pause had given time to change the current of his thoughts. "The sentence of the tribunals has been prompt, and, though there is much assumption of a dislike between the two republics, the world can now see how sternly justice is consulted on our isles. I hear the Genoese will have ample amends, and that certain of our own citizens will be mulcted of much money."

"I have heard the same since the sun set, in the Piazzetta, Signore!"

“And do men converse of our impartiality, and more than all of our promptitude? Bethink thee, Jacopo, 'tis but a se'nnight since the claim was preferred to the senate's equity!”

“None dispute the promptitude with which the republic visits offences.”

“Nor the justice, I trust also, good Jacopo. There is a beauty and a harmony in the manner in which the social machine rolls on its course, under such a system, that should secure men's applause! Justice administers to the wants of society, and checks the passions with a force as silent and dignified, as if her decrees came from a higher volition. I often compare the quiet march of the state, contrasted with the troubled movements of some other of our Italian sisters, to the difference between the clatter of a clamorous town, and the stillness of our own noiseless canals. Then the uprightness of the late decree is in the mouths of the masquers to-night?”

“Signore, the Venetians are bold when there is an opportunity to praise their masters.”

“Dost thou think thus, Jacopo? To me they have ever seemed more prone to vent their seditious discontent. But 'tis the nature of man to be niggardly of praise and lavish of censure. This decree of the tribunal must not be suffered to die, with the mere justice of the case. Our friends should dwell on it, openly, in the cafés, and at the Lido. They will have no cause to fear, should they give their tongues a little latitude. A just government hath no jealousy of comment.”

“True, Signore.”

“I look to thee and thy fellows to see that the affair be not too quickly forgotten. The contemplation of acts, such as this, will quicken the dormant seeds of virtue in the public mind. He who has examples of equity incessantly before his eyes, will

come at last to love the quality. The Genoese, I trust, will depart satisfied?"

"Doubt it not, Signore; he has all that can content a sufferer; his own with usury, and revenge of him who did the wrong."

"Such is the decree—ample restoration and the chastening hand of punishment. Few states would thus render a judgment against itself, Jacopo!"

"Is the state answerable for the deed of the merchant, Signore?"

"Through its citizen. He who inflicts punishment on his own members, is a sufferer, surely. No one can part with his own flesh without pain; is not this true, fellow?"

"There are nerves that are delicate to the touch, Signore, and an eye or a tooth is precious; but the paring of a nail, or the fall of the beard, is little heeded."

"One who did not know thee, Jacopo, would imagine thee in the interest of the emperor! The sparrow does not fall in Venice, without the loss touching the parental feelings of the senate. Well, is there further rumor among the Jews, of a decrease of gold? Sequins are not so abundant as of wont, and the chicanery of that race lends itself to the scarcity, in the hope of larger profits."

"I have seen faces on the Rialto, of late, Signore, that look empty purses. The Christian seems anxious, and in want, while the unbelievers wear their gaberdines with a looser air than is usual."

"This hath been expected. Doth report openly name any of the Israelites who are in the custom of lending, on usury, to the young nobles?"

"All, who have to lend, may be accounted of the class; the whole synagogue, rabbis, and all, are of a mind, when there is question of a Christian's purse."

"Thou likest not the Hebrew, Jacopo; but he is

of good service in the republic's straits. We count all friends, who are ready with their gold at need. Still the young hopes of Venice must not be left to waste their substance in unwary bargains with the gainful race, and should'st thou hear of any of mark, who are thought to be too deeply in their clutches, thou wilt do wisely to let the same be known, with little delay, to the guardians of the public weal. We must deal tenderly with those who prop the state, but we must also deal discreetly with those who will shortly compose it. Hast thou aught to say in the matter?"

"I have heard men speak of Signor Giacomo as paying dearest for their favors."

"Gesu Maria! my son and heir! Dost thou not deceive me, man, to gratify thine own displeasure against the Hebrews?"

"I have no other malice against the race, Signore, than the wholesome disrelish of a Christian. Thus much I hope may be permitted to a believer, but beyond that, in reason, I carry hatred to no man. It is well known that your heir is disposing freely of his hopes, and at prices that lower expectations might command."

"This is a weighty concern! The boy must be speedily admonished of the consequences, and care must be had for his future discretion. The Hebrew shall be punished, and as a solemn warning to the whole tribe, the debt confiscated to the benefit of the borrower. With such an example before their eyes, the knaves will be less ready with their sequins. Holy St. Theodore! 'twere self-destruction to suffer one of such promise to be lost for the want of prudent forethought. I will charge myself with the matter, as an especial duty, and the senate shall have no cause to say that its interests have been neglected. Hast thou had applications of late, in thy character of avenger of private wrongs?"

H 2

"None of note—there is one that seeks me earnestly, though I am not yet wholly the master of his wishes."

"Thy office is of much delicacy and trust, and, as thou art well assured, the reward is weighty and sure." The eyes of the Bravo kindled with an expression which caused his companion to pause. But observing that the repose, for which the features of Jacopo were so remarkable, again presided over his pallid face, he continued, as if there had been no interruption; "I repeat, the bounty and clemency of the state will not be forgotten. If its justice is stern and infallible, its forgiveness is cordial, and its favors ample. Of these facts I have taken much pains to assure thee, Jacopo.—Blessed St. Mark! that one of the scions of thy great stock should waste his substance for the benefit of a race of unbelievers! But thou hast not named him who seeks thee, with this earnestness?"

"As I have yet to learn his errand, before I go further, Signore, it may be well to know more of his wishes."

"This reserve is uncalled for. Thou art not to distrust the prudence of the republic's ministers, and I should be sorry were the Inquisitors to get an unfavorable opinion of thy zeal. The individual must be denounced."

"I denounce him not. The most that I can say is, that he hath a desire to deal privately with one, with whom it is almost criminal to deal at all."

"The prevention of crime is better than its punishment, and such is the true object of all government. Thou wilt not withhold the name of thy correspondent?"

"It is a noble Neapolitan, who hath long sojourned in Venice, on matters touching a great succession, and some right, even, to the senate's dignity."

“Ha! Don Camillo Monforte! Am I right, sirrah?”

“Signore, the same!”

The pause which followed was only broken by the clock of the great square striking eleven, or the fourth hour of the night, as it is termed, by the usage of Italy. The senator started, consulted a time-piece in his own apartment, and again addressed his companion.

“This is well,” he said; “thy faith and punctuality shall be remembered. Look to the fisherman, Antonio; the murmurs of the old man must not be permitted to awaken discontent, for a cause so trifling, as this transfer of his descendant from a gondola to a galley; and most of all, keep thy ears attentive to any rumors on the Rialto. The glory and credit of a patrician name must not be weakened by the errors of boyhood. As to this stranger—quickly, thy mask and cloak—depart as if thou wert merely a friend bent on some of the idle pleasantries of the hour.”

The Bravo resumed his disguise with the readiness of one long practised in its use, but with a composure that was not so easily disconcerted as that of the more sensitive senator. The latter did not speak again, though he hurried Jacopo from his presence, by an impatient movement of the hand.

When the door was closed and the Signor Gradenigo was again alone, he once more consulted the time-piece, passed his hand slowly and thoughtfully across his brow, and resumed his walk. For nearly an hour this exercise, or nervous sympathy of the body with a mind that was possibly overworked, continued without any interruption from without. Then came a gentle tap at the door, and at the usual bidding, one entered, closely masked, like him who had departed, as was so much the usage of that city, in the age of which we write. A

glance at the figure of his guest seemed to apprise the senator of his character, for the reception, while it was distinguished by the quaint courtesy of the age, was that of one expected.

"I am honored in the visit of Don Camillo Monforte," said the host, while the individual named laid aside his cloak and silken visor; "though the lateness of the hour had given me reason to apprehend that some casualty had interfered between me and the pleasure."

"A thousand excuses, noble senator, but the coolness of the canals, and the gaiety of the square, together with some apprehension of intruding prematurely on time so precious, has, I fear, kept me out of season. But I trust to the known goodness of the Signor Gradenigo for my apology."

"The punctuality of the great lords of Lower Italy is not their greatest merit," the Signor Gradenigo drily answered. "The young esteem life so endless, that they take little heed of the minutes that escape them; while we, whom age begins to menace, think chiefly of repairing the omissions of youth. In this manner, Signor Duca, does man sin and repent daily, until the opportunities of doing either are imperceptibly lost. But we will not be more prodigal of the moments than there is need—are we to hope for better views in the Spaniard?"

"I have neglected little that can move the mind of a reasonable man, and I have, in particular, laid before him the advantage of conciliating the senate's esteem."

"Therein have you done wisely, Signore, both as respects his interests and your own. The senate is a liberal paymaster to him who serves it well, and a fearful enemy to those who do harm to the state. I hope the matter of the succession draws near a conclusion?"

"I wish it were possible to say it did. I urge the

tribunal in all proper assiduity, omitting no duty of personal respect, nor of private solicitation. Padua has not a doctor more learned than he who presents my right to their wisdom, and yet the affair lingers like life in the hectic. If I have not shown myself a worthy son of St. Mark, in this affair with the Spaniard, it is more from the want of a habit of managing political interests, than from any want of zeal."

"The scales of justice must be nicely balanced to hang so long, without determining to one side or the other! You will have need of further assiduity, Don Camillo, and of great discretion in disposing the minds of the patricians in your favor. It will be well to make your attachment to the state be observed, by further service near the ambassador. You are known to have his esteem, and counsel coming from such a quarter will enter deeply into his mind. It should also quicken the exertions of so benevolent and generous a young spirit, to know that in serving his country, he also aids the cause of humanity."

Don Camillo did not appear to be strongly impressed with the justice of the latter remark. He bowed, however, in courtesy to his companion's opinion.

"It is pleasant, Signore, to be thus persuaded," he answered; "my kinsman of Castile is a man to hear reason, let it come from what quarter it may. Though he meets my arguments with some allusions to the declining power of the republic, I do not see less of deep respect for the influence of a state, that hath long made itself remarkable by its energy and will."

"Venice is no longer what the city of the Isles hath been, Signor Duca; still is she not powerless. The wings of our lion are a little clipped, but his leap is still far, and his teeth dangerous. If the

new-made prince would have his ducal coronet sit easily on his brow, he would do well to secure the esteem of his nearest neighbors."

"This is obviously true, and little that my influence can do toward effecting the object, shall be wanting. And now, may I entreat of your friendship, advice as to the manner of further urging my own long-neglected claims?"

"You will do well, Don Camillo, to remind the senators of your presence, by frequent observance of the courtesies due to their rank and yours."

"This do I never neglect, as seemly both in my station and my object."

"The judges should not be forgotten, young man, for it is wise to remember that justice hath ever an ear for solicitation."

"None can be more assiduous in the duty, nor is it common to see a suppliant so mindful of those whom he troubleth, by more substantial proofs of respect."

"But chiefly should you be particular to earn the senate's esteem. No act of service to the state is overlooked by that body, and the smallest good deed finds its way into the recesses of the two councils."

"Would I could have communication with those reverend fathers! I think the justice of my claim would speedily work out its own right."

"That were impossible!" gravely returned the senator. "Those august bodies are secret, that their majesty may not be tarnished by communication with vulgar interests. They rule like the unseen influence of mind over matter, and form, as it were, the soul of the state, whose seat, like that of reason, remains a problem exceeding human penetration."

"I express the desire, rather as a wish than with any hope of its being granted," returned the Duke of St. Agata, resuming his cloak and mask, neither of

which had been entirely laid aside. "Adieu, noble Signore; I shall not cease to move the Castilian with frequent advice, and, in return, I commit my affair to the justice of the patricians, and your own good friendship."

Signor Gradenigo bowed his guest through all the rooms of the long suite, but the last, where he committed him to the care of the groom of his chambers.

"The youth must be stirred to greater industry in this matter, by clogging the wheels of the law. He that would ask favors of St. Mark must first earn them, by showing zealous dispositions in his behalf."

Such were the reflections of the Signor Gradenigo, as he slowly returned towards his closet, after a ceremonious leave-taking with his guest, in the outer apartment. Closing the door, he commenced pacing the small apartment, with the step and eye of a man who again mused with some anxiety. After a minute of profound stillness, a door, concealed by the hangings of the room, was cautiously opened, and the face of still another visitor appeared.

"Enter!" said the senator, betraying no surprise at the apparition; "the hour is past, and I wait for thee."

The flowing dress, the gray and venerable beard, the noble outline of features, the quick, greedy, and suspicious eye, with an expression of countenance that was, perhaps, equally marked by worldly sagacity, and feelings often rudely rebuked, proclaimed a Hebrew of the Rialto.

"Enter, Hosea, and unburthen thyself," continued the senator, like one prepared for some habitual communication. "Is there aught new that touches the public weal?"

"Blessed is the people over whom there is so

fatherly a care! Can there be good or evil to the citizen of the republic, noble Signore, without the bowels of the senate moving, as the parent yearneth over its young? Happy is the country in which men of reverend years and whitened heads watch, until night draws toward the day, and weariness is forgotten in the desire to do good, and to honor the state!"

"Thy mind partaketh of the eastern imagery of the country of thy fathers, good Hosea, and thou art apt to forget that thou art not yet watching on the steps of the temple. What of interest hath the day brought forth?"

"Say rather the night, Signore, for little worthy of your ear hath happened, save a matter of some trifling import, which hath grown out of the movements of the evening."

"Have there been stilettoes busy on the bridge?—ha!—or do the people joy less than common in their levities?"

"None have died wrongfully, and the square is gay as the fragrant vineyards of Engedi. Holy Abraham! what a place is Venice for its pleasures, and how the hearts of old and young revel in their merriment! It is almost sufficient to fix the font in the synagogue, to witness so joyous a dispensation in behalf of the people of these islands! I had not hoped for the honor of an interview to-night, Signore, and I had prayed, before laying my head upon the pillow, when one charged by the council brought to me a jewel, with an order to decipher the arms and other symbols of its owner. 'Tis a ring, with the usual marks, which accompany private confidences."

"Thou hast the signet?" said the noble, stretching out an arm.

"It is here, and a goodly stone it is; a turquoise of price."

"Whence came it—and why is it sent to thee?"

"It came, Signore, as I gather more through hints and intimations of the messenger than by his words, from a place resembling that which the righteous Daniel escaped, in virtue of his godliness and birth."

"Thou meanest the Lion's Mouth?"

"So say our ancient books, Signore, in reference to the prophet, and so would the council's agent seem to intimate, in reference to the ring."

"Here is naught but a crest with the equestrian helmet—comes it of any in Venice?"

"The upright Solomon guide the judgment of his servant in a matter of this delicacy! The jewel is of rare beauty, such as few possess but those who have gold in store for other purposes. Do but regard the soft lustre in this light, noble Signore, and remark the pleasing colors that rise by the change of view!"

"Ay—'tis well—but who claimeth the bearings?"

"It is wonderful to contemplate how great a value may lie concealed in so small a compass! I have known sequins of full weight and heavy amount given for baubles less precious."

"Wilt thou never forget thy stall and the wayfarers of the Rialto? I bid thee name him who beareth these symbols as marks of his family and rank."

"Noble Signore, I obey. The crest is of the family of Monforte, the last senator of which died some fifteen years since."

"And his jewels?"

"They have passed, with other movables of which the state taketh no account, into the keeping of his kinsman and successor—if it be the senate's pleasure that there shall be a successor to that ancient name—Don Camillo of St. Agata. The wealthy Neapolitan who now urges his rights here

in Venice, is the present owner of this precious stone."

"Give me the ring; this must be looked to—hast thou more to say?"

"Nothing, Signore—unless to petition, if there is to be any condemnation and sale of the jewel, that it may first be offered to an ancient servitor of the republic, who hath much reason to regret that his age hath been less prosperous than his youth."

"Thou shalt not be forgotten. I hear it said, Hosea, that divers of our young nobles frequent thy Hebrew shops with intent to borrow gold, which, lavished in present prodigality, is to be bitterly repaid at a later day by self-denial, and such embarrassments as suit not the heirs of noble names. Take heed of this matter—for if the displeasure of the council should alight on any of thy race, there would be long and serious accounts to settle! Hast thou had employment of late with other signets, besides this of the Neapolitan?"

"Unless in the vulgar way of our daily occupation, none of note, illustrious Signore."

"Regard this," continued the Signor Gradenigo, first searching in a secret drawer, whence he drew a small bit of paper, to which a morsel of wax adhered; "canst thou form any conjecture, by the impression, concerning him who used that seal?"

The jeweller took the paper and held it towards the light, while his glittering eyes intently examined the conceit.

"This would surpass the wisdom of the son of David!" he said, after a long and seemingly a fruitless examination; "here is naught but some fanciful device of gallantry, such as the light-hearted cavaliers of the city are fond of using, when they tempt the weaker sex with fair words and seductive vanities."

"It is a heart pierced with the dart of love, and a motto of '*pensa al cuore trafitto d'amore.*'"

"Naught else, as my eyes do their duty. I should think there was but very little meant by those words, Signore!"

"That as may be. Thou hast never sold a jewel with that conceit?"

"Just Samuel! We dispose of them daily, to Christians of both sexes and all ages. I know no device of greater frequency, whereby I conceive there is much commerce in this light fidelity."

"He who used it did well in concealing his thoughts beneath so general a dress! There will be a reward of a hundred sequins to him who traces the owner."

Hosea was about to return the seal as beyond his knowledge, when this remark fell casually from the lips of the Signor Gradenigo. In a moment his eyes were fortified with a glass of microscopic power, and the paper was again before the lamp.

"I disposed of a cornelian of no great price, which bore this conceit, to the wife of the emperor's ambassador, but conceiving there was no more in the purchase than some waywardness of fancy, I took no precaution to note the stone. A gentleman in the family of the Legate of Ravenna, also, trafficked with me for an amethyst of the same design, but with him, neither, did I hold it important to be particular. Ha! here is a private mark, that in truth seemeth to be of my own hand!"

"Dost thou find a clue? What is the sign of which thou speakest?"

"Naught, noble senator, but a slur in a letter, which would not be apt to catch the eye of an over credulous maiden."

"And thou parted with the seal to——?"

Hosea hesitated, for he foresaw some danger of

losing his reward, by a too hasty communication of the truth.

"If it be important that the fact be known, Signore," he said, "I will consult my books. In a matter of this gravity, the senate should not be misled."

"Thou sayest well. The affair is grave, and the reward a sufficient pledge that we so esteem it."

"Something was said, illustrious Signore, of a hundred sequins; but my mind taketh little heed of such particulars, when the good of Venice is in question."

"A hundred is the sum I promised."

"I parted with a signet-ring, bearing some such design, to a female in the service of the nuncio's first gentleman. But this seal cannot come of that, since a woman of her station——"

"Art sure?" eagerly interrupted the Signor Gradenigo.

Hosea looked earnestly at his companion; and reading in his eye and countenance that the clue was agreeable, he answered promptly,—

"As that I live under the law of Moses! The bauble had been long on hand without an offer, and I abandoned it to the uses of my money."

"The sequins are thine, excellent Jew! This clears the mystery of every doubt. Go; thou shalt have thy reward; and if thou hast any particulars in thy secret register, let me be quickly possessed of them. Go to, good Hosea, and be punctual as of wont. I tire of these constant exercises of the spirit!"

The Hebrew, exulting in his success, now took his leave, with a manner in which habitual cupidity and subdued policy completely mastered every other feeling. He disappeared by the passage through which he had entered.

It seemed, by the manner of the Signor Gra-

denigo, that the receptions for that evening had now ended. He carefully examined the locks of several secret drawers in his cabinet, extinguished the lights, closed and secured the doors, and quitted the place. For some time longer, however, he paced one of the principal rooms of the outer suite, until the usual hour having arrived, he sought his rest, and the palace was closed for the night.

The reader will have gained some insight into the character of the individual who was the chief actor in the foregoing scenes. The Signor Gradenigo was born with all the sympathies and natural kindness of other men, but accident, and an education which had received a strong bias from the institutions of the self-styled republic, had made him the creature of a conventional policy. To him Venice seemed a free state, because he partook so largely of the benefits of her social system; and, though shrewd and practised in most of the affairs of the world, his faculties, on the subject of the political ethics of his country, were possessed of a rare and accommodating dullness. A senator, he stood in relation to the state as a director of a moneyed institution is proverbially placed in respect to his corporation; an agent of its collective measures, removed from the responsibilities of the man. He could reason warmly, if not acutely, concerning the principles of government, and it would be difficult, even in this money-getting age, to find a more zealous convert to the opinion that property was not a subordinate, but the absorbing interest of civilized life. He would talk ably of character, and honor, and virtue, and religion, and the rights of persons; but when called upon to act in their behalf, there was in his mind a tendency to blend them all with worldly policy, that proved as unerring as the gravitation of matter to the earth's centre. As a Venetian, he was equally opposed to the domination of one, or

of the whole; being, as respects the first, a furious republican, and, in reference to the last, leaning to that singular sophism which calls the dominion of the majority the rule of many tyrants! In short, he was an aristocrat; and no man had more industriously or more successfully persuaded himself into the belief of all the dogmas that were favorable to his caste. He was a powerful advocate of vested rights, for their possession was advantageous to himself; he was sensitively alive to innovations on usages and to vicissitudes in the histories of families, for calculation had substituted taste for principles; nor was he backward, on occasion, in defending his opinions by analogies drawn from the decrees of Providence. With a philosophy that seemed to satisfy himself, he contended that, as God had established orders throughout his own creation, in a descending chain from angels to men, it was safe to follow an example which emanated from a wisdom that was infinite. Nothing could be more sound than the basis of his theory, though its application had the capital error of believing there was any imitation of nature in an endeavor to supplant it.

CHAPTER VII.

The moon went down; and nothing now was seen
Save where the lamp of a Madonna shone
Faintly.

ROGERS.

Just as the secret audiences of the Palazzo Gradenigo were ended, the great square of St. Mark began to lose a portion of its gaiety. The cafés were now occupied by parties who had the means, and were in the humor, to put their indulgences to

more substantial proof than the passing gibe or idle laugh; while those who were reluctantly compelled to turn their thoughts from the levities of the moment to the cares of the morrow, were departing in crowds to humble roofs and hard pillows. There remained one of the latter class, however, who continued to occupy a spot near the junction of the two squares, as motionless as if his naked feet grew to the stone on which he stood. It was Antonio.

The position of the fisherman brought the whole of his muscular form and bronzed features beneath the rays of the moon. The dark, anxious, and stern eyes were fixed upon the mild orb, as if their owner sought to penetrate into another world, in quest of that peace which he had never known in this. There was suffering in the expression of the weather-worn face; but it was the suffering of one whose native sensibilities had been a little deadened by too much familiarity with the lot of the feeble. To one, who considered life and humanity in any other than their familiar and vulgar aspects, he would have presented a touching picture of a noble nature, enduring with pride, blunted by habit; while to him, who regards the accidental dispositions of society as paramount laws, he might have presented the image of dogged turbulence and discontent, healthfully repressed by the hand of power. A heavy sigh struggled from the chest of the old man, and, stroking down the few hairs which time had left him, he lifted his cap from the pavement, and prepared to move.

"Thou art late from thy bed, Antonio," said a voice at his elbow. "The triglie must be of good price, or of great plenty, that one of thy trade can spare time to air himself in the Piazza at this hour. Thou hearest, the clock is telling the fifth hour of the night."

The fisherman bent his head aside, and regarded

the figure of his masked companion, for a moment, with indifference, betraying neither curiosity nor feeling at his address.

"Since thou knowest me," he answered, "it is probable thou knowest that in quitting this place, I shall go to an empty dwelling. Since thou knowest me so well, thou should'st also know my wrongs."

"Who hath injured thee, worthy fisherman, that thou speakest so boldly beneath the very windows of the doge?"

"The state."

"This is hardy language for the ear of St. Mark! Were it too loudly spoken, yonder lion might growl.—Of what dost thou accuse the republic?"

"Lead me to them that sent thee, and I will spare the trouble of a go-between. I am ready to tell my wrongs to the doge, on his throne; for what can one, poor, and old as I, dread from their anger?"

"Thou believest me sent to betray thee?"

"Thou knowest thine own errand."

The other removed his mask, and turned his face towards the moon.

"Jacopo!" exclaimed the fisherman, gazing at the expressive Italian features; "one of thy character can have no errand with me."

A flush, that was visible even in that light, passed athwart the countenance of the Bravo; but he stilled every other exhibition of feeling.

"Thou art wrong. My errand is with thee."

"Does the senate think a fisherman of the Lagoones of sufficient importance to be struck by a stiletto? Do thy work, then!" he added, glancing at his brown and naked bosom; "there is nothing to prevent thee!"

"Antonio, thou dost me wrong. The senate has no such purpose. But I have heard that thou hast reason for discontent, and that thou speakest openly,

on the Lido and among the islands, of affairs that the patricians like not to be stirred among men of your class. I come, as a friend, to warn thee of the consequences of such indiscretion, rather than as one to harm thee."

"Thou art sent to say this?"

"Old man, age should teach thy tongue moderation. What will avail vain complaints against the republic, or what canst thou hope for, as their fruits, but evil to thyself, and evil to the child that thou lovest?"

"I know not—but when the heart is sore, the tongue will speak. They have taken away my boy, and they have left little behind that I value. The life they threaten is too short to be cared for."

"Thou should'st temper thy regrets with wisdom. The Signor Gradenigo has long been friendly to thee, and I have heard that thy mother nursed him. Try his ears with prayers, but cease to anger the republic with complaints."

Antonio looked wistfully at his companion, but when he had ceased, he shook his head mournfully, as if to express the hopelessness of relief from that quarter.

"I have told him all that a man, born and nursed on the Lagunes, can find words to say. He is a senator, Jacopo; and he thinks not of suffering he does not feel."

"Art thou not wrong, old man, to accuse him who hath been born in affluence, of hardness of heart, merely that he doth not feel the misery thou would'st avoid, too, were it in thy power? Thou hast thy gondola and nets, with health and the cunning of thy art, and in that art thou happier than he who hath neither—would'st thou forget thy skill, and share thy little stock with the beggar of San Marco, that your fortunes might be equal?"

"There may be truth in what thou sayest of our

labor and our means, but when it comes to our young, nature is the same in both. I see no reason why the son of the patrician should go free, and the child of the fisherman be sold to blood. Have not the senators enough of happiness, in their riches and greatness, that they rob me of my son?"

"Thou knowest, Antonio, the state must be served, and were its officers to go into the palaces in quest of hardy mariners for the fleet, would they, think you, find them that would honor the winged lion, in the hour of his need? Thy old arm is muscular, and thy leg steady on the water, and they seek those who, like thee, have been trained to the seas."

"Thou should'st have said, also, and thy old breast is scarred. Before thy birth, Jacopo, I went against the infidel, and my blood was shed, like water, for the state. But they have forgotten it, while there are rich marbles raised in the churches, which speak of what the nobles did, who came unharmed from the same wars."

"I have heard my father say as much," returned the Bravo, gloomily, and speaking in an altered voice. "He, too, bled in that war; but that is forgotten."

The fisherman glanced a look around, and perceiving that several groups were conversing near, in the square, he signed to his companion to follow him, and walked towards the quays.

"Thy father," he said, as they moved slowly on together, "was my comrade and my friend. I am old, Jacopo, and poor; my days are past in toil, on the Lagunes, and my nights in gaining strength to meet the labor of the morrow; but it hath grieved me to hear that the son of one I much loved, and with whom I have so often shared good and evil, fair and foul, hath taken to a life like that which men say is thine. The gold that is the price of

blood was never yet blessed to him that gave, or him that received."

The Bravo listened in silence, though his companion, who, at another moment, and under other emotions, would have avoided him as one shrinks from contagion, saw, on looking mournfully up into his face, that the muscles were slightly agitated, and that a paleness crossed his cheeks, which the light of the moon rendered ghastly.

"Thou hast suffered poverty to tempt thee into grievous sin, Jacopo; but it is never too late to call on the saints for aid, and to lay aside the stiletto! It is not profitable for a man to be known in Venice as thy fellow, but the friend of thy father will not abandon one who shows a penitent spirit. Lay aside thy stiletto, and come with me to the Lagunes. Thou wilt find labor less burdensome than guilt, and though thou never canst be to me like the boy they have taken, for he was innocent as the lamb! thou wilt still be the son of an ancient comrade, and a stricken spirit. Come with me then to the Lagunes, for poverty and misery like mine, cannot meet with more contempt, even for being thy companion."

"What is it men say, that thou treatest me thus?" demanded Jacopo, in a low, struggling voice.

"I would they said untruth! But few die by violence, in Venice, that thy name is not uttered."

"And would they suffer one thus marked, to go openly on the canals, or to be at large in the great square of San Marco?"

"We never know the reasons of the senate. Some say thy time is not yet come, while others think thou art too powerful for judgment."

"Thou dost equal credit to the justice and the activity of the inquisition. But should I go with thee to-night, wilt thou be more discreet in speech, among thy fellows of the Lido, and the islands?"

"When the heart hath its load, the tongue will

strive to lighten it. I would do any thing to turn the child of my friend from his evil ways, but forget my own. Thou art used to deal with the patricians, Jacopo; would there be possibility for one, clad in this dress, and with a face blackened by the sun, to come to speak with the doge?"

"There is no lack of seeming justice in Venice, Antonio; the want is in the substance. I doubt not thou would'st be heard."

"Then will I wait, here, upon the stones of the square, until he comes forth for the pomp of tomorrow, and try to move his heart to justice. He is old, like myself, and he hath bled too, for the state, and what is more, he is a father."

"So is the Signor Gradenigo."

"Thou doubtest his pity—ha?"

"Thou canst but try. The Doge of Venice will hearken to a petition from the meanest citizen. I think," added Jacopo, speaking so low as to be scarcely audible, "he would listen even to me."

"Though I am not able to put my prayer in such speech as becometh the ear of a great prince, he shall hear the truth from a wronged man. They call him the chosen of the state, and such a one should gladly listen to justice. This is a hard bed, Jacopo," continued the fisherman, seating himself at the foot of the column of St. Theodore, "but I have slept on colder and as hard, when there was less reason to do it—a happy night."

The Bravo lingered a minute near the old man, who folded his arms on his naked breast, which was fanned by the sea-breeze, and disposed of his person to take his rest in the square, a practice not unusual among men of his class; but when he found that Antonio was inclined to be alone, he moved on, leaving the fisherman to himself.

The night was now getting to be advanced, and few of the revellers remained in the areas of the

two squares. Jacopo cast a glance around, and noting the hour and the situation of the place, he proceeded to the edge of the quay. The public gondoliers had left their boats moored, as usual, at this spot, and a profound stillness reigned over the whole bay. The water was scarce darkened by the air, which rather breathed upon than ruffled its surface, and no sound of oar was audible amid the forest of picturesque and classical spars, which crowded the view between the Piazzetta and the Guidecca. The Bravo hesitated, cast another wary glance around him, settled his mask, undid the slight fastenings of a boat, and presently he was gliding away into the centre of the basin.

"Who cometh?" demanded one, who seemingly stood at watch, in a felucca, anchored a little apart from all others.

"One expected," was the answer.

"Roderigo?"

"The same."

"Thou art late," said the mariner of Calabria, as Jacopo stepped upon the low deck of the *Bella Sorrentina*. "My people have long been below, and I have dreamt thrice of shipwreck, and twice of a heavy sirocco, since thou hast been expected."

"Thou hast had more time to wrong the customs. Is the felucca ready for her work?"

"As for the customs, there is little chance of gain in this greedy city. The senators secure all profits to themselves and their friends, while we of the barks are tied down to low freights and hard bargains. I have sent a dozen casks of lachrymæ christi up the canals since the masquers came abroad, and beyond that I have not occasion. There is enough left for thy comfort, at need. Wilt drink?"

"I am sworn to sobriety. Is thy vessel ready, as wont, for the errand?"

"Is the senate as ready with its money? This is the fourth of my voyages in their service; and they have only to look into their own secrets to know the manner in which the work hath been done."

"They are content, and thou hast been well rewarded."

"Say it not. I have gained more gold by one lucky shipment of fruits from the isles, than by all their night-work. Would those who employ me give a little especial traffic on the entrance of the felucca, there might be advantage in the trade."

"There is nothing which St. Mark visits with a heavier punishment than frauds on his receipts. Have a care with thy wines, or thou wilt lose not only thy bark and thy voyage, but thy liberty!"

"This is just the ground of my complaint, Signor Roderigo. Rogue and no rogue, is the republic's motto. Here, they are as close in justice as a father amid his children; and there, it is better that what is done should be done at midnight. I like not the contradiction, for just as my hopes are a little raised, by what I have witnessed, perhaps a little too near, they are all blown to the winds, by such a frown as San Gennero himself might cast upon a sinner."

"Remember thou art not in thy wide Mediterranean, but on a canal of Venice. This language might be unsafe, were it heard by less friendly ears."

"I thank thee for thy care, though the sight of yonder old palace is as good a hint to the loose tongue, as the sight of a gibbet, on the sea-shore, to a pirate. I met an ancient fellow in the Piazzetta, about the time the masquers came in, and we had some words on this matter. By his tally, every second man in Venice is well paid for reporting what the others say and do. 'Tis a pity, with all their seeming love of justice, good Roderigo, that

the senate should let divers knaves go at large; men whose very faces cause the stones to redden with anger and shame!"

"I did not know that any such were openly seen in Venice; what is secretly done may be favored for a time, through difficulty of proof, but—"

"Cospetto! They tell me the councils have a short manner of making a sinner give up his misdeeds. Now, here is the miscreant Jacopo.—What aileth thee, man? The anchor, on which thou leanest, is not heated."

"Nor is it of feathers; one's bones may ache from its touch without offence, I hope."

"The iron is of Elba—and was forged in a volcano. This Jacopo is one that should not go at large in an honest city, and yet is he seen pacing the square with as much ease as a noble in the Broglio!"

"I know him not."

"Not to know the boldest hand and surest stiletto in Venice, honest Roderigo, is to thy praise. But he is well marked among us of the port, and we never see the man but we begin to think of our sins, and of penances forgotten. I marvel much that the inquisitors do not give him to the devil, on some public ceremony, for the benefit of small offenders!"

"Are his deeds so notorious, that they might pronounce on his fate without proof?"

"Go, ask that question in the streets! Not a Christian loses his life in Venice without warning, and the number is not few, to say nothing of those who die with state fevers, but men see the work of his sure hand in the blow. Signor Roderigo, your canals are convenient graves for sudden deaths!"

"Methinks there is contradiction in this. Thou speakest of proofs of the hand that gave it, in the manner of the blow, and then thou callest in the aid of the canals to cover the whole deed. Truly, there

is some wrong done this Jacopo, who is, haply, a man slandered."

"I have heard of slandering a priest, for they are Christians, bound to keep good names for the church's honor, but to utter an injury against a bravo, would a little exceed the tongue of an avvocato. What mattereth it whether the hand be a shade deeper in color or not, when blood is on it."

"Thou sayest truly," answered the pretended Roderigo, drawing a heavy breath. It mattereth little, indeed, to him condemned, whether the sentence cometh of one, or of many crimes."

"Dost know, friend Roderigo, that this very argument hath made me less scrupulous concerning the freight I am called on to carry, in this secret trade of ours. Thou art fairly in the senate's business, worthy Stefano, I say to myself, and therefore the less reason that thou should'st be particular in the quality of the merchandise. That Jacopo hath an eye and a scowl that would betray him, were he chosen to the chair of St. Peter! But doff thy mask, Signor Roderigo, that the sea-air may cool thy cheek; 'tis time there should no longer be this suspicion between old and tried friends."

"My duty to those that send me forbid the liberty, else would I gladly stand face to face with thee, Master Stefano."

"Well, notwithstanding thy caution, cunning Signore, I would hazard ten of the sequins thou art to pay to me, that I will go, on the morrow, into the crowd of San Marco, and challenge thee, openly, by name, among a thousand. Thou mayest as well unmask, for I tell thee thou art as well known to me as the latine yards of my felucca."

"The less need to uncover. There are certain signs, no doubt, by which men who meet so often should be known to each other."

"Thou hast a goodly countenance, Signore, and

the less need to hide it. I have noted thee among the revellers, when thou hast thought thyself unseen, and I will say of thee this much, without wish to gain aught in our bargain, one of appearance fair as thine, Signor Roderigo, had better be seen openly than go thus for ever behind a cloud."

"My answer hath been made. What the state wills cannot be overlooked; but since I see thou knowest me, take heed not to betray thy knowledge."

"Thou would'st not be more safe with thy confessor. Diamine! I am not a man to gad about among the water-sellers, with a secret at the top of my voice; but thou didst leer aside when I winked at thee dancing among the masquers on the quay. Is it not so, Roderigo?"

"There is more cleverness in thee, Master Stefano, than I had thought; though thy readiness with the felucca is no secret."

"There are two things, Signor Roderigo, on which I value myself, but always, I hope, with Christian moderation. As a mariner of the coast, in mistral or sirocco, levanter or zephyr, few can claim more practice; and for knowing an acquaintance in a carnival, I believe the father of evil himself could not be so disguised that eye of mine should not see his foot! For anticipating a gale, or looking behind a mask, Signor Roderigo, I know not my own equal among men of small learning."

"These faculties are great gifts in one who liveth by the sea and a critical trade."

"Here came one Gino, a gondolier of Don Camillo Monforte, and an ancient fellow of mine, aboard the felucca, attended by a woman in mask. He threw off the girl dexterously enough, and, as he thought, among strangers; but I knew her at a glance for the daughter of a wine-seller, who had already tasted lachrymæ christi of mine. The

woman was angered at the trick, but making the best of luck, we drove a bargain for the few casks which lay beneath the ballast, while Gino did his master's business in San Marco."

"And what that business was thou didst not learn, good Stefano?"

"How should I, Master Roderigo, when the gondolier scarce left time for greeting; but Annina——"

"Annina!"

"The same. Thou knowest Annina, old Tommaso's daughter; for she danced in the very set in which I detected thy countenance! I would not speak thus of the girl, but that I know thou art not backward to receive liquors that do not visit the custom-house, thyself."

"For that, fear nothing. I have sworn to thee that no secret of this nature shall pass my lips. But this Annina is a girl of quick wit and much boldness."

"Between ourselves, Signor Roderigo, it is not easy to tell who is in the senate's pay, here in Venice, or who is not. I have sometimes fancied, by thy manner of starting, and the tones of thy voice, that thou wert, thyself, no less than the lieutenant-general of the galleys, a little disguised."

"And this with thy knowledge of men!"

"If faith were always equal, where would be its merit? Thou hast never been hotly chased by an infidel, Master Roderigo, or thou would'st know how the mind of man can change from hope to fear, from the big voice to the humble prayer! I remember once, in the confusion and hurry of baffling winds and whistling shot, having always turbans before the eye, and the bastinado in mind, to have beseeched St. Stefano in some such voice as one would use to a dog, and to have bullied the men with the whine of a young kitten. *Corpo di Bacco!*

One hath need of experience in these affairs, Signor Roderigo, to know even his own merits."

"I believe thee. But who is this Gino, of whom thou hast spoken, and what has his occupation, as a gondolier, to do with one known in thy youth in Calabria?"

"Therein lie matters exceeding my knowledge. His master, and I may say, my master, for I was born on his estates, is the young Duca di Sant' Agata,—the same that pushes his fortunes with the senate, in a claim to the riches and honors of the last Monforte that sat in thy councils. The debate hath so long endured, that the lad hath made himself a gondolier, by sheer shoving an oar between his master's palace and those of the nobles he moves with interest—at least such is Gino's own history of his education."

"I know the man. He wears the colors of him he serves. Is he of quick wit?"

"Signor Roderigo, all who come of Calabria cannot boast that advantage. We are no more than our neighbors, and there are exceptions in all communities, as in all families. Gino is ready enough with his oar, and as good a youth, in his way, as need be. But as to looking into things beyond their surface, why we should not expect the delicacy of a becca fica in a goose. Nature makes men, though kings make nobles.—Gino is a gondolier."

"And of good skill?"

"I say nothing of his arm, or his leg, both of which are well enough in their places; but when it comes to knowing men and things—poor Gino is but a gondolier! The lad hath a most excellent heart, and is never backward to serve a friend. I love him, but thou would'st not have me say more than the truth will warrant."

"Well, keep thy felucca in readiness, for we know not the moment it may be needed."

"Thou hast only to bring thy freight, Signore, to have the bargain fulfilled."

"Adieu.—I would recommend to thee, to keep apart from all other trades, and to see that the revelleries of to-morrow do not debauch thy people."

"God speed thee, Signor Roderigo.—Naught shall be wanting."

The Bravo stepped into his gondola, which glided from the felucca's side with a facility which showed, that an arm, skilled in its use, held the oar. He waved his hand, in adieu to Stefano, and then the boat disappeared among the hulls that crowded the port.

For a few minutes the padrone of the *Bella Sorrentina* continued to pace her decks, snuffing the fresh breeze that came in over the Lido, and then he sought his rest. By this time, the dark, silent gondolas, which had been floating, by hundreds, through the basin, were all gone. The sound of music was heard no longer on the canals, and Venice, at all times noiseless, and peculiar, seemed to sleep the sleep of the dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

The fisher came
From his green islet, bringing o'er the waves
His wife and little one; the husbandman
From the firm land, with many a friar and nun,
And village maiden, her first flight from home,
Crowding the common ferry.

ROGERS.

A BRIGHTER day than that which succeeded the night last mentioned, never dawned upon the massive domes, the gorgeous palaces, and the glittering canals of Venice. The sun had not been long above

the level of the Lido, before the strains of horns and trumpets arose from the square of St. Mark. They were answered, in full echoes, from the distant arsenal. A thousand gondolas glided from the canals, stealing in every direction across the port, the Giudecca, and the various outer channels of the place, while the well-known routes, from Fusina and the neighboring isles, were dotted with endless lines of boats, urging their way towards the capital.

The citizens began to assemble early, in their holiday attire, while thousands of contadini landed at the different bridges, clad in the gay costumes of the main. Before the day had far advanced, all the avenues of the great square were again thronged, and by the time the bells of the venerable cathedral had finished a peal of high rejoicing, St. Mark's again teemed with its gay multitude. Few appeared in masks, but pleasure seemed to lighten every eye, while the frank and unconcealed countenance willingly courted the observation and sympathy of its neighbors. In short, Venice and her people were seen, in all the gaiety and carelessness of a favorite Italian festa. The banners of the conquered nations flapped heavily on the triumphal masts, each church-tower hung out its image of the winged lion, and every palace was rich in its hangings of tapestry and silk, floating from balcony and window.

In the midst of this exhilarating and bright spectacle was heard the din of a hundred thousand voices. Above the constant hum, there arose, from time to time, the blasts of trumpets and the symphonies of rich music. Here the improvisatore, secretly employed by a politic and mysterious government, recounted, with a rapid utterance, and in language suited to the popular ear, at the foot of the spars which upheld the conquered banners of Candia, Crete, and the Morea, the ancient triumphs of the republic; while, there, a ballad-singer chaunted, to

the greedy crowd, the glory and justice of San Marco. Shouts of approbation succeeded each happy allusion to the national renown, and bravos, loud and oft-repeated, were the reward of the agents of the police, whenever they most administered to the self-delusion and vanity of their audience.

In the mean time, gondolas rich in carvings and gildings, and containing females renowned for grace and beauty, began to cluster, in hundreds, around the port. A general movement had already taken place among the shipping, and a wide and clear channel was opened from the quay, at the foot of the Piazzetta, to the distant bank, which shut out the waves of the Adriatic. Near this watery path, boats of all sizes and descriptions, filled with the curious and observant, were fast collecting.

The crowd thickened as the day drew in, all the vast plains of the Padovano appearing to have given up their people to swell the numbers of those that rejoiced. A few timid and irresolute masquers now began to appear in the throng, stealing a momentary pleasure under the favor of that privileged disguise, from out of the seclusion and monotony of their cloisters. Next came the rich marine equipages of the accredited agents of foreign states, and then, amid the sound of clarions and the cries of the populace, the Bucentaur rowed out of the channel of the arsenal, and came sweeping to her station, at the quay of St. Mark.

These preliminaries, which occupied some hours, being observed, the javelin-men, and others employed about the person of the head of the republic, were seen opening an avenue through the throng. After which, the rich strains of a hundred instruments, proclaimed the approach of the doge.

We shall not detain the narrative, to describe the pomp in which a luxurious and affluent aristocracy, that in general held itself aloof from familiar inter-

course with those it ruled, displayed its magnificence to the eyes of the multitude, on an occasion of popular rejoicing. Long lines of senators, dressed in their robes of office, and attended by crowds of liveried followers, came from under the galleries of the palace, and descended by the Giant's Stairway, into the sombre court. Thence, the whole issued into the Piazzetta, in order, and proceeded to their several stations, on the canopied deck of the well-known bark. Each patrician had his allotted place, and before the rear of the cortège had yet quitted the quay, there was a long and imposing row of grave legislators seated in the established order of their precedency. The ambassadors, the high dignitaries of the state, and the aged man, who had been chosen to bear the empty honors of sovereignty, still remained on the land, waiting, with the quiet of trained docility, the moment to embark. At this moment, a man of an embrowned visage, legs bare to the knee, and breast open to the breeze, rushed through the guards, and knelt on the stones of the quay, at his feet.

"Justice!—great prince!" cried the bold stranger; "justice and mercy! Listen to one, who has bled for St. Mark, and who hath his scars for his witnesses."

"Justice and mercy are not always companions," calmly observed he, who wore the horned bonnet, motioning to his officious attendants to let the intruder stay.

"Mighty prince! I come for the last."

"Who and what art thou?"

"A fisherman of the Lagunes. One named Antonio, who seeketh the liberty of the prop of his years—a glorious boy, that force and the policy of the state have torn from me."

"This should not be! Violence is not the attri-

bute of justice—but the youth hath offended the laws, and he suffereth for his crimes !”

“He is guilty, Excellent and most Serene Highness, of youth, and health, and strength, with some skill in the craft of the mariner. They have taken him, without warning or consent, for the service of the galleys, and have left me in my age, alone.”

The expression of pity, which had taken possession of the venerable features of the prince, changed instantly to a look of uneasiness and distrust. The eye, which just before had melted with compassion, became cold and set in its meaning, and signing to his guards, he bowed with dignity to the attentive and curious auditors, among the foreign agents, to proceed.

“Bear him away,” said an officer, who took his master’s meaning from the glance; “the ceremonies may not be retarded, for a prayer so idle.”

Antonio offered no resistance, but yielding to the pressure of those around him, he sunk back meekly, among the crowd, disappointment and sorrow giving place, for an instant, to an awe and an admiration of the gorgeous spectacle, that were perhaps in some degree inseparable from his condition and habits. In a few moments, the slight interruption produced by this short scene, was forgotten in the higher interest of the occasion.

When the ducal party had taken their places, and an admiral of reputation was in possession of the helm, the vast and gorgeous bark, with its gilded galleries thronged with attendants, swept away from the quây, with a grand and stately movement. Its departure was the signal for a new burst of trumpets and clarions, and for fresh acclamations from the people. The latter rushed to the edge of the water, and by the time the *Bucentaur* had reached the middle of the port, the stream was black with the gondolas that followed in her train. In this

manner did the gay and shouting cortège sweep on, some darting ahead of the principal bark, and some clinging, like smaller fish swimming around the leviathan, as near to her sides, as the fall of the ponderous oars would allow. As each effort of the crew sent the galley farther from the land, the living train seemed to extend itself, by some secret principle of expansion; nor was the chain of its apparent connexion entirely broken, until the Bucentaur had passed the island, long famous for its convent of religious Armenians. Here the movement became slower, in order to permit the thousand gondolas to approach, and then, the whole moved forward, in nearly one solid phalanx, to the landing of the Lido.

The marriage of the Adriatic, as the ceremony was quaintly termed, has been too often described to need a repetition here. Our business is rather with incidents of a private and personal nature than with descriptions of public events, and we shall pass over all that has no immediate connexion with the interest of the tale.

When the Bucentaur became stationary, a space around her stern was cleared, and the doge appeared in a rich gallery, so constructed as to exhibit the action to all in sight. He held a ring, glittering with precious stones, on high, and, pronouncing the words of betrothal, he dropped it upon the bosom of his fancied spouse. Shouts arose, trumpets blew their blasts, and each lady waved her handkerchief, in felicitation of the happy union. In the midst of the fracas—which was greatly heightened by the roar of cannon on board the cruisers in the channel, and from the guns in the arsenal—a boat glided into the open space beneath the gallery of the Bucentaur. The movement of the arm which directed the light gondola was dexterous and still strong, though the hairs of him who held the oar were thin and white.

A suppliant eye was cast up at the happy faces that adorned the state of the prince, and then the look was changed intently to the water. A small fisherman's buoy fell from the boat, which glided away so soon, that, amid the animation and uproar of that moment, the action was scarce heeded by the excited throng.

The aquatic procession now returned towards the city, the multitude rending the air with shouts at the happy termination of a ceremony, to which time and the sanction of the sovereign pontiff had given a species of sanctity that was somewhat increased by superstition. It is true that a few among the Venetians themselves regarded these famous nuptials of the Adriatic with indifference; and that several of the ministers of the northern and more maritime states, who were witnesses on the occasion, had scarcely concealed, as they cast glances of intelligence and pride among themselves, their smiles. Still, such was the influence of habit, for so much does even arrogant assumption, when long and perseveringly maintained, count among men, that neither the increasing feebleness of the republic, nor the known superiority of other powers on the very element which this pageant was intended to represent as the peculiar property of St. Mark, could yet cover the lofty pretension with the ridicule it merited. Time has since taught the world that Venice continued this idle deception for ages after both reason and modesty should have dictated its discontinuance; but, at the period of which we write, that ambitious, crapulous, and factitious state was rather beginning to feel the symptomatic evidence of its fading circumstances, than to be fully conscious of the swift progress of a downward course. In this manner do communities, like individuals, draw near their dissolution, inattentive to the symptoms of decay, until they are overtaken.

with that fate, which finally overwhelms empires and their power in the common lot of man.

The Bucentaur did not return directly to the quay, to disburthen itself of its grave and dignified load. The gaudy galley anchored in the centre of the port, and opposite to the wide mouth of the great canal. Officers had been busy, throughout the morning, in causing all the shipping and heavy boats, of which hundreds lay in that principal artery of the city, to remove from the centre of the passage, and heralds now summoned the citizens to witness the regatta, with which the public ceremonies of the day were to terminate.

Venice, from her peculiar formation and the vast number of her watermen, had long been celebrated for this species of amusement. Families were known and celebrated in her traditions for dexterous skill with the oar, as they were known in Rome for feats of a far less useful and of a more barbarous nature. It was usual to select from these races of watermen the most vigorous and skilful; and, after invoking the aid of patron-saints, and arousing their pride and recollections by songs that recounted the feats of their ancestors, to start them for the goal, with every incitement that pride and the love of victory could awaken.

Most of these ancient usages were still observed. As soon as the Bucentaur was in its station, some thirty or forty gondoliers were brought forth, clad in their gayest habiliments, and surrounded and supported by crowds of anxious friends and relatives. The intended competitors were expected to sustain the long-established reputations of their several names, and they were admonished of the disgrace of defeat. They were cheered by the men, and stimulated by the smiles and tears of the other sex. The rewards were recalled to their minds; they were fortified by prayers to the saints; and then

they were dismissed, amid the cries and the wishes of the multitude, to seek their allotted places beneath the stern of the galley of state.

It has already been mentioned in these pages, that the city of Venice is divided into two nearly equal parts by a channel much broader than that of the ordinary passages of the town. This dividing artery, from its superior size and depth, and its greater importance, is called the grand canal. Its course is not unlike that of an undulating line, which greatly increases its length. As it is much used by the larger boats of the bay—being, in fact, a sort of secondary port—and its width is so considerable, it has throughout the whole distance but one bridge—the celebrated Rialto. The regatta was to be held on this canal, which offered the requisites of length and space, and which, as it was lined with most of the palaces of the principal senators, afforded all the facilities necessary for viewing the struggle.

In passing from one end of this long course to the other, the men destined for the race were not permitted to make any exertion. Their eyes roamed over the gorgeous hangings, which, as is still wont throughout Italy on all days of festa, floated from every window, and on groups of females in rich attire, brilliant with the peculiar charms of the famed Venetian beauty, that clustered in the balconies. Those who were domestics, rose and answered to the encouraging signals thrown from above, as they passed the palaces of their masters; while those who were watermen of the public, endeavored to gather hope among the sympathizing faces of the multitude.

At length every formality had been duly observed, and the competitors assumed their places. The gondolas were much larger than those commonly used, and each was manned by three watermen, in

the centre, directed by a fourth, who, standing on the little deck in the stern, steered, while he aided to impel the boat. There were light, low staffs in the bows, with flags, that bore the distinguishing colors of several noble families of the republic, or which had such other simple devices as had been suggested by the fancies of those to whom they belonged. A few flourishes of the oars, resembling the preparatory movements which the master of fence makes ere he begins to push and parry, were given; a whirling of the boats, like the prancing of curbed racers, succeeded; and then at the report of a gun, the whole darted away as if the gondolas were impelled by volition. The start was followed by a shout, which passed swiftly along the canal, and an eager agitation of heads that went from balcony to balcony, till the sympathetic movement was communicated to the grave load under which the Bucen-taur labored.

For a few minutes the difference in force and skill was not very obvious. Each gondola glided along the element, apparently with that ease with which a light-winged swallow skims the lake, and with no visible advantage to any one of the ten. Then, as more art in him who steered, or greater powers of endurance in those who rowed, or some of the latent properties of the boat itself, came into service, the cluster of little barks, which had come off like a closely-united flock of birds taking flight together in alarm, began to open, till they formed a long and vacillating line, in the centre of the passage. The whole train shot beneath the bridge, so near each other as to render it still doubtful which was to conquer, and the exciting strife came more in view of the principal personages of the city.

But here those radical qualities, which insure success in efforts of this nature, manifested themselves. The weaker began to yield, the train to

lengthen, and hopes and fears to increase, until those in the front presented the exhilarating spectacle of success, while those behind offered the still more noble sight of men struggling without hope. Gradually the distances between the boats increased, while that between them and the goal grew rapidly less, until three of those in advance came in, like glancing arrows, beneath the stern of the Bucen-taur, with scarce a length between them. The prize was won, the conquerors were rewarded, and the artillery gave forth the usual signals of rejoicing. Music answered to the roar of cannon and the peals of bells, while sympathy with success, that predominant and so often dangerous principle of our nature, drew shouts even from the disappointed.

The clamor ceased, and a herald proclaimed aloud the commencement of a new and a different struggle. The last, and what might be termed the national race, had been limited, by an ancient usage, to the known and recognized gondoliers of Venice. The prize had been awarded by the state, and the whole affair had somewhat of an official and political character. It was now announced, however, that a race was to be run, in which the reward was open to all competitors, without question as to their origin, or as to their ordinary occupations. An oar of gold, to which was attached a chain of the same precious metal, was exhibited as the boon of the doge to him who showed most dexterity and strength in this new struggle; while a similar ornament of silver was to be the portion of him, who showed the second-best dexterity and bottom. A mimic boat, of less precious metal, was the third prize. The gondolas were to be the usual light vehicles of the canals, and as the object was to display the peculiar skill of that city of islands, but one oarsman was allowed to each, on whom would necessarily fall the whole duty of guiding,

while he impelled his little bark. Any of those who had been engaged in the previous trial were admitted to this; and all desirous of taking part in the new struggle were commanded to come beneath the stern of the Bucentaur, within a prescribed number of minutes, that note might be had of their wishes. As notice of this arrangement had been previously given, the interval between the two races was not long.

The first who came out of the crowd of boats, which environed the vacant place that had been left for the competitors, was a gondolier of the public landing, well known for his skill with the oar, and his song on the canal.

"How art thou called, and in whose name dost thou put thy chance?" demanded the herald of this aquatic course.

"All know me for Bartolomeo, one who lives between the Piazzetta and the Lido, and, like a loyal Venetian, I trust in San Teodoro."

"Thou art well protected; take thy place, and await thy fortune."

The conscious waterman swept the water with a back stroke of his blade, and the light gondola whirled away into the centre of the vacant spot, like a swan giving a sudden glance aside.

"And who art thou?" demanded the official of the next that came.

"Enrico, a gondolier of Fusina. I come to try my oar with the braggarts of the canals."

"In whom is thy trust?"

"Sant' Antonio di Padua."

"Thou wilt need his aid, though we commend thy spirit. Enter, and take place."—"And who art thou?" he continued, to another, when the second had imitated the easy skill of the first.

"I am called Gino of Calabria, a gondolier in private service."

“What noble retaineth thee?”

“The illustrious and most excellent Don Camillo Monforte, Duca and Lord of Sant’ Agata in Napoli, and of right a senator in Venice.”

“Thou should’st have come of Padua, friend, by thy knowledge of the laws!—Dost thou trust in him thou servest for the victory?”

There was a movement among the senators at the answer of Gino; and the half-terrified varlet thought he perceived frowns gathering on more than one brow. He looked around in quest of him whose greatness he had vaunted, as if he sought succor.

“Wilt thou name thy support in this great trial of force?” resumed the herald.

“My master,” uttered the terrified Gino, “St. Januarius, and St. Mark.”

“Thou art well defended. Should the two latter fail thee, thou mayest surely count on the first!”

“Signor Monforte has an illustrious name, and he is welcome to our Venetian sports,” observed the doge, slightly bending his head towards the young Calabrian noble, who stood at no great distance, in a gondola of state, regarding the scene with a deeply-interested countenance. This cautious interruption of the pleasantries of the official was acknowledged by a low reverence, and the matter proceeded.

“Take thy station, Gino of Calabria, and a happy fortune be thine,” said the latter; then turning to another, he asked in surprise—“Why art thou here?”

“I come to try my gondola’s swiftness.”

“Thou art old, and unequal to this struggle; husband thy strength for daily toil. An ill-advised ambition hath put thee on this useless trial.”

The new aspirant had forced a common fisherman’s gondola, of no bad shape, and of sufficient

lightness, but which bore about it all the vulgar signs of its daily uses, beneath the gallery of the Bucentaur. He received the reproof meekly, and was about to turn his boat aside, though with a sorrowing and mortified eye, when a sign from the doge arrested his arm.

"Question him, as of wont," said the prince.

"How art thou named?" continued the reluctant official, who, like all of subordinate condition, had far more jealousy of the dignity of the sports he directed, than his superior.

"I am known as Antonio, a fisherman of the Lagoon."

"Thou art old!"

"Signore, none know it better than I. It is sixty summers since I first threw net, or line, into the water."

"Nor art thou clad, as befitteth one who cometh before the state of Venice, in a regatta."

"I am here in the best that I have. Let them who would do the nobles greater honor, come in better."

"Thy limbs are uncovered—thy bosom bare—thy sinews feeble—go to; thou art ill advised to interrupt the pleasures of the nobles, by this levity."

Again Antonio would have shrunk from the ten thousand eyes that shone upon him, when the calm voice of the doge once more came to his aid.

"The struggle is open to all," said the sovereign; "still I would advise the poor and aged man to take counsel; give him silver, for want urges him to this hopeless trial."

"Thou hearest; alms are offered thee; but give place to those who are stronger, and more seemly, for the sport."

"I will obey, as is the duty of one born and accustomed to poverty. They said the race was open

to all, and I crave the pardon of the nobles, since I meant to do them no dishonor."

"Justice in the palace, and justice on the canals," hastily observed the prince. "If he will continue, it is his right. It is the pride of St. Mark that his balances are held with an even hand."

A murmur of applause succeeded the specious sentiment, for the powerful rarely affect the noble attribute of justice, however limited may be its exercise, without their words finding an echo in the tongues of the selfish.

"Thou hearest—His Highness, who is the voice of a mighty state, says thou mayest remain;—though thou art still advised to withdraw."

"I will then see what virtue is left in this naked arm," returned Antonio, casting a mournful glance, and one that was not entirely free from the latent vanity of man, at his meagre and threadbare attire. "The limb hath its scars, but the infidels may have spared enough, for the little I ask."

"In whom is thy faith?"

"Blessed St. Anthony, of the Miraculous Draught."

"Take thy place.—Ha! here cometh one unwilling to be known! How now! who appears with so false a face?"

"Call me, Mask."

"So neat and just a leg and arm, need not have hid their fellow, the countenance. Is it Your Highness's pleasure that one disguised should be entered for the sports?"

"Doubt it not. A mask is sacred in Venice. It is the glory of our excellent and wise laws, that he who seeketh to dwell within the privacy of his own thoughts, and to keep aloof from curiosity by shadowing his features, rangeth our streets and canals, as if he dwelt in the security of his own abode. Such are the high privileges of liberty, and such it

is to be a citizen of a generous, a magnanimous, and a free state!"

A thousand bowed in approbation of the sentiment, and a rumor passed, from mouth to mouth, that a young noble was about to try his strength, in the regatta, in compliment to some wayward beauty.

"Such is justice!" exclaimed the herald, in a loud voice, admiration apparently overcoming respect, in the ardor of the moment. "Happy is he that is born in Venice, and envied are the people in whose councils, wisdom and mercy preside, like lovely and benignant sisters! On whom dost thou rely?"

"Mine own arm."

"Ha! This is impious! None so presuming may enter into these privileged sports."

The hurried exclamation of the herald was accompanied by a general stir, such as denotes sudden and strong emotion in a multitude.

"The children of the republic are protected by an even hand," observed the venerable prince. "It formeth our just pride, and blessed St. Mark forbid that aught resembling vain-glory should be uttered! but it is truly our boast that we know no difference between our subjects of the islands, or those of the Dalmatian coast; between Padua, or Candia; Corfu, or St. Giorgio. Still it is not permitted for any to refuse the intervention of the saints."

"Name thy patron, or quit the place," continued the observant herald, anew.

The stranger paused, as if he looked into his mind, and then he answered—

"San Giovanni of the Wilderness."

"Thou namest one of blessed memory!"

"I name him who may have pity on me, in this living desert."

"The temper of thy soul is best known to thyself, but this reverend rank of patricians, yonder brilliant

show of beauty, and that goodly multitude, may claim another name.—Take thy place.”

While the herald proceeded to take the names of three or four more applicants, all gondoliers in private service, a murmur ran through the spectators, which proved how much their interest and curiosity had been awakened, by the replies and appearance of the two last competitors. In the mean time, the young nobles who entertained those who came last, began to move among the throng of boats, with the intention of making such manifestations of their gallant desires, and personal devotion, as suited the customs and opinions of the age. The list was now proclaimed to be full, and the gondolas were towed off, as before, towards the starting point, leaving the place, beneath the stern of the Bucentaur, vacant. The scene that followed, consequently passed directly before the eyes of those grave men, who charged themselves with most of the private interests, as well as with the public concerns of Venice.

There were many unmasked and high-born dames, whirling about in their boats, attended by cavaliers in rich attire, and, here and there, appeared a pair of dark lustrous eyes, peeping through the silk of a visor, that concealed some countenance too youthful for exposure, in so gay a scene. One gondola, in particular, was remarked for the singular grace and beauty of the form it held, qualities which made themselves apparent, even through the half-disguise of the simple habiliments she wore. The boat, the servants, and the ladies, for there were two, were alike distinguished for that air of severe but finished simplicity, which oftener denotes the presence of high quality and true taste, than a more lavish expenditure of vulgar ornament. A Carmelite, whose features were concealed by his cowl, testified that their condition was high, and lent a dignity to their presence, by his reverend and grave protection. A

hundred gondolas approached this party, and after as many fruitless efforts to penetrate the disguises, glided away, while whispers and interrogatories passed from one to the other, to learn the name and station of the youthful beauty. At length, a gay bark, with watermen in gorgeous liveries, and in whose equipment there was a studied display of magnificence, came into the little circle that curiosity had drawn together. The single cavalier, who occupied the seat, arose, for few gondolas appeared that day with their gloomy-looking and mysterious pavilions, and saluted the masked females, with the ease of one accustomed to all presences, but with the reserve of deep respect.

"I have a favorite follower in this race," he said gallantly, "and one in whose skill and force I put great trust. Until now, I have uselessly sought a lady of a beauty and merit so rare, as to warrant that I should place his fortune on her smiles. But I seek no farther."

"You are gifted with a keen sight, Signore, that you discover all you seek beneath these masks," returned one of the two females, while their companion, the Carmelite, bowed graciously to the compliment, which seemed little more than was warranted by the usage of such scenes.

"There are other means of recognition than the eyes, and other sources of admiration than the senses, lady. Conceal yourselves as you will, here do I know that I am near the fairest face, the warmest heart, and the purest mind of Venice!"

"This is bold augury, Signore," returned she, who was evidently the oldest of the two, glancing a look at her companion, as if to note the effect of this gallant speech. "Venice has a name for the beauty of its dames, and the sun of Italy warms many a generous heart."

"Better that such noble gifts should be directed

to the worship of the Creator than of the creature," murmured the monk.

"Some there are, holy father, who have admiration for both. Such I would fain hope is the happy lot of her who is favored with the spiritual counsel of one so virtuous and wise as yourself. Here I place my fortune, let what may follow; and here would I gladly place a heavier stake, were it permitted."

As the cavalier spoke, he tendered to the silent fair a bouquet of the sweetest and most fragrant flowers; and among them were those to which poets and custom have ascribed the emblematic qualities of constancy and love. She, to whom this offering of gallantry was made, hesitated to accept it. It much exceeded the reserve imposed on one of her station and years, to allow of such homage from the other sex, though the occasion was generally deemed one that admitted of more than usual gallantry; and she evidently shrunk, with the sensitiveness of one whose feelings were unpractised, from an homage so public.

"Receive the flowers, my love," mildly whispered her companion; "the cavalier who offers them simply intends to show the quality of his breeding."

"That will be seen in the end," hastily returned Don Camillo—for it was he. "Signore, adieu; we have met on this water when there was less restraint between us."

He bowed, and signing to his gondolier, was quickly lost in the crowd of boats. Ere the barks, however, were separated, the mask of the silent fair was slightly moved, as if she sought relief from the air; and the Neapolitan was rewarded for his gallantry, by a momentary glance at the glowing countenance of Violetta.

"Thy guardian hath a displeased eye," hurriedly

observed Donna Florinda. "I wonder that we should be known!"

"I should more wonder that we were not. I could recall the noble Neapolitan cavalier amid a million! Thou dost not remember all that I owe to him!"

Donna Florinda did not answer; but, in secret, she offered up a fervent prayer that the obligation might be blessed to the future happiness of her who had received it. There was a furtive and uneasy glance between her and the Carmelite; but, as neither spoke, a long and thoughtful silence succeeded the rencontre.

From this musing, the party, in common with all the gay and laughing multitude by which they were surrounded, were reminded of the business on which they were assembled by the signal-gun, the agitation on the great canal nearest the scene of strife, and a clear blast of the trumpets. But in order that the narrative may proceed regularly, it is fit that we should return, a little, in the order of time.

CHAPTER IX.

Here art thou in appointment fresh and fair,
Anticipating time with starting courage.

SHAKESPEARE.

It has been seen that the gondolas, which were to contend in the race, had been towed towards the place of starting, in order that the men might enter on the struggle with undiminished vigor. In this precaution, even the humble and half-clad fisherman had not been neglected, but his boat, like the others, was attached to the larger barges to which this dut

had been assigned. Still, as he passed along the canal, before the crowded balconies and groaning vessels which lined its sides, there arose that scornful and deriding laugh, which seems ever to grow more strong and bold, as misfortune weighs most heavily on its subject.

The old man was not unconscious of the remarks of which he was the subject; and, as it is rare indeed that our sensibilities do not survive our better fortunes, even he was so far conscious of a fall as not to be callous to contempt thus openly expressed. He looked wistfully on every side of him, and seemed to search, in every eye he encountered, some portion of the sympathy which his meek and humble feelings still craved. But even the men of his caste and profession threw jibes upon his ear; and, though of all the competitors perhaps the one whose motive most hallowed his ambition, he was held to be the only proper subject of mirth. For the solution of this revolting trait of human character, we are not to look to Venice and her institutions, since it is known that none are so arrogant, on occasions, as the ridden, and that the abject and insolent spirits are usually tenants of the same bosom.

The movement of the boats brought those of the masked waterman and the subject of these taunts side by side.

"Thou art not the favorite in this strife," observed the former, when a fresh burst of jibes were showered on the head of his unresisting associate. "Thou hast not been sufficiently heedful of thy attire; for this is a town of luxury, and he who would meet applause must appear on the canals in the guise of one less borne upon by fortune."

"I know them! I know them!" returned the fisherman; "they are led away by their pride, and they think ill of one who cannot share in their vanities. But, friend unknown, I have brought with me a face

which, old though it be, and wrinkled, and worn by the weather like the stones of the sea-shore, is uncovered to the eye, and without shame."

"There may be reasons which thou knowest not, why I wear a mask. But if my face be hid, the limbs are bare, and thou seest there is no lack of sinews to make good that which I have undertaken. Thou should'st have thought better of the matter, ere thou putttest thyself in the way of so much mortification. Defeat will not cause the people to treat thee more tenderly."

"If my sinews are old and stiffened, Signor Mask, they are long used to toil. As to shame, if it is a shame to be below the rest of mankind in fortune, it will not now come for the first time. A heavy sorrow hath befallen me, and this race may lighten the burthen of grief. I shall not pretend that I hear this laughter, and all these scornful speeches as one listens to the evening breeze on the Lagunes—for a man is still a man, though he lives with the humblest, and eats of the coarsest. But let it pass; Sant' Antonio will give me heart to bear it."

"Thou hast a stout mind, fisherman; and I would gladly pray my patron to grant thee a stronger arm, but that I have much need of this victory myself. Wilt thou be content with the second prize, if, by any manner of skill, I might aid thee in thy efforts?—for, I suppose, the metal of the third is as little to thy taste as it is to my own."

"Nay, I count not on gold, or silver."

"Can the honor of such a struggle awaken the pride of one like thee?"

The old man looked earnestly at his companion; but he shook his head, without answer. Fresh merriment, at his expense, caused him to bend his face towards the scoffers; and he perceived they were, just then, passing a numerous group of his fellows of the Lagunes, who seemed to feel that his unjusti-

fiable ambition reflected, in some degree, on the honor of their whole body.

"How now, old Antonio!" shouted the boldest of the band—"is it not enough that thou hast won the honors of the net, but thou would'st have a golden oar at thy neck?"

"We shall yet see him of the senate!" cried a second.

"He standeth in need of the horned bonnet for his naked head," continued a third. "We shall see the brave Admiral Antonio, sailing in the Bucentaur, with the nobles of the land!"

Their sallies were succeeded by coarse laughter. Even the fair, in the balconies, were not uninfluenced by these constant jibes, and the apparent discrepancy between the condition and the means of so unusual a pretender to the honors of the regatta. The purpose of the old man wavered; but he seemed goaded by some inward incentive that still enabled him to maintain his ground. His companion closely watched the varying expression of a countenance that was far too little trained in deception to conceal the feelings within; and, as they approached the place of starting, he again spoke.

"Thou mayest yet withdraw," he said;—"why should one of thy years make the little time he has to stay bitter, by bearing the ridicule of his associates for the rest of his life?"

"St. Anthony did a greater wonder, when he caused the fishes to come upon the waters to hear his preaching, and I will not show a cowardly heart, at a moment when there is most need of resolution."

The masked waterman crossed himself devoutly; and, relinquishing all further design to persuade the other to abandon the fruitless contest, he gave all his thoughts to his own interest in the coming struggle.

The narrowness of most of the canals of Venice.

with the innumerable angles and the constant passing, have given rise to a fashion of construction and of rowing that are so peculiar to that city and its immediate dependencies as to require some explanation. The reader has doubtless already understood that a gondola is a long, narrow, and light boat, adapted to the uses of the place, and distinct from the wherries of all other towns. The distance between the dwellings, on most of the canals, is so small, that the width of the latter does not admit of the use of oars on both sides at the same time. The necessity of constantly turning aside to give room for others, and the frequency of the bridges and the corners, have suggested the expediency of placing the face of the waterman in the direction in which the boat is steering, and, of course, of keeping him on his feet. As every gondola, when fully equipped, has its pavilion in the centre, the height of the latter renders it necessary to place him who steers on such an elevation, as will enable him to overlook it. From these several causes, a one-oared boat, in Venice, is propelled by a gondolier who stands on a little angular deck in its stern, formed like the low roof of a house; and the stroke of the oar is given by a push, instead of a pull, as is common elsewhere. This habit of rowing erect, however, which is usually done by a forward, instead of a backward, movement of the body, is not unfrequent in all the ports of the Mediterranean, though in no other is there a boat which resembles the gondola in all its properties, or uses. The upright position of the gondolier requires that the pivot on which the oar rests should have a corresponding elevation; and there is, consequently, a species of bumkin, raised from the side of the boat, to the desired height, and which, being formed of a crooked and very irregular knee of wood, has two or three row-locks, one above the other, to suit the stature of different mdi-

viduals, or to give a broader or a narrower sweep of the blade as the movement shall require. As there is frequent occasion to cast the oar from one of these row-locks to the other, and not unfrequently to change its side, it rests in a very open bed; and the instrument is kept in its place by great dexterity alone, and by a perfect knowledge of the means of accommodating the force and the rapidity of the effort to the forward movement of the boat and the resistance of the water. All these difficulties united, render skill in a gondolier one of the most delicate branches of a waterman's art, as it is clear that muscular strength alone, though of great aid, can avail but little in such a practice.

The great canal of Venice, following its windings, being more than a league in length, the distance in the present race was reduced nearly half, by causing the boats to start from the Rialto. At this point, then, the gondolas were all assembled, attended by those who were to place them. As the whole of the population which, before, had been extended along the entire course of the water, was now crowded between the bridge and the Bucentaur, the long and graceful avenue resembled a vista of human heads. It was an imposing sight to look along that bright and living lane, and the hearts of each competitor beat high, as hope, or pride, or apprehension, became the feeling of the moment.

"Gino of Calabria," cried the marshal who placed the gondolas, "thy station is on the right. Take it, and St. Januarius speed thee!"

The servitor of Don Camillo assumed his oar, and the boat glided gracefully into its berth.

"Thou comest next, Enrico of Fusina. Call stoutly on thy Paduan patron, and husband thy strength; for none of the main have ever yet borne away a prize in Venice."

He then summoned, in succession, those whose

names have not been mentioned, and placed them, side by side, in the centre of the canal.

"Here is place for thee, Signore," continued the officer, inclining his head to the unknown gondolier; for he had imbibed the general impression that the face of some young patrician was concealed beneath the mask, to humor the fancy of some capricious fair.—"Chance hath given thee the extreme left."

"Thou hast forgotten to call the fisherman," observed the masker, as he drove his own gondola into its station.

"Does the hoary fool persist in exposing his vanity and his rags to the best of Venice?"

"I can take place in the rear," meekly observed Antonio. "There may be those in the line it doth not become one like me to crowd; and a few strokes of the oar, more or less, can differ but little, in so long a strife."

"Thou hadst better push modesty to discretion, and remain."

"If it be your pleasure, Signore, I would rather see what St. Anthony may do for an old fisherman, who has prayed to him, night and morning, these sixty years?"

"It is thy right; and, as thou seemest content with it, keep the place thou hast in the rear. It is only occupying it a little earlier than thou would'st otherwise. Now, recall the rules of the games, hardy gondoliers, and make thy last appeal to thy patrons. There is to be no crossing, or other foul expedients; naught except ready oars, and nimble wrists. He who varies, needlessly, from his line until he leadeth, shall be recalled by name; and whoever is guilty of any act to spoil the sports, or otherwise to offend the patricians, shall be both checked and punished. Be ready for the signal."

The assistant, who was in a strongly manned boat, fell back a little, while runners, similarly

equipped, went ahead to order the curious from the water. These preparations were scarcely made, when a signal floated on the nearest dome. It was repeated on the campanile, and a gun was fired at the arsenal. A deep but suppressed murmur arose in the throng, which was as quickly succeeded by suspense.

Each gondolier had suffered the bows of his boat to incline slightly toward the left shore of the canal, as the jockey is seen, at the starting-post, to turn his courser aside, in order to repress its ardor, or divert its attention. But the first long and broad sweep of the oar brought them all in a line again, and away they glided in a body.

For the first few minutes there was no difference in speed, nor any sign by which the instructed might detect the probable evidence of defeat or success. The whole ten, which formed the front line, skimmed the water with an equal velocity, beak to beak, as if some secret attraction held each in its place, while the humble, though equally light bark of the fisherman steadily kept its position in the rear.

The boats were soon held in command. The oars got their justest poise and widest sweep, and the wrists of the men accustomed to their play. The line began to waver. It undulated, the glittering prow of one protruding beyond the others; and then it changed its form. Enrico of Fusina shot ahead, and, privileged by success, he insensibly sheered more into the centre of the canal, avoiding, by the change, the eddies, and the other obstructions of the shore. This manœuvre which, in the language of the course, would have been called "taking the track," had the additional advantage of throwing upon those who followed some trifling impediment from the back-water. The sturdy and practised Bartolomeo of the Lido, as his companions usually called him, came next, occupying the space on his

leader's quarter, where he suffered least from the reaction caused by the stroke of his oar. The gondolier of Don Camillo, also, soon shot out of the crowd, and was seen plying his arms vigorously still farther to the right, and a little in the rear of Bartolomeo. Then came, in the centre of the canal, and near as might be in the rear of the triumphant waterman of the main, a dense body, with little order and varying positions, compelling each other to give way, and otherwise increasing the difficulties of their struggle. More to the left, and so near to the palaces as barely to allow room for the sweep of his oar, was the masked competitor, whose progress seemed retarded by some unseen cause, for he gradually fell behind all the others, until several boats' lengths of open water lay between him and even the group of his nameless opponents. Still he plied his arms steadily, and with sufficient skill. As the interest of mystery had been excited in his favor, a rumor passed up the canal, that the young cavalier had been little favored by fortune in the choice of a boat. Others, who reflected more deeply on causes, whispered of the folly of one of his habits, taking the risk of mortification by a competition with men whose daily labor had hardened their sinews, and whose practice enabled them to judge closely of every chance of the race. But when the eyes of the multitude turned from the cluster of passing boats to the solitary barge of the fisherman, who came singly on in the rear, admiration was again turned to derision.

Antonio had cast aside the cap he wore of wont, and the few straggling hairs that were left streamed about his hollow temples, leaving the whole of his swarthy features exposed to view. More than once, as the gondola came on, his eyes turned aside reproachfully, as if he keenly felt the stings of so many unlicensed tongues applied to feelings which, though

blunted by his habits and condition, were far from extinguished. Laugh rose above laugh, however, and taunt succeeded taunt more bitterly, as the boats came among the gorgeous palaces, which lined the canal nearer to the goal. It was not that the owners of these lordly piles indulged in the unfeeling triumph, but their dependants, constantly subject themselves to the degrading influence of a superior presence, let loose the long-pent torrents of their arrogance, on the head of the first unresisting subject which offered.

Antonio bore all these jibes manfully, if not in tranquillity, and always without retort, until he again approached the spot occupied by his companions of the Lagunes. Here his eye sunk under the reproaches, and his oar faltered. The taunts and denunciations increased as he lost ground, and there was a moment when the rebuked and humbled spirit of the old man seemed about to relinquish the contest. But dashing a hand across his brow, as if to clear a sight which had become dimmed and confused, he continued to ply the oar, and, happily, he was soon past the point most trying to his resolution. From this moment the cries against the fisherman diminished, and as the Bucentaur, though still distant, was now in sight, interest in the issue of the race absorbed all other feelings.

Enrico still kept the lead; but the judges of the gondolier's skill began to detect signs of exhaustion in his faltering stroke. The waterman of the Lido pressed him hard, and the Calabrian was drawing more into a line with them both. At this moment, too, the masked competitor exhibited a force and skill that none had expected to see in one of his supposed rank. His body was thrown more upon the effort of the oar, and as his leg was stretched behind to aid the stroke, it discovered a volume of muscle, and an excellence of proportion, that excit-

ed murmurs of applause. The consequence was soon apparent. His gondola glided past the crowd, in the centre of the canal, and by a change that was nearly insensible, he became the fourth in the race. The shouts which rewarded his success had scarcely parted from the multitude, ere their admiration was called to a new and an entirely unexpected aspect in the struggle.

Left to his own exertions, and less annoyed by that derision and contempt which often defeat even more generous exertions, Antonio had drawn nearer to the crowd of nameless competitors. Though undistinguished in this narrative, there were seen, in that group of gondoliers, faces well known on the canals of Venice, as belonging to watermen, in whose dexterity and force the city took pride. Either favored by his isolated position, or availing himself of the embarrassment these men gave to each other, the despised fisherman was seen a little on their left, coming up abreast, with a stroke and velocity that promised farther success. The expectation was quickly realized. He passed them all, amid a dead and wondering silence, and took his station, as fifth in the struggle.

From this moment all interest in those who formed the vulgar mass was lost. Every eye was turned towards the front, where the strife increased at each stroke of the oar, and where the issue began to assume a new and doubtful character. The exertions of the waterman of Fusina were seemingly redoubled, though his boat went no faster. The gondola of Bartolomeo shot past him; it was followed by those of Gino and the masked gondolier, while not a cry betrayed the breathless interest of the multitude. But when the boat of Antonio also swept ahead, there arose such a hum of voices as escapes a throng, when a sudden and violent change of feeling is produced in their wayward sentiments.

Enrico was frantic with the disgrace. He urged every power of his frame to avert the dishonor, with the desperate energy of an Italian, and then he cast himself into the bottom of the gondola, tearing his hair and weeping, in agony. His example was followed by those in the rear, though with more governed feelings, for they shot aside among the boats which lined the canal, and were lost to view.

From this open and unexpected abandonment of the struggle, the spectators got the surest evidence of its desperate character. But as a man has little sympathy for the unfortunate, when his feelings are excited by competition, the defeated were quickly forgotten. The name of Bartolomeo was borne high upon the winds, by a thousand voices, and his fellows of the Piazzetta and the Lido called upon him, aloud, to die for the honor of their craft. Well did the sturdy gondolier answer to their wishes, for palace after palace was left behind, and no further change was made in the relative positions of the boats. But, like his predecessor, the leader redoubled his efforts, with a diminished effect, and Venice had the mortification of seeing a stranger leading one of the most brilliant of her regattas. Bartolomeo no sooner lost place, than Gino, the masker, and the despised Antonio, in turn, shot by, leaving him who had so lately been first in the race, the last. He did not, however, relinquish the strife, but continued to struggle with the energy of one who merited a better fortune.

When this unexpected and entirely new character was given to the contest, there still remained a broad sheet of water, between the advancing gondolas and the goal. Gino led, and with many favorable symptoms of his being able to maintain his advantage. He was encouraged by the shouts of the multitude, who now forgot his Calabrian origin, in his success, while many of the serving-men of his

master, cheered him on, by name. All would not do. The masked waterman, for the first time, threw the grandeur of his skill and force into the oar. The ashen instrument bent to the power of an arm, whose strength appeared to increase at will, and the movements of his body became rapid as the leaps of the grayhound. The pliant gondola obeyed, and amid a shout which passed from the Piazzetta to the Rialto, it glided ahead.

If success gives force and increases the physical and moral energies, there is a fearful and certain reaction in defeat. The follower of Don Camillo was no exception to the general law, and when the masked competitor passed him, the boat of Antonio followed as if it were impelled by the same strokes. The distance between the two leading gondolas even now seemed to lessen, and there was a moment of breathless interest, when all there expected to see the fisherman, in despite of his years and boat, shooting past his rival.

But expectation was deceived. He of the mask, notwithstanding his previous efforts, seemed to sport with the toil, so ready was the sweep of his oar, so sure its stroke, and so vigorous the arm by which it was impelled. Nor was Antonio an antagonist to despise. If there was less of the grace of a practised gondolier of the canals in his attitudes, than in those of his companion, there was no relaxation in the force of his sinews. They sustained him to the last, with that enduring power which had been begotten by threescore years of unremitting labor, and while his still athletic form was exerted to the utmost, there appeared no failing of its energies.

A few moments sent the leading gondolas several lengths ahead of their nearest followers. The dark beak of the fisherman's boat hung upon the quarter of the more showy bark of his antagonist, but it could do no more. The port was open before them,

and they glanced by church, palace, barge, mystick, and felucca, without the slightest inequality in their relative speed. The masked waterman glanced a look behind, as if to calculate his advantage, and then bending again to his pliant oar, he spoke, loud enough to be heard only by him who pressed so hard upon his track.

"Thou hast deceived me, fisherman!" he said; "there is more of manhood in thee, yet, than I had thought."

"If there is manhood in my arms, there is childishness and sorrow at the heart;" was the reply.

"Dost thou so prize a golden bauble? Thou art second; be content with thy lot."

"It will not do; I must be foremost, or I have wearied my old limbs in vain!"

This brief dialogue was uttered, with an ease that showed how far use had accustomed both to powerful bodily efforts, and with a firmness of tones, that few could have equalled, in a moment of so great physical effort. The masker was silent, but his purpose seemed to waver. Twenty strokes of his powerful oar-blade, and the goal was attained: but his sinews were not so much extended, and that limb, which had shown so fine a development of muscle, was less swollen and rigid. The gondola of old Antonio glided abeam.

"Push thy soul into the blade," muttered he of the mask, "or thou wilt yet be beaten!"

The fisherman threw every effort of his body on the coming effort, and he gained a fathom. Another stroke caused the boat to quiver to its centre, and the water curled from its bows, like the ripple of a rapid. Then the gondola darted between the two goal-barges, and the little flags that marked the point of victory fell into the water. The action was scarce noted, ere the glittering beak of the masquer shot past the eyes of the judges, who

doubted, for an instant, on whom success had fallen. Gino was not long behind, and after him came Bartolomeo, fourth and last, in the best-contested race which had ever been seen on the waters of Venice.

When the flags fell, men held their breaths in suspense. Few knew the victor, so close had been the struggle. But a flourish of the trumpets soon commanded attention, and then a herald proclaimed, that—

“Antonio, a fisherman of the Lagunes, favored by his holy patron of the Miraculous Draught, had borne away the prize of gold—while a waterman, who wore his face concealed, but who hath trusted to the care of the blessed San Giovanni of the Wilderness, is worthy of the silver prize, and that the third had fallen to the fortunes of Gino of Calabria, a servitor of the illustrious Don Camillo Monforte, Duca di Sant’ Agata, and lord of many Neapolitan Seignories.”

When this formal announcement was made, there succeeded a silence like that of the tomb. Then there arose a general shout among the living mass, which bore on high the name of Antonio, as if they celebrated the success of some conqueror. All feeling of contempt was lost in the influence of his triumph. The fishermen of the Lagunes, who so lately had loaded their aged companion with contumely, shouted for his glory, with a zeal that manifested the violence of the transition from mortification to pride, and, as has ever been and ever will be the meed of success, he who was thought least likely to obtain it, was most greeted with praise and adulation, when it was found that the end had disappointed expectation. Ten thousand voices were lifted, in proclaiming his skill and victory, and young and old, the fair, the gay, the noble, the winner of sequins and he who lost, struggled alike, to catch a glimpse of the humble old man, who had so unex-

pectedly wrought this change of sentiment in the feelings of a multitude.

Antonio bore his triumph meekly. When his gondola had reached the goal, he checked its course, and, without discovering any of the usual signs of exhaustion, he remained standing, though the deep heaving of his broad and tawny chest, proved that his powers had been taxed to their utmost. He smiled as the shouts arose on his ear, for praise is grateful, even to the meek; still he seemed oppressed, with an emotion of a character deeper than pride. Age had somewhat dimmed his eye, but it was now full of hope. His features worked, and a single burning drop fell on each rugged cheek. The fisherman then breathed more freely.

Like his successful antagonist, the waterman of the mask betrayed none of the debility which usually succeeds great bodily exertion. His knees were motionless, his hands still grasped the oar firmly, and he too kept his feet with a steadiness that showed the physical perfection of his frame. On the other hand, both Gino and Bartolomeo sunk in their respective boats, as they gained the goal, in succession; and so exhausted was each of these renowned gondoliers, that several moments elapsed before either had breath for speech. It was during this momentary pause that the multitude proclaimed its sympathy with the victor, by their longest and loudest shouts. The noise had scarcely died away, however, before a herald summoned Antonio of the Lagunes, the masked waterman of the Blessed St. John of the Wilderness, and Gino the Calabrian, to the presence of the doge, whose princely hand was to bestow the promised prizes of the regatta.

CHAPTER X.

We shall not spend a large expense of time,
Before we reckon with your several loves,
And make us even with you.

Macbeth.

WHEN the three gondolas reached the side of the Bucentaur, the fisherman hung back, as if he distrusted his right to intrude himself into the presence of the senate. He was, however, commanded to ascend, and signs were made for his two companions to follow.

The nobles, clad in their attire of office, formed a long and imposing lane from the gangway to the stern, where the titular sovereign of that still more titular republic was placed, in the centre of the high officers of the state, gorgeous and grave in borrowed guise and natural qualities.

"Approach," said the Prince, mildly, observing that the old and half-naked man that led the victors hesitated to advance. "Thou art the conqueror, fisherman, and to thy hands must I consign the prize."

Antonio bent his knee to the deck, and bowed his head lowly ere he obeyed. Then taking courage, he drew nearer to the person of the doge, where he stood with a bewildered eye and rebuked mien, waiting the further pleasure of his superiors. The aged prince paused for stillness to succeed the slight movements created by curiosity. When he spoke, it was amid a perfect calm.

"It is the boast of our glorious republic," he said, "that the rights of none are disregarded; that the lowly receive their merited rewards as surely as the great; that St. Mark holds the balance with an even

hand, and that this obscure fisherman, having deserved the honors of this regatta, will receive them with the same readiness on the part of him who bestows, as if he were the most favored follower of our own house. Nobles and burghers of Venice, learn to prize your excellent and equable laws in this occasion, for it is most in acts of familiar and common usage that the parental character of a government is seen, since in matters of higher moment, the eyes of a world impel a compliance with its own opinions."

The doge delivered these preliminary remarks in a firm tone, like one confident of his auditors' applause. He was not deceived. No sooner had he done, than a murmur of approbation passed through the assembly, and extended itself to thousands who were beyond the sound of his voice, and to more who were beyond the reach of his meaning. The senators bent their heads in acknowledgment of the justice of what their chief had uttered, and the latter, having waited to gather these signs of an approving loyalty, proceeded.

"It is my duty, Antonio, and, being a duty, it hath become a pleasure, to place around thy neck this golden chain. The oar which it bears is an emblem of thy skill; and among thy associates it will be a mark of the republic's favor and impartiality, and of thy merit. Take it, then, vigorous old man, for though age hath thinned thy temples and furrowed thy cheek, it hath scarce affected thy wonderful sinews and hardy courage!"

"Highness!" observed Antonio, recoiling apace, when he found that he was expected to stoop, in order that the bauble might be bestowed, "I am not fit to bear about me such a sign of greatness and good-fortune. The glitter of the gold would mock my poverty, and a jewel, which comes from so

princely a hand, would be ill placed on a naked bosom."

This unexpected refusal caused a general surprise, and a momentary pause.

"Thou hast not entered on the struggle, fisherman, without a view to its prize? But thou sayest truly, the golden ornament would, indeed, but ill befit thy condition and daily wants. Wear it for the moment, since it is meet that all should know the justice and impartiality of our decisions, and bring it to my treasurer when the sports are done; he will make such an exchange as better suits thy wishes. There is precedent for this practice, and it shall be followed."

"Illustrious Highness! I did not trust my old limbs in so hard a strife without hopes of a reward. But it was not gold, nor any vanity to be seen among my equals with that glittering jewel, that led me to meet the scorn of the gondoliers, and the displeasure of the great."

"Thou art deceived, honest fisherman, if thou supposest that we regard thy just ambition with displeasure. We love to see a generous emulation among our people, and take all proper means to encourage those aspiring spirits who bring honor to a state, and fortune to our shores."

"I pretend not to place my poor thoughts against those of my prince," answered the fisherman; "my fears and shame have led me to believe, that it would give more pleasure to the noble and gay had a younger and happier borne away this honor."

"Thou must not think this. Bend, then, thy knee, that I may bestow the prize. When the sun sets, thou wilt find those in my palace, who will relieve thee of the ornament, at a just remuneration."

"Highness!" said Antonio, looking earnestly at the doge, who again arrested his movement, in sur-

prise, "I am old, and little wont to be spoilt by fortune. For my wants, the Lagunes, with the favor of the Holy St. Anthony, are sufficient; but it is in thy power to make the last days of an old man happy, and to have thy name remembered in many an honest and well-meant prayer. Grant me back my child, forget the boldness of a heart-broken father!"

"Is not this he who urged us with importunity, concerning a youth that is gone into the service of the state?" exclaimed the prince, across whose countenance passed that expression of habitual reserve, which so often concealed the feelings of the man.

"The same," returned a cold voice, which the ear of Antonio well knew came from the Signor Gradenigo.

"Pity for thy ignorance, fisherman, represses our anger. Receive thy chain, and depart."

Antonio's eye did not waver. He kneeled with an air of profound respect, and folding his hands on his bosom, he said—

"Misery has made me bold, dread Prince! What I say comes from a heavy heart, rather than from a licentious tongue, and I pray your royal ear to listen with indulgence."

"Speak briefly, for the sports are delayed."

"Mighty Doge! riches and poverty have caused a difference in our fortunes, which knowledge and ignorance have made wider. I am rude in my discourse, and little suited to this illustrious company. But, Signore, God hath given to the fisherman the same feelings, and the same love for his offspring, as he has given to a prince. Did I place dependence only on the aid of my poor learning, I should now be dumb, but there is a strength within that gives me courage to speak to the first and noblest in Venice in behalf of my child."

"Thou canst not impeach the senate's justice, old

man, nor utter aught, in truth, against the known impartiality of the laws!"

"Sovrano Mio! deign to listen, and you shall hear. I am what your eyes behold—a man, poor, laborious, and drawing near to the hour when he shall be called to the side of the Blessed St. Anthony of Rimini, and stand in a presence even greater than this. I am not vain enough to think that my humble name is to be found among those of the patri-cians who have served the republic in her wars—that is an honor which none but the great, and the noble, and the happy, can claim; but if the little I have done for my country is not in the Golden Book, it is written here," as Antonio spoke, he pointed to the scars on his half-naked form; "these are signs of the enmity of the Turk, and I now offer them as so many petitions to the bounty of the senate."

"Thou speakest vaguely. What is thy will?"

"Justice, mighty Prince. They have forced the only vigorous branch from the dying trunk—they have lopped the withering stem of its most promising shoot—they have exposed the sole companion of my labors and pleasures, the child to whom I have looked to close my eyes, when it shall please God to call me away, untaught, and young in lessons of honesty and virtue, a boy in principle as in years, to all the temptation, and sin, and dangerous companionship of the galleys!"

"Is this all? I had thought thy gondola in the decay, or thy right to use the Lagunes in question!"

"Is this all?" repeated Antonio, looking around him in bitter melancholy. "Doge of Venice, it is more than one, old, heart-stricken, and bereaved, can bear!"

"Go to; take thy golden chain and oar, and depart among thy fellows in triumph. Gladden thy heart at a victory, on which thou could'st not, in reason, have counted, and leave the interests of the

state to those that are wiser than thee, and more fitted to sustain its cares."

The fisherman arose with an air of rebuked submission, the result of a long life passed in the habit of political deference; but he did not approach to receive the proffered reward.

"Bend thy head, fisherman, that his Highness may bestow the prize," commanded an officer.

"I ask not for gold, nor any oar, but that which carries me to the Lagunes in the morning, and brings me back into the canals at night. Give me my child, or give me nothing."

"Away with him!" muttered a dozen voices; "he utters sedition! let him quit the galley."

Antonio was hurried from the presence, and forced into his gondola with very unequivocal signs of disgrace. This unwonted interruption of the ceremonies clouded many a brow, for the sensibilities of a Venetian noble were quick, indeed, to reprehend the immorality of political discontent, though the conventional dignity of the class suppressed all other ill-timed exhibition of dissatisfaction.

"Let the next competitor draw near," continued the sovereign, with a composure that constant practice in dissimulation rendered easy.

The unknown waterman to whose secret favor Antonio owed his success, approached, still concealed by the licensed mask.

"Thou art the gainer of the second prize," said the prince, "and were rigid justice done, thou should'st receive the first also, since our favor is not to be rejected with impunity.—Kneel, that I may bestow the favor."

"Highness, pardon!" observed the masker, bowing with great respect, but withdrawing a single step from the offered reward; "if it be your gracious will to grant a boon, for the success of the

regatta, I, too, have to pray that it may be given in another form."

"This is unusual! It is not wont that prizes, offered by the hand of a Venetian doge, should go a-begging."

"I would not seem to press more than is respectful, in this great presence. I ask but little, and, in the end, it may cost the republic less, than that which is now offered."

"Name it."

"I, too, and on my knee, in dutiful homage to the chief of the state, beg that the prayer of the old fisherman be heard, and that the father and son may be restored to each other, for the service will corrupt the tender years of the boy, and make the age of his parent miserable."

"This touches on importunity! Who art thou, that comest in this hidden manner, to support a petition, once refused?"

"Highness—the second victor in the ducal regatta."

"Dost trifle in thy answers? The protection of a mask, in all that does not tend to unsettle the peace of the city, is sacred. But here seemeth matter to be looked into.—Remove thy disguise, that we see thee, eye to eye."

"I have heard that he who kept civil speech, and in naught offended against the laws, might be seen at will, disguised in Venice, without question of his affairs, or name."

"Most true, in all that does not offend St. Mark. But here is a concert worthy of inquiry: I command thee, unmask."

The waterman, reading in every face around him the necessity of obedience, slowly withdrew the means of concealment, and discovered the pallid countenance and glittering eyes of Jacopo. An involuntary movement of all near, left this dreaded

person standing, singly, confronted with the prince of Venice, in a wide circle of wondering and curious listeners.

"I know thee not!" exclaimed the doge, with an open amazement that proved his sincerity, after regarding the other earnestly for a moment. "Thy reasons for the disguise should be better than thy reasons for refusing the prize."

The Signor Gradenigo drew near to the sovereign, and whispered in his ear. When he had done, the latter cast one look, in which curiosity and aversion were in singular union, at the marked countenance of the Bravo, and then, he silently motioned to him to depart. The throng drew about the royal person, with instinctive readiness, closing the space in his front.

"We shall look into this, at our leisure," said the doge. "Let the festivities proceed."

Jacopo bowed low, and withdrew. As he moved along the deck of the Bucentaur, the senators made way, as if pestilence was in his path, though it was quite apparent, by the expression of their faces, that it was in obedience to a feeling of a mixed character. He avoided, but still tolerated Bravo descended to his gondola, and the usual signals were given to the multitude beneath, who believed the customary ceremonies were ended.

"Let the gondolier of Don Camillo Monforte stand forth," cried a herald, obedient to the beck of a superior.

"Highness, here;" answered Gino, troubled and hurried.

"Thou art of Calabria?"

"Highness, yes."

"But of long practice on our Venetian canals, or thy gondola could never have outstripped those of the readiest oarsmen.—Thou servest a noble master?"

“Highness, yes.”

“And it would seem that the Duke of St. Agata is happy in the possession of an honest and faithful follower?”

“Highness, too happy.”

“Kneel, and receive the reward of thy resolution and skill.”

Gino, unlike those who had preceded him, bent a willing knee to the deck, and took the prize with a low and humble inclination of the body. At this moment the attention of the spectators was drawn from the short and simple ceremony by a loud shout, which arose from the water, at no great distance from the privileged bark of the senate. A common movement drew all to the side of the galley, and the successful gondolier was quickly forgotten.

A hundred boats were moving, in a body, towards the Lido, while the space they covered on the water presented one compact mass of the red caps of fishermen. In the midst of this marine picture was seen the bare head of Antonio, borne along in the floating multitude, without any effort of his own. The general impulsion was received from the vigorous arms of some thirty or forty of their number, who towed those in the rear by applying their force to three or four large gondolas in advance.

There was no mistaking the object of this singular and characteristic procession. The tenants of the Lagunes, with the fickleness with which extreme ignorance acts on human passions, had suddenly experienced a violent revolution in their feelings towards their ancient comrade. He who, an hour before, had been derided as a vain and ridiculous pretender, and on whose head bitter imprecations had been so lavishly poured, was now lauded with cries of triumph.

The gondoliers of the canals were laughed to scorn, and the ears of even the haughty nobles were

not respected, as the exulting band taunted their pampered menials.

In short, by a process which is common enough with man in all the divisions and subdivisions of society, the merit of one was at once intimately and inseparably connected with the glory and exultation of all.

Had the triumph of the fisherman confined itself to this natural and commonplace exhibition, it would not have given grave offence to the vigilant and jealous power that watched over the peace of Venice. But, amid the shouts of approbation were mingled cries of censure. Words of grave import were even heard, denouncing those who refused to restore to Antonio his child; and it was whispered on the deck of the Bucentaur, that, filled with the imaginary importance of their passing victory, the hardy band of rioters had dared to menace a forcible appeal, to obtain what they audaciously termed the justice of the case.

This ebullition of popular feeling was witnessed by the assembled senate in ominous and brooding silence. One unaccustomed to reflection on such a subject, or unpractised in the world, might have fancied alarm and uneasiness were painted on the grave countenances of the patricians, and that the signs of the times were little favorable to the continuance of an ascendancy that was dependent more on the force of convention, than on the possession of any physical superiority. But, on the other hand, one who was capable of judging between the power of political ascendancy, strengthened by its combinations and order, and the mere ebullitions of passion, however loud and clamorous, might readily have seen that the latter was not yet displayed in sufficient energy to break down the barriers which the first had erected.

The fishermen were permitted to go their way

unmolested, though here and there a gondola was seen stealing towards the Lido, bearing certain of those secret agents of the police whose duty it was to forewarn the existing powers of the presence of danger. Among the latter was the boat of the wine-seller, which departed from the Piazzetta, containing a stock of his merchandise, with Annina, under the pretence of making his profit out of the present turbulent temper of their ordinary customers. In the mean time, the sports proceeded, and the momentary interruption was forgotten; or, if remembered, it was in a manner suited to the secret and fearful power which directed the destinies of that remarkable republic.

There was another regatta, in which men of inferior powers contended; but we deem it unworthy to detain the narrative by a description.

Though the grave tenants of the Bucentaur seemed to take an interest in what was passing immediately before their eyes, they had ears for every shout that was borne on the evening breeze from the distant Lido; and more than once the doge himself was seen to bend his looks in that direction, in a manner which betrayed the concern that was uppermost in his mind.

Still the day passed on as usual. The conquerors triumphed, the crowd applauded, and the collected senate appeared to sympathize with the pleasures of a people, over whom they ruled with a certainty of power that resembled the fearful and mysterious march of destiny.

CHAPTER XI.

"Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?"

SHAKESPEARE.

THE evening of such a day, in a city with the habits of Venice, was not likely to be spent in the dullness of retirement. The great square of St. Mark was again filled with its active and motley crowd, and the scenes already described in the opening chapters of this work, were resumed, if possible, with more apparent devotion to the levities of the hour, than on the occasion mentioned. The tumblers and jugglers renewed their antics, the cries of the fruit-sellers and other venders of light luxuries were again mingled with the tones of the flute and the notes of the guitar and harp, while the idle and the busy, the thoughtless and the designing, the conspirator and the agent of the police, once more met in privileged security.

The night had advanced beyond its turn, when a gondola came gliding through the shipping of the port, with that easy and swan-like motion, which is peculiar to its slow movement, and touched the quay with its beak, at the point where the canal of St. Mark forms its junction with the bay.

"Thou art welcome, Antonio," said one, who approached the solitary individual that had directed the gondola, when the latter had thrust the iron spike of his painter between the crevices of the stones, as gondoliers are accustomed to secure their barges; "thou art welcome, Antonio, though late."

"I begin to know the sounds of that voice, though they come from a masked face," said the fisherman. "Friend, I owe my success to-day to thy kindness, and though it has not had the end for which I had both hoped and prayed, I ought not to thank thee

less. Thou hast thyself been borne hard upon by the world, or thou would'st not have bethought thee of an old and despised man, when the shouts of triumph were ringing in thy ear, and when thy own young blood was stirred with the feelings of pride and victory."

"Nature gives thee strong language, fisherman. I have not passed the hours, truly, in the games and levities of my years. Life has been no festa to me—but no matter. The senate was not pleased to hear of lessening the number of the galleys' crew, and thou wilt bethink thee of some other reward. I have, here, the chain and golden oar in the hope that it will still be welcome."

Antonio looked amazed, but, yielding to a natural curiosity, he gazed a moment with a longing at the prize. Then, recoiling with a shudder, he uttered moodily, and with the tones of one whose determination was made: "I should think the bauble coined of my grandchild's blood! Keep it: they have trusted it to thee, for it is thine of right, and now that they refuse to hear my prayer, it will be useless to all but to him who fairly earned it."

"Thou makest no allowance, fisherman, for difference of years and for sinews that are in their vigor. Methinks that in adjudging such a prize, thought should be had to these matters, and then wouldest thou be found outstripping us all. Holy St. Theodore! I passed my childhood with the oar in hand, and never before have I met one in Venice who has driven my gondola so hard! Thou touchest the water with the delicacy of a lady fingering her harp, and yet with the force of the wave rolling on the Lido!"

"I have seen the hour, Jacopo, when even thy young arm would have tired, in such a strife between us. That was before the birth of my eldest son, who died in battle with the Ottoman, when the dear boy

he left me was but an infant in arms. Thou never sawest the comely lad, good Jacopo?"

"I was not so happy, old man; but if he resembled thee, well mayest thou mourn his loss. Body of Diana! I have little cause to boast of the small advantage youth and strength gave me."

"There was a force within that bore me and the boat on—but of what use hath it been? Thy kindness, and the pain given to an old frame, that hath been long racked by hardship and poverty, are both thrown away on the rocky hearts of the nobles."

"We know not yet, Antonio. The good saints will hear our prayers, when we least think they are listening. Come with me, for I am sent to seek thee."

The fisherman regarded his new acquaintance with surprise, and then turning to bestow an instant of habitual care on his boat, he cheerfully professed himself ready to proceed. The place where they stood was a little apart from the thoroughfare of the quays, and though there was a brilliant moon, the circumstance of two men, in their garbs, being there, was not likely to attract observation; but Jacopo did not appear to be satisfied with this security from remark. He waited until Antonio had left the gondola, and, then, unfolding a cloak, which had lain on his arm, he threw it, without asking permission, over the shoulders of the other. A cap, like that he wore himself, was next produced, and being placed on the gray hairs of the fisherman, effectually completed his metamorphosis.

"There is no need of a mask," he said, examining his companion attentively, when his task was accomplished. "None would know thee, Antonio, in this garb."

"And is there need of what thou hast done, Jacopo? I owe thee thanks for a well-meant, and, but for the hardness of heart of the rich and powerful, for what would have proved, a great kindness. Still

I must tell thee that a mask was never yet put before my face; for what reason can there be, why one who rises with the sun to go to his toil, and who trusteth to the favor of the blessed St. Anthony for the little he hath, should go abroad like a gallant ready to steal the good name of a virgin, or a robber at night?"

"Thou knowest our Venetian custom, and it may be well to use some caution, in the business we are on."

"Thou forgettest that thy intention is yet a secret to me. I say it again, and I say it with truth and gratitude, that I owe thee many thanks, though the end is defeated, and the boy is still a prisoner in the floating-school of wickedness—but thou hast a name, Jacopo, that I could wish did not belong to thee. I find it hard to believe all that they have this day said, on the Lido, of one who has so much feeling for the weak and wronged."

The Bravo ceased to adjust the disguise of his companion, and the profound stillness which succeeded his remark, proved so painful to Antonio, that he felt like one reprieved from suffocation, when he heard the deep respiration that announced the relief of his companion.

"I would not willingly say—"

"No matter," interrupted Jacopo, in a hollow voice. "No matter, fisherman; we will speak of these things on some other occasion. At present, follow, and be silent."

As he ceased, the self-appointed guide of Antonio beckoned for the latter to come on, when he led the way from the water-side. The fisherman obeyed, for little did it matter to one poor and heart-stricken as he, whither he was conducted. Jacopo took the first entrance into the court of the doge's palace. His footstep was leisurely, and to the passing multitude they appeared like any others of the thousands,

who were abroad to breathe the soft air of the night or to enter into the pleasures of the piazza.

When within the dimmer and broken light of the court, Jacopo paused, evidently to scan the persons of those it contained. It is to be presumed he saw no reason to delay, for with a secret sign to his companion to follow, he crossed the area, and mounted the well-known steps, down which the head of the Faliero had rolled, and which, from the statues on the summit, is called the Giant's Stairs. The celebrated mouths of the lions were passed, and they were walking swiftly along the open gallery, when they encountered a halberdier of the ducal guard.

"Who comes?" demanded the mercenary, throwing forward his long and dangerous weapon.

"Friends to the state and to St. Mark."

"None pass, at this hour, without the word."

Jacopo motioned to Antonio to stand fast, while he drew nearer to the halberdier and whispered. The weapon was instantly thrown up, and the sentinel again paced the long gallery, with practised indifference. The way was no sooner cleared than they proceeded. Antonio, not a little amazed at what he had already seen, eagerly followed his guide, for his heart began to beat high with an exciting, but undefined hope. He was not so ignorant of human affairs as to require to be told, that those who ruled would some time concede that in secret, which policy forbade them to yield openly. Full, therefore, of the expectation of being ushered into the presence of the doge himself, and of having his child restored to his arms, the old man stepped lightly along the gloomy gallery, and darting through an entrance, at the heels of Jacopo, he found himself at the foot of another flight of massive steps. The route now became confused to the fisherman, for, quitting the more public vomitories of the palace, his companion held his way by a secret door, through

many dimly lighted and obscure passages. They ascended and descended frequently, as often quitting or entering rooms of but ordinary dimensions and decorations, until the head of Antonio was completely turned, and he no longer knew the general direction of their course. At length they stopped, in an apartment of inferior ornaments, and of a dusky color, which the feeble light rendered still more gloomy.

"Thou art well acquainted with the dwelling of our prince," said the fisherman, when his companion enabled him to speak, by checking his swift movements. "The oldest gondolier of Venice is not more ready on the canals, than thou appearest to be among these galleries and corridors."

"'Tis my business to bring thee hither, and what I am to do, I endeavor to do well. Antonio, thou art a man that feareth not to stand in the presence of the great, as this day hath shown. Summon thy courage, for a moment of trial is before thee."

"I have spoken boldly to the doge. Except the Holy Father, himself, what power is there on earth beside to fear?"

"Thou mayest have spoken, fisherman, too boldly. Temper thy language, for the great love not words of disrespect."

"Is truth unpleasant to them?"

"That is as may be. They love to hear their own acts praised, when their acts have merited praise, but they do not like to hear them condemned, even though they know what is said to be just."

"I fear me," said the old man, looking with simplicity at the other, "there is little difference between the powerful and the weak, when the garments are stripped from both, and the man stands naked to the eye."

"That truth may not be spoken here."

"How! Do they deny that they are Christians, and mortals, and sinners?"

“They make a merit of the first, Antonio—they forget the second, and they never like to be called the last, by any but themselves.”

“I doubt, Jacopo, after all, if I get from them the freedom of the boy.”

“Speak them fair, and say naught to wound their self-esteem, or to menace their authority—they will pardon much, if the last, in particular, be respected.”

“But it is that authority which has taken away my child! Can I speak in favor of the power which I know to be unjust?”

“Thou must feign it, or thy suit will fail.”

“I will go back to the Lagunes, good Jacopo, for this tongue of mine hath ever moved at the bidding of the heart. I fear I am too old to say that a son may righteously be torn from the father by violence. Tell them, thou, from me, that I came thus far, in order to do them respect, but, that seeing the hopelessness of beseeching further, I have gone to my nets, and to my prayers to blessed St. Anthony.”

As he ceased speaking, Antonio wrung the hand of his motionless companion, and turned away, as if to retire. Two halberds fell to the level of his breast, ere his foot had quitted the marble floor, and he now saw, for the first time, that armed men crossed his passage, and that, in truth, he was a prisoner. Nature had endowed the fisherman with a quick and just perception, and long habit had given great steadiness to his nerves. When he perceived his real situation, instead of entering into useless remonstrance, or in any manner betraying alarm, he again turned to Jacopo with an air of patience and resignation.

“It must be that the illustrious Signore wish to do me justice,” he said, smoothing the remnant of his hair, as men of his class prepare themselves for the presence of their superiors, “and it would not be decent, in an humble fisherman, to refuse them the

opportunity. It would be better, however, if there were less force used here in Venice, in a matter of simple right and wrong. But the great love to show their power, and the weak must submit."

"We shall see!" answered Jacopo, who had manifested no emotion during the abortive attempt of the other to retire.

A profound stillness succeeded. The halberdiers maintained their rigid attitudes, within the shadow of the wall, looking like two insensible statues, in the attire and armor of the age, while Jacopo and his companion occupied the centre of the room, with scarcely more of the appearance of consciousness and animation. It may be well to explain, here, to the reader, some of the peculiar machinery of the state, in the country of which we write, and which is connected with the scene that is about to follow: for the name of a republic, a word which, if it mean any thing, strictly implies the representation and supremacy of the general interests, but which has so frequently been prostituted to the protection and monopolies of privileged classes, may have induced him to believe that there was, at least, a resemblance between the outlines of that government, and the more just, because more popular, institutions of his own country.

In an age, when rulers were profane enough to assert, and the ruled weak enough to allow, that the right of a man to govern his fellows was a direct gift from God, a departure from the bold and selfish principle, though it were only in profession, was thought sufficient to give a character of freedom and common sense to the polity of a nation. This belief is not without some justification, since it establishes in theory, at least, the foundations of government on a base sufficiently different from that which supposes all power to be the property of one, and that one to be the representative of the faultless

and omnipotent Ruler of the Universe. With the first of these principles we have nothing to do, except it be to add that there are propositions so inherently false that they only require to be fairly stated to produce their own refutation; but our subject necessarily draws us into a short digression on the errors of the second, as they existed in Venice.

It is probable that when the patricians of St. Mark created a community of political rights in their own body, they believed their state had done all that was necessary to merit the high and generous title it assumed. They had innovated on a generally received principle, and they cannot claim the distinction of being either the first, or the last, who have imagined that to take the incipient steps in political improvement, is at once to reach the goal of perfection. Venice had no doctrine of divine right, and as her prince was little more than a pageant, she boldly laid claim to be called a republic. She believed that a representation of the most prominent and brilliant interests in society was the paramount object of government, and, faithful to the seductive, but dangerous, error, she mistook to the last, collective power for social happiness.

It may be taken as a governing principle, in all civil relations, that the strong will grow stronger, and the feeble more weak, until the first become unfit to rule, or the last unable to endure. In this important truth is contained the secret of the downfall of all those states which have crumbled beneath the weight of their own abuses. It teaches the necessity of widening the foundations of society, until the base shall have a breadth capable of securing the just representation of every interest, without which the social machine is liable to interruption from its own movement, and eventually to destruction from its own excesses.

Venice, though ambitious and tenacious of the

name of a republic, was, in truth, a narrow, a vulgar, and an exceedingly heartless oligarchy. To the former title she had no other claim than her denial of the naked principle already mentioned, while her practice is liable to the reproach of the two latter, in the unmanly and narrow character of its exclusion, in every act of her foreign policy, and in every measure of her internal police. An aristocracy must ever want the high personal feeling which often tempers despotism by the qualities of the chief, or the generous and human impulses of a popular rule. It has the merit of substituting things for men, it is true, but unhappily it substitutes the things of a few men for those of the whole. It partakes, and it always has partaken, though necessarily tempered by circumstances and the opinions of different ages, of the selfishness of all corporations, in which the responsibility of the individual, while his acts are professedly submitted to the temporizing expedients of a collective interest, is lost in the subdivision of numbers. At the period of which we write, Italy had several of these self-styled commonwealths, in not one of which, however, was there ever a fair and just confiding of power to the body of the people, though perhaps there is not one that has not been cited, sooner or later, in proof of the inability of man to govern himself! In order to demonstrate the fallacy of a reasoning, which is so fond of predicting the downfall of our own liberal system, supported by examples drawn from trans-atlantic states of the middle ages, it is necessary only to recount here, a little in detail, the forms in which power was obtained and exercised, in the most important of them all.

Distinctions in rank, as separated entirely from the will of the nation, formed the basis of Venetian polity. Authority, though divided, was not less a birthright, than in those governments in which it was

openly avowed to be a dispensation of Providence. The patrician order had its high and exclusive privileges, which were guarded and maintained with a most selfish and engrossing spirit. He who was not born to govern, had little hope of ever entering into the possession of his natural rights; while he who was, by the intervention of chance, might wield a power of the most fearful and despotic character. At a certain age, all of senatorial rank (for, by a specious fallacy, nobility did not take its usual appellations) were admitted into the councils of the nation. The names of the leading families were inscribed in a register, which was well entitled the "Golden Book," and he who enjoyed the envied distinction of having an ancestor thus enrolled, could, with a few exceptions (such as that named in the case of Don Camillo), present himself in the senate, and lay claim to the honors of the "Horned Bonnet." Neither our limits, nor our object will permit a digression of sufficient length to point out the whole of the leading features of a system so vicious, and which was, perhaps, only rendered tolerable to those it governed, by the extraneous contributions of captured and subsidiary provinces, on which, in truth, as in all cases of metropolitan rule the oppression weighed most grievously. The reader will at once see, that the very reason why the despotism of the self-styled republic was tolerable to its own citizens, was but another cause of its eventual destruction.

As the senate became too numerous to conduct, with sufficient secrecy and dispatch, the affairs of a state that pursued a policy alike tortuous and complicated, the most general of its important interests were intrusted to a council composed of three hundred of its members. In order to avoid the publicity and delay of a body large even as this, a second selection was made, which was known as the Coun-

cil of Ten, and to which much of the executive power, that aristocratical jealousy withheld from the titular chief of the state, was confided. To this point the political economy of the Venetian republic, however faulty, had at least some merit for simplicity and frankness. The ostensible agents of the administration were known, and though all real responsibility to the nation was lost, in the superior influence and narrow policy of the patricians, the rulers could not entirely escape from the odium that public opinion might attach to their unjust or illegal proceedings. But a state, whose prosperity was chiefly founded on the contribution and support of dependants, and whose existence was equally menaced by its own false principles, and by the growth of other and neighboring powers, had need of a still more efficient body, in the absence of that executive which its own republican pretensions denied to Venice. A political inquisition, which came in time to be one of the most fearful engines of police ever known, was the consequence. An authority, as irresponsible as it was absolute, was periodically confided to another and still smaller body, which met and exercised its despotic and secret functions, under the name of the Council of Three. The choice of these temporary rulers was decided by lot, and in a manner that prevented the result from being known to any but to their own number, and to a few of the most confidential of the more permanent officers of the government. Thus there existed, at all times, in the heart of Venice, a mysterious and despotic power, that was wielded by men who moved in society unknown, and apparently surrounded by all the ordinary charities of life; but which, in truth, was influenced by a set of political maxims, that were perhaps as ruthless, as tyrannic, and as selfish as ever were invented by the evil ingenuity of man. It was, in short, a power that

could only be intrusted, without abuse, to infallible virtue and infinite intelligence, using the terms in a sense limited by human means ; and yet it was here confided to men, whose title was founded on the double accident, of birth—and the colors of balls, and by whom it was wielded, without even the check of publicity.

The Council of Three met in secret, ordinarily issued its decrees without communicating with any other body, and had them enforced with a fearfulness of mystery, and a suddenness of execution, that resembled the blows of fate. The doge himself was not superior to its authority, nor protected from its decisions, while it has been known that one of the privileged three has been denounced by his companions. There is still in existence a long list of the state maxims which this secret tribunal recognized as its rule of conduct, and it is not saying too much to affirm, that they set at defiance every other consideration but expediency,—all the recognized laws of God, and every principle of justice, which is esteemed among men. The advances of the human intellect, supported by the means of publicity, may temper the exercise of a similar irresponsible power, in our own age, but in no country has this substitution, of a soulless corporation for an elective representation, been made, in which a system of rule has not been established, that sets at naught the laws of natural justice and the rights of the citizen. Any pretension to the contrary, by placing profession in opposition to practice, is only adding hypocrisy to usurpation.

It appears to be an unavoidable general consequence that abuses should follow, when power is exercised by a permanent and irresponsible body, from whom there is no appeal. When this power is secretly exercised, the abuses become still more grave. It is also worthy of remark, that in the na-

tions which submit, or have submitted to these undue and dangerous influences, the pretensions to justice and generosity are of the most exaggerated character; for while the fearless democrat vents his personal complaints aloud, and the voice of the subject of professed despotism is smothered entirely, necessity itself dictates to the oligarchist the policy of seemliness, as one of the conditions of his own safety. Thus Venice prided herself on the justice of St. Mark, and few states maintained a greater show, or put forth a more lofty claim to the possession of the sacred quality, than that whose real maxims of government were veiled in a mystery that even the loose morality of the age exacted.

CHAPTER XII.

"A power that if but named
 In casual converse, be it where it might,
 The speaker lower'd, at once, his voice, his eyes,
 And pointed upward as at God in heaven."

ROGERS.

THE reader has probably anticipated, that Antonio was now standing in an antechamber of the secret and stern tribunal, described in the preceding chapter. In common with all of his class, the fisherman had a vague idea of the existence, and of the attributes, of the council before which he was to appear; but his simple apprehension was far from comprehending the extent, or the nature, of functions that equally took cognizance of the most important interests of the republic, and of the more trifling concerns of a patrician family. While conjectures on the probable result of the expected interview were passing through his mind, an inner

door opened, and an attendant signed for Jacopo to advance.

The deep and imposing silence which instantly succeeded the entrance of the summoned into the presence of the Council of Three, gave time for a slight examination of the apartment and of those it contained. The room was not large for that country and climate, but rather of a size suited to the closeness of the councils that had place within its walls. The floor was tessellated with alternate pieces of black and white marble; the walls were draped in one common and sombre dress of black cloth; a single lamp of dark bronze was suspended over a solitary table in its centre, which, like every other article of the scanty furniture, had the same melancholy covering as the walls. In the angles of the room there were projecting closets, which might have been what they seemed, or merely passages into the other apartments of the palace. All the doors were concealed from casual observation by the hangings, which gave one general and chilling aspect of gloom to the whole scene. On the side of the room opposite to that on which Antonio stood, three men were seated in curule chairs; but their masks, and the drapery which concealed their forms, prevented all recognition of their persons. One of this powerful body wore a robe of crimson, as the representative that fortune had given to the select council of the doge, and the others robes of black, being those which had drawn the lucky, or rather the unlucky balls, in the Council of Ten, itself a temporary and chance-created body of the senate. There were one or two subordinates near the table, but these, as well as the still more humble officials of the place, were hid from all ordinary knowledge, by disguises similar to those of the chiefs. Jacopo regarded the scene like one accustomed to its effect, though with evident reverence and awe; but the

impression on Antonio was too manifest to be lost. It is probable that the long pause which followed his introduction, was intended to produce, and to note this effect, for keen eyes were intently watching his countenance during its continuance.

"Thou art called Antonio, of the Lagunes?" demanded one of the secretaries near the table, when a sign had been secretly made from the crimson member of that fearful tribunal, to proceed.

"A poor fisherman, eccellenza, who owes much to blessed Saint Antonio of the Miraculous Draught."

"And thou hast a son who bears thine own name, and who follows the same pursuit?"

"It is the duty of a Christian to submit to the will of God! My boy has been dead twelve years, come the day when the republic's galleys chased the infidel from Corfu to Candia. He was slain, noble Signore, with many others of his calling, in that bloody fight."

There was a movement of surprise among the clerks, who whispered together, and appeared to examine the papers in their hands, with some haste and confusion. Glances were sent back at the judges, who sate motionless, wrapped in the impenetrable mystery of their functions. A secret sign, however, soon caused the armed attendants of the place to lead Antonio and his companion from the room.

"Here is some inadvertency!" said a stern voice, from one of the masked Three, so soon as the fall of the footsteps of those who retired was no longer audible. "It is not seemly that the inquisition of St. Mark should show this ignorance."

"It touches merely the family of an obscure fisherman, illustrious Signore," returned the trembling dependant; "and it may be that his art would wish to deceive us in the opening interrogatories."

"Thou art in error," interrupted another of the

Three. "The man is named Antonio Vecchio, and, as he sayeth, his only child died in the hot affair with the Ottoman. He of whom there is question, is a grandson, and is still a boy."

"The noble Signore is right!" returned the clerk. — "In the hurry of affairs, we have misconceived a fact, which the wisdom of the council has been quick to rectify. St. Mark is happy in having among his proudest and oldest names, senators who enter thus familiarly into the interests of his meanest children!"

"Let the man be again introduced," resumed the judge, slightly bending his head to the compliment. "These accidents are unavoidable in the press of affairs."

The necessary order was given, and Antonio, with his companion constantly at his elbow, was brought once more into the presence.

"Thy son died in the service of the republic, Antonio?" demanded the secretary.

"Signore, he did. Holy Maria have pity on his early fate, and listen to my prayers! So good a child and so brave a man can have no great need of masses for his soul, or his death would have been doubly grievous to me, since I am too poor to buy them."

"Thou hast a grandson?"

"I had one, noble senator; I hope he still lives."

"He is not with thee in thy labors on the Lagoon?"

"San Teodoro grant that he were! he is taken, Signore, with many more of tender years, into the galleys, whence may our Lady give him a safe deliverance! If your eccellenza has an opportunity to speak with the general of the galleys, or with any other who may have authority in such a matter, on my knees, I pray you to speak in behalf of the child, who is a good and pious lad, that seldom casts a line

into the water, without an ave or a prayer to St. Anthony, and who has never given me uneasiness, until he fell into the grip of St. Mark "

" Rise—This is not the affair in which I have to question thee. Thou hast this day spoken of thy prayer to our most illustrious prince, the doge ?"

" I have prayed his highness to give the boy liberty."

" And this thou hast done openly, and with little deference to the high dignity and sacred character of the chief of the republic ?"

" I did it like a father and a man. If but half what they say of the justice and kindness of the state were true, his highness would have heard me as a father and a man."

A slight movement among the fearful Three, caused the secretary to pause ; when he saw, however, that his superiors chose to maintain their silence, he continued—

" This didst thou once in public and among the senators, but when repulsed, as urging a petition both out of place and out of reason, thou soughtest other to prefer thy request ?"

" True, illustrious Signore."

" Thou camest among the gondoliers of the regatta in an unseemly garb, and placed thyself foremost with those who contended for the favor of the senate and its prince !"

" I came in the garb which I wear before the Virgin and St. Antonio, and if I was foremost in the race, it was more owing to the goodness and favor of the man at my side, than any virtue which is still left in these withered sinews and dried bones. San Marco remember him in his need, for the kind wish, and soften the hearts of the great to hear the prayer of a childless parent !"

There was another slight expression of surprise,

or curiosity, among the inquisitors, and once more the secretary suspended his examination.

"Thou hearest, Jacopo," said one of the Three. "What answer dost thou make the fisherman?"

"Signore, he speaketh truth."

"And thou hast dared to trifle with the pleasures of the city, and to set at naught the wishes of the doge!"

"If it be a crime, illustrious senator, to have pitied an old man who mourned for his offspring, and to have given up my own solitary triumph to his love for the boy, I am guilty."

There was a long and silent pause after this reply. Jacopo had spoken with habitual reverence, but with the grave composure that appeared to enter deeply into the composition of his character. The paleness of the cheek was the same, and the glowing eye, which so singularly lighted and animated a countenance that possessed a hue not unlike that of death, scarce varied its gaze, while he answered. A secret sign caused the secretary to proceed with his duty.

"And thou owest thy success in the regatta, Antonio, to the favor of thy competitor—he who is now with thee, in the presence of the council?"

"Under San Teodoro and St. Antonio, the city's patron and my own."

"And thy whole desire was to urge again thy rejected petition in behalf of the young sailor?"

"Signore, I had no other. What is the vanity of a triumph among the gondoliers, or the bauble of a mimic oar and chain, to one of my years and condition?"

"Thou forgettest that the oar and chain are gold?"

"Excellent gentlemen, gold cannot heal the wounds which misery has left on a heavy heart. Give me back the child, that my eyes may not be closed by

strangers, and that I may speak good counsel into his young ears, while there is hope my words may be remembered, and I care not for all the metals of the Rialto! Thou mayest see that I utter no vain vaunt, by this jewel, which I offer to the nobles, with the reverence due to their greatness and wisdom."

When the fisherman had done speaking, he advanced, with the timid step of a man unaccustomed to move in superior presences, and laid upon the dark cloth of the table a ring that sparkled with, what at least seemed to be, very precious stones. The astonished secretary raised the jewel, and held it in suspense before the eyes of the judges.

"How is this?" exclaimed he of the Three, who had oftenest interfered in the examination; "that seemeth the pledge of our nuptials!"

"It is no other, illustrious senator: with this ring did the doge wed the Adriatic, in the presence of the ambassadors and the people."

"Hadst thou aught to do with this, also Jacopo?" sternly demanded the judge.

The Bravo turned his eye on the jewel with a look of interest, but his voice maintained its usual depth and steadiness as he answered,

"Signore, no—until now, I knew not the fortune of the fisherman."

A sign to the secretary caused him to resume his questions.

"Thou must account, and clearly account, Antonio," he said, "for the manner in which this sacred ring came into thy possession; hadst thou any one to aid thee in obtaining it?"

"Signore, I had."

"Name him, at once, that we take measures for his security."

"'Twill be useless, Signore; he is far above the power of Venice."

“What meanest thou, fellow? None are superior to the right and the force of the republic that dwell within her limits. Answer without evasion, as thou valuest thy person.”

“I should prize that which is of little value, Signore, and be guilty of a great folly, as well as of a great sin, were I to deceive you, to save a body old and worthless as mine from stripes. If your excellencies are willing to hear, you will find that I am no less willing to tell the manner in which I got the ring.”

“Speak, then, and trifle not.”

“I know not, Signori, whether you are used to hearing untruths, that you caution me so much not to deal with them; but we of the Lagunes are not afraid to say what we have seen and done, for most of our business is with the winds and waves, which take their orders from God himself. There is a tradition, Signori, among us fishermen, that in times past, one of our body brought up from the bay, the ring with which the doge is accustomed to marry the Adriatic. A jewel of that value was of little use to one who casts his nets daily for bread and oil, and he brought it to the doge, as became a fisherman, into whose hands the saints had thrown a prize to which he had no title, as it were to prove his honesty. This act of our companion is much spoken of on the Lagunes and at the Lido, and it is said there is a noble painting done by some of our Venetian masters, in the halls of the palace, which tells the story as it happened; showing the prince on his throne, and the lucky fisherman with his naked legs, rendering back to his highness that which had been lost. I hope there is foundation for this belief, Signori, which greatly flatters our pride, and is not without use in keeping some among us truer to the right, and better favored in the eyes of St. Anthony, than might otherwise be.”

"The fact was so."

"And the painting, excellent Signore? I hope our vanity has not deceived us concerning the picture, neither?"

"The picture you mention is to be seen within the palace."

"Corpo di Bacco! I have had my misgivings on that point, for it is not common that the rich and the happy should take such note of what the humble and the poor have done. Is the work from the hands of the great Tiziano himself, eccellenza?"

"It is not; one of little name hath put his pencil to the canvas."

"They say that Tiziano had the art of giving to his works the look and richness of flesh, and one would think that a just man might find, in the honesty of the poor fisherman, a color bright enough to have satisfied even his eye. But it may be that the senate saw danger in thus flattering us of the Lagoon."

"Proceed with the account of thine own fortune with the ring."

"Illustrious nobles, I have often dreamed of the luck of my fellow of the old times; and more than once have I drawn the nets with an eager hand in my sleep, thinking to find that very jewel entangled in its meshes, or embowelled by some fish. What I have so often fancied has at last happened. I am an old man, Signori, and there are few pools or banks between Fusina and Giorgio, that my lines or my nets have not fathomed or covered. The spot to which the Bucentoro is wont to steer in these ceremonies is well known to me, and I had a care to cover the bottom round about with all my nets in the hope of drawing up the ring. When his highness cast the jewel, I dropped a buoy to mark the spot—Signori, this is all—my accomplice was St. Anthony."

“For doing this you had a motive?”

“Holy Mother of God! Was it not sufficient to get back my boy from the gripe of the galleys?” exclaimed Antonio, with an energy and a simplicity that are often found to be in the same character. “I thought that if the doge and the senate were willing to cause pictures to be painted, and honors to be given to one poor fisherman for the ring, they might be glad to reward another, by releasing a lad who can be of no great service to the republic, but who is all to his parent.”

“Thy petition to his highness, thy strife in the regatta, and thy search for the ring, had the same object?”

“To me, Signore, life has but one.”

There was a slight but suppressed movement among the council.

“When thy request was refused by his highness as ill-timed—”

“Ah! eccellenza, when one has a white head and a failing arm, he cannot stop to look for the proper moment in such a cause!” interrupted the fisherman, with a gleam of that impetuosity which forms the true base of Italian character.

“When thy request was denied, and thou hadst refused the reward of the victor, thou went among thy fellows and fed their ears with complaints of the injustice of St. Mark, and of the senate’s tyranny?”

“Signore, no. I went away sad and heart-broken, for I had not thought the doge and nobles would have refused a successful gondolier so light a boon.”

“And this thou didst not hesitate to proclaim among the fishermen and idlers of the Lido?”

“Eccellenza, it was not needed—my fellows knew my unhappiness, and tongues were not wanting to tell the worst.”

“There was a tumult, with thee at its head, and sedition was uttered, with much vain-boasting of

what the fleet of the Lagunes could perform against the fleet of the republic."

"There is little difference, Signore, between the two, except that the men of the one go in gondolas with nets, and the men of the other are in the galleys of the state. Why should brothers seek each other's blood?"

The movement among the judges was more manifest than ever. They whispered together, and a paper containing a few lines written rapidly in pencil, was put into the hands of the examining secretary.

"Thou didst address thy fellows, and spoke openly of thy fancied wrongs; thou didst comment on the laws which require the services of the citizens, when the republic is compelled to send forth a fleet against its enemies."

"It is not easy to be silent, Signore, when the heart is full."

"And there was consultation among thee of coming to the palace in a body, and of asking the discharge of thy grandson from the doge, in the name of the rabble of the Lido."

"Signore, there were some generous enough to make the offer, but others were of advice it would be well to reflect before they took so bold a measure."

"And thou—what was thine own counsel on that point?"

"Eccellenza, I am old, and though unused to be thus questioned by illustrious senators, I had seen enough of the manner in which St. Mark governs, to believe a few unarmed fishermen and gondoliers would not be listened to with—"

"Ha! Did the gondoliers become of thy party I should have believed them jealous, and displeased with the triumph of one who was not of their body."

"A gondolier is a man, and though they had the feelings of human nature on being beaten, they had

also the feelings of human nature when they heard that a father was robbed of his son.—Signore,” continued Antonio, with great earnestness and a singular simplicity, “there will be great discontent on the canals, if the galleys sail with the boy aboard them!”

“Such is thy opinion;—were the gondoliers on the Lido numerous?”

“When the sports ended, eccellenza, they came over by hundreds, and I will do the generous fellows the justice to say, that they had forgotten their want of luck in the love of justice. Diamine! these gondoliers are not so bad a class as some pretend, but they are men like ourselves, and can feel for a Christian as well as another!”

The secretary paused, for his task was done; and a deep silence pervaded the gloomy apartment. After a short pause one of the three resumed—

“Antonio Vecchio,” he said “thou hast served thyself in these said galleys, to which thou now seemest so averse—and served bravely, as I learn?”

“Signore, I have done my duty by St. Mark. I played my part against the infidel, but it was after my beard was grown, and at an age when I had learnt to know good from evil. There is no duty more cheerfully performed by us all, than to defend the islands and the Lagunes against the enemy.”

“And all the republic’s dominions.—Thou canst make no distinctions between any of the rights of the state.”

“There is a wisdom granted to the great, which God hath denied the poor and the weak, Signore. To me it does not seem clear that Venice, a city built on a few islands, hath any more right to carry her rule into Crete or Candia, than the Turk hath to come here.”

“How! Dost thou dare, on the Lido, to question the claim of the republic to her conquests! or do

the irreverent fishermen dare thus to speak lightly of her glory!"

"Eccellenza, I know little of rights that come by violence. God hath given us the Lagunes, but I know not that he has given us more. This glory of which you speak may sit lightly on the shoulders of a senator, but it weighs heavily on a fisherman's heart."

"Thou speakest, bold man, of that which thou dost not comprehend."

"It is unfortunate, Signore, that the power to understand hath not been given to those who have so much power to suffer."

An anxious pause succeeded this reply.

"Thou mayest withdraw, Antonio," said he, who apparently presided in the dread councils of the Three. "Thou wilt not speak of what has happened, and thou wilt await the inevitable justice of St. Mark, in full confidence of its execution."

"Thanks, illustrious senator; I will obey your excellency; but my heart is full, and I would fain say a few words concerning the child, before I quit this noble company."

"Thou mayest speak—and here thou mayest give free vent to all thy wishes, or to all thy griefs, if any thou hast. St. Mark has no greater pleasure than to listen to the wishes of his children."

"I believe they have reviled the republic in calling its chiefs heartless, and sold to ambition!" said the old man, with generous warmth, disregarding the stern rebuke which gleamed in the eye of Jacopo. "A senator is but a man, and there are fathers and children among them, as among us of the Lagunes."

"Speak, but refrain from seditious or discreditable discourse," uttered a secretary, in a half-whisper. "Proceed."

"I have little now to offer, Signori; I am not

used to boast of my services to the state, excellent gentlemen, but there is a time when human modesty must give way to human nature. These scars were got in one of the proudest days of St. Mark, and in the foremost of all the galleys that fought among the Greek islands. The father of my boy wept over me then, as I have since wept over his own son—yes—I might be ashamed to own it among men; but if the truth must be spoken, the loss of the boy has drawn bitter tears from me in the darkness of night, and in the solitude of the Lagunes. I lay many weeks, Signori, less a man than a corpse, and when I got back again to my nets and my toil, I did not withhold my son from the call of the republic. He went in my place to meet the infidel—a service from which he never came back. This was the duty of men who had grown in experience, and who were not to be deluded into wickedness by the evil company of the galleys. But this calling of children into the snares of the devil grieves a father, and—I will own the weakness, if such it be—I am not of a courage and pride to send forth my own flesh and blood into the danger and corruption of war and evil society, as in days when the stoutness of the heart was like the stoutness of the limbs. Give me back, then, my boy, till he has seen my old head laid beneath the sands, and until, by the aid of blessed St. Anthony, and such councils as a poor man can offer, I may give him more steadiness in his love of the right, and until I may have so shaped his life, that he will not be driven about by every pleasant or treacherous wind that may happen to blow upon his bark. Signori, you are rich, and powerful, and honored, and though you may be placed in the way of temptations to do wrongs that are suited to your high names and illustrious fortunes, ye know little of the trials of the poor. What are the temptations of the blessed St. Anthony him-

self, to those of the evil company of the galleys! And now, Signori, though you may be angry to hear it, I will say, that when an aged man has no other kin on earth, or none so near as to feel the glow of the thin blood of the poor, than one poor boy, St. Mark would do well to remember that even a fisherman of the Lagunes can feel as well as the doge on his throne. This much I say, illustrious senators, in sorrow, and not in anger; for I would get back the child, and die in peace with my superiors, as with my equals."

"Thou mayest depart," said one of the Three.

"Not yet, Signore, I have still more to say of the men of the Lagunes, who speak with loud voices concerning this dragging of boys into the service of the galleys."

"We will hear their opinions."

"Noble gentlemen, if I were to utter all they have said, word for word, I might do some disfavor to your ears! Man is man, though the Virgin and the saints listen to his aves and prayers from beneath a jacket of serge and a fisherman's cap. But I know too well my duty to the senate to speak so plainly. But, Signori, they say, saving the bluntness of their language, that St. Mark should have ears for the meanest of his people as well as for the richest noble; and that not a hair should fall from the head of a fisherman, without its being counted as if it were a lock from beneath the horned bonnet; and that where God hath not made marks of his displeasure, man should not."

"Do they dare to reason thus?"

"I know not if it be reason, illustrious Signore, but it is what they say, and, eccellenza, it is holy truth. We are poor workmen of the Lagunes, who rise with the day to cast our nets, and return at night to hard beds and harder fare; but with this we might be content, did the senate count us as

Christians and men. That God hath not given to all the same chances in life, I well know, for it often happens that I draw an empty net, when my comrades are groaning with the weight of their draughts; but this is done to punish my sins, or to humble my heart, whereas it exceeds the power of man to look into the secrets of the soul, or to foretell the evil of the still innocent child. Blessed St. Anthony knows how many years of suffering this visit to the galleys may cause to the child in the end. Think of these things, I pray you, Signori, and send men of tried principles to the wars."

"Thou mayest retire," rejoined the judge.

"I should be sorry that any who cometh of my blood," continued the inattentive Antonio, "should be the cause of ill-will between them that rule and them that are born to obey. But nature is stronger even than the law, and I should discredit her feelings were I to go without speaking as becomes a father. Ye have taken my child and sent him to serve the state at the hazard of body and soul, without giving opportunity for a parting kiss, or a parting blessing—ye have used my flesh and blood as ye would use the wood of the arsenal, and sent it forth upon the sea as if it were the insensible metal of the balls ye throw against the infidel. Ye have shut your ears to my prayers, as if they were words uttered by the wicked, and when I have exhorted you on my knees, wearied my stiffened limbs to do ye pleasure, rendered ye the jewel which St. Anthony gave to my net, that it might soften your hearts, and reasoned with you calmly on the nature of your acts, you turn from me coldly, as if I were unfit to stand forth in defence of the offspring that God hath left my age! This is not the boasted justice of St. Mark, Venetian senators, but hardness of heart and a wasting of the means of the poor, that would ill become the most grasping Hebrew of the Rialto!"

“Hast thou aught more to urge, Antonio?” asked the judge, with the wily design of unmasking the fisherman’s entire soul.

“Is it not enough, Signore, that I urge my years, my poverty, my scars, and my love for the boy? I know ye not, but though ye are hid behind the folds of your robes and masks, still must ye be men. There may be among ye a father, or perhaps some one who hath a still more sacred charge, the child of a dead son. To him I speak. In vain ye talk of justice when the weight of your power falls on them least able to bear it; and though ye may delude yourselves, the meanest gondolier of the canal knows—”

He was stopped from uttering more by his companion, who rudely placed a hand on his mouth.

“Why hast thou presumed to stop the complaints of Antonio?” sternly demanded the judge.

“It was not decent, illustrious senators, to listen to such disrespect in so noble a presence,” Jacopo answered, bending reverently as he spoke. “This old fisherman, dread Signori, is warmed by love for his offspring, and he will utter that which, in his cooler moments, he will repent.”

“St. Mark fears not the truth! If he has more to say, let him declare it.”

But the excited Antonio began to reflect. The flush which had ascended to his weather-beaten cheek disappeared, and his naked breast ceased to heave. He stood like one rebuked, more by his discretion than his conscience, with a calmer eye, and a face that exhibited the composure of his years, and the respect of his condition—

“If I have offended, great patricians,” he said, more mildly, “I pray you to forget the zeal of an ignorant old man, whose feelings are master of his breeding, and who knows less how to render the truth agreeable to noble ears, than to utter it.”

“Thou mayest depart.”

The armed attendants advanced, and, obedient to a sign from the secretary, they led Antonio and his companion through the door by which they had entered. The other officials of the place followed, and the secret judges were left by themselves in the chamber of doom.

CHAPTER XIII.

“O! the days that we have seen.”

SHELTON.

A PAUSE like that which accompanies self-contemplation, and perhaps conscious distrust of purpose, succeeded. Then the Three arose, together, and began to lay aside the instruments of their disguise. When the masks were removed, they exposed the grave visages of men in the decline of life, athwart which worldly cares and worldly passions had drawn those deep lines, which no subsequent ease or resignation can erase. During the process of unrobing neither spoke, for the affair, on which they had just been employed, caused novel and disagreeable sensations to them all. When they were delivered from their superfluous garments and their masks, however, they drew near the table, and each sought that relief for his limbs and person which was natural to the long restraint he had undergone.

“There are letters from the French king intercepted,” said one, after time had permitted them to rally their thoughts;—“it would appear they treat of the new intentions of the emperor.”

“Have they been restored to the ambassador? or

are the originals to go before the senate?" demanded another.

"On that we must take counsel, at our leisure. I have naught else to communicate, except that the order given to intercept the messenger of the Holy See hath failed of its object."

"Of this the secretaries advertised me. We must look into the negligence of the agents, for there is good reason to believe much useful knowledge would have come from that seizure."

"As the attempt is already known and much spoken of, care must be had to issue orders for the arrest of the robbers, else may the republic fall into disrepute with its friends. There are names on our list which might be readily marked for punishment, for that quarter of our patrimony is never in want of proscribed, to conceal an accident of this nature."

"Good heed will be had to this, since, as you say, the affair is weighty. The government or the individual that is negligent of reputation, cannot expect long to retain the respect of its equals."

"The ambition of the House of Hapsburgh robs me of my sleep!" exclaimed the other, throwing aside some papers, over which his eye had glanced, in disgust. "Holy St. Theodore! what a scourge to the race is the desire to augment territories and to extend an unjust rule, beyond the boundaries of reason and nature! Here have we, in Venice, been in undisputed possession of provinces that are adapted to our institutions, convenient to our wants, and agreeable to our desires, for ages;—provinces that were gallantly won by our ancestors, and which cling to us as habits linger in our age: and yet are they become objects of a covetous ambition to our neighbor, under a vain pretext of a policy, that I fear is strengthened by our increasing weakness. I sicken, Signori, of my esteem for men, as I dive deeper into their tempers and desires, and often wish

myself a dog, as I study their propensities. In his appetite for power, is not the Austrian the most rapacious of all the princes of the earth?"

"More so, think you, worthy Signore, than the Castilian? You overlook the unsatiated desire of the Spanish king to extend his sway in Italy."

"Hapsburgh or Bourbon; Turk or Englishman; they all seem actuated by the same fell appetite for dominion; and now that Venice hath no more to hope, than to preserve her present advantages, the least of all our enjoyments becomes a subject of covetous envy to our enemies. There are passions to weary one of an interference with governments, and to send him to his cord of penitence and the cloisters!"

"I never listen to your observations, Signore, without quitting the chamber an edified man! Truly this desire in the strangers to trespass on our privileges, and it may be well said, privileges which have been gained by our treasures and our blood, becomes more manifest, daily. Should it not be checked, St. Mark will be stripped, in the end, of even a landing-place for a gondola on the main."

"The leap of the winged lion is much curtailed, excellent Sir, or these things might not be! It is no longer in our power to persuade, or to command, as of old, and our canals begin to be encumbered with slimy weeds, instead of well-freighted argosies, and swift-sailing feluccas."

"The Portuguese hath done us irretrievable harm, for without his African discoveries, we might yet have retained the traffic in Indian commodities. I cordially dislike the mongrel race, being, as it is, half Gothic and half Moorish!"

"I trust not myself to think of their origin or of their deeds, my friends, lest prejudice should kindle feelings unbecoming a man and a Christian.—How now, Signor Gradenigo; thou art thoughtful?"

The third member of the secret council, who had not spoken since the disappearance of the accused, and who was no other than the reader's old acquaintance of the name just mentioned, slowly lifted his head, from a meditative position, at this address.

"The examination of the fisherman hath recalled scenes of my boyhood," he answered, with a touch of nature, that seldom found place in that chamber.

"I heard thee say, he was thy foster-brother," returned the other, struggling to conceal a gape.

"We drank of the same milk, and, for the first years of life, we sported at the same games."

"These imaginary kindred often give great uneasiness. I am glad your trouble hath no other source, for I had heard that the young heir of your house hath shown a prodigal disposition of late, and I feared that matter might have come to your knowledge, as one of the council, that a father might not wish to learn."

The selfish features of the Signor Gradenigo, instantly underwent a change. He glanced curiously, and with a strong distrust, but in a covert manner, at the fallen eyes of his two companions, anxious to penetrate their secret thoughts ere he ventured to expose his own.

"Is there aught of complaint against the youth?" he demanded, in a voice of hesitation. "You understand a father's interest, and will not conceal the truth."

"Signore, you know that the agents of the police are active, and little that comes to their knowledge fails to reach the ears of the council. But, at the worst, the matter is not of life or death. It can only cost the inconsiderate young man a visit to Dalmatia, or an order to waste the summer at the foot of the Alps."

"Youth is the season of indiscretion, as ye know, Signori," returned the father, breathing more freely, "and as none become old that have not been young, I have little need to awaken your recollection of its weaknesses. I trust my son is incapable of designing aught against the republic?"

"Of that he is not suspected." A slight expression of irony crossed the features of the old senator, as he spoke. "But he is represented as aiming too freely at the person and wealth of your ward; and that she, who is the especial care of St. Mark, is not to be solicited without the consent of the senate, is an usage well known to one of its most ancient and most honorable members."

"Such is the law, and none coming of me shall show it disrespect. I have preferred my claims to that connexion, openly, but with diffidence; and I await the decision of the state, in respectful confidence."

His associates bowed in courteous acknowledgment of the justice of what he said, and of the loyalty of his conduct, but it was in the manner of men too long accustomed to duplicity, to be easily duped.

"None doubt it, worthy Signor Gradenigo, for thy faith to the state is ever quoted as a model for the young, and as a subject for the approbation of the more experienced. Hast thou any communications to make on the interest of the young heiress, thyself?"

"I am pained to say, that the deep obligation conferred by Don Camillo Monforte, seems to have wrought upon her youthful imagination, and I apprehend that, in disposing of my ward, the state will have to contend with the caprice of a female mind. The waywardness of that age will give more trouble, than the conduct of far graver matters."

“Is the lady attended by suitable companions, in her daily life?”

“Her companions are known to the Senate. In so grave an interest, I would not act without their authority and sanction. But the affair hath great need of delicacy in its government. The circumstance, that so much of my ward’s fortune lies in the states of the church, renders it necessary to await the proper moment for disposing of her rights, and of transferring their substance within the limits of the republic, before we proceed to any act of decision. Once assured of her wealth, she may be disposed of, as seemeth best to the welfare of the state, without further delay.”

“The lady hath a lineage and riches, and an excellence of person, that might render her of great account in some of these knotty negotiations, which so much fetter our movements of late. The time hath been, when a daughter of Venice, not more fair, was wooed to the bed of a sovereign.”

“Signore, those days of glory and greatness exist no longer. Should it be thought expedient to overlook the natural claims of my son, and to bestow my ward to the advantage of the republic, the most that can be expected through her means, is a favorable concession in some future treaty, or a new prop to some of the many decaying interests of the city. In this particular, she may be rendered of as much, or even of more use, than the oldest and wisest of our body. But that her will may be free, and the child may have no obstacles to her happiness, it will be necessary to make a speedy determination of the claim preferred by Don Camillo. Can we do better than to recommend a compromise, that he may return without delay to his own Calabria?”

“The concern is weighty, and it demands deliberation.”

“He complains of our tardiness already, and not

without show of reason. It is five years since the claim was first preferred."

"Signor Gradenigo, it is for the vigorous and healthful to display their activity, the aged and the tottering must move with caution. Were we, in Venice, to betray precipitation in so weighty a concern, without seeing an immediate interest in the judgment, we should trifle with a gale of fortune that every sirocco will not blow into the canals. We must have terms with the lord of Sant Agata, or we greatly slight our own advantage."

"I hinted of the matter to your excellencies, as a consideration for your wisdom; methinks it will be something gained to remove one so dangerous, from the recollection, and from before the eyes, of a love-sick maiden."

"Is the damsel so amorous?"

"She is of Italy, Signore, and our sun bestows warm fancies and fervent minds."

"Let her to the confessional and her prayers! The godly prior of St. Mark will discipline her imagination, till she shall conceit the Neapolitan a Moor, and an infidel. Just San Teodoro, forgive me! But thou canst remember the time, my friends, when the penance of the church was not without service, on thine own fickle tastes and truant practices."

"The Signore Gradenigo was a gallant in his time," observed the third, "as all well know who travelled in his company. Thou wert much spoken of at Versailles and at Vienna,—nay, thou canst not deny thy vogue to one who, if he hath no other merit, hath a memory."

"I protest against these false recollections," rejoined the accused, a withered smile lighting his faded countenance; "we have been young, Signori; but among us all, I never knew a Venetian of more general fashion and of better report, especially

with the dames of France, than he who has just spoken."

"Account it not—account it not—'twas the weakness of youth and the use of the times!—I remember to have seen thee, Enrico, at Madrid, and a gayer or more accomplished gentleman was not known at the Spanish court."

"Thy friendship blinded thee—I was a boy and full of spirits; no more, I may assure thee. Didst hear of my affair with the *mosquetaire*, when at Paris?"

"Did I hear of the general war?—Thou art too modest, to raise this doubt of a meeting that occupied the coteries for a month, as it had been a victory of the powers! Signor Gradenigo, it was a pleasure to call him countryman at that time, for I do assure thee, a sprightlier or a more gallant gentleman did not walk the terrace."

"Thou tellest me of what my own eyes have been a witness. Did I not arrive when men's voices spoke of nothing else?—A beautiful court and a pleasant capital were those of France in our day, Signori."

"None pleasanter, or of greater freedom of intercourse—St. Mark aid me with his prayers! The many pleasant hours that I have passed between the *Marais* and the *Chateau*! Didst ever meet *La Comtesse de Mignon* in the gardens?"

"Zitto—thou growest loquacious, caro; nay, she wanted not for grace and affability, that I will say. In what a manner they played in the houses of resort, at that time!"

"I know it to my cost. Will you lend me your belief, dear friends? I arose from the table of *La Belle Duchesse de* ———, the loser of a thousand sequins, and to this hour it seemeth but a moment that I was occupied."

"I remember the evening.—Thou wert seated be-

tween the wife of the Spanish ambassador, and a miladi of England. Thou wert playing at rouge-et-noir, in more ways than one, for thy eyes were on thy neighbors instead of thy cards—Giulio, I would have paid half the loss, to have read the next epistle of the worthy senator thy father!”

“He never knew it—he never knew it—we had our friends on the Rialto, and the account was settled a few years later. Thou wast well with Ninon, Enrico?”

“A companion of her leisure, and one who basked in the sunshine of her wit.”

“Nay, they said thou wert of more favor—”

“Mere gossip of the salons. I do protest, gentlemen,—not that others were better received—but idle tongues will have their discourse!”

“Wert thou of the party, Alessandro, that went in a fit of gaiety from country to country, till it numbered ten courts at which it appeared in as many weeks?”

“Was I not its mover? What a memory art thou getting! ’Twas for a hundred golden louis, and it was bravely won by an hour. A postponement of the reception by the elector of Bavaria, went near to defeat us, but we bribed the groom of the chambers, as thou mayest remember, and got into the presence as it were by accident.”

“Was that held to be sufficient?”

“That was it, for our terms mentioned the condition of holding discourse with ten sovereigns, in as many weeks, in their own palaces. Oh! it was fairly won; and I believe I may say that it was as gaily expended!”

“For the latter will I vouch, since I never quitted thee while a piece of it all remained. There are divers means of dispensing gold in those northern capitals, and the task was quickly accomplished.

They are pleasant countries for a few years of youth and idleness!"

"It is a pity that their climates are so rude."

A slight and general shudder expressed their Italian sympathy, but the discourse did not the less proceed.

"They might have a better sun, and a clearer sky, but there is excellent cheer, and no want of hospitality," observed the Signor Gradenigo, who maintained his full share of the dialogue, though we have not found it necessary to separate sentiments that were so common among the different speakers. "I have seen pleasant hours even with the Genoese, though their town hath a cast of reflection and sobriety, that is not always suited to the dispositions of youth."

"Nay, Stockholm and Copenhagen have their pleasures too, I do assure thee. I passed a season between them. Your Dane is a good joker and a hearty bottle companion."

"In that the Englishman surpasseth all! If I were to relate their powers of living in this manner, dear friends, ye would discredit me. That which I have seen often, seemeth impossible even to myself. 'Tis a gloomy abode, and one that we of Italy little like, in common."

"Name it not in comparison with Holland—wert ever in Holland, friends?—didst ever enjoy the fashion of Amsterdam and the Hague? I remember to have heard a young Roman urge a friend to pass a winter there; for the witty rogue termed it, the beau ideal of the land of petticoats!"

The three old Italians, in whom this sally excited a multitude of absurd recollections and pleasant fancies, broke out into a general and hearty fit of laughter. The sound of their cracked merriment, echoing in that gloomy and solemn room, suddenly recalled them to the recollection of their duties.

Each listened an instant, as if in expectation that some extraordinary consequence was to follow so extraordinary an interruption of the usual silence of the place, like a child whose truant propensities were about to draw detection on his offence,—and then the principal of the council furtively wiped the tears from his eyes, and resumed his gravity.

“Signori,” he said, fumbling in a bundle of papers. “we must take up the matter of the fisherman—but we will first inquire into the circumstance of the signet left, the past night, in the lion’s mouth. Signor Gradenigo, you were charged with the examination.”

“The duty hath been executed, noble Sirs, and with a success I had not hoped to meet with. Haste, at our last meeting, prevented a perusal of the paper to which it was attached, but it will now be seen that the two have a connexion. Here is an accusation which charges Don Camillo Monforte with a design to bear away, beyond the power of the senate, the Donna Violetta, my ward, in order to possess her person and riches. It speaketh of proofs in possession of the accuser, as if he were an agent intrusted by the Neapolitan.* As a pledge of his truth, I suppose, for there is no mention made of any other use, he sends the signet of Don Camillo himself, which cannot have been obtained without that noble’s confidence.”

“Is it certain that he owns the ring?”

“Of that am I well assured. You know I am especially charged with conducting his personal demand with the senate, and frequent interviews have given me opportunity to note that he was wont to wear a signet, which is now wanting. My jeweller of the Rialto hath sufficiently identified this, as the missing ring.”

“Thus far it is clear, though there is an obscurity in the circumstance that the signet of the accused

should be found with the accusation, which, being unexplained, renders the charge vague and uncertain. Have you any clue to the writing, or any means of knowing whence it comes?"

There was a small but nearly imperceptible red spot on the cheek of the Signor Gradenigo, that did not escape the keen distrust of his companions; but he concealed his alarm, answering distinctly that he had none.

"We must then defer a decision for further proof. The justice of St. Mark hath been too much vaunted to endanger its reputation by a hasty decree, in a question which so closely touches the interest of a powerful noble of Italy. Don Camillo Monforte hath a name of distinction, and counteth too many of note among his kindred, to be dealt with as we might dispose of a gondolier, or the messenger of some foreign state."

"As respects him, Signore, you are undoubtedly right. But may we not endanger our heiress by too much tenderness?"

"There are many convents in Venice, Signore."

"The monastic life is ill suited to the temper of my ward," the Signor Gradenigo drily observed, "and I fear to hazard the experiment; gold is a key to unlock the strongest cell; besides, we cannot with due observance of propriety place a child of the state in durance."

"Signor Gradenigo, we have had this matter under long and grave consideration, and agreeably to our laws, when one of our number hath a palpable interest in the affair, we have taken counsel of his highness, who is of accord with us in sentiment. Your personal interest in the lady might have warped your usually excellent judgment; else, be assured, we should have summoned you to the conference."

The old senator, who thus unexpectedly found himself excluded from consultation, on the very

matter, that, of all others, made him most value his temporary authority, stood abashed and silent—reading in his countenance, however, a desire to know more, his associates proceeded to communicate all it was their intention he should hear.

“It hath been determined to remove the lady to a suitable retirement, and for this purpose care hath been already had to provide the means. Thou wilt be temporarily relieved of a most grievous charge, which cannot but have worked heavily on thy spirits, and, in other particulars, have lessened thy much-valued usefulness to the republic.”

This unexpected communication was made with marked courtesy of manner; but with an emphasis and tone, that sufficiently acquainted the Signor Gradenigo with the nature of the suspicions that beset him. He had too long been familiar with the sinuous policy of the council, in which, at intervals, he had so often sat, not to understand that he would run the risk of a more serious accusation were he to hesitate in acknowledging its justice. Teaching his features, therefore, to wear a smile as treacherous as that of his wily companion, he answered with seeming gratitude.

“His highness and you, my excellent colleagues, have taken counsel of your good wishes and kindness of heart, rather than of the duty of a poor subject of St. Mark, to toil on in his service while he hath strength and reason for the task,” he said. “The management of a capricious female mind is a concern of no light moment, and while I thank you for this consideration of my case, you will permit me to express my readiness to resume the charge whenever it shall please the state again to confer it.”

“Of this none are more persuaded than we, nor are any better satisfied of your ability to discharge the trust faithfully. But you enter, Signore, into all

our motives, and will join us in the opinion, that it is equally unbecoming the republic, and one of its most illustrious citizens, to leave a ward of the former in a position that shall subject the latter to unmerited censure. Believe me, we have thought less of Venice in this matter, than of the honor and the interests of the house of Gradenigo; for, should this Neapolitan thwart our views, you of us all would be most liable to be disapproved of."

"A thousand thanks, excellent Sir," returned the deposed guardian. "You have taken a load from my mind, and restored some of the freshness and elasticity of youth! The claim of Don Camillo now is no longer urgent, since it is your pleasure to remove the lady, for a season, from the city."

"'Twere better to hold it in deeper suspense, if it were only to occupy his mind. Keep up thy communications, as of wont, and withhold not hope, which is a powerful exciter in minds that are not deadened by experience. We shall not conceal from one of our number, that a negotiation is already near a termination, which will relieve the state from the care of the damsel, and at some benefit to the republic. Her estates lying without our limits greatly facilitate the treaty, which hath only been withheld from your knowledge, by the consideration, that of late, we have rather too much overloaded thee with affairs."

Again the Signor Gradenigo bowed submissively, and with apparent joy. He saw that his secret design had been penetrated, notwithstanding all his practised duplicity and specious candor; and he submitted with that species of desperate resignation, which becomes a habit, if not a virtue, in men long accustomed to be governed despotically. When this delicate subject, which required the utmost finesse of Venetian policy, since it involved the interests of one, who happened, at the moment, to be

in the dreaded council itself, was disposed of, the three turned their attention to other matters, with that semblance of indifference to personal feeling, which practice in tortuous paths of state-intrigue enabled men to assume.

"Since we are so happily of opinion, concerning the disposition of the Donna Violetta," coolly observed the oldest senator, a rare specimen of hackneyed and worldly morality, "we may look into our list of daily duties—what saith the lion's mouths to-night?"

"A few of the ordinary and unmeaning accusations that spring from personal hatred," returned another. "One chargeth his neighbor with oversight in religious duties, and with some carelessness of the fasts of Holy Church—a foolish scandal, fitted for the ears of a curate."

"Is there naught else?"

"Another complaineth of neglect in a husband. The scrawl is in a woman's hand, and beareth, on its face, the evidence of a woman's resentment."

"Sudden to rise and easy to be appeased. Let the neighborhood quiet the household by its sneers—What next?"

"A suitor in the courts maketh complaint of the tardiness of the judges."

"This toucheth the reputation of St. Mark; it must be looked to!"

"Hold!" interrupted the Signor Gradenigo. "The tribunal acteth advisedly—'tis in the matter of a Hebrew, who is thought to have secrets of importance. The affair hath need of deliberation, I do assure you."

"Destroy the charge—Have we more?"

"Nothing of note. The usual number of pleasantries and hobbling verses which tend to nothing. If we get some useful gleanings, by these secret accusations, we gain much nonsense. I would whip

a youngster of ten who could not mould our soft Italian into better rhyme than this."

" 'Tis the wantonness of security. Let it pass, for all that serveth to amuse suppresseth turbulent thoughts. Shall we now see his highness, Signori?"

"You forget the fisherman," gravely observed the Signor Gradenigo.

"Your honor sayeth true. What a head for business hath he! Nothing that is useful escapeth his ready mind."

The old senator, while he was too experienced to be cajoled by such language, saw the necessity of appearing flattered. Again he bowed, and protested aloud and frequently against the justice of compliments that he so little merited. When this little by-play was over, they proceeded gravely to consider the matter before them.

As the decision of the Council of Three will be made apparent in the course of the narrative, we shall not continue to detail the conversation that accompanied their deliberations. The sitting was long, so long indeed that when they arose, having completed their business, the heavy clock of the square tolled the hour of midnight.

"The doge will be impatient," said one of the two nameless members, as they threw on their cloaks, before leaving the chamber. "I thought his highness wore a more fatigued and feeble air to-day, than he is wont to exhibit, at the festivities of the city."

"His highness is no longer young, Signore. If I remember right, he greatly outnumbereth either of us in years. Our Lady of Loretto lend him strength long to wear the ducal bonnet, and wisdom to wear it well!"

"He hath lately sent offerings to her shrine."

"Signore, he hath. His confessor hath gone in

person with the offering, as I know of certainty. 'Tis not a serious gift, but a mere remembrance to keep himself in the odor of sanctity. I doubt that his reign will not be long!"

"There are, truly, signs of decay in his system. He is a worthy prince, and we shall lose a father when called to weep for his loss!"

"Most true, Signore: but the horned bonnet is not an invulnerable shield against the arrows of death. Age and infirmities are more potent than our wishes."

"Thou art moody to-night, Signor Gradenigo. Thou art not used to be so silent with thy friends."

"I am not the less grateful, Signore, for their favors. If I have a loaded countenance, I bear a lightened heart. One who hath a daughter of his own so happily bestowed in wedlock as thine, may judge of the relief I feel by this disposition of my ward. Joy affects the exterior, frequently, like sorrow; ay, even to tears."

His two companions looked at the speaker with much obvious sympathy in their manners. They then left the chamber of doom together. The menials entered and extinguished the lights, leaving all behind them in an obscurity that was no bad type of the gloomy mysteries of the place.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Then methought,
A serenade broke silence, breathing hope
Through walls of stone."

Italy.

NOTWITHSTANDING the lateness of the hour, the melody of music was rife on the water. Gondolas continued to glide along the shadowed canals, while

the laugh or the song was echoed among the arches of the palaces. The piazza and piazzetta were yet brilliant with lights, and gay with their multitudes of unwearied revellers.

The habitation of Donna Violetta was far from the scene of general amusement. Though so remote, the hum of the moving throng, and the higher strains of the wind-instruments, came, from time to time, to the ears of its inmates, mellowed and thrilling by distance.

The position of the moon cast the whole of the narrow passage which flowed beneath the windows of her private apartments into shadow. In a balcony which overhung the water, stood the youthful and ardent girl, listening with a charmed ear and a tearful eye to one of those soft strains, in which Venetian voices answered to each other from different points on the canals, in the songs of the gondoliers. Her constant companion and Mentor was near, while the ghostly father of them both stood deeper in the room.

“There may be pleasanter towns on the main, and capitals of more revelry,” said the charmed Violetta, withdrawing her person from its leaning attitude, as the voices ceased; “but in such a night and at this witching hour, what city may compare with Venice?”

“Providence has been less partial in the distribution of its earthly favors than is apparent to a vulgar eye,” returned the attentive Carmelite. “If we have our peculiar enjoyments and our moments of divine contemplation, other towns have advantages of their own; Genoa and Pisa, Firenze, Ancona, Roma, Palermo, and, chiefest of all, Napoli—”

“Napoli, father!”

“Daughter, Napoli. Of all the towns of sunny Italy, 'tis the fairest and the most blessed in natural gifts. Of every region I have visited, during a life

of wandering and penitence, that is the country on which the touch of the Creator hath been the most God-like !”

“Thou art imaginative to-night, good Father Anselmo. The land must be fair indeed, that can thus warm the fancy of a Carmelite.”

“The rebuke is just. I have spoken more under the influence of recollections that came from days of idleness and levity, than with the chastened spirit of one, who should see the hand of the Maker, in the most simple and least lovely of all his wondrous works.”

“You reproach yourself causelessly, holy father,” observed the mild Donna Florinda, raising her eyes towards the pale countenance of the monk; “to admire the beauties of nature, is to worship him who gave them being.”

At that moment a burst of music rose on the air, proceeding from the water beneath the balcony. Donna Violetta started back, abashed, and as she held her breath in wonder, and haply with that delight which open admiration is apt to excite in a youthful female bosom, the color mounted to her temples.

“There passeth a band;” calmly observed the Donna Florinda.

“No, it is a cavalier! There are gondoliers, servitors in his colors.”

“This is as hardy as it may be gallant;” returned the monk, who listened to the air with an evident and grave displeasure.

There was no longer any doubt but that a serenade was meant. Though the custom was of much use, it was the first time that a similar honor had been paid beneath the window of Donna Violetta. The studied privacy of her life, her known destiny, and the jealousy of the despotic state, and perhaps the deep respect which encircled a maiden of her

tender years and high condition, had, until that moment, kept the aspiring, the vain, and the interested, equally in awe.

"It is for me!" whispered the trembling, the distressed, the delighted Violetta.

"It is for one of us, indeed;" answered the cautious friend.

"Be it for whom it may, it is bold," rejoined the monk.

Donna Violetta shrunk from observation, behind the drapery of the window, but she raised a hand in pleasure, as the rich strains rolled through the wide apartments.

"What a taste rules the band!" she half-whispered, afraid to trust her voice, lest a sound should escape her ears. "They touch an air of Petrarch's sonnetas! How indiscreet, and yet how noble!"

"More noble than wise;" said the Donna Florinda, who entered the balcony, and looked intently on the water beneath.

"Here are musicians in the color of a noble in one gondola," she continued, "and a single cavalier in another."

"Hath he no servitor?—Doth he ply the oar himself?"

"Truly that decency hath not been overlooked; one in a flowered jacket guides the boat."

"Speak, then, dearest Florinda, I pray thee."

"Would it be seemly?"

"Indeed I think it. Speak them fair. Say that I am the senate's.—That it is not discreet to urge a daughter of the state thus—say what thou wilt—but speak them fair."

"Ha! It is Don Camillo Monforte! I know him by his noble stature and the gallant wave of his hand."

"This temerity will undo him! His claim will be refused—himself banished. Is it not near

the hour when the gondola of the police passes? Admonish him to depart, good Florinda—and yet—can we use this rudeness to a Signor of his rank!”

“Father, counsel us; you know the hazards of this rash gallantry in the Neapolitan—aid us with thy wisdom, for there is not a moment to lose.”

The Carmelite had been an attentive and an indulgent observer of the emotion, which sensations so novel had awakened in the ardent but unpractised breast of the fair Venetian. Pity, sorrow, and sympathy were painted on his mortified face, as he witnessed the mastery of feeling over a mind so guileless, and a heart so warm; but the look was rather that of one who knew the dangers of the passions, than of one who condemned them, without thought of their origin or power. At the appeal of the governess he turned away and silently quitted the room. Donna Florinda left the balcony and drew near her charge. There was no explanation, nor any audible or visible means of making their sentiments known to each other. Violetta threw herself into the arms of her more experienced friend, and struggled to conceal her face in her bosom. At this moment the music suddenly ceased, and the plash of oars, falling into the water, succeeded.

“He is gone!” exclaimed the young creature, who had been the object of the serenade, and whose faculties, spite of her confusion, had lost none of their acuteness. “The gondolas are moving away, and we have not made even the customary acknowledgments for their civility!”

“It is not needed—or rather it might increase a hazard that is already too weighty. Remember thy high destiny, my child, and let them depart.”

“And yet, methinks one of my station should not fail in courtesy. The compliment may mean no more than any other idle usage, and they should not quit us unthanked.”

“Rest you, within. I will watch the movement of the boats, for it surpasseth female endurance not to note their aspect.”

“Thanks, dearest Florinda! hasten, lest they enter the other canal ere thou seest them.”

The governess was quickly in the balcony. Active as was her movement, her eyes were scarcely cast upon the shadow beneath, before a hurried question demanded what she beheld.

“Both gondolas are gone,” was the answer. “That with the musicians is already entering the great canal, but that of the cavalier hath unaccountably disappeared!”

“Nay, look again; he cannot be in such haste to quit us.”

“I had not sought him in the right direction. Here is his gondola, by the bridge of our own canal.”

“And the cavalier? He waits for some sign of courtesy; it is meet that we should not withhold it.”

“I see him not. His servitor is seated on the steps of the landing, while the gondola appeareth to be empty. The man hath an air of waiting, but I nowhere see the master!”

“Blessed Maria! can aught have befallen the gallant Duca di Sant’ Agata?”

“Naught but the happiness of casting himself here!” exclaimed a voice near the person of the heiress. The Donna Violetta turned her gaze from the balcony, and beheld him who filled all her thoughts, at her feet.

The cry of the girl, the exclamation of her friend, and a rapid and eager movement of the monk, brought the whole party into a group.

“This may not be;” said the latter in a reproving voice. “Arise, Don Camillo, lest I repent listening to your prayer; you exceed our conditions.”

“As much as this emotion exceedeth my hopes,”

answered the noble. "Holy father, it is vain to oppose Providence! Providence brought me to the rescue of this lovely being, when accident threw her into the Giudecca, and, once more, Providence is my friend, by permitting me to be a witness of this feeling. Speak, fair Violetta, thou wilt not be an instrument of the senate's selfishness—thou wilt not hearken to their wish of disposing of thy hand on the mercenary, who would trifle with the most sacred of all vows, to possess thy wealth?"

"For whom am I destined?" demanded Violetta.

"No matter, since it be not for me. Some trafficker in happiness, some worthless abuser of the gifts of fortune."

"Thou knowest, Camillo, our Venetian custom, and must see that I am hopelessly in their hands."

"Arise, Duke of St. Agata," said the monk, with authority; "when I suffered you to enter this palace, it was to remove a scandal from its gates, and to save you from your own rash disregard of the state's displeasure. It is idle to encourage hopes that the policy of the republic opposes. Arise then, and respect your pledges."

"That shall be as this lady may decide. Encourage me with but an approving look, fairest Violetta, and not Venice, with its doge and inquisition, shall stir me an inch from thy feet!"

"Camillo!" answered the trembling girl, "thou, the preserver of my life, hast little need to kneel to me!"

"Duke of St. Agata—daughter!"

"Nay, heed him not, generous Violetta. He utters words of convention—he speaks as all speak in age, when men's tongues deny the feelings of their youth. He is a Carmelite, and must feign this prudence. He never knew the tyranny of the passions. The dampness of his cell has chilled the ardor of the

heart. Had he been human, he would have loved; had he loved, he would never have worn a cowl."

Father Anselmo receded a pace, like one pricked in conscience, and the paleness of his ascetic features took a deadly hue. His lips moved as if he would have spoken, but the sounds were smothered by an oppression that denied him utterance. The gentle Florinda saw his distress, and she endeavored to interpose between the impetuous youth and her charge.

"It may be as you say, Signor Monforte," she said, "and that the senate, in its fatherly care, searches a partner worthy of an heiress of a house so illustrious and so endowed as that of Tiepolo. But in this, what is there more than of wont? Do not the nobles of all Italy seek their equals in condition and in the gifts of fortune, in order that their union may be fittingly assorted. How know we that the estates of my young friend have not a value in the eye of the Duke of St. Agata, as well as in those of him that the senate may elect for thy husband?"

"Can this be true!" exclaimed Violetta.

"Believe it not; my errand in Venice is no secret. I seek the restitution of lands and houses long withheld from my family, with the honors of the senate that are justly mine. All these do I joyfully abandon for the hope of thy favor."

"Thou hearest, Florinda: Don Camillo is not to be distrusted!"

"What are the senate and the power of St. Mark, that they should cross our lives with misery? Be mine, lovely Violetta, and in the fastnesses of my own good Calabrian castle we will defy their vengeance and policy. Their disappointment shall furnish merriment for my vassals, and our felicity shall make the happiness of thousands. I affect no disrespect for the dignity of the councils, nor any indifference

to that I lose, but to me art thou far more precious than the horned bonnet itself, with all its fancied influence and glory."

"Generous Camillo!"

"Be mine, and spare the cold calculators of the senate another crime. They think to dispose of thee, as if thou wert worthless merchandise, to their own advantage. But thou wilt defeat their design. I read the generous resolution in thine eye, Violetta; thou wilt manifest a will superior to their arts and egotism."

"I would not be trafficked for, Don Camillo Monforte, but wooed and won as befitteth a maiden of my condition. They may still leave me liberty of choice. The Signor Gradenigo hath much encouraged me of late with this hope, when speaking of the establishment suited to my years."

"Believe him not; a colder heart, a spirit more removed from charity, exists not in Venice. He courts thy favor for his own prodigal son; a cavalier without honor, the companion of profligates, and the victim of the Hebrews. Believe him not, for he is stricken in deceit."

"He is the victim of his own designs, if this be true. Of all the youths of Venice I esteem Giacomo Gradenigo least."

"This interview must have an end," said the monk, interposing effectually, and compelling the lover to rise. "It would be easier to escape the toils of sin than to elude the agents of the police. I tremble lest this visit should be known, for we are encircled with the ministers of the state, and not a palace in Venice is more narrowly watched than this. Were thy presence here detected, indiscreet young man, thy youth might pine in a prison, while thou would'st be the cause of persecution and unmerited sorrow to this innocent and inexperienced maiden."

"A prison, sayest thou, father!"

"No less, daughter. Lighter offences are often expiated by heavier judgments, when the pleasure of the senate is thwarted."

"Thou must not be condemned to a prison, Camillo!"

"Fear it not. The years and peaceful calling of the father make him timid. I have long been prepared for this happy moment, and I ask but a single hour to put Venice and all her toils at defiance. Give me the blessed assurance of thy truth, and confide in my means for the rest."

"Thou hearest, Florinda!"

"This bearing is suited to the sex of Don Camillo, dearest, but it ill becometh thee. A maiden of high quality must await the decision of her natural guardians."

"But should that choice be Giacomo Gradenigo?"

"The senate will not hear of it. The arts of his father have long been known to thee; and thou must have seen, by the secrecy of his own advances, that he distrusts their decision. The state will have a care to dispose of thee as befitteth thy hopes. Thou art sought of many, and those who guard thy fortune only await the proposals which best become thy birth."

"Proposals that become my birth!"

"Suitable in years, condition, expectations, and character."

"Am I to regard Don Camillo Monforte as one beneath me?"

The monk again interposed.

"This interview must end," he said. "The eyes drawn upon us, by your indiscreet music, are now turned on other objects, Signore, and you must break your faith, or depart."

"Alone, father?"

"Is the Donna Violetta to quit the roof of her

father with as little warning as an unfavored dependant?"

"Nay, Signor Monforte, you could not, in reason, have expected more, in this interview, than the hope of some future termination to your suit—some pledge—"

"And that pledge?"

The eye of Violetta turned from her governess to her lover, from her lover to the monk, and from the latter to the floor.

"Is thine, Camillo."

A common cry escaped the Carmelite and the governess.

"Thy mercy, excellent friends," continued the blushing but decided Violetta. "If I have encouraged Don Camillo, in a manner that thy counsels and maiden modesty would reprove; reflect that had he hesitated to cast himself into the Giudecca, I should have wanted the power to confer this trifling grace. Why should I be less generous than my preserver? No, Camillo, when the senate condemns me to wed another than thee, it pronounces the doom of celibacy; I will hide my griefs in a convent till I die!"

There was a solemn and fearful interruption to a discourse which was so rapidly becoming explicit, by the sound of the bell, that the groom of the chambers, a long-tryed and confidential domestic, had been commanded to ring before he entered. As this injunction had been accompanied by another not to appear, unless summoned, or urged by some grave motive, the signal caused a sudden pause, even at that interesting moment.

"How now!" exclaimed the Carmelite to the servant, who abruptly entered. "What means this disregard of my injunctions?"

"Father, the republic!"

"Is St. Mark in jeopardy, that females and priests are summoned to aid him?"

“There are officials of the state below, who demand admission in the name of the republic?”

“This grows serious,” said Don Camillo, who alone retained his self-possession. “My visit is known, and the active jealousy of the state anticipates its object. Summon your resolution, Donna Violetta, and you, father, be of heart! I will assume the responsibility of the offence, if offence it be, and exonerate all others from censure.”

“Forbid it, Father Anselmo. Dearest Florinda, we will share his punishment!” exclaimed the terrified Violetta, losing all self-command in the fear of such a moment. “He has not been guilty of this indiscretion without participation of mine; he has not presumed beyond his encouragement.”

The monk and Donna Florinda regarded each other in mute amazement, and haply there was some admixture of feeling in the look that denoted the uselessness of caution when the passions were intent to elude the vigilance of those who were merely prompted by prudence. The former simply motioned for silence, while he turned to the domestic.

“Of what character are these ministers of the state?” he demanded.

“Father, they are its known officers, and wear the badges of their condition.”

“And their request?”

“Is to be admitted to the presence of the Donna Violetta.”

“There is still hope!” rejoined the monk, breathing more freely. Moving across the room, he opened a door which communicated with the private oratory of the palace. “Retire within this sacred chapel, Don Camillo, while we await the explanation of so extraordinary a visit.”

As the time pressed, the suggestion was obeyed on the instant. The lover entered the oratory, and

when the door was closed upon his person, the domestic, one known to be worthy of all confidence, was directed to usher in those who waited without.

But a single individual appeared. He was known, at a glance, for a public and responsible agent of the government, who was often charged with the execution of secret and delicate duties. Donna Violetta advanced to meet him, in respect to his employers, and with the return of that self-possession, which long practice interweaves with the habits of the great.

"I am honored by this care of my dreaded and illustrious guardians," she said, making an acknowledgment for the low reverence with which the official saluted the richest ward of Venice. "To what circumstance do I owe this visit?"

The officer gazed an instant about him, with an habitual and suspicious caution, and then repeating his salutations, he answered.

"Lady," he said, "I am commanded to seek an interview with the daughter of the state, the heiress of the illustrious house of Tiepolo, with the Donna Florinda Mercato, her female companion, with the Father Anselmo, her commissioned confessor, and with any other who enjoy the pleasure of her society and the honor of her confidence."

"Those you seek are here; I am Violetta Tiepolo; to this lady am I indebted for a mother's care, and this reverend Carmelite is my spiritual counselor. Shall I summon my household?"

"It is unnecessary. My errand is rather of private than of public concern. At the decease of your late most honored and much-lamented parent, the illustrious senator Tiepolo, the care of your person, lady, was committed by the republic, your natural and careful protector, to the especial guar-

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dianship and wisdom of Signore Alessandro Gradenigo, of illustrious birth and estimable qualities."

"Signore, you say true."

Though the parental love of the councils may have seemed to be dormant, it has ever been wakeful and vigilant. Now that the years, instruction, beauty, and other excellencies of their daughter, have come to so rare perfection, they wish to draw the ties that unite them nearer, by assuming their own immediate duties about her person."

"By this I am to understand that I am no longer a ward of the Signor Gradenigo?"

"Lady, a ready wit has helped you to the explanation. That illustrious patrician is released from his cherished and well-acquitted duties. To-morrow new guardians will be charged with the care of your prized person, and will continue their honorable trust, until the wisdom of the senate shall have formed for you such an alliance, as shall not disparage a noble name and qualities that might adorn a throne."

"Am I to be separated from those I love?" demanded Violetta, impetuously.

"Trust to the senate's wisdom. I know not its determination concerning those who have long dwelt with you, but there can be no reason to doubt its tenderness or discretion. I have now only to add, that until those charged anew with the honorable office of your protectors shall arrive, it will be well to maintain the same modest reserve in the reception of visitors as of wont, and that your door, lady, must in propriety be closed against the Signor Gradenigo as against all others of his sex."

"Shall I not even thank him for his care?"

"He is tenfold rewarded in the senate's gratitude."

"It would have been gracious to have expressed my feelings towards the Signor Gradenigo in

words; but that which is refused to the tongue will be permitted to the pen."

"The reserve that becomes the state of one so favored is absolute. St. Mark is jealous where he loves. And, now my commission is discharged, I humbly take my leave, flattered in having been selected to stand in such a presence, and to have been thought worthy of so honorable a duty."

As the officer ceased speaking and Violetta returned his bows, she turned her eyes, filled with apprehension, on the sorrowful features of her companions. The ambiguous language of those employed in such missions was too well known to leave much hope for the future. They all anticipated their separation on the morrow, though neither could penetrate the reason of this sudden change in the policy of the state. Interrogation was useless, for the blow evidently came from the secret council, whose motives could no more be fathomed than its decrees foreseen. The monk raised his hands in silent benediction towards his spiritual charge, and, unable, even in the presence of the stranger, to repress their grief, Donna Florinda and Violetta sunk into each other's arms, and wept.

In the mean time the minister of this cruel blow had delayed his departure, like one who had a half-formed resolution. He regarded the countenance of the unconscious Carmelite intently, and in a manner that denoted the habit of thinking much before he decided.

"Reverend Father," he said, "may I crave a moment of your time, for an affair that concerns the soul of a sinner?"

Though amazed, the monk could not hesitate about answering such an appeal. Obedient to a gesture of the officer, he followed him from the apartment, and continued at his side while the other

threaded the magnificent rooms and descended to his gondola.

"You must be much honored of the senate, holy monk," observed the latter while they proceeded, "to hold so near a trust about the person of one in whom the state takes so great an interest?"

"I feel it as such, my son. A life of peace and prayer should have made me friends."

"Men like you, father, merit the esteem they crave. Are you long of Venice?"

"Since the last conclave. I came into the republic as confessor to the late minister from Florence."

"An honorable trust. You have been with us then long enough to know that the republic never forgets a servitor, nor forgives an affront."

"'Tis an ancient state, and one whose influence still reaches far and near."

"Have a care of the step. These marbles are treacherous to an uncertain foot."

"Mine is too practised in the descent to be unsteady. I hope I do not now descend these stairs for the last time?"

The minister of the council affected not to understand the question, but he answered as if replying only to the previous observation.

"'Tis truly a venerable state," he said, "but a little tottering with its years. All who love liberty, father, must mourn to see so glorious a sway on the decline. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* You bare-footed Carmelites do well to mortify the flesh in youth, by which you escape the pains of a decreasing power. One like you can have few wrongs of his younger days to repair?"

"We are none of us without sin," returned the monk, crossing himself. "He who would flatter his soul with being perfect lays the additional weight of vanity on his life."

“Men of my occupation, holy Carmelite, have few opportunities of looking into themselves, and I bless the hour that hath brought me into company so godly. My gondola waits—will you enter?”

The monk regarded his companion in distrust, but knowing the uselessness of resistance, he murmured a short prayer and complied. A strong dash of the oars announced their departure from the steps of the palace.

CHAPTER XVI.

O pescator! dell' onda,

Fi da lin;

O pescator! dell' onda,

Fi da lin:

Vien pescar in qua,

Colla bella tua barca,

Colla bella se ne va,

Fi da lin, lin, la—

Venetian Boat Song.

THE moon was at the height. Its rays fell in a flood on the swelling domes and massive roofs of Venice, while the margin of the town was brilliantly defined by the glittering bay. The natural and gorgeous setting was more than worthy of that picture of human magnificence; for at that moment, rich as was the queen of the Adriatic in her works of art, the grandeur of her public monuments, the number and splendor of her palaces, and most else that the ingenuity and ambition of man could attempt, she was but secondary in the glories of the hour.

Above was the firmament, gemmed with worlds, and sublime in immensity. Beneath lay the broad expanse of the Adriatic, endless to the eye, tranquil

as the vault it reflected, and luminous with its borrowed light. Here and there a low island, reclaimed from the sea by the patient toil of a thousand years, dotted the Lagunes, burthened with the group of some conventual dwellings, or picturesque with the modest roofs of a hamlet of the fishermen. Neither oar, nor song, nor laugh, nor flap of sail, nor jest of mariner, disturbed the stillness. All in the near view was clothed in midnight loveliness, and all in the distance bespoke the solemnity of nature at peace. The city and the Lagunes, the gulf and the dreamy Alps, the interminable plain of Lombardy, and the blue void of heaven, lay alike, in a common and grand repose.

There suddenly appeared a gondola. It issued from among the watery channels of the town, and glided upon the vast bosom of the bay, noiseless as the fancied progress of a spirit. A practised and nervous arm guided its movement, which was unceasing and rapid. So swift indeed was the passage of the boat, as to denote pressing haste on the part of the solitary individual it contained. It held the direction of the Adriatic, steering between one of the more southern outlets of the bay and the well-known island of St. Giorgio. For half an hour the exertions of the gondolier were unrelaxed, though his eye was often cast behind him, as if he distrusted pursuit; and as often did he gaze ahead, betraying an anxious desire to reach some object that was yet invisible. When a wide reach of water lay between him and the town, however, he permitted his oar to rest, and he lent all his faculties to a keen and anxious search.

A small dark spot was discovered on the water still nearer to the sea. The oar of the gondolier dashed the element behind him, and his boat again glided away, so far altering its course as to show that all indecision was now ended. The darker spot

was shortly beheld quivering in the rays of the moon, and it soon assumed the form and dimensions of a boat at anchor. Again the gondolier ceased his efforts, and he leaned forward, gazing intently at this undefined object, as if he would aid his powers of sight by the sympathy of his other faculties. Just then the notes of music came softly across the Lagunes. The voice was feeble even to trembling, but it had the sweetness of tone and the accuracy of execution which belong so peculiarly to Venice. It was the solitary man, in the distant boat, indulging in the song of a fisherman. The strains were sweet, and the intonations plaintive to melancholy. The air was common to all who plied the oar in the canals, and familiar to the ear of the listener. He waited until the close of a verse had died away, and then he answered with a strain of his own. The alternate parts were thus maintained until the music ceased, by the two singing a final verse in chorus.

When the song was ended, the oar of the gondolier stirred the water again, and he was quickly by the other's side.

"Thou art busy with thy hook betimes, Antonio," said he who had just arrived, as he stepped into the boat of the old fisherman already so well known to the reader. "There are men, that an interview with the Council of Three, would have sent to their prayers and a sleepless bed."

"There is not a chapel in Venice, Jacopo, in which a sinner may so well lay bare his soul as in this. I have been here on the empty Lagunes, alone with God, having the gates of Paradise open before my eyes."

"One like thee hath no need of images to quicken his devotion."

"I see the image of my Savior, Jacopo, in those bright stars, that moon, the blue heavens, the misty bank of mountain, the waters on which we float, ay,

even in my own sinking form, as in all which has come from his wisdom and power. I have prayed much since the moon has risen."

"And is habit so strong in thee, that thou thinkest of God and thy sins, while thou anglest?"

"The poor must toil and the sinful must pray. My thoughts have dwelt so much of late on the boy, that I have forgotten to provide myself with food. If I fish later or earlier than common, 'tis because a man cannot live on grief."

"I have bethought me of thy situation, honest Antonio; here is that which will support life and raise thy courage. See," added the Bravo, stretching forth an arm into his own gondola, from which he drew a basket, "here is bread from Dalmatia, wine of Lower Italy, and figs from the Levant—eat, then, and be of cheer."

The fisherman threw a wistful glance at the viands, for hunger was making powerful appeals to the weakness of nature, but his hand did not relinquish its hold of the line, with which he still continued to angle.

"And these are thy gifts, Jacopo?" he asked in a voice that, spite of his resignation, betrayed the longings of appetite.

"Antonio, they are the offerings of one who respects thy courage and honors thy nature."

"Bought with his earnings?"

"Can it be otherwise?—I am no beggar, for the love of the saints, and few in Venice give unasked. Eat then, without fear; seldom wilt thou be more welcome."

"Take them away, Jacopo, if thou lovest me. Do not tempt me beyond what I can bear."

"How! art thou commanded to a penance?" hastily exclaimed the other.

"Not so—not so. It is long since I have found leisure or heart for the confessional."

"Then why refuse the gift of a friend? Remember thy years and necessities."

"I cannot feed on the price of blood!"

The hand of the Bravo was withdrawn, as if repelled by an electric touch. The action caused the rays of the moon to fall athwart his kindling eye, and firm as Antonio was in honesty and principle, he felt the blood creep to his heart, as he encountered the fierce and sudden glance of his companion. A long pause succeeded, during which the fisherman diligently plied his line, though utterly regardless of the object for which it had been cast.

"I have said it, Jacopo," he added, at length, "and tongue of mine shall not belie the thought of my heart. Take away thy food then, and forget all that is past; for what I have said hath not been said in scorn, but out of regard to my own soul. Thou knowest how I have sorrowed for the boy, but next to his loss I could mourn over thee—ay, more bitterly than over any other of the fallen!"

The hard breathing of the Bravo was audible, but still he spoke not.

"Jacopo," continued the anxious fisherman, "do not mistake me. The pity of the suffering and poor is not like the scorn of the rich and worldly. If I touch a sore, I do not bruise it with my heel. Thy present pain is better than the greatest of all thy former joys."

"Enough, old man," said the other in a smothered voice; "thy words are forgotten. Eat without fear, for the offering is bought with earnings as pure as the gleanings of a mendicant friar."

"I will trust to the kindness of St. Anthony and the fortune of my hook;" simply returned Antonio. "Tis common for us of the Lagunes to go to a supperless bed: take away the basket, good Jacopo, and let us speak of other things."

The Bravo ceased to press his food upon the fish-

erman. Laying aside his basket, he saté brooding over what had occurred.

"Hast thou come thus far for naught else, good Jacopo?" demanded the old man, willing to weaken the shock of his refusal.

The question appeared to restore Jacopo to a recollection of his errand. He stood erect, and looked about him, for more than a minute, with a keen eye and an entire intentness of purpose. The look in the direction of the city was longer and more earnest than those thrown toward the sea and the main, nor was it withdrawn, until an involuntary start betrayed equally surprise and alarm.

"Is there not a boat, here, in a line with the tower of the campanile?" he asked quickly, pointing towards the city.

"It so seems. It is early for my comrades to be abroad, but the draughts have not been heavy of late, and the revelry of yesterday drew many of our people from their toil. The patricians must eat, and the poor must labor, or both would die."

The Bravo slowly seated himself, and he looked with concern into the countenance of his companion.

"Art thou long here, Antonio?"

"But an hour. When they turned us away from the palace, thou knowest that I told thee of my necessities. There is not, in common, a more certain spot on the Lagunes than this, and yet have I long played the line in vain. The trial of hunger is hard, but, like all other trials, it must be borne. I have prayed to my patron thrice, and sooner or later he will listen to my wants. Thou art used to the manners of these masked nobles, Jacopo; dost thou think them likely to hearken to reason? I hope I did the cause no wrong for want of breeding, but I spoke them fair and plainly as fathers and men with hearts."

"As senators they have none. Thou little under-

standest, Antonio, the distinctions of these patricians. In the gaiety of their palaces, and among the companions of their pleasures, none will speak you fairer of humanity and justice—ay—even of God! but when met to discuss what they call the interests of St. Mark, there is not a rock on the coldest peak of yonder Alp, with less humanity, or a wolf among their valleys more heartless!”

“Thy words are strong, Jacopo—I would not do injustice even to those who have done me this wrong. The senators are men, and God has given all feelings and nature alike.”

“The gift is then abused. Thou hast felt the want of thy daily assistant, fisherman, and thou hast sorrowed for thy child; for thee it is easy to enter into another’s griefs; but the senators know nothing of suffering. Their children are not dragged to the galleys, their hopes are never destroyed by laws coming from hard task-masters, nor are their tears shed for sons ruined by being made companions of the dregs of the republic. They will talk of public virtue and services to the state, but in their own cases they mean the virtue of renown, and services that bring with them honors and rewards. The want of the state is their conscience, though they take heed those wants shall do themselves no harm.”

“Jacopo, Providence itself hath made a difference in men. One is large, another small; one weak, another strong; one wise, another foolish. At what Providence hath done, we should not murmur?”

“Providence did not make the senate; ’t is an invention of man. Mark me, Antonio, thy language hath given offence, and thou art not safe in Venice. They will pardon all but complaints against their justice. That is too true to be forgiven.”

“Can they wish to harm one who seeks his own child?”

“If thou wert great and respected, they would

undermine thy fortune and character, ere thou should'st put their system in danger—as thou art weak and poor, they will do thee some direct injury, unless thou art moderate. Before all, I warn thee that their system must stand!”

“Will God suffer this?”

“We may not enter into his secrets;” returned the Bravo, devoutly crossing himself. “Did his reign end with this world, there might be injustice in suffering the wicked to triumph, but, as it is, we—Yon boat approaches fast! I little like its air and movements.”

“They are not fishermen, truly, for there are many oars and a canopy!”

“It is a gondola of the state!” exclaimed Jacopo, rising and stepping into his own boat, which he cast loose from that of his companion, when he stood in evident doubt as to his future proceedings. “Antonio, we should do well to row away.”

“Thy fears are natural,” said the unmoved fisherman, “and 'tis a thousand pities that there is cause for them. There is yet time for one skilful as thou to outstrip the fleetest gondola on the canals.”

“Quick, lift thy anchor, old man, and depart,—my eye is sure. I know the boat.”

“Poor Jacopo! what a curse is a tender conscience! Thou hast been kind to me in my need, and if prayers, from a sincere heart, can do thee service, thou shalt not want them.”

“Antonio!” cried the other, causing his boat to whirl away, and then pausing an instant like a man undecided—“I can stay no longer—trust them not—they are false as fiends—there is no time to lose—I must away.”

The fisherman murmured an ejaculation of pity, as he waved a hand, in adieu!

“Holy St. Anthony, watch over my own child,

lest he come to some such miserable life!" he added, in an audible prayer—"There hath been good seed cast on a rock, in that youth, for a warmer or kinder heart is not in man. That one like Jacopo should live by striking the assassin's blow!"

The near approach of the strange gondola, now attracted the whole attention of the old man. It came swiftly towards him, impelled by six strong oars, and his eye turned feverishly in the direction of the fugitive. Jacopo, with a readiness that necessity and long practice rendered nearly instinctive, had taken a direction which blended his wake in a line with one of those bright streaks that the moon drew on the water, and which, by dazzling the eye, effectually concealed the objects within its width. When the fisherman saw that the Bravo had disappeared, he smiled and seemed at ease.

"Ay, let them come here," he said; "it will give Jacopo more time. I doubt not the poor fellow hath struck a blow, since quitting the palace, that the council will not forgive! The sight of gold hath been too strong, and he hath offended those who have so long borne with him. God forgive me, that I have had communion with such a man! but when the heart is heavy, the pity of even a dog will warm our feelings. Few care for me, now, or the friendship of such as he could never have been welcome."

Antonio ceased, for the gondola of the state came with a rushing noise to the side of his own boat, where it was suddenly stopped by a backward sweep of the oars. The water was still in ebullition, when a form passing into the gondola of the fisherman, the larger boat shot away again, to the distance of a few hundred feet, and remained at rest.

Antonio witnessed this movement in silent curiosity; but when he saw the gondoliers of the state

lying on their oars, he glanced his eye again furtively in the direction of Jacopo, saw that all was safe, and faced his companion with confidence. The brightness of the moon enabled him to distinguish the dress and aspect of a bare-footed Carmelite. The latter seemed more confounded than his companion, by the rapidity of the movement, and the novelty of his situation. Notwithstanding his confusion, however, an evident look of wonder crossed his mortified features when he first beheld the humble condition, the thin and whitened locks, and the general air and bearing of the old man with whom he now found himself.

“Who art thou?” escaped him, in the impulse of surprise.

“Antonio of the Lagunes! A fisherman that owes much to St. Anthony, for favors little deserved.”

“And why hath one like thee fallen beneath the senate’s displeasure!”

“I am honest and ready to do justice to others. If that offend the great, they are men more to be pitied than envied.”

“The convicted are always more disposed to believe themselves unfortunate than guilty. The error is fatal, and it should be eradicated from the mind, lest it lead to death.”

“Go tell this to the patricians. They have need of plain counsel, and a warning from the church.”

“My son, there is pride and anger, and a perverse heart in thy replies. The sins of the senators—and as they are men, they are not without spot—can in no manner whiten thine own. Though an unjust sentence should condemn one to punishment, it leaves the offences against God in their native deformity. Men may pity him who hath wrongfully undergone the anger of the world, but the church will only pronounce pardon on him who con-

fesseth his errors, with a sincere admission of their magnitude."

"Have you come, father, to shrive a penitent?"

"Such is my errand. I lament the occasion, and if what I fear be true, still more must I regret that one so aged should have brought his devoted head beneath the arm of justice."

Antonio smiled, and again he bent his eyes along that dazzling streak of light, which had swallowed up the gondola and the person of the Bravo.

"Father," he said, when a long and earnest look was ended, "there can be little harm in speaking truth to one of thy holy office. They have told thee there was a criminal here in the Lagunes, who hath provoked the anger of St. Mark?"

"Thou art right."

"It is not easy to know when St. Mark is pleased, or when he is not," continued Antonio, plying his line with indifference, "for the very man he now seeks has he long tolerated; ay, even in presence of the doge. The senate hath its reasons which lie beyond the reach of the ignorant, but it would have been better for the soul of the poor youth, and more seemly for the republic, had it turned a discouraging countenance on his deeds from the first."

"Thou speakest of another!—thou art not then the criminal they seek?"

"I am a sinner, like all born of woman, reverend Carmelite, but my hand hath never held any other weapon than the good sword with which I struck the infidel. There was one lately here, that I grieve to add, cannot say this!"

"And he is gone?"

"Father, you have your eyes, and you can answer that question for yourself. He is gone; though he is not far; still is he beyond the reach of the swiftest gondola in Venice, praised be St. Mark!"

The Carmelite bowed his head, where he was

seated, and his lips moved, either in prayer or in thanksgiving.

"Are you sorry, monk, that a sinner has escaped?"

"Son, I rejoice that this bitter office hath passed from me, while I mourn that there should be a spirit so depraved as to require it. Let us summon the servants of the republic, and inform them that their errand is useless."

"Be not of haste, good father. The night is gentle, and these hirelings sleep on their oars, like gulls in the Lagunes. The youth will have more time for repentance, should he be undisturbed."

The Carmelite, who had arisen, instantly reseated himself, like one actuated by a strong impulse.

"I thought he had already been far beyond pursuit," he muttered, unconsciously apologizing for his apparent haste.

"He is over bold, and I fear he will row back to the canals, in which case you might meet nearer to the city—or, there may be more gondolas of the state out—in short, father, thou wilt be more certain to escape hearing the confession of a Bravo, by listening to that of a fisherman, who has long wanted an occasion to acknowledge his sins."

Men who ardently wish the same result, require few words to understand each other. The Carmelite took, intuitively, the meaning of his companion, and throwing back his cowl, a movement that exposed the countenance of Father Anselmo, he prepared to listen to the confession of the old man.

"Thou art a Christian, and one of thy years hath not to learn the state of mind that becometh a penitent;" said the monk, when each was ready.

"I am a sinner, father; give me counsel and absolution, that I may have hope."

"Thy will be done—thy prayer's heard—approach and kneel."

Antonio, who had fastened his line to his seat, and disposed of his net with habitual care, now crossed himself devoutly, and took his station before the Carmelite. His acknowledgments of error then began. Much mental misery clothed the language and ideas of the fisherman with a dignity that his auditor had not been accustomed to find in men of his class. A spirit so long chastened by suffering had become elevated and noble. He related his hopes for the boy, the manner in which they had been blasted by the unjust and selfish policy of the state, of his different efforts to procure the release of his grandson, and his bold expedients at the regatta, and the fancied nuptials with the Adriatic. When he had thus prepared the Carmelite to understand the origin of his sinful passions, which it was now his duty to expose, he spoke of those passions themselves, and of their influence on a mind that was ordinarily at peace with mankind. The tale was told simply and without reserve, but in a manner to inspire respect, and to awaken powerful sympathy in him who heard it.

“And these feelings thou didst indulge against the honored and powerful of Venice!” demanded the monk, affecting a severity he could not feel.

“Before my God do I confess the sin! In bitterness of heart I cursed them; for to me they seemed men without feeling for the poor, and heartless as the marbles of their own palaces.”

“Thou knowest that to be forgiven, thou must forgive. Dost thou, at peace with all of earth, forget this wrong, and canst thou in charity with thy fellows, pray to Him who died for the race, in behalf of those who have injured thee?”

Antonio bowed his head on his naked breast, and he seemed to commune with his soul.

“Father,” he said, in a rebuked tone, “I hope I do.”

"Thou must not trifle with thyself to thine own perdition. There is an eye in yon vault above us which pervades space, and which looks into the inmost secrets of the heart. Canst thou pardon the error of the patricians, in a contrite spirit for thine own sins?"

"Holy Maria, pray for them, as I now ask mercy in their behalf!—Father, they are forgiven."

"Amen!"

The Carmelite arose and stood over the kneeling Antonio, with the whole of his benevolent countenance illuminated by the moon. Stretching his arms towards the stars, he pronounced the absolution, in a voice that was touched with pious fervor. The upward expectant eye, with the withered lineaments of the fisherman, and the holy calm of the monk, formed a picture of resignation and hope, that angels would have loved to witness.

"Amen! amen!" exclaimed Antonio, as he arose, crossing himself; "St. Anthony and the Virgin aid me to keep these resolutions!"

"I will not forget thee, my son, in the offices of holy church. Receive my benediction, that I may depart."

Antonio again bowed his knee, while the Carmelite firmly pronounced the words of peace. When this last office was performed, and a decent interval of mutual but silent prayer had passed, a signal was given to summon the gondola of the state. It came rowing down with great force, and was instantly at their side. Two men passed into the boat of Antonio, and with officious zeal assisted the monk to resume his place in that of the republic.

"Is the penitent shrived?" half whispered one, seemingly the superior of the two.

"Here is an error. He thou seekst has escaped. This aged man is a fisherman named Antonio, and one who cannot have gravely offended St. Mark.

The Bravo hath passed toward the island of San Giorgio, and must be sought elsewhere."

The officer released the person of the monk, who passed quickly beneath the canopy, and he turned to cast a hasty glance at the features of the fisherman. The rubbing of a rope was audible, and the anchor of Antonio was lifted by a sudden jerk. A heavy plashing of the water followed, and the two boats shot away together, obedient to a violent effort of the crew. The gondola of the state exhibited its usual number of gondoliers bending to their toil, with its dark and hearse-like canopy, but that of the fisherman was empty!

The sweep of the oars and the plunge of the body of Antonio had been blended in a common wash of the surge. When the fisherman came to the surface, after his fall, he was alone in the centre of the vast but tranquil sheet of water. There might have been a glimmering of hope, as he arose from the darkness of the sea to the bright beauty of that moon-lit night. But the sleeping domes were too far for human strength, and the gondolas were sweeping madly towards the town. He turned, and swimming feebly, for hunger and previous exertion had undermined his strength, he bent his eye on the dark spot, which he had constantly recognized as the boat of the Bravo.

Jacopo had not ceased to watch the interview, with the utmost intentness of his faculties. Favored by position, he could see without being distinctly visible. He saw the Carmelite pronouncing the absolution, and he witnessed the approach of the larger boat. He heard a plunge heavier than that of falling oars, and he saw the gondola of Antonio towing away empty. The crew of the republic had scarcely swept the Lagunes with their oar-blades, before his own stirred the water.

“Jacopo!—Jacopo!” came fearfully and faintly to his ears.

The voice was known and the occasion thoroughly understood. The cry of distress was succeeded by the rush of the water, as it piled before the beak of the Bravo's gondola. The sound of the parted element was like the sighing of a breeze. Ripples and bubbles were left behind, as the driven scud floats past the stars, and all those muscles which had once before that day been so finely developed in the race of the gondoliers, were now expanded, seemingly in twofold volumes. Energy and skill were in every stroke, and the dark spot came down the streak of light, like the swallow touching the water with its wing.

“Hither, Jacopo—thou steerest wide!”

The beak of the gondola turned, and the glaring eye of the Bravo caught a glimpse of the fisherman's head.

“Quickly, good Jacopo,—I fail!”

The murmuring of the water again drowned the stifled words. The efforts of the oar were frenzied, and at each stroke the light gondola appeared to rise from its element.

“Jacopo—hither—dear Jacopo!”

“The mother of God aid thee, fisherman!—I come.”

“Jacopo—the boy!—the boy!”

The water gurgled; an arm was visible in the air, and it disappeared. The gondola drove upon the spot where the limb had just been visible, and a backward stroke, that caused the ashen blade to bend like a reed, laid the trembling boat motionless. The furious action threw the Lagune into ebullition, but, when the foam subsided, it lay calm as the blue and peaceful vault it reflected.

“Antonio!”—burst from the lips of the Bravo.

A frightful silence succeeded the call. There was

neither answer nor human form. Jacopo compressed the handle of his oar with fingers of iron, and his own breathing caused him to start. On every side he bent a frenzied eye, and on every side he beheld the profound repose of that treacherous element which is so terrible in its wrath. Like the human heart, it seemed to sympathize with the tranquil beauty of the midnight view; but, like the human heart, it kept its own fearful secrets.

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