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TALES *of my* NATIVE TOWN

By
Gabriele D'Annunzio

TRANSLATED BY
PROF. RAFAEL MANTELLINI, Ph.D.

INSTRUCTOR OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES AT THE BERKELEY-
IRVING SCHOOL, NEW YORK CITY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY
JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER



GARDEN CITY NEW YORK LONDON
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INTRODUCTION

BY JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

I

The attitude of mind necessary to a complete enjoyment of the tales in this book must first spring from the realisation that, as stories, they are as different from our own short imaginative fiction as the town of Pescara, on the Adriatic Sea, is different from Marblehead in Massachusetts. It is true that fundamentally the motives of creative writing, at least in the Western Hemisphere, are practically everywhere alike; they are what might be called the primary emotions, hatred and envy, love and cruelty, lust, purity and courage. There are others, but these are sufficient: and an analysis of *The Downfall of Candia* together with any considerable story native to the United States would disclose a similar genesis.

But men are not so much united by the deeper bonds of a common humanity as they are separated by the superficial aspects and prejudices of society. The New England town and Pescara, at heart very much the same, are far apart in the overwhelming trivialities of civilisation, and Signor D'Annunzio's tales, read in a local state of being, might as well have remained untranslated. But this difference, of course, lies in the writer, not in his material; and Gabriele D'Annunzio is the special and peculiar product of modern Italy.

No other country, no other history, would have given birth to a genius made up of such contending and utterly opposed qualities: it is exactly as if all the small principalities that were Italy before the Risorgimento, all the amazing contradictions of stark heroics and depraved nepotism, the fanaticism and black blood and superstition, with the introspective and febrile weariness of a very old land, were bound into D'Annunzio's being.

Not only is this true of the country and of the man, the difference noted, it particularly includes the writing itself. And exactly here is the difficulty which, above all others, must be overcome if pleasure is to result from "Tales of My Native Town." These are not stories at all, in the sense of an individual coherent action with the stirring properties of a plot. The interest is not cunningly seized upon and stimulated and baffled up to a satisfactory finale. The formula that constitutes the base of practically every applauded story here—a determination opposed to hopeless odds but invariably triumphant—is not only missing from *Tales of My Native Town*, in the majority of cases it is controverted. For the greater part man is the victim of inimical powers, both within him and about; and fate, or rather circumstance, is too heavy for the defiance of any individual.

What, actually, has happened is that D'Annunzio has not disentangled these coherent fragments from the mass of life. He has not lifted his tales into the crystallised isolation of

a short story: they merge from the beginning and beyond the end into the general confusion of existence, they are moments, significantly tragic or humorous, selected from the whole incomprehensible sweep of a vastly larger work, and presented as naturally as possible. However, they are not without form, in reality these tales are woven with an infinite delicacy, an art, like all art, essentially artificial. But a definite interest in them, the sense of their beauty, must rise from an intrinsic interest in the greater affair of being. It is useless for anyone not impressed with the beauty of sheer living as a spectacle to read "Tales of My Native Town."

II

The clear understanding of a divergence should result in a common ground of departure, of sympathy, and to make this plainer still it ought to be added that in the question of taste, of the latitude of allowable material and treatment, the Italians are far more comprehensive than ourselves. This, certainly, is particularly true in their attitude toward the relation of the sexes; and here is, perhaps, the greatest difference between what might be loosely called a Latin literature and an Anglo-Saxon. We are almost exclusively interested in the results, the reactions, of sexual contacts; but the former have their gaze fixed keenly on the process itself. At the most we indicate that consummations of passion have occurred, and then turn, with a feeling of relief, to what we are convinced is the greater importance of its consequences.

But not only is Gabriele D'Annunzio perfectly within his privilege in lingering over any important, act of nature, he is equally at liberty to develop all the smaller expressions of lust practically barred from English or American pens. These, undeniably, have as large an influence in one country, one man, as in another; they are—as small things are apt to be—more powerful in the end than the greatest attributes. Yet while we have agreed to ignore them, to discard them as ignoble and obscene, in "Tales of My Native Town" erotic gestures and thoughts, libidinous whispers, play their inevitable devastating part.

Yet this is not a book devoted to such impulses; one tale only, although in many ways that is the best, has as its motive lust. It is rather in the amazingly direct treatment of disease, of physical abnormality, that it will be disturbing to the unprepared reader from an entirely different and less admirable, or, at any rate, less honest, convention. Undoubtedly D'Annunzio's unsparing revelation of human deformity and ills will seem morbid to the unaccustomed mind; but, conversely, it can be urged that the dread of these details is in itself morbid. Then, too, we have an exaggerated horror of the unpleasant, a natural, but saccharine, preference for happiness. As a nation we are not conspicuously happier than Italy, but we clamour with a deafening insistence for the semblance of a material good fortune. Meeting pain no better and no worse than other nations, from our written stories we banish it absolutely; but anyone who cares to realise the beauty that, beyond question, pervades the following pages will be obliged to harden himself to meet precisely the deplorable accidents that he must face wherever life has been contaminated by centuries of brutal ignorance, oppression and want.

Again, it is not in the larger aspects, the nobler phases, of suffering with which we are concerned, but in the cold revelation of rasping details, brutal sores and deformity, the dusty spiders of paralysis. If this were all it would be hideous beyond support; but, fortunately, the coldness is only in the method, there is a saving spirit of pity, the valid humanity born of understanding. Such horror as exists here is the result of D'Annunzio's sensitive recognition of the weight of poverty and superstition crushing men into unspeakable fatalities of the flesh. A caustic humour, as well, illuminates the darker pits of existence, ironic rather than satirical, bitter rather than fatalistic; and then admirably exposing the rough play of countrymen like the rough wine of their Province. In addition there is always, for reassurance, the inclusion of the simple bravery that in itself leavens both life and books with hope.

III

Yet, with the attention directed so exclusively upon national differences, equally it must be said that no individual has ever written into literature a more minute examination of actuality than that in "Tales of My Native Town." Indeed, to find its counterpart it would be necessary to turn to the relentlessly veracious paintings of the early Dutchmen, or the anatomical canvasses of El Greco. D'Annunzio's descriptions of countenances are dermatological, the smallest pores are carefully traced, the shape and hue and colour of every feature. This is set down not only directly but by means of remarkable similies: Binchi-Blanche has a surly, yellow-lined face like a lemon without any juice; Africana's husband's mouth resembles the cut in a rotten pumpkin; Ciarole's face was that of a gilded wooden effigy from which the gilding had partly worn off; while Biagio Quaglia reflected the brilliancy and freshness of an almond tree in springtime.

The direct descriptions are often appalling, since, as has already been indicated, nothing is considered unimportant; there are literally no reservations, or rather, no, prejudices. The physical disintegration that accompanies death is, as well, recorded to the last black clot and bubble of red froth. D'Annunzio is not afraid of death in the context of his pages, he is never reluctant to meet the great facts, the terrible penalties, of existence; rather it is upon them that his writing is founded; it has, in the main, in these tales, two sides, one of violence, of murder and venom, and the other an idyllic presentation of a setting, an environment, saturated with classic and natural beauty.

The mind, now horrified by the dislocated beggars gathered about the blind Mungia, is suddenly swept into the release of evening fragrantly cool like myrtles; or Turlendana returns from his long voyages and, with his amazing animals, makes his way home into Pescara: "The river of his native place carried to him the peaceful air of the sea.... The silence was profound. The cobwebs shone tranquilly in the sun like mirrors framed by the crystal of the sea." He passes with the Cyclopean camel, the monkey and the she-ass across the boat bridge and: "Far behind the mountain of Gran Sasso the setting sun irradiated the spring sky ... and from the damp earth, the water of the river, the seas, and the ponds, the moisture had arisen. A rosy glow tinted the houses, the sails, the masts, the plants, and the whole landscape, and the figures of the people, acquiring a sort of

transparency, grew obscure, the lines of their contour wavering in the fading light.”

Nothing could surpass in peacefulness this vision, a scene like a mirage of fabulous days wrapped in tender colour. Throughout the tale of *The Virgin Anna*, too, there are, in spite of the vitriolic realism of its spirit, the crystal ecstasies of white flocks of girls before the Eucharist of their first communion. While it was Anna’s father who came ashore from his voyages to the island of Rota with his shirt all scented with southern fruit. *The Virgin Anna* has many points of resemblance to that other entranced peasant in *Une Vie Simple*; but Anna had a turtle in place of a parrot, and D’Annunzio is severer with his subject than was Flaubert.

But such idylls are quickly swept away in the fiery death of the Duke of Orfena, with the pistols ringing in high stately chambers, and Mazzagrognà, the major-domo, a dripping corpse, hanging in the railing of a balcony. There is no shrinking, no evasion, here; and none is permitted the reader:—the flames that consume the Duke are not romantic figments, their fierce energy scorches the imagination.

IV

These qualities belong to a high order of creative writing, they can never be the property of mere talent, they have no part in concessions to popular and superficial demands. This does not necessarily imply a criticism of the latter: it is not a crime to prefer happiness to misery, and certainly the tangible facts of happiness are success and the omnipotence of love. Tales and stories exist as a source of pleasure, but men take their pleasures with a difference; and for any who are moved by the heroic spectacle of humanity pinned by fatality to earth but forever struggling for release “*Tales of My Native Town*” must have a deep significance.

No one has abhorred brutality and deception more passionately than Gabriele D’Annunzio, and no one has held himself more firmly to the exact drawing of their insuperable evils. But this is not all; it is not, perhaps, even the most important aspect: that may well be his fascinating art. Here, above all, the contending elements, of his being, the brilliant genius of the Renaissance, predominate; an age bright with blood and gold and silk, an age of poetry as delicately cultivated as its assassinations. It was a period logical and cruel, lovely and corrupt; and, to an extraordinary degree, it has its reflection in D’Annunzio’s writing.

Yet, in him, it is troubled by modern apprehensions, a social conscience unavoidable now to any fineness of perception. His tales are no longer simply the blazing arbitrary pictures of the Quattrocento; they possess our own vastly more burdened spirit. In this, as well, they are as American as they are Italian; the crimes and beggars and misery of Pescara, the problems and hopes of one, belong to the other; the bonds of need and sympathy are complete.

The tales themselves are filled with energy and movement, the emotions are in high keys. At times a contest of will, of temptation playing with fear, as in *The Gold Pieces*, they rise

to pitched battles between whole towns; the factions, more often than not led by Holy reliques and statues, a sacred arm in silver or the sparkling bust of a Saint with a solar disc, massed with scythes and bars and knives, meet in sanguinary struggle. Or again the passions smoulder into individual bitterness and scandal and mean hatred. The Duchess of Amalfi is such a chronicle, the record of Don Giovà's devastating passion for Violetta Kutufa, who came to Pescara with a company of singers at Carnival.

Nothing is omitted that could add to the veracity, the inevitable collapse, of this almost senile Don Juan; while the psychology of the ending is an accomplishment of arresting power and fitness. There is in *The Duchess of Amalfi* a vivid presentation of Pescara itself, the houses and Violetta's room scented with cyprus-powder, the square with the cobblers working and eating figs, a caged blackbird whistling the Hymn of Garibaldi, the Casino, immersed in shadow, its tables sprinkled with water.

Around Pescara is the level sea, the river and mountains and the broad campagna, the vines, the wine vats and oil presses, the dwellings of mud and reeds; the plain is flooded with magnificent noon, and, at night, Turlendana, drunk, is mocked by the barking of vagrant dogs; the men linger under Violetta's lighted windows, and the strains of her song run through all the salons, all the heads, of the town.... It is as far away as possible, and yet, in its truth, implied in every heart.

TALES OF MY NATIVE TOWN

I

THE HERO

Already the huge standards of Saint Gonselvo had appeared on the square and were swaying heavily in the breeze. Those who bore them in their hands were men of herculean stature, red in the face and with their necks swollen from effort; and they were playing with them.

After the victory over the Radusani the people of Mascalico celebrated the feast of September with greater magnificence than ever. A marvellous passion for religion held all souls. The entire country sacrificed the recent richness of the corn to the glory of the Patron Saint. Upon the streets from one window to another the women had stretched their nuptial coverlets. The men had wreathed with vines the doorways and heaped up the thresholds with flowers. As the wind blew along the streets there was everywhere an immense and dazzling undulation which intoxicated the crowd.

From the church the procession proceeded to wind in and out and to lengthen out as far as the square. Before the altar, where Saint Pantaleone had fallen, eight men, privileged souls, were awaiting the moment for the lifting of the statue of Saint Gonselvo; their names were: Giovanni Curo, l'Ummalido, Mattala, Vencenzio Guanno, Rocco di Cenzo, Benedetto Galante, Biagio di Clisci, Giovanni Senzapaura. They stood in silence, conscious of the dignity of their work, but with their brains slightly confused. They seemed very strong; had the burning eye of the fanatic, and wore in their ears, like women, two circles of gold. From time to time they tested their biceps and wrists as if to calculate their vigour; or smiled fugitively at one another.

The statue of the Patron Saint was enormous, very heavy, made of hollow bronze, blackish, with the head and hands of silver.

Mattala cried:

“Ready!”

The people, everywhere, struggled to see. The windows of the church roared at every gust of the wind. The nave was fumigated with incense and resin. The sounds of instruments were heard now and then. A kind of religious fever seized the eight men, in the centre of that turbulence. They extended their arms to be ready.

Mattala cried:

“One! Two! Three!”

Simultaneously the men made the effort to raise the statue to the altar. But its weight was overpowering, and the figure swayed to the left. The men had not yet succeeded in getting a firm grip around the base. They bent their backs in their endeavour to resist. Biagio di Clisci and Giovanni Curo, the least strong, lost their hold. The statue swerved violently to one side. L'Ummalido gave a cry.

“Take care! Take care!” vociferated the spectators on seeing the Patron Saint so imperilled. From the square came a resounding crash that drowned all voices.

L'Ummalido had fallen on his knees with his right arm beneath the bronze. Thus kneeling, he held his two large eyes, full of terror and pain, fixed on his hand which he could not free, while his mouth twisted but no longer spoke. Drops of blood sprinkled the altar.

His companions, all together, made a second effort to raise the weight. The operation was difficult. L'Ummalido, in a spasm of pain, twisted his mouth. The women spectators shuddered.

At length the statue was lifted and L'Ummalido withdrew his hand, crushed and bleeding and formless. “Go home, now! Go home!” the people cried, while pushing him toward the door of the church.

A woman removed her apron and offered it to him for a bandage. L'Ummalido refused it. He did not speak, but watched a group of men who were gesticulating and disputing around the statue.

“It is my turn!”

“No!—no! It's my turn!”

“No! let me!”

Cicco Ponno, Mattia Seafarolo and Tommaso di Clisci were contending for the place left vacant by L'Ummalido.

He approached the disputants. Holding his bruised hand at his side, and with the other opening a path, he said simply:

“The position is mine.”

And he placed his left shoulder as a prop for the Patron Saint. He stifled down his pain, gritting his teeth, with fierce will-power.

Mattala asked him:

“What are you trying to do?”

He answered:

“What Saint Gonselvo wishes me to do.”

And he began to walk with the others. Dumbfounded the people watched him pass. From time to time, someone, on seeing the wound which was bleeding and growing black, asked him:

“L'Umma', what is the matter?”

He did not answer. He moved forward gravely, measuring his steps by the rhythm of the music, with his mind a little hazy, beneath the vast coverlets that flapped in the wind and amongst the swelling crowd.

At a street corner he suddenly fell. The Saint stopped an instant and swayed, in the centre of a momentary confusion, then continued its progress. Mattia Scafarola supplied the vacant place. Two relations gathered up the swooning man and carried him to a nearby house.

Anna di Cenzo, who was an old woman, expert at healing wounds, looked at the formless and bloody member, and then shaking her head, said:

“What can I do with it?”

Her little skill was able to do nothing. L’Ummalido controlled his feelings and said nothing. He sat down and tranquilly contemplated his wound. The hand hung limp, forever useless, with the bones ground to powder.

Two or three aged farmers came to look at it. Each, with a gesture or a word, expressed the same thought.

L’Ummalido asked:

“Who carried the Saint in my place?”

They answered:

“Mattia Scafarola.”

Again he asked:

“What are they doing now?”

They answered:

“They are singing the vespers.”

The farmers bid him good-bye and left for vespers. A great chiming came from the mother church.

One of the relations placed near the wound a bucket of cold water, saying:

“Every little while put your hand in it. We must go. Let us go and listen to the vespers.”

L’Ummalido remained alone. The chiming increased, while changing its metre. The light of day began to wane. An olive tree, blown by the wind, beat its branches against the low window.

L’Ummalido began to bathe his hand little by little. As the blood and concretions fell away, the injury appeared even greater. L’Ummalido mused:

“It is entirely useless! It is lost. Saint Gonselvo, I offer it up to you.”

He took a knife and went out. The streets were deserted. All of the devotees were in the church. Above the houses sped, like fugitive herds of cattle, the violet clouds of a September sunset.

In the church the united multitude sang in measured intervals as if in chorus to the music of the instruments. An intense heat emanated from the human bodies and the burning tapers. The silver head of Saint Gonselvo scintillated from on high like a light house. L'Ummalido entered. To the stupefaction of all, he walked up to the altar and said, in a clear voice, while holding the knife in his left hand:

“Saint Gonselvo, I offer it up to you.”

And he began to cut around the right wrist, gently, in full sight of the horrified people. The shapeless hand became detached little by little amidst the blood. It swung an instant suspended by the last filaments. Then it fell into a basin of copper which held the money offerings at the feet of the Patron Saint.

L'Ummalido then raised the bloody stump and repeated in a clear voice:

“Saint Gonselvo, I offer it up to you.”

II

THE COUNTESS OF AMALFI

I

When, one day, toward two o'clock in the afternoon, Don Giovanni Ussorio was about to set his foot on the threshold of Violetta Kutufas' house, Rosa Catana appeared at the head of the stairs and announced in a lowered voice, while she bent her head:

"Don Giovà, the Signora has gone."

Don Giovanni, at this unexpected news, stood dumbfounded, and remained thus for a moment with his eyes bulging and his mouth wide open. While gazing upward as if awaiting further explanations. Since Rosa stood silently at the top of the stairs, twisting an edge of her apron with her hands and dilly-dallying somewhat, he asked at length:

"But tell me why? But tell me why?" And he mounted several steps while he kept repeating with a slight stutter:

"But why? But why?"

"Don Giovà, what have I to tell you? Only that she has gone."

"But why?"

"Don Giovà, I do not know, so there!"

And Rosa took several steps on the landing-place toward the door of the empty apartment. She was rather a thin woman, with reddish hair, and face liberally scattered with freckles. Her large, ash-coloured eyes had nevertheless a singular vitality. The excessive distance between her nose and mouth gave to the lower part of her face the appearance of a monkey.

Don Giovanni pushed open the partly closed door and passed through the first room, and then the third; he walked around the entire apartment with excited steps; he stopped at the little room, set aside for the bath. The silence almost terrified him; a heavy anxiety weighted down his heart.

"It can't be true! It can't be true!" he murmured, staring around confusedly.

The furniture of the room was in its accustomed place, but there was missing from the table under the round mirror, the crystal phials, the tortoise-shell combs, the boxes, the brushes, all of those small objects that assist at the preparation of feminine beauty. In a corner stood a species of large, zinc kettle shaped like a guitar; and within it sparkled water tinted a delicate pink from some essence. The water exhaled subtle perfume that

blended in the air with the perfume of cyprus-powder. The exhalation held in it some inherent quality of sensuousness.

“Rosa! Rosa!” Don Giovanni cried, in a voice almost extinguished by the insurmountable anxiety that he felt surging through him.

The woman appeared.

“Tell me how it happened! To what place has she gone? And when did she go? And why?” begged Don Giovanni, making with his mouth a grimace both comic and childish, in order to restrain his grief and force back the tears.

He seized Rosa by both wrists, and thus incited her to speak, to reveal.

“I do not know, Signor,” she answered. “This morning she put her clothes in her portmanteau, sent for Leones’ carriage, and went away without a word. What can you do about it? She will return.”

“Return-n-n!” sobbed Don Giovanni, raising his eyes in which already the tears had started to overflow. “Has she told you when? Speak!” And this last cry was almost threatening and rabid.

“Eh?... to be sure she said to me, ‘Addio, Rosa. We will never see each other again...! But, after all ... who can tell! Everything is possible.’”

Don Giovanni sank dejectedly upon a chair at these words, and set himself to weeping with so much force of grief that the woman was almost touched by it.

“Now what are you doing, Don Giovà? Are there not other women in this world? Don Giovà, why do you worry about it...?”

Don Giovanni did not hear. He persisted in weeping like a child and hiding his face in Rosa Catana’s apron; his whole body was rent with the upheavals of his grief.

“No, no, no.... I want Violetta! I want Violetta!” he cried.

At that stupid childishness Rosa could not refrain from smiling. She gave assistance by stroking the bald head of Don Giovanni and murmuring words of consolation.

“I will find Violetta for you; I will find her.... So! be quiet! Do not weep any more, Don Giovannino. The people passing can hear. Don’t worry about it, now.”

Don Giovanni, little by little, under the friendly caress, curbed his tears and wiped his eyes on her apron.

“Oh! oh! what a thing to happen!” he exclaimed, after having remained for a moment with his glance fixed on the zinc kettle, where the water glittered now under a sunbeam. “Oh! oh! what luck! Oh!”

He took his head between his hands and swung it back and forth two or three times, as do imprisoned monkeys.

“Now go, Don Giovanino, go!” Rosa Cantana said, taking him gently by the arm and drawing him along.

In the little room the perfume seemed to increase. Innumerable flies buzzed around a cup where remained the residue of some coffee. The reflection of the water trembled on the walls like a subtle net of gold.

“Leave everything just so!” pleaded Don Giovanni of the woman, in a voice broken by badly suppressed sobs. He descended the stairs, shaking his head over his fate. His eyes were swollen and red, bulging from their sockets like those of a mongrel dog.

His round body and prominent stomach overweighted his two slightly inverted legs. Around his bald skull ran a crown of long curling hair that seemed not to take root in the scalp but in the shoulders, from which it climbed upward toward the nape of the neck and the temples. He had the habit of replacing from time to time with his bejewelled hands, some disarranged tuft; the jewels, precious and gaudy, sparkled even on his thumb, and a cornelian button as large as a strawberry fastened the bosom of his shirt over the centre of his chest.

When he reached the broad daylight of the square, he experienced anew that unconquerable confusion. Several cobblers were working near by and eating figs. A caged blackbird was whistling the hymn of Garibaldi, continuously, always recommencing at the beginning with painful persistency.

“At your service, Don Giovanni!” called Don Domenico Oliva, as he passed, and he removed his hat with an affable Neapolitan cordiality. Stirred with curiosity by the strange expression of the *Signor*, he repassed him in a short time and resaluted him with greater liberality of gesture and affability. He was a man of very long body and very short legs; the habitual expression of his mouth was involuntarily shaped for derision. The people of Pescara called him “Culinterra.”

“At your service!” he repeated.

Don Giovanni, in whom a venomous wrath was beginning to ferment which the laughter of the fig-eaters and the trills of the blackbird irritated, at his second salute turned his back fiercely and moved away, fully persuaded that those salutes were meant for taunts.

Don Domenico, astonished, followed him with these words:

“But, Don Giovà! ... are you angry ... but....”

Don Giovanni did not listen. He walked on with quick steps toward his home. The fruit-sellers and the blacksmiths along the road gazed and could not understand the strange behaviour of these two men, breathless and dripping with perspiration under the noonday sun.

Having arrived at his door, Don Giovanni, scarcely stopping to knock, turned like a serpent, yellow and green with rage, and cried:

“Don Domè, oh Don Domè, I will hit you!” With this threat, he entered his house and closed the door violently behind him.

Don Domenico, dumbfounded, stood for a time speechless. Then he retraced his steps, wondering what could account for this behaviour, when Matteo Verdura, one of the fig-

eaters, called:

“Come here! Come here! I have a great bit of news to tell you.”

“What news?” asked the man of the long spine, as he approached.

“Don’t you know about it?”

“About what?”

“Ah! Ah! Then you haven’t heard yet?”

“Heard what?”

Verdura fell to laughing and the other cobblers imitated him. Spontaneously all of them shook with the same rasping and inharmonious mirth, differing only with the personality of each man.

“Buy three cents’ worth of figs and I will tell you.”

Don Domenico, who was niggardly, hesitated slightly, but curiosity conquered him.

“Very well, here it is.”

Verdura called a woman and had her heap up the fruit on a plate. Then he said:

“That signora who lived up there, Donna Violetta, do you remember...? That one of the theatre, do you remember...?”

“Well?”

“She has made off this morning. Crash!”

“Indeed?”

“Indeed, Don Domè.”

“Ah, now I understand!” exclaimed Don Domenico, who was a subtle man and cruelly malicious.

Then, as he wished to revenge himself for the offence given him by Don Giovanni and also to make up for the three cents expended for the news, he went immediately to the *casino* in order to divulge the secret and to enlarge upon it.

The “casino,” a kind of café, stood immersed in shadow, and up from its tables sprinkled with water, arose a singular odour of dust and musk. There snored Doctor Punzoni, relaxed upon a chair, with his arms dangling. The Baron Cappa, an old soul, full of affection for lame dogs and tender girls, nodded discreetly over a newspaper. Don Ferdinando Giordano moved little flags over a card representing the battlefields of the Franco-Prussian war. Don Settimio de Marinis appraised with Doctor Fiocca the works of Pietro Mettastasio, not without many vocal explosions and a certain flowery eloquency in the use of poetical expressions. The notary Gaiulli, not knowing with whom to play, shuffled the cards of his game alone, and laid them out in a row on the table. Don Paolo Seccia sauntered around the billiard table with steps calculated to assist the digestion.

Don Domenico Oliva entered with so much vehemence, that all turned toward him except

Doctor Panzoni, who still remained in the embrace of slumber.

“Have you heard? Have you heard?”

Don Domenico was so anxious to tell the news, and so breathless, that at first he stuttered without making himself understood. All of these gentlemen around him hung upon his words, anticipating with delight any unusual occurrence that might enliven their noonday chatter.

Don Paolo Seccia, who was slightly deaf in one ear, said impatiently, “But have they tied your tongue, Don Domè?”

Don Domenico recommenced his story at the beginning, with more calmness and clearness. He told everything; enlarged on the rage of Don Giovanni Ussorio; added fantastic details; grew intoxicated with his own words as he went on.

“Now do you see? Now do you see?”

Doctor Panzoni, at the noise, opened his eyelids, rolling his huge pupils still dull with sleep and still blowing through the monstrous hairs of his nose, said or rather snorted nasally:

“What has happened? What has happened?”

And with much effort, bearing down on his walking stick, he raised himself very slowly, and joined the gathering in order to hear.

The Baron Cappa now narrated, with much saliva in his mouth, a well-nourished story apropos of Violetta Kutufa. From the pupils of the eyes of his intent listeners gleams flashed in turn. The greenish eyes of Don Palo Seccia scintillated as if bathed in some exhilarating moisture. At last the laughter burst out.

But Doctor Panzoni, though standing, had taken refuge again in slumber; since for him sleep, irresistible as a disease, always had its seat within his own nostrils.

He remained with his snores, alone in the centre of the room, his head upon his breast, while the others scattered over the entire district to carry the news from family to family.

And the news, thus divulged, caused an uproar in Pescara. Toward evening, with a fresh breeze from the sea and a crescent moon, everybody frequented the streets and squares. The hum of voices was infinite. The name of Violetta Kutufa was at every tongue’s end. Don Giovanni Ussorio was not to be seen.

II

Violetta Kutufa had come to Pescara in the month of January, at the time of the Carnival, with a company of singers. She spoke of being a Greek from the Archipelago, of having sung in a theatre at Corfu in the presence of the Greek king, and of having made mad with love an English admiral. She was a woman of plump figure and very white skin. Her arms were unusually round and full of small dimples that became pink with every change of

motion; and these little dimples, together with her rings and all of those other graces suitable for a youthful person, helped to make her fleshiness singularly pleasing, fresh and tantalising. The features of her face were slightly vulgar, the eyes tan colour, full of slothfulness; her lips large and flat as if crushed. Her nose did not suggest Greek origin; it was short, rather straight, and with large inflated nostrils; her black hair was luxuriant. She spoke with a soft accent, hesitating at each word, smiling almost constantly. Her voice often became unexpectedly harsh.

When her company arrived, the Pescaresi were frantic with expectation. The foreign singers were lauded everywhere, for their gestures, their gravity of movement, their costumes, and for every other accomplishment. But the person upon whom all attention centred was Violetta Kutufa.

She wore a kind of dark bolero bordered with fur and held together in front with gilt aiglettes; on her head was a species of toque, all fur, and worn a little to one side. She walked about alone, stepping briskly, entered the shops, treated the shop-keepers with a certain disdain, complained of the mediocrity of their wares, left without making a purchase, hummed with indifference.

Everywhere, in the squares, on all of the walls large hand-bills announced the performance of "The Countess of Amalfi." The name of Violetta Kutufa was resplendent in vermilion letters. The souls of the Pescaresi kindled. At length the long looked-for evening arrived.

The theatre was in a room of the old military hospital, at the edge of the town near the sea. The room was low, narrow, and as long as a corridor; the stage, of wood with painted scenery, arose a few hands' breadths above the floor; along the side walls was the gallery, consisting of boards over saw-horses covered with tricoloured flags and decorated with festoons. The curtain, a masterpiece of Cucuzzitó, son of Cucuzzitó, depicted tragedy, comedy and music, interwoven, like the three Graces, and flitting over a bridge under which passed the blue stream of Pescara. The chairs for the theatre, taken from the churches, occupied half of the pit. The benches, taken from the schools, occupied the remaining space.

Toward seven in the evening, the village band started its music on the square, played until it had made the circuit of the town and at length stopped in front of the theatre. The resounding march inspired the souls of passers-by. The women curbed their impatience within the folds of their beautiful silk garments. The room filled up rapidly.

The gallery was radiant with a sparkling aureole of married and unmarried women. Teodolinda Pomarici, a sentimental, lymphatic elocutionist, sat near Fermina Memura, called "The Masculine." The Fusilli girls, arrived from Castellamare, tall maidens with very black eyes, all clothed in a uniform, pink material, with hair braided down their backs, laughed loudly and gesticulated. Emilia d'Annunzio used her beautiful lion-like eyes, with an air of infinite fatigue. Marianina Cortese made signs with her fan to Donna Rachele Profeta who sat in front of her. Donna Rachele Bucci argued with Donna Rachele Carabba on the subjects of speaking tables and spiritualism. The school-mistresses Del Gado, both clothed in changeable silk with mantillas of most antique fashion, and with diverse coiffures glittering with brass spangles, remained silent, compunctious, almost

stunned by the novelty of this experience, almost repentant for having come to so profane a spectacle. Costanza Lesbu coughed continuously, shivering under her red shawl, very pale, very blond and very thin.

In the foremost chairs of the pit sat the wealthiest citizens. Don Giovanni Ussorio was most prominent because of his well-groomed appearance, his splendid black and white checkered trousers, his coat of shining wool, his quantity of false jewelry on fingers and shirt-front. Don Antonio Brattella, a member of the Areopagus of Marseilles, a man exhaling importance from every pore and especially from the lobe of his left ear, which was as thick as a green apricot, recited in a loud voice the lyric drama of Giovanni Peruzzini, and his words as they fell from his lips acquired a certain Ciceronian resonance. The auditors, lolling in their chairs, stirred with more or less impatience. Dr. Panzoni wrestled all to no purpose with the wiles of sleep, and from time to time made a noise that blended with the “la” of the tuning instruments.

“Pss! psss! pssss!”

The silence in the theatre grew profound. At the lifting of the curtain the stage was empty. The sound of a Violoncello came from the wings. Tilde appeared and sang. Afterwards Sertorio came out and sang. After him, a crowd of supernumeraries and friends, entered and intoned a song. After them, Tilde drew toward a window and sang:

“Oh how tedious the hours
To the desirous one...!”

In the audience a slight movement was perceptible, since all felt a love duet to be imminent. Tilde, in truth, was a first soprano, none too young; she wore a blue costume, had a blond wig that insufficiently covered her head, and her face, whitened with powder, resembled a raw cutlet besprinkled with flour and partially hidden behind a hempen wig.

Egidio came on. He was the young tenor. As he had a chest singularly hollow and legs slightly curved, he resembled a double-handed spoon upon which hung a calf’s head, scraped and polished like those which one sees at times over the butcher-shops. He began:

“Tilde! thy lips are mute,
Thy lowered glances dismay me,
Tell me, why you delay me?
Why do I see thy hand now
A-tremble? Why should that be?”

And Tilde, with great force of sentiment, replied:

“At such a solemn moment, how
Can you ask why of me?”

The duet increased in tenderness. The melody of the cavalier Petrella delighted the ears of the audience. All of the women leaned intently over the rails of the gallery and their faces,

throbbing in the green reflection of the flags, were pallid.

“Like a journey from paradise
Death will appear to us.”

Tilde appeared; and now entered, singing, the Duke Carnioli, who was a man fat, fierce, and long haired enough, to be suited to the part of baritone. He sang with many flourishes, running over the syllables, sometimes moreover boldly suppressing.

“Dost thou not know the conjugal chain
Is like lead on the feet?”

But, when in the song, he mentioned at length the Countess of Amalfi, a long applause broke from the audience. The Countess was desired, demanded.

Don Giovanni Ussorio asked of Don Antonio Brattella:

“When is she coming?”

Don Antonio, in a lofty tone, replied:

“Oh! Dio mio, Don Giovà! Don’t you know? In the second act! In the second act!”

The speech of Sertorio was listened to with half-impatience. The curtain fell in the midst of weak applause. Thus began the triumphs of Violetta Kutufa. A prolonged murmur ran through the pit, through the gallery, and increased when the audience heard the blows of the scene-shifters’ hammers behind the curtain. That invisible hustling increased their expectation.

When the curtain went up a kind of spell held the audience in its grip. The scenic effect was marvellous. Three illuminated arches stretched themselves in perspective, and the middle one bordered a fantastic garden.

Several pages were dispersed here and there, and were bowing. The Countess of Amalfi, clothed in red velvet, with her regal train, her arms and shoulders bare, her face ruddy, entered with agitated step and sang:

“It was an evening of ravishment, which still
Fills my soul....”

Her voice was uneven, sometimes twanging, but always powerful and penetrating. It produced on the audience a singular effect after the whine of Tilde. Immediately the audience was divided into two factions; the women were for Tilde, the men for Leonora.

“He who resists my charms
Has not easy matter...!”

Leonora possessed in her personality, in her gestures, her movements, a sauciness that intoxicated and kindled those unmarried men who were accustomed to the flabby Venuses of the lanes of Sant’ Agostino, and to those husbands who were wearied with conjugal monotony.

All gazed at the singer's every motion, at her large white shoulders, where, with the movements of her round arms, two dimples tried to smile.

At the end of her solo, applause broke forth with a crash. Later, the swooning of the Countess, her dissimulation before the Duke Carnioli (the leader of the duet), the whole scene aroused applause. The heat in the room had become intense; in the galleries fans fluttered confusedly, and among the fans the women's faces appeared and disappeared.

When the Countess leaned against a column in an attitude of sentimental contemplation, illuminated by the calcium light, and Egidio sang his gentle love song, Don Antonio Brattella called loudly, "She is great!"

Don Giovanni Ussorio, with a sudden impulse, fell to clapping his hands alone. The others shouted at him to be silent, as they wished to hear. Don Giovanni became confused.

"All is for love, everything speaks:

The moon, the zephyrs, the stars, the sea...."

The heads of the listeners swayed with the rhythm of this melody of the Petrella style, even though the voice of Egidio was indifferent; and even though the light was glaring and yellowish their eyes drank in the scene. But when, after this last contrast of passion and seduction, the Countess of Amalfi, walking toward the garden, took up the melody alone, the melody that still vibrated in the minds of all, the delight of the audience had risen to such a height that many raised their heads and inclined them slightly backward as if to trill together with the siren, who was now concealed among the flowers. She sang:

"The bark is now ready ... ah, come beloved!

Is not Love calling ... to live is to love?"

At this climax, Violetta Kutufa made a complete conquest of Don Giovanni Ussorio, who beside himself, seized with a species of passionate, musical madness, clamoured continuously:

"Brava! Brava! Brava!"

Don Paolo Seccia called loudly:

"Oh, see here! see here! Ussorio has gone mad for her!"

All the women gazed at Ussorio, amazed and confused. The school-mistresses Del Gado shook their rosaries under their mantillas. Teodolinda Pomarici remained ecstatic. Only the Fasilli girls, in their red paint, preserved their vivacity, and chattered, shaking their serpentine braids with every movement.

In the third act, neither the dying sighs of Tilde, whom the women defended, nor the rebuffs of Sertorio and Carnioli, nor the songs of the chorus, nor the monologue of the melancholy Egidio, nor the joyfulness of the dames and cavaliers, held any power to distract the public from the preceding voluptuousness.

"Leonora! Leonora! Leonora!" they cried.

Leonora reappeared on the arm of the Count of Lara and descended from a pavilion. Thus she reached the very culmination of her triumph.

She wore now a violet gown, trimmed with silver ribbons and enormous clasps. She turned to the pit, while with her foot she gave a quick, backward stroke to her train, and exposed in the act her instep.

Then, mingling with her words, a thousand charms and a thousand affectations, she sang half-jestingly,

“I am the butterfly that sports within the flowers....”

The public grew almost delirious at this well-known song.

The Countess of Amalfi, on feeling mount up to her the ardent admiration of the men, became intoxicated, multiplied her seductive gestures, and raised her voice to the highest altitude of which she was capable. Her fleshly throat, uncovered, marked with the necklace of Venus, shook with trills.

“I, the bee, who alone on the honey is nourished,

Am inebriate under the blue of the sky....”

Don Giovanni Ussorio stared with so much intensity, that his eyes seemed to start from their sockets. The Baron Cappa was equally enchanted. Don Antonio Brattella, a member of the Areopagus of Marseilles, swelled and swelled, until at length burst from him the exclamation:

“Colossal!”

III

Thus, Violetta Kutufa made a conquest of Pescara. For more than a month performances of the opera of the Cavalier Petrella, continued with ever increasing popularity. The theatre was always full, even packed. Applause for Leonora broke out furiously at the end of every song. A singular phenomenon occurred; the entire population of Pescara seemed seized with a species of musical mania; every Pescarenican soul became inclosed in the magic circle of one single melody, that of the butterfly that sports among the flowers.

In every corner, at every hour, in every way, in every possible variation, on every instrument, with an astounding persistency, that melody was repeated; and the person of Violetta Kutufa became the symbol of those musical strains, just as—God pardon the comparison—the harmony of the organ suggests the soul of paradise.

The musical and lyrical comprehension, which in the southern people is instinctive, expanded at this time without limit. The street gamins whistled everywhere; all the amateur musicians put forth their efforts, Donna Lisitta Menuma played the tune on the harpsichord from dawn until dusk, Don Antonio Brattella played it on the flute, Don Domenico Quaquino, on the clarionette, Don Giacomo Palusci, the priest, on an old rococo spinet, Don Vincenzo Rapagneta on his violoncello, Don Vincenzo Ranieri on the

trumpet, Don Nicola d'Annunzio, on his violin. From the towers of Sant' Agostino to the Arsenal, and from Pescheria to Dogana the multifold sounds mingled together and became a discord. In the early hours of the afternoon the district had the appearance of some large hospital for incurable madness. Even the grinders sharpening knives on their wheels tried to maintain a rhythm in the shriek of the metal and the whetstone.

As it was the time of the carnival, a public festival was given in the theatre. Shrove Thursday, at ten in the evening, the room blazed with wax-candles, smelt strongly of myrtle and glittered with mirrors. The masked revellers entered in crowds. Punchinellos predominated. From a platform enveloped in green draperies, marked with constellations of stars of silver paper, the orchestra began to play and Don Giovanni Ussorio entered.

He was dressed like a grandee of Spain, and had the appearance of a very fat Count of Lara. A blue cap with a long, white plume covered his baldness, a short coat of red velvet garnished with gold rippled over his shoulders. This costume accentuated the prominence of his stomach and the skinniness of his legs. His locks, shining with cosmetic oils, resembled an artificial fringe bound around his cap, and they were blacker than usual.

An impertinent Punchinello, on passing him, cried in a disguised voice:

“How funny!”

He made a gesture of horror, so clownish, at this metamorphosis of “Don Giovanni,” that much laughter burst forth from everyone in the vicinity. La Cicarina, all red paint under the black hood of her domino, like a beautiful flower of the flesh, laughed sonorously, while she tripped with two ragged harlequins.

Don Giovanni, filled with anger, lost himself in the crowd and sought Violetta Kutufa. The sarcasms of the other revellers pursued and wounded him. Suddenly he encountered another grandee of Spain, another count of Lara. He recognised Don Antonio Brattella and, at this, received a thrust in the heart. Already, between these two men, rivalry had broken loose.

“How is the medlar?” Don Donato Brandimarte screamed venomously, alluding to the fleshy protuberance that the member of the Areopagus of Marseilles had on his left ear. Don Giovanni took a fierce pleasure in this insult.

The rivals met face to face, scanned each other from head to foot, and kept their respective stations, the one always slightly withdrawn from the other, as they wandered through the crowd.

At eleven, an agitated flutter passed over the crowd. Violetta Kutufa entered. She was dressed in Mephistophelian costume, in a black domino with long scarlet hood, and with a scarlet mask over her face. The round, swan-like chin, the thick red mouth, shone through her thin veil. The eyes, lengthened and rendered slightly oblique because of the mask, seemed to smile.

All instantaneously recognised her and almost all made way for her; Don Antonio Brattella advanced caressingly on one side. On the other came Don Giovanni; Violetta Kutufa made a hasty survey of the rings that adorned the fingers of the latter, then took the

arm of Brattella.

She laughed and walked with a certain sprightly undulation of the hips. Brattella, while talking to her in his customary, silly, vainglorious manner, called her “Contessa,” and interspersed their conversation with the lyrical verses of Giovanni Peruzzini.

She laughed and leaned toward him, and pressed his arm suggestively, since the weaknesses of this ugly, vain man amused her. At a certain point, Brattella, when repeating the words of the Count of Lara in the melodrama of Petrella, said or rather sang submissively:

“Shall I then hope?”

Violetta Kutufa answered in the words of Leonora:

“Who forbids you...? Good-bye.”

Then, seeing Don Giovanni not far away, she detached herself from this bewitching chevalier, and fastened upon the other, who already for some time had pursued with eyes full of envy and dislike, the windings of this couple through the crowd of dancers.

Don Giovanni trembled like a youth under the glance of his first sweetheart. Then, seized with a superabundant pride, he drew the opera singer into the dance. He whirled breathlessly around, with his nose against the woman’s chest, his cloak floating out behind, his plume fluttering to the breeze, streams of perspiration mixed with cosmetic oils filtering down his temples.

Exhausted, he stopped at length. He reeled with giddiness. Two hands supported him and a sneering voice whispered in his ear, “Don Giovà, stop and recover your breath for a minute!”

The voice was that of Brattella, who in turn drew the fair lady into the dance. He danced, holding his left arm arched over his hips, beating time with his feet, endeavouring to appear as light as a feather, with motions meant to be gracious, but instead so idiotic, and with grimaces so monkey-like, that everywhere the laughter and mockery of the Punchinellos began to pelt down upon him.

“Pay a cent to see it, gentlemen!”

“Here is the bear of Poland that dances like a Christian! Gaze on him, gentlemen!”

“Have a medlar? Have a medlar?”

“Oh, see! See! An orangoutang!”

Don Antonio Brattella controlled himself with much dignity, still continuing his dance. Other couples wheeled around him.

The room was filled with all kinds of people, and in the midst of the confusion the candles burned on, with their reddish flames lighting up the festoons of immortelles. All of this fluttering reflected itself in the mirrors.

La Ciccarina, the daughter of Montagna, the daughter of Suriano, the sisters Montarano,

appeared and disappeared, while enlivening the crowd with the beams of their fresh country loveliness. Donna Teodolinda Pomarici, tall and thin, clothed in blue satin, like a madonna, permitted herself to be borne about in a state of transport as her hair, loosened from its bands, waved upon her shoulders. Costanzella Coppe, the most agile and indefatigable of the dancers, and the palest, flew from one extremity of the room to the other in a flash; Amalia Solofra, with hair almost aflame in colour, clothed like a rustic, her audacity almost unequalled, had her silk waist supported by a single band that outlined the connecting point of her arm; and during the dance, at intervals, one could see dark stains under her armpits. Amalia Gagliano, a beautiful, blue-eyed creature, in the costume of a sorceress, resembled an empty coffin walking vertically. A species of intoxication held sway over all these girls. They were fermenting in the warm, dense air, like adulterated wine. The laurel and the immortelles gave out a singular odour, almost ecclesiastical.

The music ceased, now all mounted the stairs leading to the refreshment-room. Don Giovanni Ussorio came to invite Violetta to the banquet. Brattella, to show that he had reached a state of close intimacy with the opera-singer, leaned toward her and whispered something in her ear, and then fell to laughing about it. Don Giovanni no longer heeded his rival.

“Come, Contessa,” he said, with much ceremony, as he offered his arm.

Violetta accepted. Both mounted the stairs slowly with Don Antonio in the rear.

“I am in love with you!” Don Giovanni hazarded, trying to instil into his voice that note of passion, rendered familiar to him by the principal lover of a dramatic company of Chieti.

Violetta Kutufa did not answer. She was amusing herself by watching the concourse of people near the booth of Andreuccio, who was distributing refreshments, while shouting the prices in a loud voice as if at a country-fair. Andreuccio had an enormous head with polished top, a nose that curved wondrously over the projection of his lower lip; he resembled one of those large paper lanterns in the shape of a human head. The revellers ate and drank with a bestial greediness, scattering on their clothes crumbs of sweet pastry and drops of liquor. On seeing Don Giovanni, Andreuccio cried, “Signor, at your service.”

Don Giovanni had much wealth, and was a widower without blood relations; for which reasons everybody was desirous to be of service to him and to flatter him.

“A little supper,” he answered. “And take care...!” He made an expressive sign to indicate that the thing must be excellent and rare.

Violetta Kutufa sat down, and with a languid effort removed her mask from her face and opened her domino a little. Her face, surrounded by the scarlet hood, and animated with warmth, seemed even more saucy. Through the opening of the domino one saw a species of pink tights that gave a suggestion of living flesh.

“Your health!” exclaimed Don Pompeo Nervi, lingering before the well-furnished table, and seating himself at length, allured by a plate of juicy lobsters.

Then Don Tito de Sieri arrived and took a place without ceremony; also Don Giustino

Franco, together with Don Pasquale Virgilio and Don Federico Sicoli appeared. The group of guests at the table continued to swell. After much tortuous tracing and retracing of his steps, even Don Antonio Brattella came finally. These were, for the most part, habitual guests of Don Giovanni; they formed about him a kind of adulatory court, gave their votes to him in the town elections, laughed at every witticism of his, and called him by way of nickname, "The Director." Don Giovanni introduced them all to Violetta Kutufa. These parasites set themselves to eating with their voracious mouths bent over their plates.

Every word, every sentence of Don Antonio Brattella was listened to in hostile silence. Every word, every sentence of Don Giovanni, was recognised with complacent smiles and nods of the head. Don Giovanni triumphed in the centre of his court. Violetta Kutufa treated him with affability, now that she felt the force of his gold; and now, entirely free from her hood, with her locks slightly dishevelled on forehead and neck, she indulged in her usual playfulness, somewhat noisy and childish. Around them the crowd moved restlessly.

In the centre of it, three or four harlequins walked on the pavement with their hands and feet, and rolled like great beetles. Amalia Solofra, standing upon a chair, with her long arms bare to the elbows, shook a tambourine. Around her a couple hopped in rustic fashion, giving out short cries, while a group of youths stood looking on with eager eyes. At intervals, from the lower room ascended the voice of Don Ferdinando Giordano, who was ordering the quadrille with great bravado.

"Balance! Forward and back! Swing!"

Little by little Violetta Kutufa's table became full to overflowing. Don Nereo Pica, Don Sebastiano Pica, Don Grisostomo Troilo and others of this Ussorian court arrived; even to Don Cirillo d'Amelio, Don Camillo d'Angelo and Don Rocco Mattace.

Many strangers stood about with stupid expressions, and watched them eat. Women were envious. From time to time a burst of rough laughter arose from the table, and from time to time corks popped and the foam of wine overflowed.

Don Giovanni took pleasure in splashing his guests, especially the bald ones, in order to make Violetta laugh. The parasites raised their flushed faces, and, still eating, smiled at their "Director" from under the foamy rain. But Don Antonio Brattella, having taken offence, made as if to go. All of the feasters opposite him gave a low cry like a bark.

Violetta called, "Stay." Don Antonio remained. After this he gave a toast rhyming in quintains. Don Federico Sicoli, half intoxicated, gave a toast likewise in honour of Violetta and of Don Giovanni, in which he went so far as to speak of "divine shape" and "jolly times." He declaimed in a loud voice. He was a man long, thin and greenish in colour. He lived by composing verses of Saints' days and laudations for all ecclesiastical festivals. Now, in the midst of his drunkenness, the rhymes fell from his lips without order, old rhymes and new ones. At a certain point, no longer able to balance on his legs, he bent like a candle softened by heat and was silent.

Violetta Kutufa was overcome with laughter. The crowd jammed around the table as if at a spectacle.

“Let us go,” Violetta said at this moment, putting on her mask and hood.

Don Giovanni, at the culmination of his amorous enthusiasm, all red and perspiring, took her arm. The parasites drank the last drop and then arose confusedly behind the couple.

IV

A few days after, Violetta Kutufa was inhabiting an apartment in one of Don Giovanni's houses on the town square, and much hearsay floated through Pescara. The company of singers departed from Brindisi without the Countess of Amalfi. In the solemn, quiet Lenten days, the Pescaresi took a modest delight in gossip and calumny. Every day a new tale made the circuit of the city, and every day a new creation arose from the popular imagination.

Violetta Kutufa's house was in the neighbourhood of Sant' Agostino, opposite the Brina palace and adjoining the palace of Memma. Every evening the windows were illuminated and the curious assembled beneath them.

Violetta received visitors in a room tapestried with French fabrics on which were depicted in French style various mythological subjects. Two round-bodied vases of the seventeenth century occupied the two sides of the chimney-piece. A yellow sofa extended along the opposite wall between two curtains of similar material. On the chimney-piece stood a plaster Venus and a small Venus di Medici between two gilt candelabra. On the shelves rested various porcelain vases, a bunch of artificial flowers under a crystal globe, a basket of wax fruit, a Swiss cottage, a block of alum, several sea-shells and a cocoanut.

At first her guests had been reluctant, through a sense of modesty, to mount the stairs of the opera singer. Later, little by little, they had overcome all hesitation. Even the most serious men made from time to time their appearance in the *salon* of Violetta Kutufa; even men of family; and they went there almost with trepidation, with furtive delight, as if they were about to commit a slight crime against their wives, as if they were about to enter a place of soothing perdition and sin. They united in twos and threes, formed alliances for greater security and justification, laughed among themselves and nudged one another in turn for encouragement. Then the stream of light from the windows, the strains from the piano, the song of the Countess of Amalfi, the voices and applause of her guests excited them. They were seized with a sudden enthusiasm, threw out their chests, held up their heads with youthful pride and mounted resolutely, deciding that after all one had to taste of life and cull opportunities for enjoyment.

But Violetta's receptions had an air of great propriety, were almost formal. She welcomed the new arrivals with courtesy and offered them syrups in water and cordials. The newcomers remained slightly astonished, did not know quite how to behave, where to sit, what to say. The conversations turned upon the weather, on political news, on the substance of the Lenten sermons, on other matter-of-fact and tedious topics.

Don Giuseppe Postiglioni spoke of the pretensions of the Prussian Prince Hohenzollern to the throne of Spain; Don Antonio Brattella delighted in discoursing on the immortality of

the soul and other inspiring matters. The doctrine of Brattella was stupendous. He spoke slowly and emphatically, from time to time, pronouncing a difficult word rapidly and eating up the syllables. To quote an authentic report, one evening, on taking a wand and bending it, he said: "Oh, how fleible!" for flexible; another evening, pointing to his plate and making excuses for not being able to play the flute, he vouchsafed: "My entire p-l-ate is inflamed!" and still another evening, on indicating the shape of a vase, he said that in order to make children take medicine, it was necessary to scatter with some sweet substance the *origin* of the glass.

At intervals Don Paolo Seccia, incredulous soul, on hearing singular matters recounted, jumped up with: "But Don Antò, what do you mean to say?"

Don Antonio repeated his remark with a hand on his heart and a challenging expression, "My testimony is ocular! Entirely ocular." One evening he came, walking with great effort and carefully, painstakingly prepared to sit down; he had "a cold, the length of the spine!" Another evening he arrived with the right cheek slightly bruised; he had fallen "underhand"; in other words, he had slipped and struck his face on the ground. Thus were the conversations of these gatherings made up. Don Giovanni Ussorio, always present, had the airs of a proprietor; every so often he approached Violetta with ostentation and murmured something familiarly in her ear. Long intervals of silence occurred, during which Don Grisostomo Troilo blew his nose and Don Federico Sicoli coughed like a consumptive, holding both hands to his mouth and then shaking them.

The opera-singer revived the conversation with accounts of her triumphs at Corfu, Ancona and Bari. Little by little she grew animated, abandoned herself to her imagination; with discreet reserve she spoke of princely "*amours*," of royal favours, of romantic adventures; she thus evoked all of those confused recollections of novels read at other times, and trusted liberally to the credulity of her listeners. Don Giovanni at these times turned his eyes upon her full of inquietude, almost bewildered; moreover experiencing a singular irritation that had an indistinct resemblance to jealousy. Violetta at length ended with a stupid smile and the conversation languished anew.

Then Violetta went to the piano and sang. All listened with profound attention; at the end they applauded. Then Don Brattella arose with the flute. An immeasurable melancholy took hold of his listeners at that sound, a kind of swooning of body and soul. They rested with heads lowered almost to their breasts in attitudes of sufferance. At last all left, one after the other. As they took the hand of Violetta a slight scent from the strong perfume of musk remained on their fingers, and this excited them further. Then, once more in the street, they reunited in groups, holding loose discourse. They grew inflamed, lowered their voices and were silent if anyone drew near. Softly they withdrew from beneath the Brina palace to another part of the square. There they set themselves to watching Violetta's windows, still illuminated. Across the panes passed indistinct shadows; at a certain time the light disappeared, traversed two or three rooms and stopped in the last window. Shortly, a figure leaned out to close the shutters. Those spying thought they recognised in it the figure of Don Giovanni. They still continued to discuss beneath the stars and from time to time laughed, while giving one another little nudges, and gesticulating. Don

Antonio Brattella, perhaps from the reflection of the city-lamps, seemed a greenish colour. The parasites, little by little in their discourse spit out a certain animosity toward the opera-singer, who was plucking so gracefully their lord of good times. They feared lest those generous feasts might be in peril; already Don Giovanni was more sparing of his invitations.

“It will be necessary to open the eyes of the poor fellow. An adventuress! Bah! She is capable of making him marry her. Why not? And then what a scandal!”

Don Pompeo Nervi, shaking his large calf’s head, assented:

“You are right! You are right! We must bethink ourselves.”

Don Nereo Pica, “The Cat,” proposed a way, conjured up schemes; this pious man, accustomed to the secret and laborious skirmishes of the sacristy was crafty in the sowing of discord.

Thus these complainers treated together and their fat speeches only returned again into their bitter mouths. As it was spring the foliage of the public gardens smelt and trembled before them with white blossoms and through the neighbouring paths they saw, about to disappear, the figures of loosely-dressed prostitutes.

V

When, therefore, Don Giovanni Ussorio, after having heard from Rosa Catana of the departure of Violetta Kutufa, re-entered his widower’s house and heard his parrot humming the air of the butterfly and the bee, he was seized by a new and more profound discouragement.

In the entrance a girdle of sunlight penetrated boldly and through the iron grating one saw the tranquil garden full of heliotropes. His servant slept upon a bench with a straw hat pulled down over his face.

Don Giovanni did not wake the servant. He mounted the stairs with difficulty, his eyes fixed upon the steps, pausing every now and then to mutter: “Oh, what a thing to happen! Oh, oh, what luck!”

Having reached his room he threw himself upon the bed and with his mouth against the pillows, began again to weep. Later he arose; the silence was deep and the trees of the garden as tall as the window waved slightly in the stillness. There was nothing of the unusual in the things about him; he almost wondered at this.

He fell to thinking and remained a long time calling to mind the positions, the gestures, the words, the slightest motions of the deserter. He saw her form as clearly as if she were present. At every recollection his grief increased until at length a kind of dulness benumbed his mind. He remained sitting on the bed, almost motionless, his eyes red, his forehead blackened from the colouring matter of his hair mixed with perspiration, his face furrowed with wrinkles that had suddenly become more evident; he had aged ten years in an hour, a change both amusing and pathetic.

Don Grisostomo Troilo, who had heard the news, arrived. He was a man of advanced age, of short stature and with a round, swollen face from which spread out sharp, thin whiskers, well waxed and resembling the two wings of a bird. He said:

“Now, Giovà, what is the matter?”

Don Giovanni did not answer, but shook his shoulders as if to repel all sympathy. Don Grisostomo then began to reprove him benevolently, never speaking of Violetta Kutufa.

In came Don Cirillo d’Amelio with Don Nereo Pica. Both, on entering, showed almost an air of triumph.

“Now you have seen for yourself, Don Giovà! We told you so! We told you so!” they cried. Both had nasal voices and a cadence acquired from the habit of singing with the organ, because they belonged to the choir of the Holy Sacrament. They began to attack the character of Violetta without mercy. She did this and that and the other thing, they said.

Don Giovanni, outraged, made from time to time a motion as if he would not hear such slanders, but the two continued. Now, also, Don Pasquale Virgilio arrived, with Don Pompeo Nervi, Don Federico Sicoli, Don Tito de Sieri; almost all of the parasites came in a group. Supporting one another they became ferocious. Did he not know that Violetta Kutufa had abandoned herself to Tom, Dick and Harry...? Indeed she had! Indeed! They laid bare the exact particulars, the exact places.

Now Don Giovanni heard with eyes afire, greedy to know, invaded by a terrible curiosity. These revelations instead of disgusting him, fed his desire. Violetta seemed to him more enticing, even more beautiful; and he felt himself inwardly bitten by a raging jealousy that blended with his grief. Presently the woman appeared in his mind’s eye associated with a certain soft relaxation. That picture made him giddy.

“Oh Dio! Oh Dio! Oh! Oh!” He commenced to weep again. Those present looked at one another and restrained their laughter. In truth the grief of that man; fleshy, bald, deformed, expressed itself so ridiculously that it seemed unreal.

“Go away now!” Don Giovanni blubbered through his tears.

Don Grisostomo Troilo set the example; the others followed him and chattered as they passed down the stairs.

Toward evening the prostrated man revived little by little. A woman’s voice called at his door: “May I come in, Don Giovanni?”

He recognised Rosa Catana’s voice and experienced suddenly an instinctive joy. He ran to let her in. Rosa Catana appeared in the dusk of the room.

“Come in! Come in!” he cried. He made her sit down beside him, had her talk to him, asked her a thousand questions. He seemed to suffer less on hearing that familiar voice in which, under the spell of an illusion, he found some quality of Violetta’s voice. He took her hands and cried:

“You helped her to dress! Did you not?”

He caressed those rugged hands, closing his eyes and wandering slightly in his mind on the subject of those abundant, unbound locks that so many times he had touched with his hands. Rosa at first did not understand. She believed this to be some sudden passion of Don Giovanni, and withdrew her hands gently, while she spoke in an ambiguous way and laughed. But Don Giovanni murmured:

“No, no!... Stay! You combed her, did you not? You bathed her, did you not?”

He fell to kissing Rosa’s hands, those hands that had combed, bathed and clothed Violetta. He stammered, while kissing them, composed verses so strange that Rosa could scarcely refrain from laughter. But at last she understood and with feminine perception forced herself to remain serious, while she summed up the advantages that might ensue from this foolish comedy. She grew docile, let him caress her, let him call her Violetta, made use of all that experience acquired from peeping through key-holes many times at her mistress’s door; she even sought to make her voice more sweet.

In the room one could scarcely see them. Through the open windows a red reflection entered and the trees in the garden, almost black, twisted and turned in the wind. From the sloughs around the arsenal came the hoarse croak of the frogs. The noises of the city street were indistinct.

Don Giovanni drew the woman to his knees, and, completely confused as if he had swallowed some very’ strong liquor, murmured a thousand childish nothings and babbled on without end, drawing her face close to his.

“Ah, darling little Violetta!” he whispered. “Sweetheart! Don’t go away, dear...! If you go away your Nini will die, Poor Nini...! Ban-ban-ban-bannn!”

Thus he continued stupidly, as he had done before with the opera-singer. Rosa Catana patiently offered him slight caresses, as if he were a very sick, perverted child; she took his head and pressed it against her shoulder, kissed his swollen, weeping eyes, stroked his bald crown, rearranged his oiled locks.

VI

Thus, Rosa Catana, little by little, earned her inheritance from Don Giovanni Ussorio, who, in the March of 1871, died of paralysis.

III

THE RETURN OF TURLENDANA

The group was walking along the seashore. Down the hills and over the country Spring was coming again. The humble strip of land bordering the sea was already green; the various fields were quite distinctly marked by the springing vegetation, and every mound was crowned with budding trees. The north wind shook these trees, and its breath caused many flowers to fall. At a short distance the heights seemed to be covered with a colour between pink and violet; for an instant the view seemed to tremble and grow pale like a ripple veiling the clear surface of a pool, or like a faded painting.

The sea stretched out its broad expanse serenely along the coast, bathed by the moonlight, and toward the north taking on the hue of a turquoise of Persia, broken here and there by the darker tint of the currents winding over its surface.

Turlendana, who had lost the recollection of these places through a long absence, and who in his long peregrinations had forgotten the sentiments of his native land, was striding along with the tired, regular step of haste, looking neither backward nor around him.

When the camel would stop at a tuft of wild grass, Turlendana would utter a brief, hoarse cry of incitement. The huge reddish quadruped would slowly raise his head, chewing the morsel heavily between his jaws.

“Hu, Barbara!”

The she-ass, the little snowy white Susanna, protesting against the tormenting of the monkey, from time to time would bray lamentingly, asking to be freed of her rider.

But the restless Zavali gave her no peace; as though in a frenzy, with quick, short gestures of wrath, she would run over the back of the beast, jump playfully on her head, get hold of her large ears; then would lift her tail and shake the hairs, hold it up and look through the hairs, scratch poor Susanna viciously with her nails, then lift her hands to her mouth and move her jaws as though chewing, grimacing frightfully as she did so. Then suddenly, she would jump back to her seat, holding in her hands her foot, twisted like the root of a bush, and sit with her orange coloured eyes, filled with wonder and stupor, fixed on the sea, while wrinkles would appear on her head, and her thin pinkish ears would tremble nervously. Without warning she would make a malicious gesture, and recommence her play.

“Hu, Barbara!”

The camel heard and started to walk again.

When the group reached the willow tree woods, at the mouth of the River Pescara, figures

could be seen upon its right bank, above the masts of the ships anchored in the docks of Bandiera. Turlendana stopped to get a drink of water from the river.

The river of his native place carried to him the peaceful air of the sea. Its banks, covered with fluvial plains, lay stretched out as though resting from their recent work of fecundity. The silence was profound. The cobwebs shone tranquilly in the sun like mirrors framed by the crystal of the sea. The seaweed bent in the wind, showing its green or white sides.

“Pescara!” said Turlendana, with an accent of curiosity and recognition, stopping still to look at the view.

Then, going down to the shore where the gravel was clean, he kneeled down to drink, carrying the water to his mouth in his curled up palm. The camel, bending his long neck, drank with slow, regular draughts. The she-ass, too, drank from the stream, while the monkey, imitating the man, made a cup of her hands, which were violet coloured like unripe India figs.

“Hu, Barbara!” The camel heard and ceased to drink. The water dripped unheeded from his mouth onto his chest; his white gums and yellowish teeth showed between his open lips.

Through the path marked across the wood by the people of the sea, the little group proceeded on its way. The sun was setting when they reached the Arsenale of Rampigna. Turlendana asked of a sailor who was walking beside the brick parapet:

“Is that Pescara?”

The sailor, astonished at the sight of the strange beasts, answered Turlendana’s question:

“It is that,” and left his work to follow the stranger.

The sailor was soon joined by others. Soon a crowd of curious people had gathered and were following Turlendana, who went calmly on his way, unmindful of the comments of the people. When they reached the boat-bridge, the camel refused to pass over.

“Hu, Barbara! Hu, hu!” Turlendana cried impatiently, urging him on, and shaking the rope of the halter by which he led the animal. But Barbara obstinately lay down upon the ground, and stretched his head out in the dust very comfortable, showing no intention of moving.

The people jesting gathered about, having overcome their first amazement, and cried in a chorus:

“Barbara! Barbara!”

As they were somewhat familiar with monkeys, having seen some which the sailors had brought home, together with parrots, from their long cruises, they were teasing Zavali in a thousand different ways, handing her large greenish almonds, which the monkey would open, gluttonously devouring the sweet fresh meat.

After much urging and persistent shouting, Turlendana succeeded in conquering the stubbornness of the camel, and that enormous architecture of bones and skin rose

staggering to his feet in the midst of the instigating crowd.

From all directions soldiers and sailors flocked over the boat bridge to witness the spectacle. Far behind the mountain of Gran Sasso the setting sun irradiated the spring sky with a vivid rosy light, and from the damp earth, the water of the river, the seas, and the ponds, the moisture had arisen. A rosy glow tinted the houses, the sails, the masts, the plants, and the whole landscape, and the figures of the people, acquiring a sort of transparency, grew obscure, the lines of their contour wavering in the fading light.

Under the weight of the caravan the bridge creaked on its tar-smearred boats like a very large floating lighter. Turlendana, halting in the middle of the bridge, brought the camel also to a stop; stretching high above the heads of the crowd, it stood breathing against the wind, slowly moving its head like a fictitious serpent covered with hair.

The name of the beast had spread among the curious people, and all of them, from an innate love of sensation, and filled with the exuberance of spirits inspired by the sweetness of the sunset and the season of the year, cried out gleefully:

“Barbara! Barbara!” At the sound of this applauding cry and the well-meant clamour of the crowd, Turlendana, who was leaning against the chest of his camel, felt a kindly emotion of satisfaction spring up in his heart.

The she-ass suddenly began to bray with such high and discordant variety of notes, and with such sighing passion that a spontaneous burst of merriment ran through the crowd.

The fresh, happy laughter spread from one end of the bridge to the other like the roar of water falling over the stones of a cataract.

Then Turlendana, unknown to any of the crowd, began to make his way through the throng. When he was outside the gates of the city, where the women carrying reed baskets were selling fresh fish, Binchi-Banche, a little man with a yellow face, drawn up like a juiceless lemon, pushed to the front, and as was his custom with all strangers who happened to come to the place, offered his services in finding a lodging.

Pointing to Barbara, he asked first:

“Is he ferocious?”

Turlendana, smiling, answered, “No.”

“Well,” Binchi-Banche went on, reassured, “there is the house of Rosa Schiavona.” Both turned towards the Pescaria, and then towards Sant’ Agostino, followed by the crowd. From windows and balconies women and children leaned over, gazing in astonishment at the passing camel, admiring the grace of the white ass, and laughing at the comic performances of Zavali.

At one place, Barbara, seeing a bit of green hanging from a low loggia, stretched out his neck and, grasping it with his lips, tore it down. A cry of terror broke forth from the women who were leaning over the loggia, and the cry spread to other loggias. The people from the river laughed loudly, crying out, as though it were the carnival season and they were behind masks:

“Hurrah! Hurrah!”

They were intoxicated by the novelty of the spectacle, and by the invigourating spring air. In front of the house of Rosa Schiavona, in the neighbourhood of Portasale, Binchi-Banche made a sign to stop.

“This is the place,” he said.

It was a very humble one-story house with one row of windows, and the lower walls were covered with inscriptions and ugly figures. A row of bats pinned on the arch formed an ornament, and a lantern covered with reddish paper hung under the window.

This place was the abode of a sort of adventurous, roving people. They slept mixed together, the big and corpulent truckman, Letto Manoppello, the gipsies of Sulmona, horse-traders, boiler-menders, turners of Bucchianico, women of the city of Sant’ Angelo, women of wicked lives, the bag-pipers of Atina, mountaineers, bear-tamers, charlatans, pretended mendicants, thieves, and fortune-tellers. Binchi-Banche acted as a go-between for all that rabble, and was a great protégé of the house of Rosa Schiavona.

When the latter heard the noise of the newcomers, she came out upon the threshold. She looked like a being generated by a dwarf and a sow. Very diffidently she put the question:

“What is the matter?”

“There is a fellow here who wants lodging for his beasts, Donna Rosa.”

“How many beasts?”

“Three, as you see, Donna Rosa—a monkey, an ass, and a camel.”

The crowd was paying no attention to the dialogue. Some of them were exciting Zavali, others were feeling of Barbara’s legs, commenting on the callous spots on his knees and chest. Two guards of the salt store-houses, who had travelled to the sea-ports of Asia Minor, were telling in a loud voice of the wonderful properties of the camel, talking confusedly of having seen some of them dancing, while carrying upon their necks a lot of half-naked musicians and women of the Orient. The listeners, greedy to hear these marvellous tales, cried:

“Tell us some more! Tell us some more!” They stood around the story-tellers in attentive silence, listening with dilated eyes.

Then one of the guards, an old man whose eyelids were drawn up by the wind of the sea, began to tell of the Asiatic countries, and as he went on, his imagination became excited by the stories which he told, and his tales grew more wonderful.

A sort of mysterious softness seemed to penetrate the sunset. In the minds of the listeners, the lands which were described to them rose vividly before their imaginations in all their strange splendour. Across the arch of the Porta, which was already in shadow, could be seen boats loaded with salt rocking upon the river, the salt seeming to absorb all the light of the evening, giving the boats the appearance of palaces of precious crystals. Through the greenish tinted heavens rose the crescent of the moon.

“Tell us some more! Tell us some more!” the younger of those assembled were crying.

In the meanwhile Turlendana had put his beasts under cover and supplied them with food. This being done, he had again set forth with Binchi-Banche, while the people remained gathered about the door of the barn where the head of the camel appeared and disappeared behind the rock gratings.

On the way Turlendana asked:

“Are there any drinking places here?”

Binchi-Banche answered promptly:

“Yes, sir, there are.” Then, lifting his big black hands he counted off on his fingers:

“The Inn of Speranza, the Inn of Buono, the Inn of Assau, the Inn of Zarricante, the Inn of the Blind Woman of Turlendana....”

“Ah!” exclaimed the other calmly.

Binchi-Banche raised his big, sharp, greenish eyes.

“You have been here before, sir?”

Then, with the native loquacity of the Pescarese he went on without waiting for an answer:

“The Inn of the Blind Woman is large, and they sell there the best wine. The so-called Blind Woman is a woman who has had four husbands....”

He stopped to laugh, his yellowish face wrinkling into little folds as he did so.

“The first husband was Turlendana, a sailor on board the ships of the King of Naples, sailing from India to France, to Spain, and even as far as America. He was lost at sea, no one knows where, for the ship disappeared and nothing has ever been heard from it since. That was about thirty years ago. Turlendana had the strength of Samson; he could pull up an anchor with one finger ... poor fellow! He who goes to sea is apt to have such an end.”

Turlendana was listening quietly.

“The second husband, whom she married after five years of widowhood, was from Ortona, a son of Ferrante, a damned soul, who was in conspiracy with smugglers in Napoleon’s time, during the war with England. They smuggled goods from Francavilla up to Silvi and Montesilvano—sugar and coffee from the English boats. In the neighbourhood of Silvi was a tower called ‘The Tower of Saracini,’ from which the signals were given. As the patrol passed, ‘Plon, plon, plon, plon!’ came out from behind the trees....” Binchi-Banche’s face lighted up at the recollection of those times, and he quite lost himself in the pleasure of describing minutely all those clandestine operations, his expressive gestures and exclamations adding interest to the tale.

His small body would draw up and stretch out to its full height as he proceeded.

“At last the son of Ferrante was, while walking along the coast one night, shot in the back by a soldier of Murat, and killed.

“The third husband was Titino Passacantando, who died in his bed of a pernicious disease.

“The fourth still lives, and is called Verdura, a good fellow who does not adulterate the wine of the inn. Now, you will have a chance to try some.”

When they reached the much praised inn, they separated.

“Good night, sir!”

“Good night!”

Turlendana entered unconcernedly, unmindful of the curious attention of the drinkers sitting beside the long tables. Having asked for something to eat, he was conducted to an upper room where the tables were set ready for supper.

None of the regular boarders of the place were yet in the room. Turlendana sat down and began to eat, taking great mouthfuls without pausing, his head bent over his plate, like a famished person. He was almost wholly bald, a deep red scar furrowed his face from forehead to cheek, his thick greyish beard extended to his protruding cheek bones, his skin, dark, dried, rough, worn by water and sun and wrinkled by pain, seemed not to preserve any human semblance, his eyes stared into the distance as if petrified by impassivity.

Verdura, inquisitive, sat opposite him, staring at the stranger. He was somewhat flushed, his face was of a reddish colour veined with vermilion like the gall of oxen. At last he cried:

“Where do you come from?”

Turlendana, without raising his head, replied simply:

“I come from far away.”

“And where do you go?” pursued Verdura.

“I remain here.”

Verdura, amazed, was silent.

Turlendana continued to lift the fishes from his plate, one after another, taking off their heads and tails, and devouring them, chewing them up, bones and all. After every two or three fishes he drank a draught of wine.

“Do you know anybody here?” Verdura asked with eager curiosity.

“Perhaps,” replied the other laconically.

Baffled by the brevity of his interlocutor, the wine man grew silent again. Above the uproar of the drinkers below, Turlendana’s slow and laboured mastication could be heard. Presently Verdura again ventured to open his mouth.

“In what countries is the camel found? Are those two humps natural? Can such a great, strong beast ever be tamed?”

Turlendana allowed him to go on without replying.

“Your name, Mister?”

The man to whom this question was put raised his head from his plate, and answered simply, as before:

“I am called Turlendana.”

“What?”

“Turlendana.”

“Ah!”

The amazement of the inn keeper was unbounded. A sort of a vague terror shook his innermost soul.

“What? Turlendana of this place?”

“Of this place.”

Verdura’s big azure eyes dilated as he stared at the man.

“Then you are not dead?”

“No, I am not dead.”

“Then you are the husband of Rosalba Catena?”

“I am the husband of Rosalba Catena.”

“And now,” exclaimed Verdura, with a gesture of perplexity, “we are two husbands!”

“We are two!”

They remained silent for an instant. Turlendana was chewing the last bit of bread tranquilly, and through the quiet room you could hear his teeth crunching on it. Either from a natural benignant simplicity or from a glorious fatuity, Verdura was struck only by the singularity of the case. A sudden impulse of merriment overtook him, bubbling out spontaneously:

“Let us go to Rosalba! Let us go! Let us go!”

Taking the newcomer by the arm, he conducted him through the group of drinkers, waving his arms, and crying out:

“Here is Turlendana, Turlendana the sailor! The husband of my wife! Turlendana, who is not dead! Here is Turlendana! Here is Turlendana!”

IV

TURLENDANA DRUNK

The last glass had been drunk, and two o'clock in the morning was about to strike from the tower clock of the City Hall.

Said Biagio Quaglia, his voice thick with wine, as the strokes sounded through the silence of the night filled with clear moonlight:

“Well! Isn't it about time for us to go?”

Ciavola, stretched half under the bench, moved his long runner's legs from time to time, mumbling about clandestine hunts-in the forbidden grounds of the Marquis of Pescara, as the taste of wild hare came up in his throat, and the wind brought to his nostrils the resinous odour of the pines of the sea grove.

Said Biagio Quaglia, giving the blond hunter a kick, and making a motion to rise:

“Let us go.”

Ciavola with an effort rose, swaying uncertainly, thin and slender like a hunting hound.

“Let us go, as they are pursuing us,” he answered, raising his hand high in a motion of assent, thinking perhaps of the passage of birds through the air.

Turlendana also moved, and seeing behind him the wine woman, Zarricante, with her flushed raw cheeks and her protruding chest, he tried to embrace her. But Zarricante fled from his embrace, hurling at him words of abuse.

On the doorsill, Turlendana asked his friends for their company and support through a part of the road. But Biagio Quaglia and Ciavola, who were indeed a fine pair, turned their backs on him jestingly, and went away in the luminous moonlight.

Then Turlendana stopped to look at the moon, which was round and red as the face of a friar. Everything around was silent and the rows of houses reflected the white light of the moon. A cat was mewing this May night upon a door step. The man, in his intoxicated state, feeling a peculiarly tender inclination, put out his hand slowly and uncertainly to caress the animal, but the beast, being somewhat wild, took a jump and disappeared.

Seeing a stray dog approaching, he attempted to pour out upon it the wealth of his loving impulses; the dog, however, paid no attention to his calls, and disappeared around the corner of a cross street, gnawing a bone. The noise of his teeth could be heard plainly through the silence of the night.

Soon after, the door of the inn was closed and Turlendana was left-standing alone under the full moon, obscured by the shadows of rolling clouds. His attention was struck by the

rapid moving of all surrounding objects. Everything fled away from him. What had he done that they should fly away?

With unsteady steps, he moved towards the river. The thought of that universal flight as he moved along, occupied profoundly his brain, changed as it was by the fumes of the wine. He met two other street dogs, and as an experiment, approached them, but they too slunk away with their tails between their legs, keeping close to the wall and when they had gone some little distance, they began to bark. Suddenly, from every direction, from Bagno da Sant' Agostino, from Arsenale, from Pescheria, from all the lurid and obscure places around, the roving dogs ran up, as though in answer to a trumpet call to battle and the aggressive chorus of the famishing tribe ascended to the moon.

Turlendana was stupefied, while a sort of vague uneasiness awoke in his soul and he went on his way a little more quickly, stumbling over the rough places in the ground. When he reached the corner of the coopers, where the large barrels of Zazetta were piled in whitish heaps like monuments, he heard the heavy, regular breathing of a beast. As the impression of the hostility of all beasts had taken a hold on him, with the obstinacy of a drunken man, he moved in the direction of the sound, that he might make another experiment.

Within a low barn the three old horses of Michelangelo were breathing with difficulty above their manger. They were decrepit beasts who had worn out their lives dragging through the road of Chieti, twice every day, a huge stage-coach filled with merchants and merchandise. Under their brown hair, worn off in places by the rubbing of the harness, their ribs protruded like so many dried shingles through a ruined roof. Their front legs were so bent that their knees were scarcely perceptible, their backs were ragged like the teeth of a saw, and their skinny necks, upon which scarcely a vestige of mane was left, drooped towards the ground.

A wooden railing inside barred the door.

Turlendana began encouragingly:

“Ush, ush, ush! Ush, ush, ush!”

The horses did not move, but breathed together in a human way. The outlines of their bodies appeared dim and confused through the bluish shadow within the barn, and the exhalations of their breath blent with that of the manure.

“Ush, ush, ush!” pursued Turlendana in a lamenting tone, as when he used to urge Barbara to drink. Again the horses did not stir, and again:

“Ush, ush, ush! Ush, ush, ush!” One of the horses turned and placed his big deformed head upon the railing, looking with eyes which seemed in the moonlight as though filled with troubled water. The lower skin of the jaw hung flaccid, disclosing the gums. At every breath the nostrils palpitated, emitting moist breath, the nostrils closing at times, and opening again to give forth a little cloud of air bubbles like yeast in a state of fermentation.

At the sight of that senile head, the drunken man came to his senses. Why had he filled himself with wine, he, usually so sober? For a moment, in the midst of his forgetful

drowsiness, the shape of his dying camel reappeared before his eyes, lying on the ground with his long inert neck stretched out on the straw, his whole body shaken from time to time by coughing, while with every moan the bloated stomach produced a sound such as issues from a barrel half filled with water.

A wave of pity and compassion swept over the man, as before him rose this vision of the agony of the camel, shaken by strange, hoarse sobs which brought forth a moan from the enormous dying carcass, the painful movements of the neck, rising for an instant to fall back again heavily upon the straw with a deep, indistinct sound, the legs moving as if trying to run, the tense tremor of the ears, and the fixity of the eyeballs, from which the sight seemed to have departed before the rest of the faculties. All this suffering came back clearly to his memory, vivid in its almost human misery.

He leaned against the railing and opened his mouth mechanically to again speak to Michelangelo's horse:

"Ush, ush, ush! Ush, ush, ush!" Then Michelangelo, who from his bed had heard the disturbance, jumped to the window above and began to swear violently at the troublesome disturber of his night's rest.

"You damned rascal! Go and drown yourself in the Pescara River! Go away from here. Go, or I will get a gun! You rascal, to come and wake up sleeping people! You drunkard, go on; go away!"

Turlendana, staggering, started again towards the river. When at the cross-roads by the fruit market, he saw a group of dogs in a loving assembly. As the man approached, the group of canines dispersed, running towards Bagno. From the alley of Gesidio came out another horde of dogs, who set off in the direction of Bastioni.

All of the country of Pescara, bathed in the sweet light of the full moon of the springtime, was the scene of the fights of amorous canines. The mastiff of Madrigale, chained to watch over a slaughtered ox, occasionally made his deep voice heard, and was answered by a chorus of other voices. Occasionally a solitary dog would pass on the run to the scene of a fight. From within the houses, the howls of the imprisoned dogs could be heard.

Now a still stranger trouble took hold upon the brain of the drunken man. In front of him, behind him, around him, the imaginary flight of things began to take place again more rapidly than before. He moved forward, and everything moved away from him, the clouds, the trees, the stones, the river banks, the poles of the boats, the very houses,—all retreated at his approach. This evident repulsion and universal reprobation filled him with terror. He halted. His spirit grew depressed. Through his disordered brain a sudden thought ran. "The fox!" Even that fox of a Ciavola did not wish to remain with him longer! His terror increased. His limbs trembled violently. However, impelled by this thought, he descended among the tender willow trees and the high grass of the shore.

The bright moon scattered over all things a snowy serenity. The trees bent peacefully over the bank, as though contemplating the running water. Almost it seemed as though a soft, melancholy breath emanated from the somnolence of the river beneath the moon. The croaking of frogs sounded clearly. Turlendana crouched among the plants, almost hidden.

His hands trembled on his knees. Suddenly he felt something alive and moving under him; a frog! He uttered a cry. He rose and began to run, staggering, amongst the willow trees impeding his way. In his uneasiness of spirit, he felt terrified as though by some supernatural occurrence.

Stumbling over a rough place in the ground, he fell on his stomach, his face pressed into the grass. He got up with much difficulty, and stood looking around him at the trees. The silvery silhouette of the poplars rose motionless through the silent air, making their tops seem unusually tall. The shores of the river would vanish endlessly, as if they were something unreal, like shadows of things seen in dreams. Upon the right side, the rocks shone resplendently, like crystals of salt, shadowed at times by the moving clouds passing softly overhead like azure veils. Further on the wood broke the horizon line. The scent of the wood and the soft breath of the sea were blended.

“Oh, Turlendana! Ooooh!” a clear voice cried out.

Turlendana turned in amazement.

“Oh, Turlendana, Turlendanaaaaa!”

It was Binchi-Banche, who came up, accompanied by a customs officer, through the path used by the sailors through the willow-tree thicket.

“Where are you going at this time of night? To weep over your camel?” asked Binchi-Banche as he approached.

Turlendana did not answer at once. He was grasping his trousers with one hand; his knees were bent forward and his face wore a strange expression of stupidity, while he stammered so pitifully that Binchi-Banche and the customs officer broke out into boisterous laughter.

“Go on! Go on!” exclaimed the wrinkled little man, grasping the drunken man by the shoulders and pushing him towards the seashore. Turlendana moved forward. Binchi-Banche and the customs officer followed him at a little distance, laughing and speaking in low voices.

He reached the place where the verdure terminated and the sand began. The grumbling of the sea at the mouth of the Pescara could be heard. On a level stretch of sand, stretched out between the dunes, Turlendana ran against the corpse of Barbara, which had not yet been buried. The large body was skinned and bleeding, the plump parts of the back, which were uncovered, appeared of a yellowish colour; upon his legs the skin was still hanging with all the hair; there were two enormous callous spots; within his mouth his angular teeth were visible, curving over the upper jaw and the white tongue; for some unknown reason the under lip was cut, while the neck resembled the body of a serpent.

At the appearance of this ghastly sight, Turlendana burst into tears, shaking his head, and moaning in a strange unhuman way:

“Oho! Oho! Oho!”

In the act of lying down upon the camel, he fell. He attempted to rise, but the stupor caused by the wine overcame him, and he lost consciousness.

Seeing Turlendana fall, Binchi-Banche and the customs officer came over to him. Taking him, one by the head and the other by the feet, they lifted him up and laid him full length upon the body of Barbara, in the position of a loving embrace. Laughing at their deed, they departed.

And thus Turlendana lay upon the camel until the sun rose.

V

THE GOLD PIECES

Passacantando entered, rattling the hanging glass doors violently, roughly shook the rain-drops from his shoulders, took his pipe from his mouth, and with disdainful unconcern looked around the room.

In the tavern the smoke of the tobacco was like a bluish cloud, through which one could discern the faces of those who were drinking: women of bad repute; Pachio, the invalided soldier, whose right eye, affected with some repulsive disease, was covered by a greasy greenish band; Binchi-Banche, the domestic of the customs officers, a small, sturdy man with a surly, yellow-hued face like a lemon without juice, with a bent back and his thin legs thrust into boots which reached to his knees; Magnasangue, the go-between of the soldiers, the friend of comedians, of jugglers, of mountebanks, of fortune-tellers, of tamers of bears,—of all that ravenous and rapacious rabble which passes through the towns to snatch from the idle and curious people a few pennies.

Then, too, there were the belles of the Fiorentino Hall, three or four women faded from dissipation, their cheeks painted brick colour, their eyes voluptuous, their mouths flaccid and almost bluish in colour like over-ripe figs.

Passacantando crossed the room, and seated himself between the women Pica and Peppuccia on a bench against the wall, which was covered with indecent figures and writing. He was a slender young fellow, rather effeminate, with a very pale face from which protruded a nose thick, rapacious, bent greatly to one side; his ears sprang from his head like two inflated paper bags, one larger than the other; his curved, protruding lips were very red, and always had a small ball of whitish saliva at the corners. Over his carefully combed hair he wore a soft cap, flattened through long use. A tuft of his hair, turned up like a hook, curled down over his forehead to the roots of his nose, while another curled over his temple. A certain licentiousness was expressed in every gesture, every move, and in the tones of his voice and his glances.

“Ohe,” he cried, “Woman Africana, a goblet of wine!” beating the table with his clay pipe, which broke from the force of the blow.

The woman Africana, the mistress of the inn, left the bar and came forward towards the table, waddling because of her extreme corpulence, and placed in front of Passacantando a glass filled to the brim with wine. She looked at him as she did so with eyes full of loving entreaty.

Passacantando suddenly flung his arm around the neck of Peppuccia, forced her to drink from the goblet, and then thrust his lips against hers. Peppuccia laughed, disentangling herself from the arms of Passacantando, her laughter causing the unswallowed wine to

spurt from her mouth into his face.

The woman Africana grew livid. She withdrew behind the bar, where the sharp words of Peppuccia and Pica reached her ears. The glass door opened, and Fiorentino appeared on the threshold, all bundled up in a cloak, like the villain of a cheap novel.

“Well, girls,” he cried out in a hoarse voice, “it is time for you to go.” Peppuccia, Pica, and the others rose from their seats beside the men and followed their master.

It was raining hard, and the Square of Bagno was transformed into a muddy lake. Pachio, Magnasangue, and the others left one after another until only Binche-Banche, stretched under the table in the stupor of intoxication, remained. The smoke in the room gradually grew less, while a half-plucked dove pecked from the floor the scattered crumbs.

As Passacantando was about to rise, Africana moved slowly towards him, her unshapely figure undulating as she walked, her full-moon face wrinkled into a grotesque and affectionate grimace. Upon her face were several moles with small bunches of hair growing out from them, a thick shadow covered her upper lip and her cheeks. Her short, coarse, and curling hair formed a sort of helmet on her head; her thick eyebrows met at the top of her flat nose, so that she looked like a creature affected with dropsy and elephantiasis.

When she reached Passacantando, she grasped his hands in order to detain him.

“Oh, Giuva! What do you want? What have I done to you?”

“You? Nothing.”

“Why then do you cause me such suffering and torment?”

“I? I am surprised!... Good night! I have no time to lose just now,” and with a brutal gesture, he started to go. But Africana threw herself upon him, pressing his arms, and putting her face against his, leaning upon him with her full weight, with a passion so uncontrolled and terrible that Passacantando was frightened.

“What do you want? What do you want? Tell me! What do you want? Why do I do this? I hold you! Stay here! Stay with me! Don’t make me die of longing; don’t drive me mad! What for? Come,—take everything you find ...”

She drew him towards the bar, opened the drawer, and with one gesture offered him everything it contained. In the greasy till were scattered some copper coins, and a few shining silver ones, the whole amounting to perhaps five lire.

Passacantando, without saying a word, picked up the coins and began to count them slowly upon the bar, his mouth showing an expression of disgust. Africana looked at the coins and then at the face of the man, breathing hard, like a tired beast. One heard the tinkling of the coins as they fell upon the bar, the rough snoring of Binchi-Banche, the soft pattering of the dove in the midst of the continuous sound of the rain and the river down below the Bagno and through the Bandiera.

“Those are not enough,” Passacantando said at last. “I must have more than those; bring out some more, or I will go.”

He had crushed his cap down over his head, and from beneath his forehead with its curling tuft of hair, his whitish eyes, greedy and impudent, looked at Africana attentively, fascinating her.

“I have no more; you have seen all there is. Take all that you find ...” stammered Africana in a caressing and supplicating voice, her double chin quivering and her lips trembling, while the tears poured from her piggish eyes.

“Well,” said Passacantando softly, bending over her, “well, do you think I don’t know that your husband has some gold pieces?”

“Oh, Giovanni! ... how can I get them?”

“Go and take them, at once. I will wait for you here. Your husband is asleep, now is the time. Go, or you’ll not see me any more, in the name of Saint Antony!”

“Oh, Giovanni!... I am afraid!”

“What? Fear or no fear, I am going; let us go.”

Africana trembled; she pointed to Binchi-Banche still stretched under the table in a heavy sleep.

“Close the door first,” she said submissively.

Passacantando roused Binchi-Banche with a kick, and dragged him, howling and shaking with terror, out into the mud and slush. He came back and closed the door. The red lantern that hung on one of the shutters threw a rosy light into the tavern, leaving the heavy arches in deep shadow, and giving the stairway in the angle a mysterious look.

“Come! Let us go!” said Passacantando again to the still trembling Africana.

They slowly ascended the dark stairway in the corner of the room, the woman going first, the man following close behind. At the top of the stairway they emerged into a low room, planked with beams. In a small niche in the wall was a blue Majolica Madonna, in front of which burned, for a vow, a light in a glass filled with water and oil. The other walls were covered with a number of torn paper pictures, of as many colours as leprosy. A distressing odour filled the room.

The two thieves advanced cautiously towards the marital bed, upon which lay the old man, buried in slumber, breathing with a sort of hoarse hiss through his toothless gums and his dilated nose, damp from the use of tobacco, his head turned upon one cheek, resting on a striped cotton pillow. Above his open mouth, which looked like a cut made in a rotten pumpkin, rose his stiff moustache; one of his eyes, half opened, resembled the turned over ear of a dog, filled with hair, covered with blisters; the veins stood out boldly upon his bare emaciated arm which lay outside the coverlet; his crooked fingers, habitually grasping, clutched the counterpane.

Now, this old fellow had for a long time possessed two twenty-franc pieces, which had been left him by some miserly relative; these he guarded jealously, keeping them in the tobacco in his horn snuff-box, as some people do musk incense. There lay the shining pieces of gold, and the old man would take them out, look at them fondly, feel of them

lovingly between his fingers, as the passion of avarice and the lust of possession grew within him.

Africana approached slowly, with bated breath, while Passacantando, with commanding gestures, urged her to the theft. There was a noise below; both stopped. The half-plucked dove, limping, fluttered to its nest in an old slipper at the foot of the bed, but in settling itself, it made some noise. The man, with a quick, brutal motion, snatched up the bird and choked it in his fist.

“Is it there?” he asked of Africana.

“Yes, it is there, under the pillow,” she answered, sliding her hand carefully under the pillow as she spoke. The old man moved in his sleep, sighing involuntarily, while between his eyelids appeared a little rim of the whites of his eyes. Then he fell back in the heavy stupor of senile drowsiness.

Africana, in this crisis, suddenly became audacious, pushed her hand quickly forward, grasped the tobacco box and rushed towards the stairs, descending with Passacantando just behind her.

“Lord! Lord! See what I have done for you!” she exclaimed, throwing herself upon him. With shaking hands, they started together to open the snuff-box and look among the tobacco for the gold pieces. The pungent odour of the tobacco arose to their nostrils, and both, as they felt the desire to sneeze, were seized with a strong impulse to laugh. In endeavouring to repress their sneezes, they staggered against one another, pushing and wavering. But suddenly an indistinct growling was heard, then hoarse shouts broke forth from the room above, and the old man appeared at the top of the stairs. His face was livid in the red light of the lantern, his form thin and emaciated, his legs bare, his shirt in rags. He looked down at the thieving couple, and, waving his arms like a damned soul, cried:

“The gold pieces! The gold pieces! The gold pieces!”

VI

SORCERY

When seven consecutive sneezes of Mastro Peppe De Sieri, called La Brevetta, resounded loudly in the square of the City Hall, all the inhabitants of Pescara would seat themselves around their tables and begin their meal. Soon after the bell would strike twelve, and simultaneously, the people would become very hilarious.

For many years La Brevetta had given this joyful signal to the people daily, and the fame of his marvellous sneezing spread through all the country around, and also through the adjoining countries. His memory still lives in the minds of the people, for he originated a proverb which will endure for many years to come.

I

Mastro Peppe La Brevetta was a plebeian, somewhat corpulent, thick-set, and clumsy; his face shining with a prosperous stupidity, his eyes reminded one of the eyes of a sucking calf, while his hands and feet were of extraordinary dimensions. His nose was long and fleshy, his jaw-bones very strong and mobile, and when undergoing a fit of sneezing, he looked like one of those sea-lions whose fat bodies, as sailors relate, tremble all over like a jelly-pudding.

Like the sea-lions, too, he was possessed of a slow and lazy motion, their ridiculously awkward attitudes, and their exceeding fondness for sleep. He could not pass from the shade to the sun, nor from the sun to the shade without an irrepressible impulse of air rushing through his mouth and nostrils. The noise produced, especially in quiet spots, could be heard at a great distance, and as it occurred at regular intervals, it came to be a sort of time-piece for the citizens of the town.

In his youth Mastro Peppe had kept a macaroni shop, and among the strings of dough, the monotonous noise of the mills and wheels, in the mildness of the flour-dusty air, he had grown to a placid stupidity. Having reached maturity, he had married a certain Donna Pelagia of the Commune of Castelli, and abandoning his early trade, he had since that time dealt in terra cotta and Majolica ware,—vases, plates, pitchers, and all the poor earthenware which the craftsmen of Castelli manufactured for adorning the tables of the land of Abruzzi. Among the simplicity and religiousness of those shapes, unchanged for centuries, he lived in a very simple way, sneezing all the time, and as his wife was a miserly creature, little by little her avaricious spirit had communicated itself to him, until he had grown into her penurious and miserly ways.

Now Mastro Peppe was the owner of a piece of land and a small farm house, situated upon

the right bank of the river, just at the spot where the current of the river, turning, forms a sort of greenish amphitheatre. The soil being well irrigated, produced very abundantly, not only grapes and cereals, but especially large quantities of vegetables. The harvests increased, and each year Mastro Peppe's pig grew fat, feasting under an oak tree which dropped its wealth of acorns for his delectation. Each year, in the month of January, La Brevetta, with his wife, would go over to his farm, and invoke the favour of San Antonio to assist in the killing and salting of the pig.

One year it happened that his wife was somewhat ill, and La Brevetta went alone to the slaughtering of the beast. The pig was placed upon a large board and held there by three sturdy farm-hands, while his throat was cut with a sharp knife. The grunting and squealing of the hog resounded through the solitude, usually broken only by the murmuring of the stream, then suddenly the sounds grew less, and were lost in the gurgling of warm vermilion blood which was disgorged from the gaping wound, and while the body was giving its last convulsive jerks, the new sun was absorbing from the river the moisture in the form of a silvery mist. With a sort of joyous ferocity La Brevetta watched Lepruccio burn with a hot iron the deep eyes of the pig, and rejoiced to hear the boards creak under the weight of the animal, thinking of the plentiful supply of lard and the prospective hams.

The murdered beast was lifted up and suspended from a hook, shaped like a rustic pitchfork, and left there, hanging head downward. Burning bundles of reeds were used by the farm-hands to singe off the bristles, and the flames rose almost invisible in the greater light of the sun. At length, La Brevetta began to scrape with a shining blade the blackened surface of the animal's body, while one of the assistants poured boiling water over it. Gradually the skin became clean, and showed rosy-tinted as it hung steaming in the sun. Lepruccio, whose face was the wrinkled and unctuous face of an old man, and in whose ears hung rings, stood biting his lips during the performance, working his body up and down, and bending upon his knees. The work being completed, Mastro Peppe ordered the farm-hands to put the pig under cover. Never in his life had he seen so large a bulk of flesh from one pig, and he regretted that his wife was not there to rejoice with him because of it.

Since it was late in the afternoon, Matteo Puriello and Biagio Quaglia, two friends, were returning from the home of Don Bergamino Camplone, a priest who had gone into business.

These two cronies were living a gay life, given to dissipation, fond of any kind of fun, very free in giving advice, and as they had heard of the killing of the pig, and of the absence of Pelagia, hoping to meet with some pleasing adventure, they came over to tantalise La Brevetta. Matteo Puriello, commonly called Ciavola, was a man of about forty, a poacher, tall and slender, with blond hair and a yellow tinted skin, with a stiff and bristling moustache. His head was like that of a gilded wooden effigy, from which the gilding had partly worn off. His eyes round and restless, like those of a race-horse, shone like two new silver coins, and his whole person, usually clad in a suit of earth colour, reminded one, in its attitudes and movements and its swinging gait, of a hunting dog catching hares as he ran across the plain.

Biagio Quaglia, so-called Ristabilito, was under medium height, a few years younger than

his friend, with a rubicund face, of the brilliancy and freshness of an almond tree in springtime. He possessed the singular faculty of moving his ears and the skin of his forehead independently, and with the skin of the cranium, as does a monkey. By some unexplained contraction of muscles, he was in this way enabled greatly to change his aspect, and this, together with a happy vocal power of imitation, and the gift of quickly catching the ridiculous side of men and things, gave him the power to imitate in gesture and in word the, different groups of Pescara, so that he was greatly in demand as an entertainer. In this happy, parasitical mode of life, by playing the guitar at festivals and baptismal ceremonies, he was prospering. His eyes shone like those of a ferret, his head was covered with a sort of woolly hair like the down on the body of a fat, plucked goose before it is broiled.

When La Brevetta saw the two friends, he greeted them gently, saying:

“What wind brings you here?”

After exchanging pleasant greetings, La Brevetta took the two friends into the room where, upon the table, lay his wonderful pig, and asked:

“What do you think of such a pig? Eh? What do you think about it?”

The two friends were contemplating the pig in wondering silence, and Ristabilito made a curious noise by beating his palate with his tongue.

Ciavola asked:

“And what do you expect to do with it?”

“I expect to salt it,” answered La Brevetta, his voice full of gluttonous joy at the thought of the future delights of the palate.

“You expect to salt it?” cried Ristabilito. “You wish to salt it? Ciavola, have you ever seen a more foolish man than this one? To allow such an opportunity to escape!”

Stupefied, La Brevetta was looking with his calf-like eyes first at one and then at the other of his interlocutors.

“Donna Pelagia has always made you bow to her will,” pursued Ristabilito. “Now, when she is not here to see you, sell the pig and eat up the money.”

“But Pelagia?—Pelagia?—” stammered La Brevetta, in whose mind arose a vision of his wrathful wife which brought terror to his heart.

“You can tell her that the pig was stolen,” suggested the ever-ready Ciavola, with a quick gesture of impatience.

La Brevetta was horrified.

“How could I take home such a story? Pelagia would not believe me. She will throw me out of doors! She will beat me! You don’t know Pelagia.”

“Uh, Pelagia! Uh, uh, Donna Pelagia!” cried the wily fellows derisively. Then Ristabilito, mimicking the lamenting voice of Peppe and the sharp, screeching voice of the woman,

went through a scene of a comedy in which Peppe was bound to a bench, and soundly spanked by his wife, like a child.

Ciavola witnessed this performance in great glee, laughing and jumping about the pig, unable to restrain himself. The man who was being laughed at was just at this moment taken with a sudden paroxysm of sneezing, and stood waving his arms frantically toward Ristabilito, trying to make him stop. The din was so great that the window panes fairly rattled as the light of the setting sun fell on the three faces.

When Ristabilito was silenced at last, Ciavola said:

“Well, let’s go now!”

“If you wish to stay to supper with me ...” Mastro Peppe ventured to say between his teeth.

“No, no, my beauty,” interrupted Ciavola, turning toward the door. “Remember me to Pelagia,—and do salt the pig.”

II

The two friends walked together along the shore of the river. In the distance the boats of Barletta, loaded with salt, scintillated like fairy palaces of crystal; a gentle breeze was blowing from Montecorno, ruffling the limpid surface of the water.

“I say,” said Ristabilito to Ciavola, halting, “are we going to steal that pig to-night?”

“And how can we do it?” asked Ciavola.

Said Ristabilito:

“I know how to do it if the pig is left where we last saw it.”

Said Ciavola:

“Well, let us do it! But after?”

Ristabilito stopped again, his little eyes brilliant as two carbuncles, his flushed face wrinkling between the ears like a fawn’s, in a grimace of joy.

“I know it ...” he said laconically.

In the distance, his form showing black through the naked trees of the silver poplar grove, Don Bergamino Camplone approached the two. As soon as they saw him, they hastened toward him. Noticing their joyful mien, the priest, smiling, asked them:

“Well, what good news have you?”

Briefly, they communicated to him their purpose, to which he delightedly assented. Ristabilito concluded softly:

“We shall have to use great cunning. You know that Peppe, since he married that ugly woman, Donna Pelagia, has become a great miser, but he likes wine pretty well. Now then

let us get him to accompany us to the Inn of Assau. You, Don Bergamino, treat us to drinks and pay for everything. Peppe will drink as much as he can get without having to pay anything for it, and will get intoxicated. We can then go about our business with no fear of interruption.”

Ciavola favoured this plan, and the priest agreed to his share in the bargain. Then all together returned to the house of Peppe, which was only about two gun-shots away, and as they drew near, Ciavola raised his voice:

“Hello-o! La Brevetta! Do you wish to come to the Inn of Assau? The priest is here, and he is ready to pay for a bottle or two—Hello!” La Brevetta did not delay in coming down the path, and the four set out together, in the soft light of the new moon. The quiet was occasionally broken by the caterwauling of love-stricken cats. Ristabilito turned to Peppe, asking in jest:

“Oh, Peppe, don’t you hear Pelagia calling you?”

Upon the left side of the river shone the lights of the Inn of Assau, mirrored by the water. As the current of the river was not very strong here, Assau kept a little boat to ferry over his customers. In answer to their calls, the boat approached over the luminous water to meet the new-comers. When they were seated and engaged in friendly chat, Ciavola with his long legs began to rock the boat, and the creaking of the wood frightened La Brevetta, who, affected by the dampness of the river, broke forth in another paroxysm of sneezing.

Arrived at the inn, seated around an oaken table, the company became more jovial, laughing and jesting loudly, and pouring the wine into their victim, who found it easy to let the good red juice of the vines, rich in taste and colour, run down his throat.

“Another bottle,” ordered Don Bergamino, beating his fist upon the table.

Assau, an essentially rustic, bow-legged man, brought in the ruby coloured bottles. Ciavola sang with much Bacchic freedom, striking the rhythm upon the glasses. La Brevetta, his tongue now thick and his eyes swimming from the effects of the wine, was holding the priest by the sleeve to make him listen to his stammering and incoherent praises of his wonderful pig. Above their heads lines of dried, greenish pumpkins hung from the ceiling; the lamps, in which the oil was getting low, were smoking.

It was late at night and the moon was high in the sky when the friends again crossed the river. In landing, Mastro Peppe came near falling in the mud, for his legs were unsteady and his eyesight blurred.

Ristabilito said:

“Let us do a kind act. Let us carry this fellow home.”

Holding him up under the arms, they took him home through the poplar grove, and the drunken man, mistaking the white trunks of the trees in the night, stammered thickly:

“Oh, how many Dominican monks I see!...”

Said Ciavola, “They are going to look for San Antonio.”

The drunken man went on, after an interval:

“Oh, Lepruccio, Lepruccio, seven measures of salt will be enough. What shall we do?”

The three conspirators, having conveyed Mastro Peppe to the door of his house, left him there. He ascended the steps with much difficulty, mumbling about Lepruccio and the salt. Then, not noticing that he had left the door open, he threw himself into the arms of Morpheus.

Ciavola and Ristabilito, after having partaken of the supper of Don Bergamino, provided with certain crooked tools, set cautiously to work. The moon had set, the sky was glittering with stars, and through the solitude the north wind was blowing sharply. The two men advanced silently, listening for any sound, and halting now and then, when the skill and agility of Matteo Puriello would be called into use for the occasion.

When they reached the place, Ristabilito could scarcely withhold an exclamation of joy on finding the door open. Profound silence reigned through the house, except for the deep snoring of the sleeping man. Ciavola ascended the stairs first, followed by Ristabilito. In the dim light they perceived the vague outlines of the pig lying upon the table. With the utmost caution, they raised the heavy body and dragged it out by main force. They stood listening for a moment. The cocks could be heard crowing, one after another, in the yards.

Then the two thieves, laughing at their prowess, took the pig upon their shoulders and made their way up the path; to Ciavola it seemed like stealing through a wood with poached game. The pig was heavy, and they reached the house of the priest in a breathless state.

III

The next morning, having recovered from the effects of the wine, Mastro Peppe awoke, stood up in bed, and stretched himself, listening to the bells saluting the eve of San Antonio. Already in his mind, in the confusion of the first awakening, he saw Lepruccio cut into pieces and cover his beautiful fat pork-meat with salt, and his soul was filled with happiness at this thought. Impatient for the anticipated delight, he dressed hastily and went out to the stair-case, wiping his eyes to see more clearly. Upon the table where he had left the pig, the morning sun was smiling in, but nothing was there save a stain of blood!

“The pig? Where is the pig?” cried the robbed man in a hoarse voice.

In a frenzy, he descended the stairs, and noticing the open door, striking his forehead, he ran out crying, and called the labourers around him, asking every one if they had seen the pig, if they had taken it. His queries came faster and faster and his voice grew louder and louder, until the sound of the uproar came up the river to Ciavola and Ristabilito.

They came tranquilly upon the group to enjoy the spectacle and keep up the joke. As they came in sight, Mastro Peppe turned to them, weeping in his grief, and exclaimed:

“Oh, dear me! They have stolen my pig! Oh, dear me! What am I to do now? What am I to do?”

Biagio Quaglia stood a moment considering the appearance of the unhappy fellow, his eyes half-closed in an expression which was half sneer, half admiration, his head bent sideways, as though judging of the effect of this acting. Then approaching, he said:

“Yes indeed!... One cannot deny it ... You play your part well!”

Peppe, not understanding, lifted his face, streaked with tears.

“Yes, yes indeed! You are becoming very cunning!” continued Ristabilito with an air of confidential friendship.

Peppe, not yet understanding, stared stupidly at Ristabilito, and his tears stopped flowing.

“But truly, I did not think you were so malicious!” went on Ristabilito. “Good fellow! My compliments!”

“What do you mean?” asked La Brevetta between his sobs. “What do you mean?... Oh, poor me! How can I now return home?”

“Good! Good! Very well done!” cried Ristabilito. “Play your part! Play your part! Weep louder! Pull your hair! Make every one hear you! Yes, that way! Make everybody believe you!”

Peppe, still weeping, “But I am telling you the truth! My pig has been stolen from me! Oh, Lord! Poor me!”

“Go on! Go on! Don’t stop! The more you shout, the less I believe you. Go on! Go on! Some more!”

Peppe, beside himself with anger and grief, swore repeatedly.

“I tell you it is true! I hope to die on the spot if the pig has not been stolen from me!”

“Oh, poor innocent fellow!” shrieked Ciavola, jestingly. “Put your finger in your mouth! How can we believe you, when last night we saw the pig there? Has San Antonio given him wings to fly?”

“San Antonio be blest! It is as I tell you!”

“But how can it be?”

“So it is!”

“It can’t be so!”

“It is so!”

“No!”

“Yes, yes! It is so! It is so, and I am a dead man! I don’t know how I can ever go home again! Pelagia will not believe me; and if she believes me, she will never give me any peace ... I am a dead man!”

“Well, we’ll try to believe you,” said Ristabilito. “But look here, Peppe. Ciavola suggested the trick to you yesterday. Is it not so that you might fool Pelagia, and others as well? You might be capable of doing that.”

Then La Brevetta began to weep and cry and despair in such a foolish burst of grief that Ristabilito said:

“Very well, keep quiet! We believe you. But if this is true, we must find a way to repair the damage.”

“What way?” asked La Brevetta eagerly, a ray of hope coming into his soul.

“I will tell you,” said Biagio Quaglia. “Certainly someone living around here must have done it, for no one has come over from India to take your pig away. Is not that so, Peppe?”

“It is well, it is well!” assented the man, his voice still filled with tears.

“Well, then, pay attention,” continued Ristabilito, delighted at Peppe’s credulity. “Well, then, if no one has come from India to rob you, then certainly someone who lives around here must have been the thief. Is not that so, Peppe?”

“It is well. It is well.”

“Well, what is to be done? We must summon the farm-hands together and employ some sorcery to discover the thief. When the thief is discovered, the pig is found.”

Peppe’s eyes shone with greediness. He came nearer at the hint of the sorcery, which awakened in him all his native superstitions.

“You know there are three kinds of sorcerers, white ones, pink ones, and black ones; and you know there are in the town three women who know the art of sorcery: Rosa Schiavona, Rusaria Pajora, and La Ciniscia. It is for you to choose.”

Peppe stood for a moment in deep thought; then he chose Rusaria Pajora, for she was renowned as an enchantress and always accomplished great things.

“Well then,” Ristabilito finished. “There is no time to lose. For your sake, I am willing to do you a favour; I will go to town and take what is necessary; I will speak with Rusaria and ask her to give me all needful articles and will return this morning. Give me the money.”

Peppe took out of his waistcoat three francs and handed them over hesitatingly.

“Three francs!” cried the other, refusing them. “Three francs? More than ten are needed.” The husband of Pelagia almost had a fit upon hearing this.

“What? Ten francs for a sorcery?” he stammered, feeling in his pocket with trembling fingers. “Here, I give you eight of them, and no more.”

Ristabilito took them, saying dryly:

“Very well! What I can do, I will do. Will you come with me, Ciavola?”

The two companions set off toward Pescara along the path through the trees, walking quickly in single file; Ciavola showed his merriment by pounding Ristabilito on the back with his fist as they went along. Arriving at the town, they betook themselves to the store of Don Daniele Pacentro, a druggist, with whom they were on very familiar terms, and here they purchased certain aromatic drugs, having them put up in pills as big as walnuts,

well covered with sugar and apple juice. Just as the druggist finished the pills, Biagio Quaglia, who had been absent during this time, came in, carrying a piece of paper filled with dried excrements of dog, and asked the druggist to make from these two beautiful pills, similar in size and shape to the others, excepting that they were to be dipped in aloe and then lightly coated with sugar. The druggist did as he asked, and in order that these might be distinguished from the others, he placed upon each a small mark as suggested by Ristabilito.

The two cheats then betook themselves back to the house of Mastro Peppe, which they reached in a short time, arriving there at about noon, and found Mastro Peppe anxiously awaiting them. As soon as he saw the form of Ciavola approaching through the trees, he cried out:

“Well?”

“Everything is all right,” answered Ristabilito triumphantly, showing the box containing the bewitched confectionery. “Now, as today is the eve of San Antonio and the labourers are feasting, gather all the people together and offer them drink. I know that you have a certain keg of Montepulciano wine; bring that out today! And when everybody is here, I will know what to say, and what to do.”

IV

Two hours later, during the warm, clear afternoon, all the neighbouring harvesters and farm-hands, who had been summoned by La Brevetta, were assembled together in answer to the invitation. A number of great straw stacks in the yard gleamed brightly golden in the sun; a flock of geese, snowy white, with orange-coloured beaks, waddled slowly about, cackling, and hunting for a place to swim while the smell of manure was wafted at intervals from the barnyard. All these rustic men, waiting to drink, were jesting contentedly, sitting upon their curved legs, deformed by their labours; some of them had round, wrinkled faces like withered apples, some were mild and patient in expression, some showed the animation of malice, all possessed the incipient beards of adolescence, and lounged about in the easy attitudes of youth, wearing their new clothes with the manifest care of love.

Ciavola and Ristabilito did not keep them waiting long. Holding the box of candy in his hand, Ristabilito ordered the men to form a circle, and standing in the centre, he proceeded with grave voice and gestures to give a brief harangue.

“Good men! None of you know Why Mastro Peppe De Sierra has called you here...”

The men’s mouths opened in stupid wonder at this unexpected preamble, and as they listened, their joy in anticipation of the promised wine changed to an uneasy expectation of something else, they knew not what. The orator continued:

“But as something unpleasant might happen for which you would reprove me, I will tell you what is the matter before making any experiment.”

His listeners stared questioningly at each other with a look of stupidity, then turned their gaze upon the curious and mysterious box which the speaker held in his hands. One of them, when Ristabilito paused to notice the effect of his words, exclaimed impatiently:

“Well, what is it?”

“I will tell you immediately, my good men. Last night there was stolen from Mastro Peppe a beautiful pig, which was all ready for salting. Who the thief is we do not know, but certainly he must be found among you people, for nobody came from India to steal the pig from Mastro Peppe!”

Whether it was the playful effect of the strong argument about India, or whether it was the heat of the bright sun cannot be determined, but at any rate, La Brevetta began to sneeze. The peasants moved back, the flock of geese ran in all directions, terrified, and the seven consecutive sneezes resounded loudly in the air, disturbing the rural quiet. An uproar of merriment seized the crowd at the great noise. After they had again recovered their composure, Ristabilito went on gravely, as before:

“In order to discover the thief, Mastro Peppe has planned to give you certain good candies to eat, and some of his old Montepulciano wine to drink, which will be tapped for this purpose today. But I must tell you something. The thief, as soon as he bites the candy, will feel his mouth so drawn up by the bitterness of the candy that he will have to spit it out. Now, do you want to try this experiment? Or, is the thief, in order not to be found out in such a manner, ready to confess now? Tell me, what do you want to do?”

“We wish to eat and drink!” answered the crowd in a chorus, while an excited motion ran through the throng, each man showing an expression of curiosity and delight at the portentous demonstration about to be made.

Ciavola said:

“You must stand in a row for this experiment. Now, one of you is to be singled out.”

When they were all thus formed in a line, he took up the flask of wine and one of the glasses, ready to pour it. Ristabilito placed himself at one end of the line, and began slowly to distribute the candy, which cracked under the strong teeth of the peasants and instantly disappeared. When he reached Mastro Peppe, he took out one of the canine candies, which had been marked, and handed it to him, without in any way arousing suspicion by his manner.

Mastro Peppe, who had been watching with wide open eyes to detect the thief, thrust the candy quickly in his mouth, with almost gluttonous eagerness, and began to chew it up. Suddenly his jaw bones rose through his cheeks towards his eyes, the corners of his mouth twisted upwards, and his temples wrinkled, the skin of his nose drew up, his chin became contorted, and all his features took on a comic and involuntary expression of horror, a visible shiver passed down his back, the bitterness of the aloes on his tongue was beyond endurance, his stomach revolted so that he was unable to swallow the dose, and the unhappy man was forced to spit it from his mouth.

“Oho, Mastro Peppe! What in the dickens are you doing?” cried out Tulespre dei Passeri,

a greenish, hairy old goat-shepherd,—green as a swamp-turtle. Hearing his voice, Ristabilito turned around from his work of distributing the candies. Seeing La Brevetta's contortions, he said in a benevolent voice:

“Well! Perhaps the candy I gave you is too sweet. Here is another one, try this, Peppe,” and with his two fingers, he tossed into Peppe's open mouth the other canine pill.

The poor man took it, and feeling the sharp, malignant eyes of the goat-herder fixed upon him, he made a supreme effort to endure the bitterness. He neither bit nor swallowed it, but let it stay in his mouth, with his tongue pressed motionless against his teeth. But in the heat and dampness of his mouth, the aloes began to dissolve, and he could not long endure the taste; his mouth began to twist as before, his nose was filled with tears, the big drops ran down his cheeks, springing from his eyes like uncut pearls, and at last, he had to spit out the mouthful.

“Well, well, Mastro Peppe! What the dickens are you doing now?” again exclaimed the goat-herder, showing his white and toothless gums as he spoke. “Well, well! What does this mean?”

The peasants broke the lines, and crowded around La Brevetta, some jeering and laughing, others with wrathful words. Their pride had been hurt, and the ready brutality of the rustic people was aroused and the implacable austerity of their superstitious natures broke out in a sudden tempest of contumely and reproach.

“Why did you get us to come here to try to lay the blame of this thing on one of us? So this is the kind of sorcery you have gotten up? It was intended to fool us! And why? You calculated wrongly, you fool! you liar! you ill-bred fool! you rascal! You wanted to deceive us, you fool! you thief! you liar! You deserve to have every bone in your body broken, you scoundrel! you deceiver!”

Having broken the wine flasks and all the glasses, they dispersed, shouting back their last insults through the poplar grove.

Ciavola, Ristabilito, the geese, and La Brevetta were left alone in the yard. The latter, filled with shame, rage, and confusion, his tongue still biting from the acridness of the aloes, was unable to speak a word. Ristabilito stood looking at him pitilessly, tapping the ground with his toe as he stood supported on his heels, and shaking his head sarcastically, then he broke out with an insinuating sneer:

“Ha! ha! ha! ha! Good, good, La Brevetta! Now, tell us how much you got for the pig. Did you get ten ducats?”

VII

THE IDOLATERS

I

The great sandy square scintillated as if spread with powdered pumice stone. All of the houses around it, whitened with plaster, seemed red hot like the walls of an immense furnace whose fire was about to die out. In the distance, the pilasters of the church reflected the radiation of the clouds and became red as granite, the Windows flashed as if they might contain an internal conflagration; the sacred images possessed personalities alive with colour; the entire structure, beneath the splendour of this meteoric twilight, assumed a more lofty power of dominion over the houses of Radusani.

There moved from the streets to the square groups of men and women, vociferating and gesticulating. In the souls of all, superstitious terror was rapidly becoming intense; in all of those uncultivated imaginations a thousand terrible images of divine chastisement arose; comments, passionate contentions, lamentable conjurations, disconnected tales, prayers, cries mingled with the ominous rumbling of an imminent hurricane.

Already for many days that bloody redness had lingered in the sky after the sunset, had invaded the tranquillity of the night, illuminated tragically the slumber of the fields, aroused the howls of the dogs.

“Giacobbe! Giacobbe!” cried several while waving their arms who previous to this time had spoken in low voices, before the church, crowded around a pilaster of the vestibule. “Giacobbe!”

There issued from the main door and approached the summoners a long and lean man, who seemed ill with a hectic fever, was bald upon the top of his head, and crowned at the temples and neck with long reddish hair.

His small, hollow eyes, animated as if from the ardour of a deep passion, converged slightly toward his nose, and were of an uncertain colour. The lack of the two front teeth of the upper jaw gave to his mouth as he spoke, and to the movements of his sharp chin scattered with hairs, a singular appearance of satyr-like senility. The rest of his body was a miserable architectural structure of bones badly concealed by clothes, while on his hands, on the under sides of his arms and on his breast, his skin was full of azure marks, incisions made with the point of a pin and powder of indigo, in memory of visits to sanctuaries, of grace received, of vows taken.

As the fanatic drew near to the group around the pilaster, a medley of questions arose from these anxious men.

“What then? What had Don Consolo said? Had he made only the arm of silver appear?”

“And was not the entire bust a better omen? When would Pallura return with the candles?”

“Were there a hundred pounds of wax? Only a hundred pounds? And when would the bells begin to sound? What then? What then?”

The clamours increased around Giacobbe; those furthest away drew near to the church; from all the streets the people overflowed on to the piazza and filled it.

Giacobbe replied to the interrogators. He spoke in a low voice, as if he were about to reveal terrible secrets, as if he were the bearer of prophecies from afar. He had witnessed on high, in the centre of blood, a threatening hand and then a black veil, and then a sword and a trumpet....

“Tell us! Tell us!” the others induced him, while watching his face, seized with a strange greediness to hear marvellous things, while, in the meantime the fable sped from mouth to mouth throughout the assembled multitude.

II

The great vermilion clouds mounted slowly from the horizon to the zenith, until they finally filled the entire cupola of the heavens. A vapour as of melted metals seemed to undulate over the roofs of the houses, and in the descending lustre of the twilight sulphurous and violent rays blended together with trembling iridescence.

A long streamer more luminous than the rest escaped toward a street giving on the river front, and there appeared in the distance the flaming of the water between the long, slender shafts of the poplars; then came a border of ragged country, where the old Saracenic towers rose confusedly like islands of stone in the midst of obscurity; oppressive emanations from the reaped hay filled the atmosphere, which was at times like an odour of putrefied worms amongst the foliage. Troops of swallows flew across the sky with shrill-resounding notes, while going from the banks of the river to the caves. The murmuring of the multitude was interrupted by the silence of expectation. The name of Pallura was on all lips, while irate impatience burst out here and there. Along the path of the river they did not as yet see the cart appear; they lacked candles and Don Consolo delayed because of this to expose the relics and make the exorcisms; further, an imminent peril was threatening. Panic invaded all of this people, massed like a herd of beasts, no longer daring to lift their eyes to heaven. From the breasts of the women sobs began to escape, while a supreme consternation oppressed and stupefied all souls at these sounds of grief.

At length the bells rang out. As these bronze forms swung at a low height, the ominous sound of their tolling blanched the faces of all, and a species of continuous howling filled the air, between strokes.

“Saint Pantaleone! Saint Pantaleone!”

There was an immense simultaneous cry for help from these desperate souls. All upon their knees, with extended hands, with white faces, implored, “Saint Pantaleone!”

There appeared at the door of the church, in the midst of the smoke from two censers, Don Consolo in a shining violet cape embroidered with gold. He held on high the sacred arm of silver, and exorcised the air while pronouncing these words in Latin, "*Ut fidelibus tuis aeris serenitatem concedere digneris. Te rogamus, audi nos.*"

The appearance of the relic excited a delirium of tenderness in the multitude. Tears flowed from all eyes, and behind the clear veil of tears their eyes saw a miraculous, celestial splendour emanate from the three fingers held up to bless the multitude. The arm seemed larger in the kindled atmosphere, the twilight rays produced a dazzling effect on the precious stones, the balsam of the incense was wafted rapidly to the devotees.

"Te rogamus audi nos!"

But when the arm re-entered and the bells ceased to ring, in the momentary silence, they heard nearby a tinkling of bells that came from the road by the river. Then followed a sudden movement of the crowd in that direction and many said, "It is Pallura with the candles! It is Pallura who has come! See Pallura!"

The cart arrived, rattling over the gravel, dragged by a heavy grey mare, on whose back a great brass horn shone like a beautiful half moon. As Giacobbe and the others ran to meet the wagon the gentle beast stopped, blowing heavily from his nostrils. Giacobbe, who reached it first, saw, stretched in the bottom of the cart, the body of Pallura covered with blood, whereupon he began to howl and waved his arms to the crowd, shouting, "He is dead! He is dead!"

III

The sad news passed from mouth to mouth in a flash. The people pressed around the cart, stretched their necks to see the body, no longer thought of threats from above, stricken by this new, unexpected occurrence, invaded by that natural fierce curiosity that men possess in the presence of blood.

"Is he dead? How did he die?"

Pallura rested supine on the boards, with a large wound in the centre of his forehead, with an ear lacerated, with rents in his arms, in his sides, in one thigh. A tepid stream dripped from the hollow of his eyes down to his chin and neck, while it spotted his shirt, formed black and shining clots upon his breast, on his leather belt, and even on his trousers.

Giacobbe remained leaning over the body; all of those around him waited, a light as of the morning illuminated their perplexed faces; and, in that moment of silence, from the banks of the river came the croak of the frogs, and the bats passed and repassed grazing the heads of the people.

Suddenly Giacobbe standing up, with a cheek stained with blood, cried, "He is not dead. He still breathes."

A dull murmur ran through the crowd, and those nearest stretched themselves to see; the restlessness of those most distant made them break into shouts. Two women brought a

flask of water, another some strips of linen, while a youth offered a pumpkin full of wine. The face of the wounded man was bathed, the flow of blood from the forehead stanchd and his head raised.

Then there arose loud voices, demanding the cause of all this. The hundred pounds of wax were missing; barely a few fragments of candles remained among the interstices of the boards in the bottom of the cart.

In the midst of the commotion the emotions of the people were kindled more and more, and became more irritable and belligerent. As an ancient hereditary hatred for the country of Mascalico, opposite upon the other bank of the river, was always fermenting, Giacobbe cried venomously in a hoarse voice, "Maybe the candles are being used for Saint Gonselvo?"

This was like a spark of fire. The spirit of the church awoke suddenly in that race, grown brutish through so many years of blind and fierce worship of its one idol. The words of the fanatic sped from mouth to mouth. And beneath the tragic glow of the twilight this tumultuous people had the appearance of a tribe of negro mutineers.

The name of the Saint burst from all throats like a war cry. The most ardent hurled imprecations against the farther side of the river, while shaking their arms and clenching their fists. Then, all of those countenances afire with wrath and wrathful thoughts, round and resolute, whose circles of gold in the ears and thick tufts of hair on the forehead gave them a strange barbarian aspect, all of those countenances turned toward the reclining man, and softened with pity. There was around the cart a pious solicitude shown by the women, who wished to reanimate the suffering man; many loving hands changed the strips of linen on the wounds, sprinkled the face with water, placed the pumpkin of wine to the white lips and made a kind of a pillow beneath the head.

"Pallura, poor Pallura, why do you not answer?"

He remained motionless, with closed hands, with mouth half open, with a brown down on his throat and chin, with a sort of beauty of youth still apparent in his features even though they were strained by the convulsions of pain. From beneath the binding of his forehead a stream of blood dropped down upon his temples, while at the angles of his mouth appeared little bubbles of red foam, and from his throat issued a species of thick, interrupted hissing. Around him the assistance, the questions, the feverish glances increased. The mare every so often shook her head and neighed in the direction of her stable. An oppression as of an imminent hurricane weighed upon the country.

Then one heard feminine cries in the direction of the square, cries of the mother, that seemed even louder in the midst of the sudden silence of the others. An enormous woman, almost suffocated by her flesh, passed through the crowd, and arrived crying at the cart. As she was so heavy as to be unable to climb into the cart, she grasped the feet of her son, with words of love interspersed among her tears, given in a broken voice, so sharp, and with an expression of grief so terribly beast like, that a shiver ran through all of the bystanders and all turned their faces aside.

"Zaccheo! Zaccheo! my heart! my joy!"—the widow cried, over and over again, while

kissing the feet of the wounded one, and drawing him to her toward the ground. The wounded man stirred, twisted his mouth in a spasm, opened his eyes wide, but he really could not see, because a kind of humid film covered his sight. Great tears began to flow from the corners of his eyelids and to run down upon his cheeks and neck, his mouth remained twisted, and in the thick hissing of his throat one perceived a vain effort to speak. They crowded around him. "Speak, Pallura! Who has wounded you? Who has wounded you? Speak! Speak!"

And beneath the question their wrath raged; their violent desires intensified, a dull craving for vengeance shook them and that hereditary hatred boiled up again in the souls of all.

"Speak! Who has wounded you? Tell us about it! Tell us about it!"

The dying man opened his eyes a second time, and as they clasped both of his hands, perhaps through the warmth of that living contact the spirit in him revived and his face lighted up. He had upon his lips a vague murmur, betwixt the foam that rose, suddenly more abundant and bloody. They did not as yet understand his words. One could hear in the silence the breathing of the breathless multitude, and all eyes held within their depths a single flame because all minds awaited a single word.

"Ma—Ma—Ma—scalico."

"Mascalico! Mascalico!" howled Giacobbe, who was bending, with strained ear, to grasp the weak syllables from that dying mouth. An immense cry greeted this explanation. There was at first a confused rising and falling as of a tempest in the multitude. Then when one voice raised above the tumult gave the signal, the multitude disbanded in mad haste.

One single thought pursued those men, one thought that seemed to have flashed instantaneously into the minds of all: to arm themselves with something in order to wound. A species of sanguinary fatality settled upon all consciences beneath the surly splendour of the twilight, in the midst of the electrifying odours emanating from the panting country.

IV

Then the phalanxes, armed with scythes, with sickles, with hatchets, with hoes and with muskets, reunited on the square before the church.

And the idolaters shouted, "Saint Pantaleone!"

Don Consolo, terrified by the turmoil, had fled to the depths of a stall behind the altar. A handful of fanatics, conducted by Giacobbe, penetrated the large chapel, forced its gratings of bronze, and arrived at length in the underground passage where the bust of the Saint was kept. Three lamps fed with olive oil burned gently in the sacristy behind a crystal; the Christian idol sparkled with its white head surrounded by a large solar disc, and the walls were covered over with the rich gifts.

When the idol, borne upon the shoulders of four Hercules, appeared presently between the pilasters of the vestibule, and shed rays from its aureole, a long, breathless passion passed

over the expectant crowd, a noise like a joyous wind beat upon all foreheads. The column moved. And the enormous head of the Saint oscillated on high, gazing before it with two empty eyes.

In the heavens now passed at intervals meteors which seemed alive, while groups of thin clouds seemed to detach themselves from the heavens, and, while dissolving, floated slowly away. The entire country of Radusa appeared in the background like a mountain of ashes that might be concealing a fire, and in front of it the contour of the country lost itself with an indistinct flash. A great chorus of frogs disturbed the harmony of the solitude.

On the road by the river Pallura's cart obstructed progress. It was empty now, but bore traces of blood in many places. Irate imprecations exploded suddenly in the silence.

Giacobbe cried, "Let us put the Saint in it!"

The bust was placed on the boards and dragged by human strength to the ford. The procession, ready for battle, thus crossed the boundary. Along the files metal lamps were carried, the invaded waters broke in luminous sprays, and everywhere a red light flamed from the young poplars in the distance, toward the quadrangular towers. Mascalico appeared upon a little elevation, asleep in the centre of an olive orchard.

The dogs barked here and there, with a furious persistency. The column having issued from the ford, on abandoning the common road, advanced with rapid steps by a direct path that cut through the fields. The bust of silver borne anew on rugged shoulders, towered above the heads of the men amongst the high grain, odorous and starred with living fireflies.

Suddenly, a shepherd, who rested under a straw shed to guard the grain, seized by a mad terror at the sight of so many armed men, began to flee up the coast, screaming as loud as he could, "Help! Help!"

His cries echoed through the olive orchards.

Then it was that the Radusani increased their speed. Among the trunks of trees, amid the dried reeds, the Saint of silver tottered, gave back sonorous tinklings at the blows of the trees, became illuminated with vivid flashes at every hint of a fall. Ten, twelve, twenty shots rained down in a vibrating flash, one after another upon the group of houses. One heard creaks, then cries followed by a great clamorous commotion; several doors opened while others closed, windows fell in fragments and vases of basil fell shivered on the road. A white smoke rose placidly in the air, behind the path of the assailants, up to the celestial incandescence. All blinded, in a belligerent rage, shouted, "To death! To death!"

A group of idolaters maintained their positions around Saint Pantaleone. Atrocious vituperations against Saint Gonselvo burst out amongst the brandished scythes and sickles.

"Thief! Thief! Loafer! The candles!... The candles!"

Other groups besieged the doors of the houses with blows of hatchets. And, as the doors unhinged shattered and fell, the howling Pantaleonites burst inside, ready to kill. Half nude women fled to the corners, imploring pity and, trying to defend themselves from the blows by grasping the weapons and cutting their fingers, they rolled extended on the

pavement in the midst of heaps of coverings and sheets from which oozed their flaccid turnip-fed flesh.

Giacobbe, tall, slender, flushed, a bundle of dried bones rendered formidable by passion, director of the slaughter, stopped everywhere in order to make a broad, commanding gesture above all heads with his huge scythe. He walked in the front ranks, fearless, without a hat, in the name of Saint Pantaleone. More than thirty men followed him. And all had the confused and stupid sensation of walking in the midst of fire, upon an oscillating earth, beneath a burning vault that was about to shake down upon them.

But from all sides defenders began to assemble; the Mascalicesi, strong and dark as mulattoes, sanguinary, who struck with long unyielding knives, and tore the stomach and throat, accompanying each blow with guttural cries. The fray drew little by little toward the church, from the roofs of two or three houses burst flames, a horde of women and children escaped precipitately among the olives, seized with panic and no longer with light in their eyes.

Then among the men, without the handicap of the women's tears and laments, the hand-to-hand struggle grew more ferocious. Beneath the rust-coloured sky the earth was covered with corpses. Vituperations, choked within the teeth of the slain, resounded, and ever above the clamour continued the shout of the Radusani, "The candles! The candles!"

But the entrance of the church was barred by an enormous door of oak studded with nails. The Mascalicesi defended it from the blows and hatchets. The Saint of silver, impassive and white, oscillated in the thick of the fray, still sustained upon the shoulders of the four Hercules, who, although bleeding from head to foot, refused to give up. The supreme vow of the attackers was to place the idol on the altar of the enemy.

Now while the Mascalicesi raged like prodigious lions on the stone steps, Giacobbe disappeared suddenly and skirted the rear of the edifice for an undefended opening by which he could penetrate the sacristy. Finally he discovered an aperture at a slight distance from the ground, clambered up, remained fixed there, held fast at the hips by its narrowness, twisted and turned, until at length he succeeded in forcing his long body through the opening.

The welcome aroma of incense was vanishing in the nocturnal frost of the house of God. Groping in the dark, guided by the crashing of the external blows, the man walked toward the door, stumbling over the chain, and falling on his face and hands.

Radusanian hatchets already resounded upon the hardness of the oak doors, when he began to force the lock with an iron, breathless, suffocated by the violent palpitation of anxiety that sapped his strength, with his eyes blurred by indistinct flashes, with his wounds aching and emitting a tepid stream which flowed down over his skin.

"Saint Pantaleone! Saint Pantaleone!" shouted outside the hoarse voices of those who felt the door yielding slowly, while they redoubled their shouts and the blows of their hatchets. From the other side of the wood resounded the heavy thud of bodies of those that had been murdered and the sharp blow of a knife that had pinioned some one against the door, nailed through the back. And it seemed to Giacobbe that the whole nave throbbed with the

beating of his wild heart.

After a final effort, the door swung open. The Radusani rushed in headlong with an immense shout of victory, passing over the bodies of the dead, dragging the Saint of silver to the altar.

An animated oscillation of reflections suddenly illuminated the obscurity of the nave and made the gold of the candelabra glitter. And in that glaring splendour, which now and again was intensified by the burning of the adjacent houses, a second struggle took place. The entangled bodies rolled upon the bricks, remained in a death grip, balanced together here and there in their wrathful struggles, howled and rolled beneath the benches, upon the steps of the chapels and against the corners of the confessionals. In the symmetrical concave of this house of God arose that icy sound of the steel that penetrates the flesh or that grinds through the bones, that single broken groan of a man wounded in a vital part, that rattle that the framework of the skull gives forth when crushed with a blow, that roar of him who dreads to die, that atrocious hilarity of him who has reached the point of exulting in killing, all of these sounds echoed through this house of God. And the calm odour of incense arose above the conflict.

The silver idol had not yet reached the glory of the altar, because the hostile forces, encircling the altar, had prevented it. Giacobbe, wounded in many places, struck with his scythe, never yielding a palm's breadth of the steps which he had been the first to conquer. There remained but two to support the Saint. The enormous white head rolled as if drunk over the wrathful pool of blood. The Mascalicesi raged.

Then Saint Pantaleone fell to the pavement, giving a sharp rattle that stabbed the heart of Giacobbe deeper than any sword could have done. As the ruddy mower darted over to lift it, a huge demon of a man with a blow from a sickle stretched the enemy on his spine.

Twice he arose, and two other blows hurled him down again. The blood inundated his entire face, breast and hands, while on his shoulders and arms the bones, laid bare by deep wounds, shone out, but still he persisted in recovering. Maddened by his fierce tenacity of life, three, four, five ploughmen together struck him furiously in the stomach, thus disgorging his entrails. The fanatic fell backwards, struck his neck on the bust of the silver Saint, turned suddenly upon his stomach with his face pressed against the metal and with his arms extended before him and his legs contracted under him.

Thus was Saint Pantaleone lost.

VIII

MUNGIA

Through all the country of Pescara, San Silvestro, Fontanella, San Rocco, even as far as Spoltore, and through all the farms of Vallelonga beyond Allento and particularly in the little boroughs where sailors meet near the mouth of the river,—through all this country, where the houses are built of clay and of reeds, and the fire material is supplied by drift wood from the sea, for many years a Catholic rhapsodist with a barbarian and piratical name, who is as blind as the ancient Homer, has been famous.

Mungia begins his peregrinations at the beginning of spring, and ends them with the first frosts of October. He goes about the country, conducted by a woman and a child. Into the peaceful gardens and the serenity of the fields he brings his lamenting religious songs, antiphonies, preludes and responses of the offices of the dead. His figure is so familiar to all, that even the dogs in the backyards do not bark at his approach. He announces his advent with a trill from his clarionet, and at the well-known signal, the old wives come out upon the thresholds to welcome him, place his chair under the shade of a tree in the yard, and make inquiries as to his health. All the peasants come from their work, and form a subdued and awed circle about him, while with their hard hands they wipe the perspiration of toil from their foreheads, and, still holding their implements, assume a reverent attitude. Their bare arms and legs are knotted and misshapen from the severe toil of the fields; their twisted bodies have taken on the hue of the earth—working in the soil from the dawn of day, they seem to have something in common with the trees and the roots.

A sort of religious solemnity is thrown over everything by this blind man. It is not the sun, it is not the fulness of the earth, not the joy of spring vegetation, not the sounds of the distant choruses that gives to all the feeling of admiration, of devotion, and more than all, the sadness of religion. One of the old women gives the name of a departed relative to whom she wishes to offer songs and oblations. Mungia uncovers his head.

His wide shining cranium appears encircled with white hair; his whole face, which in its quiet calm has the appearance of a mask, wrinkles up when he takes the clarionet in his mouth. Upon his temples, under his eyes, beside his ears, around his nostrils and at the corners of his mouth, a thousand lines become visible, some delicate, some deep, changing with the rhythm of the music by which he is inspired. His nerves are at a tension, and over his jaw bones the purple veins show, like those of the turning vine-leaves in the autumn, the lower eyelid is turned outward, showing a reddish line, over his whole face the tough skin is tightly drawn, giving the appearance of a wonderful carving in relief; the light plays over the face with its short, stiff, and badly shaved beard, and over the neck, with its deep hollows, between the long still cords which stand out prominently, flashing like dew upon a warty and mouldy pumpkin; and, as he plays, a thousand vibrating minor notes

float out upon the air, and the humble head takes on an appearance of mystery. His fingers press the unsteady keys of the box-wood clarionet, and the notes pour out. The instrument itself seems almost human, and to breathe with life, as inanimate objects which have been long and intimately associated with men often do; the wood has an unctuous glare; the holes, which in the winter months become the nests of little spiders, are still filled with cobwebs and dust; the keys are stained with verdigris; in places beeswax has been employed to cover up breaks; the joints are held together with paper and thread, while about the edge one can still see the ornaments of its youth. The blind man's voice rises weak and uncertain, his fingers move mechanically, searching for the notes of a prelude, or an interlude of days long passed.

His long, deformed hands, with knots upon the phalanges of the first three fingers, and with the nails of his thumbs depressed and white in colour, resemble somewhat the hands of a decrepit monkey; the backs are of the unhealthy colour of decayed fruit, a mixture of pink, yellow and blue shades; the palms show a net-work of lines and furrows, and between the fingers the skin is blistered.

When he has finished the prelude, Mungia begins to sing, "*Libera Me Domine*," and "*Ne Recorderis*," slowly, and upon a modulation of five notes. The Latin words of the song are interspersed with his native idioms, and now and then, to fill out the metrical rhythm, he inserts an adverb ending in *ente*, which he follows with heavy rhymes; he raises his voice in these parts, then lowers it in the less fatiguing lines. The name of Jesus runs often through the rhapsody; not without a certain dramatic movement. The passion of Jesus is narrated in verses of five lines.

The peasants listen with an air of devotion, watching the blind man's mouth as he sings. In the season, the chorus of the vintagers comes from the fields, vieing with the notes of the pious songs; Mungia, whose hearing is weak, sings on of the mysteries of death; his lips adhere to his toothless gums, and the saliva runs down and drips from his chin; placing the clarionet again to his lips, he begins the intermezzo, then takes up the rhymes again, and so continues to the end. His recompense is a small measure of corn and a bottle of wine or a bunch of onions, and sometimes a hen.

He rises from his chair, a tall, emaciated figure, with bent back and knees turning a little backward. He wears upon his head a large green cap, and no matter what the season, he is wrapped in a peasant cloak falling from his throat below his knees and fastened with two brass buckles. He moves with difficulty, at times stopping to cough.

When October comes, and the vineyards have been vintaged and the yards are filled with mud and gravel, he withdraws into a garret, which he shares with a tailor who has a paralytic wife, and a street pauper with nine children who are variously afflicted with scrofula and the rickets. On pleasant days he is taken to the arch of Portanova, and sits upon a rock in the sun, while he softly sings the "*De Profundis*" to keep his throat in condition. On these occasions, mendicants of all sorts gather around him, men with dislocated limbs, hunchbacks, cripples, paralytics, lepers, women covered with wounds and scabs, toothless women, and those without eyebrows and without hair; children, green as locusts, emaciated, with sharp, savage eyes, like birds of prey; taciturn, with mouths

already withered; children who bear in their blood diseases inherited from the monster Poverty; all of that miserable, degenerate rabble, the remnants of a decrepit race. These ragged children of God come to gather about the singer, and speak to him as one of themselves.

Then Mungia graciously begins to sing to the waiting crowd. Chiachiu, a native of Silvi, approaches, dragging himself with great difficulty, helping himself with the palms of his hands, on which he wears a covering of leather; when he reaches the group about Mungia, he stops, holding in his hands his right foot, which is twisted and contorted like a root. Strigia, an uncertain, repugnant figure, a senile hermaphrodite with bright red carbuncles covering neck and grey locks on the temples, of which the creature seems to be proud, the top and back of the head covered with wool like a vulture, next approaches. Then come the Mammalucchi, three idiot brothers, who seem to have been brought forth from the union of man and goat, so manifest in their faces are the ovine features. The oldest of the three has some soft, degenerated bulbs protruding from the orbs of his eyes, of a bluish colour, much like oval bags of pulp about to rot. The peculiar affliction of the youngest is in his ear, the lobe of which is abnormally inflated, and of the violet hue of a fig. The three come together, with bags of strings upon their backs.

The Ossei comes also, a lean, serpent-like man with an olive-coloured face, a flat nose with a singular aspect of malice and deceit, which betrays his gipsy origin, and eyelids which turn up like those of a pilot who sails over stormy seas. Following him is Catalana di Gissi, a woman of uncertain age, her skin covered with long reddish blisters, and on her forehead spots looking like copper coins, hipless, like a bitch after confinement: she is called the Venus of the Mendicants,—the fountain of Love at which all the thirsty ones are quenched.

Then comes Jacobbe of Campoli, an old man with greenish-coloured hair like some of the mechanics' work in brass; then industrious Gargala in a vehicle built of the remains of broken boats, still smeared with tar; then Constantino di Corropoli, the cynic, whose lower lip has a growth which gives him the appearance of holding a piece of raw meat between his teeth. And still they come, inhabitants of the woods who have moved along the course of the river from the hills to the sea; all gather around the rhapsodist in the sun.

Mungia then sings with studied gestures and strange postures. His soul is filled with exaltation, an aureole of glory surrounds him, for now he gives himself freely to his Muse, unrestrained in his singing. He scarcely hears the clamour of applause which arises from the swarming mendicants as he closes.

At the end of the song, as the warm sun has left the spot where the group is assembled and is climbing the Corinthian columns of the arch of the Capitol, the mendicants bid the blind man farewell and disperse through the neighbouring lands. Usually Chiachiu di Silvi, holding his deformed foot, and the dwarfed brothers remain after the others have gone, asking alms of passers-by, while Mungia sits silent, thinking, perhaps, of the triumphs of his youth when Lucicoppelle, Golpo di Casoli, and Quattorece were alive.

Oh, the glorious band of Mungia! The small orchestra had won through all the lower valley of Pescara a lofty fame. Golpo di Casoli played the viola. He was a greyish little

man, like the lizards on the rocks, with the skin of his face and neck wrinkled and membranous like that of a turtle boiled in water. He wore a sort of Phrygian cap which covered his ears on the sides. He played on his viola with quick gestures, pressing the instrument with his sharp chin and with his contracted fingers hammering the keys in an ostentatious effort, as do the monkeys of wandering mountebanks.

After him came Quattorece with his bass viol slung over his stomach by a strap of ass-leather; he was as tall and thin as a wax candle, and throughout his person was a predominance of orange tints; he looked like one of those monochromatic painted figures in stiff attitudes which ornament some of the poetry of Castelli; his eyes shone with the yellow transparency of a shepherd dog's, the cartilage of his great ears opened like those of a bat against which an orange light is thrown, his clothes were of some tobacco-coloured cloth, such as hunters usually wear; while his old viol, ornamented with feathers, with silver adornments, bows, images, and medals, looked like some barbarian instrument from which one might expect strange sounds to issue. But Lucicoppelle, holding across his chest his rough, two-stringed guitar, well tuned in diapason, came in last, with the bold, dancing step of a rustic Figaro. He was the joyful spirit of the orchestra, the greenest one in age and strength, the liveliest and the brightest. A heavy tuft of crisp hair fell over his forehead under a scarlet cap, and in his ears shone womanlike, two silver clasps. He loved wine as a musical toast. To serenades in honour of beauty, to open-air dances, to gorgeous, boisterous feasts, to weddings, to christenings, to votive feasts and funeral rites, the band of Mungia would hasten, expected and acclaimed. The nuptial procession would move through the streets strewn with bulrush blossoms and sweet-scented herbs, greeted with joyful shouts and salutes. Five mules, decorated with wreaths, carried the wedding presents. In a cart drawn by two oxen whose harness was wound with ribbons, and whose backs were covered with draperies, were seated the bridal couple; from the cart dangled boilers, earthen vessels, and copper pots, which shook and rattled with the jolting of the vehicle; chairs, tables, sofas, all sorts of antique shapes of household furniture oscillated, creaking, about them; damask skirts, richly figured with flowers, embroidered waist-coats, silken aprons, and all sorts of articles of women's apparel shone in the sun in bright array, while a distaff, the symbol of domestic virtue, piled on top with the linen, was outlined against the blue sky like a golden staff.

The women relatives, carrying upon their heads baskets of grain, upon the top of which was a loaf, and upon the loaf a flower, came next in hierarchical order, singing as they walked. This train of simple, graceful figures reminded one of the canephoræ in the Greek bas-reliefs. Reaching the house, the women took the baskets from their heads, and threw a handful of wheat at the bride, pronouncing a ritual augury, invoking fecundity and abundance. The mother, also, observed the ceremony of throwing grain, weeping copiously as with a brush she touched her daughter on the chest, shoulders and forehead, and speaking doleful words of love as she did so.

Then in the courtyard, under a roof of branches, the feast began. Mungia, who had not yet lost his eyesight nor felt the burden of years upon him, erect in all the magnificence of a green coat, perspiring and beaming, blew with all the power of his lungs upon his clarionet, beating time with his foot. Golpo di Casoli struck his violin energetically,

Quattorece exerted himself in a wild endeavour to keep up with the crescendo of the Moorish dance, while Lucicoppelle, standing straight with his head up, holding aloft in his left hand the key of his guitar, and with the right pricking on two strings the metric chords, looked down at the women, laughing gaily among the flowers.

Then the “Master of Ceremonies” brought in the viands on large painted plates and the cloud of vapour rising from the hot dishes faded away among the foliage of the trees. The amphoras of wine, with their well-worn handles, were passed around from one to another, the men stretched their arms out across the table between the loaves of bread, scattered with anise seeds, and the cheese cakes, round as full moons, and helped themselves to olives, oranges and almonds. The smell of spice mingled with the fresh, vaporous odour of the vegetables; sometimes the guests offered the bride goblets of wine in which were small pieces of jewelry, or necklaces of great grape stones like a string of golden fruit. After a while the exhilarating effects of the liquor began to be felt, and the crowd grew hilarious with Bacchic joy and then Mungia, advancing with uncovered head and holding in his hands a glass filled to the rim, would sing the beautiful deistic ritual which to feasters throughout the land of Abruzzi gave a disposition for friendly toasts:

“To the health of all these friends of mine, united, I drink this wine so pure and fine.”

IX

THE DOWNFALL OF CANDIA

I

Three days after the customary Easter banquet, which in the house Lamonica was always sumptuous and crowded with feasters by virtue of its traditions, Donna Cristina Lamonica counted her table linen and silver while she placed each article systematically in chest and safe, ready for future similar occasions.

With her, as usual, at this task and aiding, were the maid Maria Bisaccia and the laundress Candida Marcanda, popularly known as "Candia." The large baskets heaped with fine linen rested in a row on the pavement. The vases of silver and the other table ornaments sparkled upon a tray; they were solidly fashioned, if somewhat rudely, by rustic silversmiths, in shape almost liturgical, as are all of the vases that the rich provincial families hand down from generation to generation. The fresh fragrance of bleached linen permeated the room.

Candia took from the baskets the doilies, the table cloths and the napkins, had the "signora" examine the linen intact, and handed one piece after another to Maria, who filled up the drawers while the "signora" scattered through the spaces an aroma, and took notes in a book. Candia was a tall woman, large-boned, parched, fifty years of age; her back was slightly curved from bending over in that position habitual to her profession; she had very long arms and the head of a bird of prey resting upon the neck of a tortoise. Maria Bisaccia was an Ortonesian, a little fleshy, of milk-white complexion, also possessing very clear eyes; she had a soft manner of speaking and made slow, delicate gestures like one who was accustomed habitually to exercise her hands amongst sweet pastry, syrups, preserves and confectionery. Donna Cristina, also a native of Ortona, educated in a Benedictine monastery, was small of stature, dressed somewhat carelessly, with hair of a reddish tendency, a face scattered with freckles, a nose long and thick, bad teeth, and most beautiful and chaste eyes which resembled those of a priest disguised as a woman.

The three women attended to the work with much assiduity, spending thus a large part of the afternoon.

At length, just as Candia went out with the empty baskets, Donna Cristina counted the pieces of silver and found that a spoon was missing.

"Maria! Maria!" she cried, suddenly panic-stricken. "One spoon is lacking.... Count them! Quick!"

“But how? It cannot be, Signora,” Maria answered. “Allow me a glance at them.” She began to re-sort the pieces, calling their numbers aloud. Donna Cristina looked on and shook her head. The silver clinked musically.

“An actual fact!” Maria exclaimed at last with a motion of despair. “And now what are we to do?”

She was quite above suspicion. She had given proof of fidelity and honesty for fifteen years in that family. She had come from Ortona with Donna Cristina at the time of her marriage, almost constituting a part of the marriage portion, and had always exercised a certain authority in the household under the protection of the “signora.” She was full of religious superstition, devoted to her especial saint and her especial church, and finally, she was very astute. With the “signora” she had united in a kind of hostile alliance to everything pertaining to Pescara, and especially to the popular saint of these Pescaresian people. On every occasion she quoted the country of her birth, its beauties and riches, the splendours of its basilica, the treasures of San Tomaso, the magnificence of its ecclesiastical ceremonies in contrast to the meagreness of San Cetto, which possessed but a solitary, small, holy arm of silver.

At length Donna Cristina said, “Look carefully everywhere.”

Maria left the room to begin a search. She penetrated all the angles of the kitchen and loggia, but in vain, and returned at last with empty hands.

“There is no such thing about! Neither here nor there!” she cried. Then the two set themselves to thinking, to heaping up conjectures, to searching their memories.

They went out on the loggia that bordered the court, on the loggia belonging to the laundry, in order to make a final examination. As their speech grew louder, the occupants of the neighbouring houses appeared at their windows.

“What has befallen you? Donna Cristina, tell us! Tell us!” they cried. Donna Cristina and Maria recounted their story with many words and gestures.

“Jesu! Jesu! then there must be thieves among us!” In less than no time the rumour of this theft spread throughout the vicinity, in fact through all of Pescara. Men and women fell to arguing, to surmising, whom the thief might be. The story on reaching the most remote house of Sant’ Agostina, was huge in proportions; it no longer told of a single spoon, but of all the silver of the Lamonica house.

Now, as the weather was beautiful and the roses in the loggia had commenced to bloom, and two canaries were singing in their cages, the neighbours detained one another at the windows for the sheer pleasure of chattering about the season with its soothing warmth. The heads of the women appeared amongst the vases of basil, and the hubbub they made seemed especially to please the cats in the caves above.

Donna Cristina clasped her hands and cried, “Who could it have been?”

Donna Isabella Sertale, nicknamed “The Cat,” who had the stealthy, furtive movements of a beast of prey, called in a twanging voice, “Who has been with you this long time, Donna Cristina? It seems to me that I have seen Candia come and go.”

“A-a-a-h!” exclaimed Donna Felicetta Margasanta, called “The Magpipe,” because of her everlasting garrulity.

“Ah!” the other neighbours repeated in turn.

“And you had not thought of her?”

“And did you not observe her?”

“And don’t you know of what metal Candia is made?”

“We would do well to tell you of her!”

“That we would!”

“We would do well to tell you!”

“She washes the clothes in goodly fashion, there is none to dispute that. She is the best laundress that dwells in Pescara, one cannot help saying that. But she holds a defect in her five fingers. Did you not know that, now?”

“Once two of my doilies disappeared.”

“And I missed a tablecloth.”

“And I a shift shirt.”

“And I three pairs of stockings.”

“And I two pillow-cases.”

“And I a new skirt.”

“And I failed to recover an article.”

“I have lost——”

“And I, too.”

“I have not driven her out, for who is there to fill her place?”

“Silvestra?”

“No! No!”

“Angelantonia? Balascetta?”

“Each worse than the other!”

“One must have patience.”

“But a spoon, think of that!”

“It’s too much! it is!”

“Don’t remain silent about it, Donna Cristina, don’t remain silent!”

“Whether silent or not silent!” burst out Maria Bisaccia, who for all her placid and benign expression never let a chance escape her to oppress or put in a bad light the other servants of the house, “we will think for ourselves!”

In this fashion the chatter from the windows on the loggia continued, and accusation fled from mouth to mouth throughout the entire district.

II

The following morning, when Candia Marcanda had her hands in the soap-suds, there appeared at her door-sill the town guard Biagio Pesce, popularly known as "The Corporal." He said to her, "You are wanted by Signor Sindaco at the town-hall this very moment."

"What did you say?" asked Candia, knitting her brows without discontinuing her task.

"You are wanted by Signor Sindaco at the town-hall this very moment."

"I am wanted? And why?" Candia asked in a brusque manner. She did not know what was responsible for this unexpected summons and therefore reared at it like a stubborn animal before a shadow.

"I cannot know the reason," answered the Corporal. "I have received but an order."

"What order?"

The woman because of an obstinacy natural to her could not refrain from questions. She was unable to realise the truth.

"I am wanted by Signor Sindaco? And why? And what have I done? I have no wish to go there. I have done nothing unseemly."

Then the Corporal cried impatiently, "Ah, you do not wish to go there? You had better beware!" And he went away muttering, with his hand on the hilt of his shabby sword.

Meanwhile several who had heard the dialogue came from their doorways into the street and began to stare at the laundress, who was violently attacking her wash. Since they knew of the silver spoon they laughed at one another and made remarks that the laundress did not understand. Their ridicule and ambiguous expressions filled the heart of the woman with much uneasiness, which increased when the Corporal appeared accompanied by another guard.

"Now move on!" he said resolutely.

Candia wiped her arms in silence and went. Throughout the square everyone stopped to look. Rosa Panara, an enemy, from the threshold of her shop, called with a fierce laugh, "Drop the bone thou hast picked up!"

The laundress, bewildered, unable to imagine the cause of this persecution, could not answer.

Before the town-hall stood a group of curious people who waited to see her pass. Candia, suddenly seized with a wrathful spirit, mounted the stairs quickly, came into the presence of Signor Sindaco out of breath, and asked, "Now, what do you want with me?"

Don Silla, a man of peaceable temperament, remained for a moment somewhat taken

aback by the sharp voice of the laundress and turned a beseeching look upon the faithful custodians of the communal dignity. Then he took some tobacco from a horn-box and said, "Be seated, my daughter."

Candia remained upon her feet. Her hooked nose was inflated with choler, and her cheeks, roughly seamed, trembled from the contraction of her tightly compressed jaws.

"Speak quickly, Don Silla!" she cried.

"You were occupied yesterday in carrying back the clean linen to Donna Cristina Lamonica?"

"Well, and what of it? Is she missing something? Everything was counted piece by piece ... nothing was lacking. Now, what is it all about?"

"One moment, my daughter! The room had silver in it...!"

Candia, divining the truth, turned upon him like a viper about to sting. At the same time her thin lips trembled.

"The room had silver in it," he continued, "and now Donna Cristina finds herself lacking one spoon. Do you understand, my daughter? Was it taken by you ... through mistake?"

Candia jumped like a grasshopper at this undeserved accusation. In truth she had stolen nothing. "Ah, I? I?" she cried. "Who says I took it? Who has seen me in such an act? You fill me with amazement ... you fill me with wonder! Don Silla! I a thief? I? I?..."

And her indignation had no limit. She was even more wounded by this unjust accusation because she felt herself capable of the deed which they had attributed to her.

"Then you have not taken it?" Don Silla interrupted, withdrawing prudently into the depths of his large chair.

"You fill me with amazement!" Candia chided afresh, while she shook her long hands as if they were two whips.

"Very well, you may go. We will see in time." Without saying good-bye, Candia made her exit, striking against the door-post as she did so. She had become green in the face and was beside herself with rage. On reaching the street and seeing the crowd assembled there, she understood at length that popular opinion was against her, that no one believed in her innocence. Nevertheless she began publicly to exculpate herself. The people laughed and drifted away from her. In a wrathful state of mind she returned home, sank into a condition of despair and fell to weeping in her doorway.

Don Donato Brandimarte, who lived next door, said to her by way of a joke:

"Cry aloud, Candia. Cry to the full extent of your strength, for the people are about to pass now."

As there were clothes lying in a heap waiting to be boiled clean she finally grew quiet, bared her arms and set herself to work. While working, she brooded on how to clear her character, constructed a method of defence, sought in her cunning, feminine thoughts an artificial means for proving her innocence; balancing her mind subtly in mid-air, she had

recourse to all of those expedients which constitute an ignorant argument, in order to present a defence that might persuade the incredulous.

Later, when she had finished her task, she went out and went first to Donna Cristina.

Donna Cristina would not see her. Maria Bisaccia listened to Candia's prolific words and shook her head without reply and at length left her in a dignified way.

Then Candia visited all of her customers. To each one she told her story, to each one she laid bare her defence, always adding to it a new argument, ever increasing the size of the words, becoming more heated and finally despairing in the presence of incredulity and distrust as all was useless. She felt at last that an explanation was no longer possible. A kind of dark discouragement fastened upon her mind. What more could she do! What more could she say!

III

Donna Cristina Lamonica, meanwhile, sent for La Cinigia, a woman of the ignorant masses, who followed the profession of magic and unscientific medicine. Previously, La Cinigia had several times discovered stolen goods and some said that she had underhand dealings with the thieves.

Donna Cristina said to her, "Recover the spoon for me and I will give you a rich present."

La Cinigia answered, "Very well. Twenty-four hours will suffice me." And after twenty-four hours she brought the news, "The spoon is to be found in the court in a hole adjacent to the sewer." Donna Cristina and Maria descended to the court, searched, and to their great astonishment found the missing piece.

The news spread rapidly throughout Pescara. Then in triumph, Candia Marcanda immediately began to frequent the streets. She seemed taller, held her head more erect and smiled into the eyes of everyone as if to say, "Now you have seen for yourselves?"

The people in the shops, when she passed by, murmured something and then broke into laughter. Filippo Selvi, who was drinking a glass of brandy in the Café d'Angeladea, called to Candia, "Over here is a glass waiting for Candia."

The woman, who loved ardent liquor, moved her lips greedily.

Filippo Selvi added, "And you are deserving of it, there is no doubt of that."

A crowd of idlers had assembled before the café. All wore a teasing expression upon their countenances. Filippo La Selvi having turned to his audience while the woman was drinking, vouchsafed, "And she knew how to find it, did she? The old fox...."

He struck familiarly the bony shoulder of the laundress by way of prelude.

Everyone laughed.

Magnafave, a small hunchback, defective in body and speech and halting on the syllables, cried:

“Ca-ca-ca—Candia—a—and—Cinigia!” He followed this with gesticulations and wary stutterings, all of which implied that Candia and La Cinigia were in league. At this the crowd became convulsed with mirth.

Candia remained dazed for a moment with the glass in her hand. Then of a sudden she understood. They still did not believe in her innocence. They were accusing her of having secretly carried back the spoon, in agreement with the fortune-teller as to the placing of it, in order to escape disgrace.

At this thought, the blind grip of rage seized her. She could not find words for speech. She threw herself upon the weakest of her tormentors, which was the small hunchback, and belaboured him with blows and scratches. The crowd, taking a cruel pleasure in witnessing the scuffle, cheered itself into a circle as if watching the struggle of two animals, and encouraged both combatants with cries and gesticulations.

Magnafave, terrified by her unexpected madness, sought to flee, dodging like a monkey; but, detained by those terrible hands of the laundress, he whirled with ever-increasing velocity, like a stone from a sling, until at length he fell upon his face with great violence.

Several ran forward to raise him. Candia withdrew in the midst of hisses, shut herself up in her house, threw herself across her bed, weeping and biting her fingers. This latest accusation burnt into her more than the former, particularly because she realised that she was capable of such a subterfuge. How to disentangle herself now? How make the truth clear? She grew desperate on thinking that she could not bring to the aid of her argument any material difficulties that might have hindered the execution of such a deceit. Access to the court was very easy; a never closed door was on the first landing-place of a large staircase and in order to dispose of waste matter and to attend to other diverse duties, a quantity of people passed freely in and out of that doorway. Therefore she could not close the mouths of her accusers by saying, “How could I have got in there?” The means for accomplishing such an undertaking were many and simple, and on this very lack of obstacles popular opinion chose to establish itself.

Candia therefore sought different persuasive arguments; she sharpened all her cunning, imagined three, four, five separate circumstances that might easily account for the finding of the spoon in that hole; she took refuge in mental turnings and twistings of every kind and subtilised with singular ingenuity. Later she began to go around from shop to shop, from house to house, straining in every way to overcome the incredulity of the people.

At first they listened to her enticing arguments for a diversion. At last they said, “Oh, very well! Very well!” But with a certain inflection of the voice which left Candia crushed. All her efforts then were useless. No one believed!

With an astonishing persistency, she returned to the siege. She passed entire nights pondering on new reasons, how to construct new explanations, to overcome new obstacles. Little by little, from the continuous absorption, her mind weakened, could not entertain any thought save that of the spoon, and had scarcely any longer any realisation of the events of every day life. Later, through the cruelty of the people, a veritable mania arose in the mind of the poor woman.

She neglected her duties and was reduced almost to penury. She washed the clothes badly, lost and tore them. When she descended to the bank of the river under the iron-bridge where the other laundresses had collected, at times she let escape from her hands garments which the current snatched and they were gone forever. She babbled continuously on the same subject. To drown her out the young laundresses set themselves to singing and to bantering one another from their places with impromptu verses. She shouted and gesticulated like a mad woman.

No one any longer gave her work. Out of compassion for her, her former customers sent her food. Little by little the habit of begging settled upon her. She walked the streets, ragged, bent, and dishevelled. Impertinent boys called after her, "Now tell us the story of the spoon, that we may know about it, do, Candia!"

She stopped sometimes unknown passersby to recount her story and to wander into the mazes of her defence. The scapegoats of the town hailed her and for a cent made her deliver her narration three, four times; they raised objections to her arguments and were attentive to the end of the tale for the sake of wounding her at last with a single word. She shook her head, moved on and clung to other feminine beggars and reasoned with them, always, always indefatigable and unconquerable. She took a fancy to a deaf woman whose skin was afflicted with a kind of reddish leprosy, and who was lame in one leg.

In the winter of 1874 a malignant fever seized her. Donna Cristina Lamonica sent her a cordial and a hand-warmer. The sick woman, stretched on her straw pallet, still babbled about the spoon. She raised on her elbows, tried to motion with her hands in order to assist in the summing up of her conclusions. The leprous woman took her hands and gently soothed her.

In her last throes, when her enlarged eyes were already being veiled behind some suffusing moisture that had mounted to them from within, Candia murmured, "I was not the one, Signor ... you see ... because ... the spoon...."

X

THE DEATH OF THE DUKE OF OFENA

I

When the first confused clamour of the rebellion reached Don Filippo Cassaura, he suddenly opened his eyelids, that weighed heavily upon his eyes, inflamed around the upturned lids, like those of pirates who sail through stormy seas.

“Did you hear?” he asked of Mazzagrogna, who was standing nearby, while the trembling of his voice betrayed his inward fear.

The majordomo answered, smiling, “Do not be afraid, Your Excellency. Today is St. Peter’s day. The mowers are singing.”

The old man remained listening, leaning on his elbow and looking over the balcony. The hot south wind was fluttering the curtains. The swallows, in flocks, were darting back and forth as rapidly as arrows through the burning air. All the roofs of the houses below glared with reddish and greyish tints. Beyond the roofs was extended the vast, rich country, gold in colour, like ripened wheat.

Again the old man asked, “But Giovanni, have you heard?”

And indeed, clamours, which did not seem to indicate joy, reached their ears. The wind, rendering them louder at intervals, pushing them and intermingling with its whistling noise, made them appear still more strange.

“Do not mind that, Your Excellency,” answered Mazzagrogna. “Your ears deceive you.”

“Keep quiet.” And he arose to go towards one of the balconies.

He was a thick-set man, bow-legged, with enormous hands, covered with hair on the backs like a beast. His eyes were oblique and white, like those of the Albinos. His face was covered with freckles. A few red hairs straggled upon his temples and the bald top of his head was flecked with dark projections in the shape of chestnuts.

He remained standing for a while, between the two curtains, inflated like sails, in order to watch the plain beneath. Thick clouds of dust, rising from the road of the Fara, as after the passing of immense flocks of sheep, were swept by the wind and grew into shapes of cyclones. From time to time these whirling clouds caused whistling sounds, as if they encompassed armed people.

“Well?” asked Don Filippo, uneasily.

“Nothing,” repeated Mazzagrogna, but his brows were contracted.

Again the impetuous rush of wind brought a tumult of distant cries.

One of the curtains, blown by the wind, began to flutter and wave in the air like an inflated flag. A door was suddenly shut with violence and noise, the glass panel trembled from the shock. The papers, accumulated upon the table, were scattered around the room.

“Do close it! Do close it!” cried the old man, with emotional terror.

“Where is my son?”

He was lying upon the bed, suffocated by his fleshiness, and unable to rise, as all the lower part of his body was deadened by paralysis. A continuous paralytic tremor agitated his muscles. His hands, lying on the bed sheets, were contorted, like the roots of old olive trees. A copious perspiration dripped from his forehead and from his bald head, and dropped from his large face, which had a pinkish, faded colour, like the gall of oxen.

“Heavens!” murmured Mazzagrogna, between his teeth, as he closed the shutters vehemently. “They are in earnest!”

One could now perceive upon this road of Fara, near the first house, a multitude of men, excited and wavering, like the overflow of rivulets, which indicated a still greater multitude of people, invisible, hidden by the rows of roofs and by the oak trees of San Pio. The auxiliary legion of the country had met the one of the rebellion. Little by little the crowd would diminish, entering the roads of the country and disappearing like an army of ants through the labyrinth of the ant hill.

The suffocated cries, echoing from house to house, reached them now, like a continuous but indistinct rumbling. At moments there was silence and then you could hear the great fluttering of the ash trees in front of the palace, which seemed as if already abandoned.

“My son! Where is he?” again asked the old man, in a quivering, squeaking voice. “Call him! I wish to see him.”

He trembled upon his bed, not only because he was a paralytic, but also because of fear.

At the time of the first seditious movement of the day before, at the cries of about a hundred youths, who had come under the balcony to shout against the latest extortions of the Duke of Ofena, he had been overcome by such a foolish fright, that he had wept like a little girl, and had spent the night invoking the Saints of Paradise. The thought of death and of his danger gave rise to an indescribable terror in that paralytic old man, already half dead, in whom the last breaths of life were so painful. He did not wish to die.

“Luigi! Luigi!” he began to cry in his anguish.

All the place was filled with the sharp rattling of the window glasses, caused by the rush of the wind. From time to time one could hear the banging of a door, and the sound of precipitate steps and sharp cries.

“Luigi!”

The Duke ran up. He was somewhat pale and excited, although endeavouring to control himself. He was tall and robust, his beard still black on his heavy jaws. From his mouth, full and imperious, came forth explosive outbursts; his voracious eyes were troubled; his strong nose, covered with red spots, quivered.

“Well, then?” asked Don Filippo, breathlessly, with a rattling sound, as though suffocated.

“Do not fear, father, I am here,” answered the Duke, approaching the bed and trying to smile.

Mazzagrogna was standing in front of one of the balconies, looking out attentively. No cries reached them now and no one was to be seen.

The sun, gradually descending in the clear sky, was like a rosy circle of flames, enlarging and glaring over the hill-tops. All the country around seemed to burn and the southwest wind resembled a breath from the fire. The first quarter of the moon arose through the groves of Lisci. Poggio, Revelli, Ricciano, Rocca of Forca, were seen through the window panes, revealed by distant flashes of lightning, and from time to time the sound of bells could be heard. A few incendiary fires began to glow here and there. The heat was suffocating.

“This,” said the Duke of Ofena, in his hoarse, harsh voice, “comes from Scioli, but——”

He made a menacing gesture, then he approached Mazzagrogna.

He felt uneasy, because Carletto Grua could not yet be seen. He paced up and down the hall with a heavy step. He then detached from a hook two long, old-fashioned pistols, examining them carefully. The father followed his every movement with dilated eyes, breathing heavily, like a calf in agony, and now and then he shook the bed cover with his deformed hands. He asked two or three times of Mazzagrogna, “What can you see?”

Suddenly Mazzagrogna exclaimed, “Here comes Carletto, running with Gennaro.”

You could hear, in fact, the furious blows upon the large gate. Soon after, Carletto and the servant entered the room, pale, frightened, stained with blood and covered with dust.

The Duke, on perceiving Carletto, uttered a cry. He took him in his arms and began to feel him all over his body, to find the wounds.

“What have they done to you? What have they done to you? Tell me!”

The youth was weeping like a girl.

“There,” said he, between his sobs. He lowered his head and pointed on the top, to some bunches of hair, sticking together with congealed blood.

The Duke passed his fingers softly through the hair to discover the wounds. He loved Carletto Grua, and had for him a lover’s solicitude.

“Does it hurt you?” he asked.

The youth sobbed more vehemently. He was slender, like a girl, with an effeminate face, hardly shaded by an incipient blond beard, his hair was rather long, he had a beautiful

mouth, and the sharp voice of an eunuch. He was an orphan, the son of a confectioner of Benevento. He acted as valet to the Duke.

“Now they are coming,” he said, his whole frame trembling, turning his eyes, filled with tears, towards the balcony, from which came the clamours, louder and more terrible.

The servant, who had a deep wound upon his shoulder, and his arm up to the elbow all stained with blood, was telling falteringly how they had both been overtaken by the maddened mob, when Mazzagrogna, who had remained watching, cried out, “Here they are! They are coming to the palace. They are armed!”

Don Luigi, leaving Carletto, ran to look out.

III

In truth, a multitude of people, rushing up the wide incline with such united fury, shouting and shaking their weapons and their tools, did not resemble a gathering of individuals, but rather the overflow of a blind mass of matter, urged on by an irresistible force.

In a few moments, the mob was beneath the palace, stretching around it like an octopus, with many arms, and enclosing the whole edifice in a surging circle.

Some among the rebels carried large bunches of lighted sticks, like torches, casting over their faces a mobile, reddish light and scattering sparks and burning cinders, which caused noisy, crackling sounds. Some, in a compact group, were carrying a pole, from the top of which hung the corpse of a man. They were threatening death, with gestures and cries. With hatred they were shouting the name, “Cassaura! Cassaura!”

The Duke of Ofena threw up his hands in despair upon recognising on the top of the pole the mutilated body of Vincenzo Murro, the messenger he had sent during the night to ask for help from the soldiers. He pointed out the hanging body to Mazzagrogna, who said, in a low voice, “It is the end!”

Don Filippo, however, heard him, and began to give forth such a rattling sound that they all felt their hearts oppressed and their courage failing them.

The servants, with pale faces, ran to the threshold, and were held there by cowardice. Some were crying and invoking their Saints, while others were contemplating treachery. “If we should give up our master to the people, they might, perhaps, spare our lives.”

“To the balcony! To the balcony!” cried the people, breaking in. “To the balcony!”

At this moment, the Duke spoke aside, in a subdued voice, to Mazzagrogna.

Turning to Don Filippo, he said, “Place yourself in a chair, father; it will be better for you.”

A slight murmur arose among the servants. Two of them came forward to help the paralytic to get out of bed. Two others stood near the chair, which ran on rollers. The work was painful.

The corpulent old man was panting and lamenting loudly, his arm clinging to the neck of the servant who supported him. He was dripping with perspiration, while the room, the shutters being closed, was filled with an unbearable stench. When he reached the chair, his feet began to tap on the floor with a rhythmical motion. His loose stomach hung on his knees, like a half filled leather bag.

Then the Duke said to Mazzagrogna, "Giovanni, it is your turn!"

And the latter, with a resolute gesture, opened the shutters and went out onto the balcony.

IV

A sonorous shouting greeted him. Five, ten, twenty bundles of lighted sticks were simultaneously thrust beneath the place where he was standing. The glare illuminated the animated faces, eager for carnage, the steel of the guns, the iron axes. The faces of the torch-bearers were sprinkled with flour, as a protection from the sparks, and in the midst of their whitened faces their reddish eyes shone singularly. The black smoke arose in the air, fading away rapidly. The flames whistled and, stretching up on one side, were blown by the wind like infernal hair. The thinnest and driest reeds bent over quickly, reddening, breaking down and cracking like sky-rockets. It was a gay sight.

"Mazzagrogna! Mazzagrogna! To death with the seducer! To death with the crooked man!" they all cried, crowding together to throw insults at him.

Mazzagrogna stretched out his hands, as though to subdue the clamour; he gathered together all his vocal force and began, in the name of the king, as if promulgating a law to infuse respect into the people.

"In the name of His Majesty, Ferdinando II, and by the grace of God, King of both Sicilies, of Jerusalem——"

"To death with the thief!"

Two or three shots resounded among the cries, and the speaker, struck on his chest and on his forehead, staggered, throwing his hands above his head and falling downward. Upon falling, his head stuck between two of the spikes of the iron railing and hung over the edge like a pumpkin. The blood began to drip down upon the soil beneath.

This spectacle rejoiced the people. The uproar arose to the stars. Then the bearer of the pole holding the hanging corpse came under the balcony and held the body of Vincenzo Murro near to that of the majordomo. The pole was wavering in the air and the people, dumbfounded, watched as the two bodies jolted together. An improvised poet, alluding to the Albino-like eyes of Mazzagrogna and to the bleared ones of the messenger, shouted these lines:

*"Lean over the window, you fried eyes,
That you may look upon the open skies!"*

A great outburst of laughter greeted the jest of the poet and the laughter spread from

mouth to mouth like the sound of water falling down a stony valley.

A rival poet shouted:

*“Look, what a blind man can see!
If he closes his eyes and tries to flee.”*

The laughter was renewed.

A third one cried out:

*“Oh, face of a dead brute!
Your crazy hair stands resolute!”*

Many more imprecations were cast at Mazzagrogna. A ferocious joy had invaded the hearts of the people. The sight and smell of blood intoxicated those nearest. Tomaso of Beffi and Rocco Fuici challenged each other to hit with a stone the hanging head of the dead man, which was still warm, and at every blow moved and shed blood. A stone, thrown by Rocco Fuici, at last, hit it in the centre, causing a hollow sound. The spectators applauded, but they had had enough of Mazzagrogna.

Again a cry arose, “Cassaura! Cassaura! To death! To death!”

Fabrizio and Ferdinandino Scioli, pushing their way through the crowd, were instigating the most zealous ones. A terrible shower of stones, like a dense hailstorm, mingled with gun-shots, beat against the windows of the palace, the window panes falling upon the assailing hoards and the stones rebounding. A few of the bystanders were hurt.

When they were through with the stones and had used all their bullets, Ferdinandino Scioli cried out, “Down with the doors!”

And the cry, repeated from mouth to mouth, shook every hope of salvation out of the Duke of Ofena.

V

No one had dared to close the balcony, where Mazzagrogna had fallen. His corpse was lying in a contorted position. Then the rebels, in order to be freer, had left the pole, holding the bleeding body of the messenger, leaning against the balcony. Some of his limbs had been cut off with a hatchet, and the body could be seen through the curtains as they were inflated by the wind. The evening was still. The stars scintillated endlessly. A few stubble fields were burning in the distance.

Upon hearing the blows against the door the Duke of Ofena wished to try another experiment.

Don Filippo, stupefied with terror, kept his eyes closed and was speechless. Carletto Grua, his head bandaged, doubled up in the corner, his teeth chattering with fever and fear, watched with his eyes sticking out of their orbits, every gesture, every motion of his master. The servants had found refuge in the garrets. A few of them still remained in the

adjoining rooms.

Don Luigi gathered them together, reanimated their courage and rearmed them with pistols and guns, and then assigned to each one his place under the parapets of the windows, and between the shutters of the balcony. Each one had to shoot upon the rebels with the greatest possible celerity, silently, without exposing himself.

“Forward!”

The firing began. Don Luigi was placing his hopes in a panic. He was untiringly discharging his long-range pistols with most marvellous energy. As the multitude was dense, no shot went astray. The cries arising after every discharge excited the servants and increased their ardour. Already disorder invaded the mutineers. A great many were running away, leaving the wounded on the ground.

Then a cry of victory arose from the group of the domestics.

“Long live the Duke of Ofena!” These cowardly men were growing brave, as they beheld the backs of their enemy. They no longer remained hidden, no longer shot at haphazard, but, having risen to their feet, were aiming at the people. And every time they saw a man fall, would cry, “Long live the Duke!”

Within a short time the palace was freed from the siege. All around the wounded ones lay, groaning. The residue of the sticks, which were still burning over the ground and crackling as they died out, cast upon the bodies uncertain flashes of light reflected in the pools of blood. The wind had grown, striking the old oaks with a creeping sound. The barking of dogs, answering one another, resounded throughout the valley.

Intoxicated by their victory and broken down with fatigue, the domestics went downstairs to partake of some refreshments. They were all unhurt. They drank freely and abundantly. Some of them announced the names of those they had struck, and described the way they had fallen. The cook was boasting of having killed the terrible Rocco Furci; and as they became excited by the wine the boasting increased.

VI

Now, while the Duke of Ofena feeling safe, for at least that night, from any danger, was attending the whining Carletto, a glare of light from the south was reflected in the mirror, and new clamours arose through the gusts of the south wind beneath the palace. At the same time four or five servants appeared, who, while sleeping, intoxicated, in the rooms below, had been almost suffocated by the smoke. They had not yet recovered their senses, staggering, being unable to talk, as their tongues were thick with drink. Others came running up, shouting:

“Fire! Fire!”

They were trembling, leaning against one another like a herd of sheep. Their native cowardice had again overtaken them. All their senses were dull as in a dream. They did not know what they ought to do, nor did the consciousness of real danger urge them to use

a ruse as a means of escape.

Taken very much by surprise the Duke was at first perplexed. But Carletto Grua, noticing the smoke coming in, and hearing that singular roar which the flames make by feeding themselves, began to cry so loudly, and to make such maddened gestures, that Don Filippo awoke from the half drowsiness into which he had fallen, on beholding death.

Death was unavoidable. The fire, owing to the strong wind, was spreading with stupendous speed through the whole edifice, devouring everything in flames. These flames ran up the walls, hugging the tapestries, hesitating an instant over the edge of the cloth, with clear and changeable yet vague tints penetrating through the weave, with a thousand thin, vibrating tongues, seeming to animate, in an instant, the mural figures, with a certain spirit, by lighting up for a second a smile never before seen upon the mouths of the nymphs and the Goddess, by changing in an instant their attitudes and their motionless gestures.

Passing on, in their still increasing flight, they would wrap themselves around the wooden carvings, preserving to the last their shapes, as though to make them appear to be manufactured of fiery substance when they were suddenly consumed, turning to Cinders, as if by magic. The voices of the flames were forming a vast choir, a profound harmony, like the rustling of millions of weeds. At intervals, through the roaring openings, appeared the pure sky with its galaxy of stars.

Now the entire palace was a prey of the fire.

“Save me! Save me!” cried the old man, attempting in vain to get up, already feeling the floor sinking beneath him, and almost blinded by the implacable reddish glare.

“Save me! Save me!”

With a supreme effort he succeeded in rising and began to run, the trunk of his body leaning forward, moving with little hopping steps, as if pushed by an irresistible progressive impulse, waving his shapeless hands, until he fell overpowered—the victim of the fire—collapsing and curling up like an empty bladder.

By this time the cries of the people increased and at intervals arose above the roar of the fire. The servants, crazed with terror and pain, jumped out of the windows, falling upon the ground dead, where if not entirely dead they were instantly killed. With every fall a greater clamour arose.

“The Duke! The Duke!” the unsatisfied barbarians were crying as if they wanted to see the little tyrant jump out with his cowardly protégé.

“Here he comes! Here he comes! Is it he?”

“Down! down! We want you!”

“Die, you dog! Die! Die! Die!”

In the large doorway, in the presence of the people, Don Luigi appeared carrying on his shoulders the motionless body of Carletto Grua. His whole face was burned and almost unrecognisable. He no longer had any hair nor beard left. He was walking boldly through

the fire, endeavouring to keep his courage in spite of that atrocious pain.

At first the crowd was dumb. Then again broke forth in shouts and gestures, waiting ferociously for this great victim to expire before them.

“Here, here, you dog! We want to see you die!”

Don Luigi heard through the flames these last insults. He gathered together all of his will-power and stood for an instant in an attitude of indescribable scorn. Then turning abruptly he disappeared forever where the fire was raging fiercest.

XI

THE WAR OF THE BRIDGE

Fragments of the Pescarese Chronicle

Towards the middle of August—when in the fields the wheat was bleaching dry in the sun—Antonio Mengarino, an old peasant full of probity and wisdom, standing before the Board of the Council when they were discussing public matters, heard some of the councillors, citizens of the place, discoursing in low tones about the cholera, which was spreading through the province; and he listened with close attention to the proposals for preserving the health and for eliminating the fears of the people and he leaned forward curiously and incredulously as he listened.

With him in the Council were two other peasants, Giulio Citrullo of the Plain, and Achille di Russo of the Hills, to whom the old man would turn from time to time, winking and grimacing insinuatingly, to warn them of the deception which he believed was concealed in the words of the Councillors and the Mayor.

At last, unable to restrain himself longer, he spoke out with the assurance of a man who knows and sees.

“Stop your idle talk! What if there is a little cholera among us. Let us keep the secret to ourselves.”

At this unexpected outburst, the Councillors were taken by surprise, then burst into laughter.

“Go on, Mengarino! What foolishness are you talking!” exclaimed Don Aiace, the Assessor, slapping the old man on the shoulder, while the rest, with much shaking of heads and beating of fists upon the table, talked of the pertinacious ignorance of the country people.

“Well, well, but do you think we are deceived by your talk?” asked Antonio Mengarino, with a quick gesture, hurt by the laughter which his words had created, and in the hearts of the three peasants their instinctive hostility toward and hatred of the upper classes were revived. Then they were excluded from the secrets of the Council? Then they were still considered ignoramuses? Oh, those were two galling thoughts!

“Do as you please. We are going,” said the old man bitterly, putting on his hat and the three peasants left the hall in silent dignity.

When they were outside the town, in the upland country filled with vineyards and cornfields, Giulio Citrullo stopped to light his pipe, and said decisively:

“We will not mind them! We can be on our guard, and know that we shall have to take

precautions. I would not like to be in their places!”

Meanwhile, throughout the farming country, the fear of the disease had taken possession of all. Over the fruit trees, the vineyards, the cisterns, and the wells, the farmers, suspicious and threatening, kept close and indefatigable watch. Through the night frequent shots broke the silence, and even the dogs barked till dawn. Imprecations against the Government burst forth with greater violence from day to day. All the peaceful labours of the farm-hands were undertaken with a sort of carelessness; from the fields expressions of rebellion rose in songs and rhymes, improvised by the hands.

Then, the old men recalled instances in the past which confirmed the suspicions about poisoning. In the year '54, some vintagers had one day caught a man hidden in the top of a fig-tree, and when they forced him to descend, they noticed in his hand a vial, which he had attempted to conceal. With dire threats they compelled him to swallow the yellowish ointment which it contained, whereupon shortly he fell writhing in agony with greenish foam issuing from his mouth and died within a few minutes. In Spoltore, in the year '57, Zinicche, a blacksmith, killed the Chancellor, Don Antonio Rapino, in the square, after which the mysterious deaths ceased, and the country was saved.

Then stories began to be circulated of recent mysterious happenings. One woman said that seven cases of poison had come to the City Hall, sent by the Government to be distributed through the country by mixing it with the salt. The cases were green, fastened with iron bands and three locks. The Mayor had been obliged to pay seven thousand ducats to bury the cases and save the country. Another story went about that the Government paid the Mayor five ducats for every dead person because the population was too large, and it was the poor who must die. The Mayor was now making out a list of those selected. Ha! He would get rich, this great signore! And so the excitement grew. The peasants would not buy anything in the market of Pescara; the figs were left to rot on the trees; the grapes were left among the vine-leaves; even the nightly depredations in the orchards and vineyards did not occur, for the robbers feared to eat poisoned fruit. The salt, which was the only provision obtained from the city stores, was given to dogs and cats before being used, to make sure that it was harmless.

One day the news came that in Naples the people were dying in large numbers and hearing the name of Naples, of that great, far-distant kingdom where “Gianni Without Fear” made his fortune, the imaginations of the people were inflamed. The vintage time came, but the merchants of Lombardy bought the home grapes, and took them to the north to make artificial wines. The luxury of new wine was scarce; the vintagers who trampled out the juice of the grapes in the vats to the songs of maidens, had little to do.

But when the work of the vineyards was ended, and the fruit of the trees was gone, the fears and suspicions of the people grew less, for now there was little chance for the Government to scatter the poison. Heavy, beneficent rains fell upon the country, drenching the soil and preparing it for the ploughing and the sowing, and together with the favour of the soft autumnal sun and the moon in its first quarter, had its beneficent influence upon seeds. One morning through all the country the report was spread that at Villareale, near the oak groves of Don Settimio, over the shore of the river, three women had died after

having eaten soup made from dough bought in the city. The indignation of every person in the country was aroused, and with greater vehemence after the quiet of the transient security.

“Aha! That is well! The ‘great Signore’ does not wish to renounce the ducats!... But they cannot harm us now, for there is no more fruit to eat, and we do not go to Pescara. The ‘great Signore’ is playing his cards very badly. He wishes to see us die! But he has mistaken the time, poor Signore!

“Where can he put the poison? In the dough? In the salt?... But we shall not eat any more dough, and we have our salt first tried by the dogs and cats. Ha, rascally Signore! What have you done? Your day will come, too....”

Thus, everywhere the grumbling rose, mixed with mocking and contumely against the men of the Commune and the Government.

In Pescara, one after another, three, four, five persons were taken with the disease. Evening was approaching, and over the houses hung a funereal dread, which seemed to be mingled with the dampness arising from the river. Through the streets the people ran frantically towards the City Hall, where the Mayor, the Councillors, and the gendarmes, overwhelmed with the miserable confusion, ran up and down the stairs, all talking loudly, giving contrary orders, not knowing what action to take, where to go, nor what to do.

The strange occurrence and the excitement which followed it, caused many of the people to grow slightly ill. Feeling a strange sensation in their stomachs, they would begin to tremble, and with chattering teeth would look into one another’s faces; then, with rapid strides, would hasten to lock themselves in their homes, leaving their evening meals untouched.

Then, late in the night, when the first tumult of the panic had subsided, the police lighted fires of sulphur and tar at the corners of the streets. The red flames lighted up the walls and the windows, and the unpleasant odour of manure pervaded the air of the frightened city, and in the light of the distant moon, it looked as though the tar men were merrily smearing the keels of vessels. Thus did the Asiatic Plague make an entrance into Pescara.

The disease, creeping along the river, spread through the little seashore hamlets,—through those groups of small, low houses where the sailors live, and where old men are engaged in small industries.

Most of those seized with the disease died, because no amount of reasoning and assurance, or experiments, could persuade them to take the medicine. Anisafine, the hunchback who sold water mixed with spirit of anise to the soldiers, when he saw the glass of the physician, closed his lips tightly and shook his head in refusal of the potion. The doctor tried to coax him with persuasive words and first drank half the liquid, then the assistants each took a sip. Anisafine continued to shake his head.

“But don’t you see,” exclaimed the doctor, “we have been drinking? But you....”

Anisafine began to laugh sceptically, “Ha! ha! ha! You took the counter-poison,” he said, and soon after he was dead.

Cianchine, simple-minded butcher, did the same thing. The doctor, as a last resort, poured the medicine between the man's teeth. Cianchine spit it out wrathfully, overwhelmed with horror. Then he began to abuse those present, and died raging, held by two amazed gendarmes.

The public kitchens, instituted by charitably-disposed people, were at first thought by the peasants to be laboratories for the mixing of poisons. The beggars would starve rather than eat meat cooked in those boilers. Costantino di Corropoli, the cynic, went about scattering his doubts through his circle. He would wander around the kitchens, saying aloud with an indescribable gesture, "You can't entrap me!"

The woman Catalana di Gissi was the first to conquer her fears. Hesitating a little, she entered and ate a small mouthful, waiting to notice the effect of the food and then took a few sips of wine, whereupon, feeling restored and fortified, she smiled with astonishment and pleasure. All the beggars were waiting for her to come out and when they saw her unharmed, they rushed in to eat and drink.

The kitchens are inside an old open theatre in the neighbourhood of Portanova. The kettles in which the food is prepared are placed where the orchestra used to sit. The steam from them rises and fills the old stage; through the smoke you see the scenery behind on the stage, representing a feudal castle in the light of the full moon. Here at noon-time gathers around a rustic table the tribe of the beggars. Before the hour strikes, there is a swarming of multi-coloured rags in the pit, and there arises the grumbling of hoarse voices. Some new figures appear among the well-known ones; noteworthy among whom is a certain woman called Liberata Lotta di Montenerodomo, stupendous as the mythological Minerva, with a regular and austere brow and with her hair strained tightly over her head and adhering to it like a helmet. She holds in her hands a grass-green vase, and stands aside, taciturn, waiting to be asked to partake.

However, the great epic account of this chronicle of the cholera is the War of the Bridge.

An old feud exists between Pescara and Castellammare Adriatico, which districts lie on either side of the river.

The opposing factions were assiduously engaged in pillage and reprisals, the one doing all that lay in its power to hinder the prosperity of the other, and as the important factor in the prosperity of a country is its commerce, and as Pescara possessed many industries and great wealth, the people of Castellammare had long sought with much astuteness and all manner of allurements to draw the merchants away from the rival town.

An old wooden bridge, built on big tarred boats chained together and fastened to the piers, spans the river. The cables and the ropes, which stretch from almost the height of the piers to the low parapets, cross each other in the air, looking like some barbaric instrument. The uneven boards creak under the weight of the wagons, and when the ranks of the soldiers pass over, the whole of the great structure shakes and vibrates from one end to the other, resounding like a drum. It was from this bridge that the popular legends of Saint Cetto, the Liberator, originated, and the saint yearly stops in the centre with great Catholic pomp to receive the salutes which the sailors send him from the anchored boats.

Thus, between the panorama of Montecorno and the sea, the humble structure looms up like a monument of the country, and possessing the sacredness of all monuments, gives to strangers the impression of a people who live in primeval simplicity. As the hatred between the Pescaraese and the Castellammarese meets on this bridge, the boards of which are worn under the daily heavy traffic, and as the trade of the city spreads to the province of Teramo, with what joy would the opposing faction cut the cables and push out to sea to be wrecked the seven supporting boats.

A good opportunity having presented itself, the leader of the enemy, with a great display of his rural forces, prevented the Pescaraese from passing over the wide road which stretches out from the bridge far across the country, uniting numberless villages. It was his intention to blockade the rival city by a siege, in order to shut away from it all internal and external traffic in order to draw to the market of his own city the sailors and buyers who were accustomed to trade on the right shore of the river, and having thus stagnated the business of Pescara, and having cut off from the town all source of revenue, to rise up in triumph. He offered to the owners of the Pescaraese boats twenty francs for every hundred pounds of fish, on condition that all boats should land and load their cargoes on his shore, and with the stipulation that the price should last up to the day of the Nativity of Christ. But as the price of fish usually rose shortly before the Nativity to fifteen ducats for every hundred pounds, the profit to himself was evident, and the cunning of his scheme was clearly revealed. The owners refused such an offer, preferring to allow their nets to remain idle.

Then the wily fellow spread the report of a great mortality in Pescara. Professing friendship for the province of Teramo he succeeded in rousing both that province and Chieti against the peaceful city, from which the plague had really disappeared entirely. He waylaid and kept prisoners some honest passers-by who were exercising their legitimate right to pass along this road on their way to a more distant part of the country. He stationed a group of loafers on the border line who kept watch from dawn to sunset, shouting out warnings to anyone who approached. All this caused violent rebellion on the part of the Pescaraese against such unjust and arbitrary measures. The great class of rough, ugly labourers were lounging about in idleness, and merchants sustained severe losses from the enforced dulness of trade. The cholera had left the city and seemed to have disappeared also from the seashore towns, where only a few decrepit old men had died. All the citizens, rugged and full of health and spirits, would have rejoiced to take up their customary labours.

Then the tribunes rose to action: Francesco Pomarice, Antonio Sorrentino, Pietro D'Amico; and in the streets the people, divided into groups, listened to their words, applauding, proposing, and uttering cries. A great tumult was brewing. As an illustration, some recounted the heart-rending tale of Moretto di Claudia, who had been taken by force, by men paid to do the deed, and being imprisoned in the Lazzaretto, was kept for five consecutive days without other food than bread, at the end of which time he succeeded in escaping from a window, swam across the river, and came to his people dripping with water, out of breath, and overcome with exultation and joy at his escape.

The Mayor, seeing the storm gathering, endeavoured to arbitrate with the Great Enemy of Castellammare. The Mayor is a little fellow, a knighted Doctor of Law, carefully dressed, curly haired, his shoulders covered with dandruff, his small roving eyes accustomed to pleasant simulation. The Great Enemy is a degenerate, a nephew of the good Gargantuasso, a big fellow, puffing, exploding, devouring. The meeting of the two took place on neutral ground, with the Prefects of Teramo and of Chieti as witnesses.

But towards sunset one of the guards went into Pescara to bring a message to one of the councillors of the Commune; he went in with another of the loafers to drink, after which he strolled about the streets. When the tribunes saw him, they immediately gave chase. With cries and shouts, he was driven towards the banks of the river as far as Lazzaretto. The water glared in the light of the setting sun, and the belligerent reddening of the air intoxicated the people.

Then from the willow trees on the opposite shore a crowd of Castellammarese poured out, with vehement gestures and angry protests against the outrage. With a fury equalling their own, the Pescaraese answered their gibes. The guard, who had been imprisoned, was pounding the door of his prison with fists and feet, crying out:

“Open to me! Open to me!”

“You go to sleep in there and don’t worry!” the men called to him scornfully, while someone cruelly added:

“Ah, if you knew how many have been killed down there! Don’t you smell the blood? Doesn’t it make you sick?”

“Hurrah! Hurrah!”

Towards Bandiera the gleam of gun-barrels could be seen. The little Mayor, at the head of a band of soldiers, was coming to liberate the guard that the wrath of the Great Enemy might not be incurred.

Suddenly the irritated rabble broke out in an angry uproar. Loud cries rose against the cowardly liberator of the Castellammarese. From Lazzaretto to the city sounded the clamour of hisses and contumely. To the delight of the people the shouting lasted until their voices grew hoarse. After the first outburst the revolt began to turn in other directions. The shops were all closed, the citizens gathered in the street, rich and poor mingling together familiarly, all possessed of the same wild desire to speak, to shout, to gesticulate, to express in a thousand different ways the feelings which burned within them.

Every few minutes another tribune would arrive with fresh news. Groups dissolved to form new groups, varying according to differences of opinion.

The free spirit of the day affected everyone; every breath of air seemed to intoxicate like a draught of wine, the hilarity of the Pescaraese revived, and they continued their rebellion ironically for pure enjoyment, for spite, and for the love of novelty. The stratagems of the Great Enemy were increased. Any agreement was broken to further the skilful schemes which were suggested, and the weakness of the little Mayor favoured this method of procedure.

On the morning of All Souls' Day at about seven o'clock, when the first ceremonies were being performed in the churches, the tribunes started to make a tour of the city, followed by a crowd which grew larger at every step, and became more and more clamorous. When all the people had gathered, Antonio Sorrentino addressed them in a stirring harangue. Then the procession proceeded in an orderly way towards the City Hall. The streets in the shadows were still bluish from smoke; the houses were bathed in sunlight.

At the sight of the City Hall an immense cry broke out. From every mouth vituperations were hurled; every fist rose threateningly. The shouts vibrated at intervals as though produced by an instrument, and above the confused mass of heads the vermilion flags waved as if agitated by a heavy popular breath. No one appeared upon the balcony of the City Hall. The sun was gradually descending from the roof to the meridian sand, black with figures and lines, upon which vibrated the indicating shadow. From the Torretta of the D'Annunzio to the bell-tower of the Abbey, flocks of doves were flying against the azure sky.

The shouts increased. A number of the more zealous ones took by assault the stairs of the building. The little Mayor, pallid and timid, yielded to the wish of the people. He left his seat in the City Hall, resigned his office, and passed down the street between two gendarmes, followed by the whole Board of Councillors. He then left the city and withdrew to the hall of Spoltore.

The doors of the City Hall were closed and for a time Anarchy ruled the city. In order to prevent an open battle, which seemed imminent, between the Castellammarese and the Pescaraese, the soldiers stationed themselves at the extreme left end of the bridge. Having torn down the flags, the crowd set out for the road to Chieti, where the Prefect, who had been summoned by a Royal Commissary, was expected. All their plans seemed to be ferocious. However, in the soft warmth of the sunlight, their ire was soon decreased.

Through the wide street poured forth from the church the women of the place, dressed in various coloured gowns, and covered with jewelry consisting mostly of silver filigree and gold necklaces. The appearance of these happy and joyful faces quieted and soothed the turbulent spirits of the mob. Jest and laughter broke forth spontaneously, and the short period of waiting was almost gay. Towards noon the carriage of the Prefect came in sight. The people formed themselves in a semicircle to stop its passage. Antonio Sorrentino again gave a harangue, not without a certain flowery eloquence. The crowd, in the pauses of the speech, asked in various ways for justice and relief from the abuses, and that no measure should be taken which would involve killing.

The two large skeletons of horses, still animated, however, shook their bells from time to time, showing the rebels their white gums as if in a grimace of derision. A delegate of the police, looking like an old singer of some comic opera, who still wore around his face a druid beard, from the height of the back seat was emphasising the words of the tribune's speech with grave gestures of his hand. As the speaker in his enthusiasm went on with impetuous eloquence, he became too audacious, and the Prefect, rising from his seat, took advantage of the moment to interrupt. He ventured several irrelevant and timid remarks, which were drowned by the cries of the people.

“To Pescara! To Pescara!”

The carriage, pushed along by the press of the crowd, entered the city and the City Hall being closed, it stopped before the Delegation. Ten men, named by the people, together with the Prefect, formed a temporary parliament. The crowd filled the street and every now and then an impatient murmur arose.

The houses, heated by the sun, radiated a delightful warmth, and an indescribable mildness emanated from the sky and sea, from the floating vegetation alongside the water-troughs, from the roses, from the windows, from the white walls of the houses, from the very air of the place itself. This place is renowned as the home of the most beautiful women of Pescara, from generation to generation its fame for its beauties has been perpetuated.

The home of Don Ussorio is the abode of flourishing children and pretty girls; the house is all covered with little loggias, which are overflowing with carnations growing in rough vases ornamented with bas-reliefs.

Gradually the impatient crowd grew quiet. From one end of the street to the other the speakers were subsiding. Domenico di Matteo, a sort of rustic Rodomonte, was making loud jests upon the asininity and avidity of the doctors who cause their patients to die in order to get a larger fee from the Commune. He was telling of some marvellous cures he had effected on himself. Once he had a terrible pain on his chest, and was about to die. The physician had forbidden him to drink water, and he was burning with thirst. One night, when everyone was asleep he got up quietly, felt about for a water tank, and having found it, stuck his head in it and drank like a pack horse until the tank was empty. Next morning he had entirely recovered. Another time, he and a companion, having been ill for a long time with intermittent fever, and having taken large quantities of quinine without avail, decided to make an experiment. Across the river from them was a vineyard filled with grapes, hanging ripe and delicious in the sun. Going to the shore, they undressed themselves, plunged into the water, and swam through the current to the other shore, and after having eaten as many grapes as they could, swam back again. The intermittent fever disappeared. Another time he was ill with blood poisoning, and spent more than fifteen ducats for doctors and medicine in vain. As he watched his mother doing the washing, a happy thought struck him. One after another he swallowed five glasses of lime-water, and was cured.

From the balconies, from the windows, from the loggias, a number of beautiful women leaned out, one after another. The men in the street raised their eyes towards these fair apparitions, walking along with heads bent backward. As the dinner hour was passed, they felt a certain dizziness in their heads and their stomachs, and an awakening faintness. Brief talks between street and windows took place, the young men making gestures and little speeches to the belles, the belles answering with motions of their hands or shakes of their heads, or sometimes by laughing aloud. Their fresh laughter poured out on the men below like strings of crystals, increasing their admiration. The heat given out by the walls of the houses mingled with the heat of the bodies of the crowd. The whitish reflection dazzled the eyes; something enervating and stupefying seemed to descend upon the

restless mob. Suddenly upon the loggia appeared the woman Ciccarina, the belle of the belles, the rose of the roses, the adorable object whom all desired. With a common impulse, every look was turned towards her. She acknowledged this homage with triumphant smiles, laughing, radiant, like a Venetian Dogess before her people. The sunlight fell on her full flushed face, reminding one of the pulp of a succulent fruit. Her loose hair, so bright that it seemed to dart golden flames, encircled her forehead, temples and neck. The fascination of a Venus emanated from her whole person. She simply stood there, between two cages of black birds, smiling in great unconcern, not at all troubled by the longing and admiration shown in the eyes of all the men watching her.

The black birds, singing a sort of rustic madrigal, fluttered their wings towards her. Ciccarina, smiling, withdrew from the loggia. The crowd remained in the street, dazzled by the vision, and a little dizzy from hunger. Then one of the speakers, leaning out from the window of the Delegation, announced in a shrill voice:

“Citizens! The matter will be settled within three hours!”

XII

THE VIRGIN ANNA

I

Luca Minella, born in the year 1789 at Ortona in one of the houses of Porta Caldara, was a seaman. In early youth he sailed for some time on the brigantine *Santa Liberata*, from the bay of Ortona to the ports of Dalmatia, loaded with varieties of wood, fresh and dried fruit. Later, because of a whim to change masters, he entered the service of Don Rocco Panzavacante, and upon a new skiff made many voyages for the purpose of trading in lemons, to the promontory of Roto, which is a large and agreeable elevation on the Italian coast, wholly covered with orchards of oranges and lemons.

In his twenty-seventh year he kindled with love for Francesca Nobile, and after several months they were married. Luca, a man of short and very strong build, had a soft blond beard upon his flushed visage, and, like a woman, wore two circles of gold in his ears. He loved wine and tobacco; professed an ardent devotion for the holy Apostle Saint Thomas; and, in that he was of a superstitious nature and given to trances, he recounted singular and marvellous adventures of those foreign countries and told stories of the Dalmatian people and the islands of the Adriatic as if they were tribes and countries in the proximity of the poles. Francesca, a woman whose youth was on the wane, had the florid complexion and mobile features of the Ortonesian girl. She loved the church, the religious functions, the sacred pomp, the music of the organ; she lived in great simplicity; and, since she was somewhat stunted in intelligence, believed the most incredible things and praised her Lord in His every deed.

Of this union Anna was born in the month of June of the year 1817. Inasmuch as the confinement was severe, and they feared some misfortune, the sacrament of baptism was administered before the birth of the child. After much travail the birth took place. The little creature drank nourishment from its mother and grew in health and happiness. Toward evening Francesca went down to the seacoast, with the nursing baby in her arms, whenever she expected the skiff to return loaded from Roto, and Luca on coming ashore wore a shirt all scented with the southern fruits. When mounting together to their home above, they always stopped a moment at the church and knelt in prayer. In the chapels the votive lamps were burning, and in the background, behind the seven bronzes, the statue of the Apostle sparkled like a treasure. Their prayers asked for celestial benediction to fall upon their daughter. On going out, when the mother bathed Anna's forehead in holy water, her infantile screams echoed the length of the naves.

The infancy of Anna passed smoothly, without any noteworthy event. In May of 1823 she

was dressed as a cherub, with a crown of roses and a white veil; and, in the midst of an angelical company, confusedly followed a procession, holding in her hand a thin taper. In the church her mother wished to lift her in her arms and have her kiss her protecting Saint. But, as other mothers lifting other cherubs pushed through the crowd, the flame of one of the tapers caught Anna's veil and suddenly a flame enveloped her tender body. A contagion of fear spread among the people and each one strove to be the first to escape. Francesca, for all that her hands were almost rendered useless by terror, succeeded in tearing off the burning garments, strained the nude and unconscious child to her heart, threw herself down behind the fugitives, and invoked her Lord with loud cries.

From the burns Anna was ill and in peril for a long time. She lay upon her bed with thin, bloodless face and without speech as if she had become mute, while her eyes, open and fixed, held an expression of forgetful stupor rather than of pain. In the autumn she recovered and went to take her vow.

When the weather was mild the family descended to the boat for their evening meal. Under the awning Francesca lit the fire and placed the fish upon it; the hospitable odour of the food spread the length of the harbour, blending with the perfume from the foliage of the Villa Onofria. The sea lay so tranquilly that one scarcely heard between the rocks the rustling of the water, and the air was so limpid that one saw the steeple of San Vito emerge in the distance amid the surrounding houses. Luca and the other men fell to singing, while Anna tried to help her mother. After the meal, as the moon mounted in the sky, the sailors prepared the skiff for weighing anchor. Meanwhile Luca, under the stimulation of the wine and food, seized with his habitual avidity for miraculous stories, commenced to tell of distant shores. "There was, further up than Roto, a mountain all inhabited by monkeys and men from India; it was very high, with plants that produced precious stones." His wife and daughter listened in silent astonishment. Then, the sails unfolded along the masts, sails all covered with black figures and Catholic symbols, like the ancient flags of a country. Thus Luca departed.

In February of 1826 Francesca gave birth to a dead child. In the spring of 1830 Luca wished to take Anna to the promontory. Anna was then on the threshold of girlhood. The voyage was a happy one. On the high seas they encountered a merchant vessel, a large ship borne along by means of its enormous white sails. The dolphins swam in the foam; the water moved gently around, scintillating, and seeming to carry upon its surface a covering of peacock feathers. Anna gazed from the ship into the distance with eyes never satiated. Then a kind of blue cloud rose from the line of horizon; it was the fruit covered mountain.

The coast of Puglia came into view little by little under the sunlight. The perfume of the lemons permeated the morning air. When Anna descended to the shore, she was overcome by a sense of gladness as she examined curiously the plantations and the men native to the place. Her father took her to the house of a woman no longer young, who spoke with a slight stutter.

They remained with her two days. Once Anna saw her father kiss this woman upon the mouth, but she did not understand. On their return the skiff was loaded with oranges, and

the sea was still gentle. Anna preserved the remembrance of that voyage as if it were a dream; and, since she was by nature taciturn, she did not recount many stories of it to her comrades, who pursued her with questions.

II

In the following May, to the festival of the Apostle, came the Archbishop of Orsogna. The church was entirely decorated with red draperies and leaves of gold, while before the bronze rails burned eleven silver lamps fashioned by silversmiths for religious purposes, and every evening the orchestra sang a solemn oratorio with a splendid chorus of childish voices. On Saturday the statue of the Apostle was to be shown. Devotees made pilgrimages from all the maritime and inland countries; they came up the coast, singing and bearing in their hands votive offerings, with the sea in full sight.

Anna on Friday had her first communion. The Archbishop was an old man, reverent and gentle, and when he lifted his hand to bless her, the jewel in his ring shone like a divine eye. Anna, when she felt on her tongue the wafer of the Eucharist, became blinded with a sudden wave of joy that seemed to moisten her hair, like a soft and tepid scented bath. Behind her a murmur ran through the multitude; near by other virgins were taking the Sacrament and bowing their faces upon the rail in great contrition.

That evening Francesca wished to sleep, as was the custom among the worshippers, upon the pavement of the church, while awaiting the early morning revelation of the saint. She was seven months with child and the weight of it wearied her greatly. On the pavement, the pilgrims lay crowded together, while heat emanating from their bodies filled the air. Diverse confused cries issued at times from some of those unconscious with sleep; the flames of the burning oil in the cups trembled and were reflected as they hung suspended between the arches, while through the openings of the large doors the stars glittered in the early spring night.

Francesca lay awake for two hours in pain, since the exhalations from the sleepers gave her nausea. But, having determined to resist and to endure for the welfare of her soul, she was overcome at last by weariness and bent her head in sleep. At dawn she awoke. Expectation increased in the souls of the watchers and more people arrived. In each one burned the desire to be the first to see the Apostle. At length the first grating was opened, the noise of its hinges resounding clearly through the silence, and echoing in all hearts. The second grating was opened, then the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and finally the last. It seemed now as if a cyclone had struck the crowd. The mass of men hurled themselves toward the tabernacle, sharp cries rang in the air; ten, fifteen persons were wounded and suffocated while a tumultuous prayer arose. The dead were dragged to the open air. The body of Francesca, all bruised and livid, was carried to her family. Many curious ones crowded around it, and her relatives lamented piteously. Anna, when she saw her mother stretched on the bed, purple in the face and stained with blood, fell to the earth unconscious. Afterwards, for many months she was tormented by epilepsy.

III

In the summer of 1835 Luca set sail for a Grecian port upon the skiff "Trinita" belonging to Don Giovanni Camaccione. Moreover, as he held a secret thought in his mind, before leaving, he sold his furniture and asked some relatives to keep Anna in their house until he should return. Some time after that the skiff returned loaded with dried figs and eggs from Corinth, after having touched at the coast of Roto. Luca was not among the crew, and it became known later that he had remained in the "country of the oranges" with a lady-love.

Anna remembered their former stuttering hostess. A deep sadness settled down upon her life at this recollection. The house of her relatives was on the eastern road, in the vicinity of Molo. The sailors came there to drink wine in a low room, where almost all day their songs resounded amid the smoke of their pipes. Anna passed in and out among the drinkers, carrying full pitchers, and her first instinct of modesty awoke from that continuous contact, that continuous association with bestial men. Every moment she had to endure their impudent jokes, cruel laughter and suggestive gestures, the wickedness of men worn out by the fatigues of a sailor's life. She dared not complain, because she ate her bread in the house of another. But that continuous ordeal weakened her and a serious mental derangement arose little by little from her weakened condition.

Naturally affectionate, she had a great love for animals. An aged ass was housed under a shed of straw and clay behind the house. The gentle beast daily bore burdens of wine from Saint Apollinare to the tavern; and for all that his teeth had commenced to grow yellow, and his hoofs to decay, for all that his skin was already parched and had scarcely a hair upon it, still, at the sight of a flowering thistle he put up his ears and began to bray vivaciously in his former youthful way.

Anna filled his manger with fodder and his trough with water. When the heat was severe, she came to rest in the shadow of the shed. The ass ground up wisps of straw laboriously between his jaws and she with a leafy branch performed a work of kindness by keeping his back free from the molestation of insects. From time to time the ass turned its long-eared head with a curling of the flaccid lips which revealed the gums as if performing a reddish animal smile of gratitude, and with an oblique movement of his eye in its orbit showed the yellowish ball veined with purple like a gall bladder. The insects circled with a continuous buzzing around the dung-heap; neither from earth nor sea came a sound, and an infinite sense of peace filled the soul of the woman.

In April of 1842 Pantaleo, the man who guided the beast of burden on his daily journeys, died from a knife-wound. From that time on the duty fell to Anna. Either she left at dawn and returned by noon, or she left at noon and returned by night. The road wound over a sunny hill planted with olives, descended through a moist country used for pasture, and on rising again through vineyards, arrived at the factories of Saint Apollinare. The ass walked wearily in front with lowered ears, a green fringe all worn and discoloured beat against his ribs and haunches and in the pack-saddle glittered several fragments of brass plate.

When the animal stopped to regain his breath, Anna gave him a little caressing blow on the neck and urged him with her voice, because she had pity for his infirmities. Every so

often she tore from the hedges a handful of leaves and offered them to him for refreshment; she was moved on feeling in her palm the soft movement of his lips as they nibbled her offering. The hedges were in bloom and the blossoms of the white thorn had a flavour of bitter almonds.

On the confines of the olive grove was a large cistern, and near this cistern a long, stone canal where the animals came to drink. Every day Anna paused at this spot and here she and the ass quenched their thirst before continuing the journey. Once she encountered the keeper of a herd of cattle, who was a native of Tollo and whose expression was a little cross and who had a hare-lip. The man returned her greeting and they began to converse on the pasturage and the water, then on sanctuaries and miracles. Anna listened graciously and with frequent smiles. She was lean and pale with very clear eyes and uncommonly large mouth, and her auburn hair was smoothed back without a part. On her neck one saw the red scars of her burns and her veins stood out and palpitated incessantly.

From that time on their conversations were repeated at intervals. Through the grass the cattle dispersed, either lying down and pondering or standing and eating. Their peaceful moving forms added to the tranquillity of the pastoral solitude. Anna, seated on the edge of the cistern, talked simply and the man with his split lip seemed overcome with love. One day with a sudden, spontaneous blossoming of her memory, she told of her sailing to the mountain of Roto; and, since the remoteness of the time had blurred her memory, she told marvellous things with a strong appearance of truth. The man, astonished, listened without winking an eye. When Anna stopped speaking, to both the surrounding silence and solitude seemed deeper and both remained in thought. Then the cattle, driven by habit, came to the trough and between their legs dangled the bags of milk supplied anew from the pasture. As they thrust their noses into the stream, the water diminished with their slow, regular gulps.

IV

During the last days of June the ass fell sick. It took neither food nor drink for almost a week. The daily journeys were interrupted. One morning Anna, descending to the shed, found the beast all cramped upon the straw in a pitiable condition. A kind of hoarse, tenacious cough shook from time to time his huge frame thinly covered with skin, while above the eyes two deep cavities had formed like two hollow orbits, and the eyes themselves resembled two great bladders filled with whey. When the ass heard Anna's voice he tried to get up; his body reeled upon his legs, his neck sank beneath the sharp shoulder-blades, and his ears dangled, with involuntary and ungainly motions, like those of a big toy broken at the hinges. A mucous liquid dropped from his nose, sometimes flowing in little sluggish rivulets down to his knees. The raw spots in the skin turned the colour of azure, and the sores here and there bled.

Anna, at this sight, was inwardly torn by a pitying anguish; and, since by nature and by habit she never experienced any physical repugnance on coming in contact with things commonly regarded as repellant, she drew near to touch the animal. With one hand she

held up his lower jaw and with the other a shoulder and thus sought to help him walk, hoping that exercise might do him good. At first the animal hesitated, shaken by new outbreaks of coughing, but at length he began to walk down the gentle incline that led to the shore. The water before them shone white in the birth of the morning and the *Calafatti* near La Penna were smearing a keel with pitch. As Anna sustained her burden with her hands, and held the halter rope, the ass through a misstep of a hind leg fell suddenly. The great structure of bones gave a rattle within as if ruptured, the skin over the stomach and flanks resounded dully and palpitated. The legs made a motion as if to run, while blood issued from the gums and spread among the teeth.

The woman began to call and run toward the house. But the *Calafatti*, having arrived, laughed and joked at the reclining ass. One of them struck the dying beast in the stomach with his foot. Another grabbed his ears and raised his head, which sank heavily again to earth. The eyes at length closed, a chill ran over the white skin of the stomach, parting the tufts of hair as a wind would do, while one of his hind legs beat two or three times in the air. Then all was still, except that in the shoulder, where there was an ulcer, a slight quivering took place, like that caused by some insect a moment before in the living flesh. When Anna returned to the spot she found the *Calafatti* dragging the carcass by the tail, and singing a Requiem with imitation brays.

Thus Anna was left alone. Still for a long time she lived on in the house of her relatives and gradually faded, while she fulfilled her humble duties and endured with much Christian patience her vexations. In 1845 her epilepsy returned to her with violence, but disappeared again after some months. Her religious faith became at the same time more deep and living. She went up to the church every morning and every evening, and knelt habitually in an obscure corner protected by a great pillar of marble where was pictured in rough bas-relief the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. Did she not at first choose that corner because she was attracted by the gentle ass bearing the child Jesus and His mother from the land of idolatry? A great peace as of love descended upon her soul when she bent her knees in the shadow, and prayers rose unpolluted from her breast as from a natural spring, because she prayed only through a blind passion to adore, and not through any hope to obtain the grace of happiness in her own life. She prayed with her head lowered on a chair, and as Christians, in coming and going, touched the holy water with their fingers and crossed themselves, she from time to time shivered on feeling on her hair some welcome drops of the holy water.

V

When in the year 1851 Anna came for the first time to the country of Pescara, the feast of Rosario was approaching, which is celebrated on the first Sunday of October.

The woman came from Ortona on foot, for the purpose of fulfilling a vow; and bearing with her, hidden in a handkerchief of silk, a little heart of silver, she walked religiously along the seacoast; since at that time the province road was not yet constructed, and a wood of pines almost covered the virgin soil. The day was calm, save that the waves of the

sea were ever increasing and at the farthest point of the horizon the clouds continued to rise in the shape of large funnels. Anna walked on entirely absorbed in holy thoughts. Towards evening, as she was approaching Salini, suddenly the rain began to fall, at first gently, but later in a great downpour; so much so that, not finding any shelter, she was wet through and through. Further on, the gorge of the Alento was flooded, and she had to remove her shoes and ford the river. In the vicinity of Vallelonga the rain ceased, and the forest of pines serenely revived gave forth an odour almost of incense. Anna, rendering thanks in her soul to her Lord, followed the shore path with steps more rapid, since she felt the unwholesome dampness penetrate her bones, and her teeth began to chatter from a chill.

At Pescara she was suddenly stricken with a swamp-fever, and cared for through pity in the house of Donna Cristina Basile. From her bed on hearing the sacred chants, and seeing the tops of the standards wave to the height of her window, she set herself to praying and invoking her recovery. When the Virgin passed she could see only the jewelled crown, and she endeavoured to kneel upon the pillows in order to worship.

After three weeks she recovered and Donna Cristina having asked her to remain, she stayed on in the capacity of a servant. She had a little room looking out upon a court. The walls were whitened with plaster, an old screen covered with curious figures blocked a corner, and among the beams of the roof many spiders stretched in peace their intricate webs. Under the window projected a short roof, and further down opened the court full of tame birds. On the roof grew from a pile of earth enclosed with five tiles a tobacco plant. The sun lingered there from early in the morning until the evening. Every summer the plant bloomed. Anna, in this new life, in this new house, little by little felt herself revive and her natural inclination for order reasserted itself.

She attended tranquilly and without speaking to all her duties. Meanwhile her belief in things supernatural increased. Two or three legends had in the distant past established themselves with regard to certain spots in the Basile house, and from generation to generation they had been handed down. In the yellow room on the second floor (now unoccupied) lived the soul of Donna Isabella. In a dark room with a winding staircase descending to a door that had not been opened for a long time, lived the soul of Don Samuele. Those two names exercised a singular power over the present occupants, and diffused through the entire ancient building a kind of conventional solemnity. Further, as the inside court was surrounded by many roofs, the cats on the loggia gathered in counsel and mewed with a mysterious sweetness, while begging Anna for bits from her meals.

In March of the year 1853 the husband of Donna Cristina after many weeks of convulsions died of a urinary disease. He was a God fearing man, domestic and charitable, at the head of a congregation of landowners, read theological works, and knew how to play on the piano several simple airs of the ancient Neapolitan masters. When the viaticum arrived, magnificent with its quantity of servers and richness of equipage, Anna knelt on the doorsill and prayed in a loud voice. The room filled with the vapour of incense, in the midst of which glittered the *cyborium* and the censers flickering like burning lamps. One heard weeping, and then arose the voices of the priests recommending the soul to the Most

High. Anna, carried away by the solemnity of that sacrament, lost all horror of death, and from that time on the death of a Christian seemed to her a journey sweet and joyful.

Donna Cristina kept the windows of her house closed for an entire month. She mourned for her husband at the hours of dinner and supper, gave in his name alms to beggars; and many times a day, with the tail of a fox swished the dust from his piano, as if from a relic, while emitting sighs. She was a woman of forty years, tending toward fleshiness, although still youthful in her form which sterility had preserved. And since she inherited from the deceased a considerable sum, the five oldest bachelors of the country began to lay ambushes for her and to allure her with flattering wiles to new nuptials. The competitors were: Don Ignazio Cespa, an effeminate person, of ambiguous sex, with the face of an old gossip marked from the small-pox, and a head of hair filled with cosmetics, with fingers heavy from rings and ears pierced with two minute circles of gold; Don Paolo Nervegna, doctor of law, a man talkative and keen, who had his lips always curled as if he were chewing on some bitter herb, and a kind of red, unconcealable wart on his forehead; Don Fileno d'Amelio, a new leader of the congregation, slightly bald, with a forehead sloping backward, and deep-set lamb-like eyes; Don Pompeo Pepe, a jocular man and a lover of wine, women and leisure, luxuriantly corpulent, especially in his face and sonorous in laughter and speech; Don Fiore Ussorio, a man of pugnacious disposition, a great reader of political works, and a triumphant quoter of historical examples in every dispute, pallid with an unearthly pallor, with a thin circle of beard around his cheeks and a mouth peculiarly leaning toward an oblique line. To these were added, as a help to Donna Cristina's power of resistance, the Abbot Egidio Cennamele who, wishing to draw the heritage to the benefit of the church, with well covered cleverness antagonised the wooers by means of flattery. This great contest, which some day should be narrated in more detail, lasted a long time and held great variety of incident.

The principal theatre of the first act was the dining-room—a rectangular room where on the French paper of the walls were graphically represented the facts of Ulysses' sail to the island of Calypso. Almost every evening the combatants assembled around the besieged's window and played the game of *briscola* and of love alternately.

VI

Anna was a constant witness. She introduced the visitors, spread the cloth upon the table, and, in the midst of the siege, brought in glasses full of a greenish cordial mixed by the nuns with special drugs. Once at the top of the stairs she heard Don Fiore Ussorio, in the heat of a dispute, insult the Abbot Cennamele who spoke submissively; and since this irreverence seemed monstrous to her, from that time on she judged Don Fiore to be a diabolical man and at his appearance rapidly made the sign of the cross and murmured a *Pater*.

One day in the spring of 1856 while on the bank of the Pescara, she saw a fleet of boats pass the mouth of the river and sail slowly up the current of the stream. The sun was serene, the two shores were mirrored in the depths facing one another, some green

branches and several baskets of reeds floated in the midst of the current toward the sea like placid symbols, and the barks, with the mitre of Saint Thomas painted for an ensign in a corner of their sails, proceeded thus on the beautiful river sanctified by the legend of Saint Cetto Liberatore. Recollections of her birthplace awoke in the soul of the woman with a sudden start, at that sight; and on thinking of her father, she was overcome with a deep tenderness.

The barks were Ortonesian skiffs and came from the promontory of Roto with a cargo of lemons. Anna, when the anchors were cast, approached the sailors and gazed at them in silence with a curiosity yearning and fearful. One of them, struck by her expression, recognised her and questioned her familiarly: "Whom was she seeking? What did she want?" Then Anna drew the man aside and asked him if by chance he had seen in the "country of the oranges" Luca Minella, her father. "He had not seen him? He no longer lived with that woman?" The man answered that Luca had been dead for some time. "He was old, and could not live very long?" Then Anna restrained her tears and wished to know many things. "Luca had married that woman and they had had two children. The elder of the two sailed upon a skiff and came sometimes to Pescara for trade." Anna started.

A perplexing confusion, a kind of troubled dismay seized her mind. She could not regain her equilibrium in the face of these complicated facts. She had two brothers then? She must love them? She must endeavour to see them? Now what ought she to do? Thus, wavering, she returned home. Afterwards, for many evenings, when the barks entered the river, she descended the long dock to watch the sailors. One skiff brought from Dalmatia a load of asses and ponies. The beasts on reaching land stamped and the air rang with their brays and neighs. Anna, in passing, stroked the large heads of the asses.

VII

At about that time she received as a gift from a squire a turtle. This new pet, heavy and taciturn, was her delight and care in her leisure hours. It walked from one end of the room to the other, lifting with difficulty from the ground the great weight of its body. It had claws, like olive-coloured stumps, and was young; the sections of its dorsal shield, spotted yellow and black, glittered often in the sunlight with a shade of amber. The head covered with scales, tapering to the nose and yellowish, projected and nodded with timorous benignity, and it seemed sometimes like the head of an old worn-out serpent that had issued from the husk of its own skin. Anna was much delighted with the traits of the animal; its silence, its frugality, its modesty, its love of home. She fed it with leaves, roots and worms, while watching ecstatically the movement of its little horned and ragged jaws. She experienced almost a feeling of maternity as she gently called the animal and chose for it the tenderest and sweetest herbs. Then the turtle became the presager of an idyl. The squire, on coming many times a day to the house, lingered on the loggia to chat with Anna. Since he was a man of humble spirit, devout, prudent, and just, he enjoyed seeing the reflections of his pious virtues in the soul of the woman. Hence, from habit there arose between the two, little by little, a friendly familiarity. Anna already had several white hairs

on her temples, and a placid sincerity suffused her face. Zacchiale exceeded her in age by several years; he had a large head with bulging forehead and two gentle, round, rabbit-like eyes. During their soliloquies they sat for the most part on the loggia. Above them, between the roofs, the sky seemed a transparent cupola, while at intervals the pet doves in their soarings traversed this patch of the heavens. Their conversations turned upon the harvests, the fruitfulness of the earth and simple rules for cultivation, and they were both full of experience and self-denial. Since Zacchiale loved at times, because of a natural diffident vanity, to make show of his knowledge before the ignorant and credulous woman, she conceived for him an unlimited esteem and admiration. She learned from him that the earth was divided into five races of men: the white, the yellow, the red, the black, and the brown. She learned that in form the earth was round, that Romulus and Remus were nourished by a wolf, and that in autumn the swallows flew over the sea to Egypt where the Pharaohs reigned in ancient times. But did not men all have one colour, in the image and semblance of God? How could we walk upon a ball? Who were the Pharaohs? She did not succeed in understanding and thus remained completely confused. However, after that she regarded the swallows with reverence and judged them to be birds gifted with human foresight.

One day Zacchiale showed her a copy of the Old Testament, illustrated with drawings. Anna examined it slowly, listening to his explanations. She saw Adam and Eve among the hares and fawns, Noah half nude kneeling before an altar, the three angels of Abraham, Moses rescued from the water; she saw with joy finally a Pharaoh, in the presence of the rod of Moses, changed into a serpent; the queen of Sheba, the feast of the Tabernacle, and the martyrdom of the Maccabees. The affair of Balaam's ass filled her with wonder and tenderness. The story of the cup of Joseph in the sack of Benjamin caused her to burst into tears. Now she imagined the Israelites walking through a desert all covered with scales, under a dew that was called manna and which was white like snow and sweeter than bread. After the Sacred History, seized with a strange ambition, Zacchiale began to read to her of the enterprises of the kings of France with the Emperor Constantine up to the time of Orlando, Count of Anglante. A great tumult then upset the woman's mind, the battles of the Philistines and Syrians she confused with the battles of the Saracens, Holofernes with Rizieri, King Saul with King Mambrino, Eleazar with Balante, Naomi with Galeana.

Worn out she no longer followed the thread of the narrative, but shivered only at intervals when she heard fall from the lips of Zacchiale the sound of some beloved name. And she had a strong liking for Dusolina and the Duke of Bovetto, who seized all of England while becoming enamoured of the daughter of the Frisian King.

The first day of September came. In the air, tempered with recent rain, was a placid autumnal clarity. Anna's room became the spot for their readings. One day Zacchiale, seated, read "how Galeana, daughter of the King Galafro, became enamoured of Mainetto and wished to make him a garland of green."

Anna, because the fable seemed simple and rustic, and because the voice of the reader seemed to sweeten with new inflections, listened with evident eagerness. The turtle gently dragged itself over several leaves of lettuce, the sun illumined a great spider's web upon

the window, and one saw the last red flowers of the tobacco plant through the subtle threads of gold.

When the chapter was finished Zacchiele laid aside the book, and, gazing at the woman, smiled with one of those simple smiles of his, which had a way of wrinkling his temples and the corners of his mouth. Then he began to speak to her vaguely, with the timidity of one who does not quite know how to arrive at the desired point. Finally he was filled with ardour. Had she never thought of matrimony? Anna did not reply to this question. Both remained silent and both felt in their souls a confused sweetness, almost an astonished reawakening of buried youth and a reclaiming of love. They were excited by it as if the fumes of a very strong wine had mounted to their weakened brains.

VIII

But a tacit promise of marriage was given many days later, in October, at the first birth of the oil in the olive, and at the last migration of the swallows. With Donna Cristina's permission, one Monday Zacchiele took Anna to the factory on the hills where his mill was located. They left by the Portasale, on foot, took the Salaria road, turning their backs on the river. From the day of the fable of Galeana and Mainetto, they had experienced, the one toward the other, a kind of trepidation, a mixture of bashful timidity and respect. They had lost that beautiful familiarity of previous times; now they spoke seldom together and always with a hesitating reserve, avoiding each other's face, with uncertain smiles, becoming confused at times through a sudden blush, dallying thus with timid, childish acts of innocence.

They walked in silence, at first, each following the dry and narrow path which the footsteps of travellers had marked on both sides of the road, and between them ran the road, muddy and indented with deep ruts from the wheels of vehicles. The unrestrained joy of the vintage filled the country; the songs at the crushing of the wine resounded over the plain. Zacchiele kept slightly in the rear, breaking the silence from time to time with some remark on the weather, the vines, the harvest of olives, while Anna examined curiously all of the bushes flaming with berries, the tilled fields, the water in the ditches; and, little by little, a vague joy was born in her soul, like one who, after a long period of fasting, is rejoiced by pleasant sensations experienced long ago. As the road took a turn up the declivity through the rich olive orchards of Cardirusso, clearly arose to her mind the remembrance of Saint Apollinare and the ass and the keeper of the herds. She felt her blood suddenly surge toward her heart. That episode, buried with her youth, now revived in her memory with a marvellous clearness; a picture of the place formed itself before her mind's eye and she saw again the man with the hare-lip and again heard his voice, while experiencing a new confusion without knowing why.

As they approached the factory the wind among the trees caused the mature olives to fall and a patch of serene sea was revealed from the heights. Zacchiele had moved to the side of the woman and was looking at her from time to time with a pious supplicating tenderness. "What was she thinking of now?" Anna turned with an air almost of fright, as

if she had been caught in a sin. "She was thinking of nothing." They arrived at the mill where the farmers were crushing the first harvest of olives fallen prematurely from the trees. The room for the crushing was low and dimly lighted; from the ceiling sparkling with saltpetre hung lanterns of brass which smoked; a cart-horse, blindfolded, turned with even steps an immense mill-stone; and the farmers, clothed in a kind of long tunic similar to a sack, with legs and arms bare, muscular and oily, were pouring the liquid into jugs, jars and vats.

Anna watched the work attentively, and as Zacchiele gave orders to the workers and wound in and out among the machines, observing the quality of the olives with great decision of judgment, she felt her admiration for him increase. Later, as Zacchiele standing before her took up a great brimful pitcher and on pouring the oil, so pure and luminous, into a vat, spoke of God's abundance, she made the sign of the cross, quite overwhelmed with veneration for the richness of the soil.

There came at length to the door two women of the factory, and each held at her breast a nursing child and dragged at her skirts a luxuriant group of children. They fell to conversing placidly, and, while Anna tried to caress the children, each talked of her own fertility, and with an honest frankness of speech told of her various deliverances. The first had had seven children; the second eleven. It was the will of Jesus Christ, for working people were needed. Then the conversation turned upon familiar matters. Albarosa, one of the mothers, asked Anna many questions. Had she never had any children? Anna, in answering that she was not married, experienced for the first time a kind of humiliation and grief, before that chaste and powerful maternity. Then, changing the subject of their discourse, she rested her hand on the nearest child. The others looked on with wide-open eyes that seemed to have acquired a limpid, vegetable colour from the continuous sight of green things. The odour of the crushed olives floated in the air, penetrating the throat and exciting the palate. The groups of workers appeared and disappeared under the red light of the lamps.

Zacchiele, who up to that moment had been watching carefully the measuring of the oil, approached the women. Albarosa welcomed him with a merry expression. "How long were they to wait for Don Zacchiele to take a wife?" Zacchiele smiled, slightly confused by this question, and gave a stealthy glance at Anna who was still caressing the rustic child and feigning not to have heard. Albarosa, through a kindly pleasantry, characteristic of the peasant, embracing Anna and Zacchiele significantly with a wink of her bovine eyes, pursued her comment. They were a couple blessed by God. Why were they delaying? The farmers, having suspended their work to attend to their meal, made a circle around them. The couple, even more confused by these witnesses, remained silent in an attitude bordering between tremulous smiles and shame-faced modesty. One of the youths among the onlookers, inspired by the affectionate compunctions in the face of Don Zacchiele, nudged his companions with his elbows. The hungry horse neighed.

The meal was prepared. A strenuous activity invaded the large rustic family. In the yard, in the open air, among the peaceful olives and within sight of the sea beneath, the men sat at their meal. The plates of vegetables, seasoned with fresh oil, smoked; the wine scintillated

in the simple vases of liturgical shape, while the frugal food disappeared rapidly into the stomachs of the workers.

Anna now felt herself filled by a tumult of joy, and she seemed suddenly almost united by a kind of friendly domesticity with the two women. They took her into their houses where the rooms were large and light, although very old. On the walls sacred images alternated with pasqual palms; joints of pork hung from the rafters; the posts, ample and very high, rose from the pavement with cradles beside them; from all emanated the serenity of family concord. Anna, beholding these arrangements, smiled timidly at some inward sweetness, and at a certain point was seized by a strange emotion, almost as if all of her latent virtues of the domestic mother and her instincts to succour had escaped and suddenly risen up.

When the women descended again to the yard, the men still remained around the table and Zacchiele was talking to them. Albarosa took a small loaf of corn-bread, divided it in the middle, spread it with oil and salt, and offered it to Anna. The fresh oil, just pressed from the fruit, diffused in the mouth a savoury, sharp aroma, and Anna, allured, ate all of the bread. She even drank the wine. Then as the evening was falling, she and Zacchiele began the descent of the hill on their return. Behind them the farmers were singing. Many other songs arose from the fields and pervaded the evening air with the soft fullness of a Gregorian chant. The wind blew moistly through the olive trees, a dying splendour between rose and violet suffused the sky. Anna walked in front with swift steps, grazing the tree-trunks. Zacchiele called the woman by name; she turned to him humbly and palpitatingly. "What did he wish?" Zacchiele said no more; he took two steps and arrived at her side. Thus they continued their walk, in silence, until the Salaria road no longer divided them. As in going, each had taken the marginal road, on the right and left. At length they re-entered the Portasale.

IX

Through a native irresolution Anna continually deferred her matrimony. Religious doubts tormented her. She had heard it said that only virgins would be admitted to the circle around the mother of God in Paradise. What then? Must she renounce that celestial sweetness for an earthly blessing? An ardour for devotion even more compelling seized her. In all of her unoccupied hours she went to the church of the Rosario; knelt before the great confessional of oak and remained motionless in the attitude of prayer. The church was simple and poor; the pavement was covered with mortuary stones and a single shabby metal lamp burned before the altar. The woman mourned inwardly for the pomp of her basilica, the solemnity of the ceremonies, the eleven lamps of silver, the three altars of precious marbles.

But in Holy Week of the year 1857 a great event happened. Between the Confraternity commanded by Don Fileno d'Amelio and the Abbot Cennamele, who was aided by the parochial satellites, broke out a war; and the cause of it was a dispute about the procession of the dead Jesus. Don Fileno wished this ostentation, furnished by the congregation, to issue from the parochial church. The war attracted and enveloped all of the citizens as well

as the militia of the King of Naples, residing in the fortress. Popular tumult arose, the roads were occupied by assemblies of fanatical people, armed platoons went around to suppress disorders, the Archbishop of Chieti was besieged by innumerable messages from both parties; much money for corruption was spent everywhere and a murmur of mysterious plots spread throughout the city. The house of Donna Cristina Basile was the hearth of all the dissensions. Don Fiore Ussorio shone for his wonderful stratagems and his boldness in these days of struggle. Don Paolo Nervegna had a great effusion of bile. Don Ignazio Cespa exercised, to no purpose, all of his conciliative blandishments and mellifluous smiles. The victory was fought for with an implacable violence up to the ritualistic hour for the funeral ostentation. The people fermented with expectation; the captain of the militia, a partisan of the abbey, threatened punishment to the instigators of the Confraternity. Revolt was on the point of breaking forth. When, lo, there arrived at the square a mounted soldier, bearer of an episcopal message, that gave the victory to the congregation.

The ostentation then passed with rare magnificence through the streets scattered with flowers. A chorus of fifty child voices sang the hymn of the Passion and ten censers filled the entire city with the smell of incense. The canopies, the standards, the tapers, which made up this new display, filled the bystanders with wonder. The Abbot, although discomfited, did not intervene, and in his place Don Pasquale Carabba, the Great Coadjutor, clothed in ample vestments, followed with much solemnity the bier of Jesus.

Anna, during the contest, had made offerings for the victory of the Abbot. But the sumptuousness of this ceremony blinded her; a kind of rapture overcame her at the spectacle, and she felt gratitude even toward Don Fiore Ussorio, who passed bearing in his hand an immense taper. Then as the last band of celebrators arrived before her, she mingled with the fanatical crowd of men, women and children and thus moved along as if scarcely touching the earth, while always holding her eyes fixed on the surmounting wreath of the Mater Dolorosa. On high, from one balcony to another, were stretched, consecutively, illustrious flags; from the houses of the stewards hung rude figures of lambs fashioned from corn, while at intervals, where three or four streets met, lighted brasiers spread fumes of aromatics.

The procession did not pass under the windows of the Abbot. From time to time a kind of irregular fluctuation ran the length of the line, as if the band of standard-bearers had encountered an obstacle. The cause of it was a struggle between the bearer of the Crucifix of the Confraternity and the lieutenant of the militia, both having received the command to follow a different route. Since the lieutenant could not use violence without committing sacrilege, the Crucifix conquered. The Congregation exulted, the Commanding General burned with wrath, and the people were filled with curiosity. When the ostentation, in the vicinity of the Arsenale, turned again to enter the church of Saint John, Anna took an oblique path and in a few steps reached the main door. She kneeled. First there arrived before her a man bearing the enormous cross, while the standard-bearers followed him, balancing very tall banners on their foreheads or chins, and gesticulating with a clever play of muscles. Then, almost in the centre of a cloud of incense, came the other bands, the angelic choruses, men in cassocks, the virgins, the gentlemen, the clerics, the militias.

The sight was grand. A kind of mystic terror seized the soul of the woman.

There advanced in the vestibule, according to custom, an acolyte carrying a large silver plate for receiving tapers. Anna watched. Then it was that the Commander, crunching between his teeth bitter words for the Confraternity, threw his taper violently upon the plate and turned his back with a threatening shrug. All remained dumbfounded. And in the sudden silence one heard the clash of the sword of the officer as he left the church. Don Fiore Ussorio only had the temerity to smile.

X

For a long time these deeds aroused the vocal activity of the citizens and were a cause for quarrels. As Anna had been a witness of the last scene, several came to her to get the facts. She recounted her story with patience, and always in the same way. Her life from now on was entirely expended in religious practices, domestic duties, and in loving ministrations for her turtle. At the first signs of spring, it awoke from its condition of lethargy. One day, unexpectedly, it unsheathed from its shield the serpentine head and swung it weakly, while its feet remained in torpor. The little eyes were half covered with the eyelids. The animal, perhaps no longer conscious of being a captive, pushed by the need to find food, as in the sand of its native wood, moved at length with a lazy and uncertain effort, while feeling the ground with its feet.

Anna, in the presence of this reawakening, was filled with an ineffable tenderness, and looked on with eyes wet with tears. Then she took the turtle, laid it upon her bed, and offered it some green leaves. The turtle hesitated to touch the leaves, and in opening its jaws showed its fleshy tongue, like that of a parrot. The covering of the neck and claws seemed to be the flaccid and yellowish membrane of a dead body. The woman, at this sight, felt herself overcome with a great tenderness; and to restore her beloved she caressed it as would a mother a convalescent child. She greased with sweet oil the bony shield, and as the sun beat down upon it the polished sections shone with beauty.

Among such cares passed the months of spring. But Zacchiale, counselled by the spring season to greater pursuit of love, beset the woman with such tender supplications that he had at last from her a solemn promise. The nuptials should be celebrated the day preceding the nativity of Christ.

Then the idyl reblossomed. While Anna attended to her needlework for her trousseau, Zacchiale read in a loud voice the story of the New Testament. The marriage at Cana, the miracles of the Redeemer, the dead of Nain, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the liberation of the daughter of Cainan, the ten lepers, the blind-born, the resurrection of the Nazarene, all of those miraculous narrations ravished the soul of the woman. And she pondered long on Jesus who entered into Jerusalem riding on an ass, while the people spread in His path their garments and waved palms.

In the room, the herb of thyme shed odour from an earthen vase. The turtle came sometimes to the seamstress and caught in its mouth the hem of the cloth, or chewed the

leather of her shoe. One day Zacchiale, while reading the parable of the Prodigal Son, feeling suddenly something soft under his feet, through an involuntary motion of fright, gave a kick, and the turtle, struck against the wall, fell back upside down. Its dorsal shell burst in many places, while a little blood appeared on one of its claws, which the animal waved fruitlessly in an effort to regain its correct position.

In spite of the fact that the unhappy lover showed himself contrite and even inconsolable, Anna, after that day, locked herself in a kind of diffident severity, scarcely spoke, and no longer wished to hear his reading. And thus the Prodigal Son was left forever under the trees with the acorns to watch his master's pigs.

XI

Zacchiale lost his life in the great flood of October, 1857. The dairy farm where he lived, in the neighbourhood of the Cappuccini Convent, beyond the Porta-Giulia, was inundated by the flood. The waters covered the entire country, from the hill of Orlando to the hill of Castellammare; and, since it had flown over vast deposits of clay, it looked bloody as in the ancient fable. The tops of the trees emerged here and there from this blood, so miry and extensive. At intervals passed enormous trunks of trees with all of their roots, furniture, unrecognisable materials, groups of beasts not yet dead who bellowed and disappeared and then reappeared and were lost sight of in the distance. The droves of oxen, especially, presented a wonderful sight; their great white bodies pursued one another, their heads reared desperately from out the water, furious interlacings of horns occurred in their rushes of terror. As the sea was to the east, the waves at the mouth of the river overflowed into it. The salt lake of Palata and its estuaries also joined with the river. The fort became a lost island. Inland the roads were submerged, and in the house of Donna Cristina the water-line reached almost half way up the stairs. The tumult increased continuously, while the bells sounded clamorously. The prisoners, within their prisons, howled.

Anna, believing in some supreme chastisement from the Most High, took recourse in prayers for salvation. The second day, as she mounted to the top of the pigeon-house, she saw nothing but water, water everywhere under the clouds, and later observed, terrified, horses galloping madly on the ridge of San Vitale. She descended, dulled, with her mind in a turmoil, and the persistency of the noise and the mists of the air blurred in her every sense of place and time.

When the flood began to subside, the country people entered the city by means of scows. Men, women and children carried in their faces and eyes a grievous stupefaction. All narrated sad stories. And a ploughman of the Cappuccini came to the Basile house to announce that Don Zacchiale had been washed out to sea. The ploughman spoke simply in telling of the death. He said that in the vicinity of the Cappuccini certain women had bound their nursing children to the top of an enormous tree to rescue them from the waters and that the whirlpools had uprooted the tree, dragging down the five little creatures. Don Zacchiale was upon a roof with other Christians in a compact group, and as the roof was

about to be submerged the corpses of animals and broken branches beat against these desperate ones. When at length the tree with the babies passed over them, the impact was so terrible that after its passage there was no longer a trace of roof or Christians.

Anna listened without weeping, and in her mind, shaken by the account of that death, by that tree with its five infants, and those men all crouched upon the roof while the corpses of beasts beat against it, sprang up a kind of superstitious wonder like the excitement she had felt in hearing certain stories of the Old Testament. She mounted slowly to her room, and tried to compose herself. The sun shone upon her window, and the turtle slept in a corner, covered with his shield, while the chattering of swallows came from the tiles. All of these natural things, this customary tranquillity of her daily life, little by little comforted her. From the depths of that momentary calm at length her grief arose clearly, and she bent her head upon her breast in deep depression.

Her heart was stung with remorse for having preserved against Zacchiae that strange, silent rancour for so long a time; recollections one after another came to mind, and the virtues of her lost lover shone more brightly than ever in her memory. As the scourgings of her grief increased, she got up, went to her bed, and there stretched herself out upon her face. Her weeping mingled with the chattering of the birds.

Afterwards, when her tears were dried, the peace of resignation began to descend upon her soul, and she came to feel that everything of this earth was frail and that we ought to bend ourselves to the will of God. The unction of this simple act of consecration spread in her heart a fulness of sweetness. She felt herself freed from all inquietude, and found repose in her humble but firm faith. From now on in her law there was but this one clause: The sovereign will of God, always just, always adorable, established in all things praised and exalted through all eternity.

XII

Thus to the daughter of Luca was opened the true road to Paradise. The passing of time was not marked by her except in ecclesiastical occurrences. When the river re-entered its channel, there issued in consecutive order for many days processions throughout the cities and country. She followed all of them, together with the people, singing the *Te Deum*. The vineyards everywhere had been devastated; the earth was soft and the air pregnant with white vapours, singularly luminous, like those rising from the swamps in spring.

Then came the feast of All Saints; then the solemnity for the dead. A great number of masses were celebrated for the assistance of the victims of the flood. At Christmas Anna wished to make a manger; she bought a Christ-child, Mary, Saint Joseph, an ox and an ass, wise men, and shepherds, all made of wax. Accompanied by the daughter of the sacristan she went to the ditches of the Salaria road to search for moss. Under the glassy serenity of the fields, the lands were covered with lime, the factory of Albarosa appeared on the hill among the olives, and no voice disturbed the silence. Anna, as she discovered the moss, bent and with a knife cut the clod. On contact with the cold verdure her hands became violet coloured. From time to time, at the sight of a clod greener than the others, there

escaped from her an exclamation of contentment. When her basket was full, she sat down upon the edge of the ditch with the girl. She raised her eyes thoughtfully and slowly to the olive-orchard, and they rested upon the white wall of the factory that resembled a cloisteral edifice. Then she bowed her head, tormented by her thoughts. Later she turned suddenly to her companion—"Had she never seen the olives crushed!" She began to picture the work of the crushing with voluble speech; and, as she spoke, little by little arose in her mind other recollections than those she was describing, and they showed themselves in her voice by a slight trembling.

That was the last weakness. In April of 1858, shortly after Ascension Day, she fell sick. She remained in bed almost a month, tormented by a pulmonary inflammation. Donna Cristina came morning and evening to her room to visit her. An aged maid servant who made public profession of assisting the sick gave her medicines to her. Then the turtle cheered the days of her convalescence. And as the animal was emaciated from fasting, and was nothing but skin, Anna, seeing him so lean, and perceiving herself so debilitated, felt that secret satisfaction that we experience when we suffer the same pain as a beloved one. A mild tepidity arose from the tiles covered with lichens, in the court the cocks crew, and one morning two swallows entered suddenly, flapped their wings about the room, and fled away again.

When Anna returned for the first time to the church, after her recovery, it was the festival of roses. On entering she breathed in greedily the perfume of incense. She walked softly along the nave, in order to find the spot where she had been accustomed to kneel, and she felt herself seized with a sudden joy when finally she discovered between the mortuary stories that one which bore in its centre an almost effaced bas-relief. She knelt upon it, and fell to praying. The people multiplied. At a certain point in the ceremony two acolytes descended from the choir with two silver basins full of roses, and commenced to scatter the flowers upon the heads of the prostrate ones, while the organ played a joyful hymn. Anna remained bent in a kind of ecstasy that gave her the blessedness of the mystic celebration and a vaguely voluptuous feeling of recovery. When several roses happened to fall upon her, she gave a long sigh. The poor woman had never before in her life experienced anything more sweet than that sigh of mystic delight and its subsequent languor.

The Rose Easter remained therefore Anna's favourite festival and it returned periodically without any noteworthy episode. In 1860 the city was disturbed with serious agitations. One heard often in the night the roll of drums, the alarms of sentinels, the reports of muskets. In the house of Donna Cristina a more lively fervour for action manifested itself among the five suitors. Anna was not frightened, but lived in profound meditation, having neither a realisation of public events nor of domestic wants, fulfilling her duties with machine-like exactness.

In the month of September the fortress of Pescara was evacuated, the Bourbon militia dispersed, their arms and baggage thrown into the water of the river, while bands of citizens flocked through the streets with liberal acclamations of joy. Anna, when she heard that the Abbot Cennamele had fled precipitately, thought that the enemies of the Church of

God had triumphed, and was greatly grieved at this.

After this her life unfolded in peace for a long time. The shell of the turtle increased in breadth and became more opaque; the tobacco plant sprang up annually, blossomed and fell; the wise swallows every autumn departed for the land of the Pharaohs. In 1865 the great contest of the suitors at length culminated in the victory of Don Fileno D'Amelio. The nuptials were celebrated in the month of March with banquets of solemn gaiety. There came to prepare the valuable dishes two Capuchin fathers, Fra Vittorio and Fra Mansueto.

They were the two who after the suppression of the order remained to guard the convent. Fra Vittorio was a sexagenary, reddened, strengthened and made happy by the juice of the grape. A little green band covered an infirmity of his right eye, while the left scintillated, full of a penetrating liveliness. He had exercised from his youth the art of drugs, and, as he had much skill in the kitchen, gentlemen were accustomed to summon him on occasions of festivity. At work he used rough gestures that revealed in the ample sleeves his hairy arms, his whole beard moved with every motion of his mouth and his voice broke into shrill cries. Fra Mansueto, on the contrary, was a lean old man with a great head and on his chin a goatee. He had two yellowish eyes full of submission. He cultivated the soil and going from door to door carried eatable herbs to the houses. In serving a company he took a modest position, limped on one foot, spoke in the soft idiomatic patois of Ortona, and, perhaps in memory of the legend of Saint Thomas, exclaimed, "For the Turks!" every little while stroking his polished head with his hand.

Anna attended to the placing of the plates, the kitchen ware and the coppers. It seemed to her now that the kitchen had assumed a kind of secret solemnity through the presence of the brothers. She remained to watch attentively all of the acts of Fra Vittorio, seized with that trepidation that all simple people feel in the presence of men gifted with some superior virtue. She admired especially the infallible gesture with which the great Capuchin scattered upon the dishes certain secret drugs of his, certain particular aromas known only to him. But the humility, the mildness, the modest jokes of Fra Mansueto little by little made a conquest of her. And the bonds of a common country and the still stronger ones of a common dialect cemented their friendship.

As they conversed, recollections of the past germinated in their speech. Fra Mansueto had known Luca Minella and he was in the basilica when the death of Francesca Nobile had happened among the pilgrims. "For the Turks!" He had even helped to carry the corpse up to the house at the Porta-Caldara, and he remembered that the dead woman wore a waist of yellow silk and many chains of gold....

Anna grew sad. In her memory this matter up to that moment had remained confused, vague, almost uncertain, dimmed by the very long inert stupor that had followed her first paroxysms of epilepsy. But when Fra Mansueto said that her mother was in Paradise because those who die in the cause of religion dwell among the saints, Anna experienced an unspeakable sweetness and felt suddenly surge up in her soul an immense adoration for the sanctity of her mother.

Then, remembering the places of her native country, she began to discourse minutely on the Church of the Apostle, mentioning the shapes of the altars, the position of the Chapels,

the number of the ornaments, the shape of the cupola, the positions of the images, the divisions of the pavement and the colours of the windows. Fra Mansueto followed her with benignity; and, since he had been in Ortona several months before, recounted the new things seen there. The Archbishop of Orsogna had given the Church a precious vase of gold with settings of precious stones. The Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament had renovated all the wood and leather of the stoles. Donna Blandina Onofrii had furnished an entire change of apparel, consisting in Dalmatian chasubles, stoles, sacerdotal cloaks and surplices.

Anna listened greedily, and the desire to see these new things and to see again the old ones began to torment her. When the Capuchin was silent she turned to him with an air half of pleasure, half of timidity. The May feast was drawing near. Should they go?

XIII

During the last days of May, Anna, having had permission from Donna Cristina, made her preparations. She felt anxious about the turtle. Ought she to leave it or carry it with her? She remained a long time in doubt but at length decided to carry it for security. She put it in a basket with her clothes and the boxes of confection which Donna Cristina was sending to Donna Veronica Monteferrante, Abbess of the monastery of Santa Caterina. At dawn Anna and Fra Mansueto set out. Anna had from the first a nimble step and a gay aspect; her hair, already almost entirely grey, lay in shining folds beneath her handkerchief. The brother limped, supporting himself with a stick, and an empty knapsack swung from his shoulders. When they reached the wood of pines, they made their first halt.

The trees in the May morning, immersed in their native perfume, swayed voluptuously between the serenity of the sky and that of the sea. The trunks wept resin. The blackbirds whistled. All the fountains of life seemed open for the transfiguration of the earth.

Anna sat down upon the grass, offered the monk bread and fruit, and began to talk about the festivity, eating at intervals. The turtle tried with its two foremost legs to reach the edge of the basket, and its timid serpent-like head projected and withdrew in its efforts. Then, when Anna took it out, the beast began to advance on the moss toward a bush of myrtle, with less slowness, perhaps feeling the joy of its primitive liberty arise confusedly in it. Its shell amongst the green looked more beautiful. Fra Mansueto made several moral reflections and praised Providence that gives to the turtle a house, and sleep during the winter season. Anna recounted several facts which demonstrated great frankness and rectitude in the turtle. Then she added, "What are the animals thinking of?"

The brother did not answer. Both remained perplexed. There descended from the bark of a pine a file of ants and they extended themselves across the ground, each ant dragged a fragment of food and the entire innumerable family fulfilled its work with diligent precision. Anna watched, and there awoke in her mind the ingenuous beliefs of her childhood. She spoke of wonderful dwellings that the ants excavated beneath the earth. The brother replied with an accent of intense faith, "God be praised!" And both remained

pensive, beneath the greatness, while worshipping God in their hearts.

In the early hours of the evening they arrived in the country of Ortona. Anna knocked at the door of the monastery and asked to see the abbess. On entering they saw a little court paved with black and white stone with a cistern in the centre. The reception parlour was a low room, with a few chairs around it; two walls were occupied by a grating, the other two by a crucifix and images. Anna was immediately seized by a feeling of veneration for the solemn peace that reigned in this spot. When the Mother Veronica appeared unexpectedly behind the grating, tall and severe in her monastic habit, Anna experienced an unspeakable confusion as if in the presence of a supernatural apparition. Then, reassured by the kind smile of the abbess, she delivered her message briefly, placed her boxes in the cavity of the turnstile and waited. The Mother Veronica moved about her benignly, watching her with her beautiful lion-like eyes; she gave her an effigy of the Virgin, and in taking leave she extended her illustrious hand to be kissed through the grating, and disappeared.

Anna went out full of trepidation. As she passed the vestibule, there reached her ears a chorus of litanies, a song, very regular and sweet, which came perhaps from some subterranean chapel. When she passed through the court she saw on the left, at the top of the wall, a branch loaded with oranges. And, as she set foot again on the road, she seemed to have left behind her a garden of blessedness.

Then she turned toward the eastern road in order to search for her relations. At the door of the old house an unknown woman stood leaning against the door-post. Anna approached her timidly and asked news of the family of Francesca Nobile. The woman interrupted her: "Why? Why? What did she want?"—with a voice and an investigating expression. Then, when Anna recalled herself, she permitted her to enter.

The relations had almost all died or emigrated. There remained in the house an old, rich man, Uncle Mingo, who had taken for his second wife "the daughter of Sblendore" and lived with her almost in misery. The old man at first did not recognise Anna. He was seated upon an old ecclesiastical chair, whose red material hung in shreds; his hands rested on the arms, contorted and rendered enormous through the monstrosity of gout, his feet with rhythmic movements beat the earth, while a continuous paralytic trembling agitated the muscles of his neck, elbows and knees. As he gazed at Anna he held open with difficulty his inflamed eyelids. At length he remembered her.

As Anna proceeded to explain her own experiences, the daughter of Sblendore, sniffing money, began to conceive in her mind hopes of usurpation, and by virtue of these hopes became more benign in her expression. Anna's tale was scarcely told when she offered her hospitality for the night, took her basket of clothes and laid it down, promised to take care of her turtle and then made several complaints, not without tears, about the infirmity of the old man and the misery of their house. Anna went out with her soul full of pity; she went up the coast toward the belfry of the church, feeling anxious on approaching it.

Around the Farnese palace the people surged like billows; and that great feudal relic ornamented with figures, magnificent in the sunlight, was most conspicuous. Anna passed through the crowd, alongside of the benches of the silversmiths who made sacred apparel and native objects. At all of that scintillating display of liturgical forms her heart dilated

with joy and she made the sign of the cross before each bench as before an altar. When at night she reached the door of the church and heard the canticle of the ritual, she could no longer contain her joy as she advanced as far as the pulpit, with steps almost vacillating. Her knees bent beneath her and the tears welled up in her eyes. She remained there in contemplation of the candelabras, the ostensories, of all those objects on the altar, her mind dizzy from having eaten nothing since morning. An immense weakness seized her nerves and her soul shrank to the point of annihilation. Above her, along the central nave, the glass lamps formed a triple crown of fire. In the distance, four solid trunks of wax flamed at the sides of the tabernacle.

XIV

The five days of the festival Anna lived thus within the church from early morning until the hour at which the doors were closed—most faithfully she breathed in that warm air which implanted in her senses a blissful torpor, in her soul a joy, full of humility. The orations, the genuflections, the salutations, all of those formulas, all of those ritualistic gestures incessantly repeated, dulled her senses. The fumes of the incense hid the earth from her.

Rosaria, the daughter of Sblendore, meanwhile profited by moving her to pity with lying complaints and by the miserable spectacle of the paralytic old man. She was an unprincipled woman, expert in fraud and dedicated to debauchery; her entire face was covered with blisters, red and serpentine, her hair grey, her stomach obese. Bound to the paralytic by vices common to both and by marriage, she and he had squandered in a short time their substance in guzzling and merry-making. Both in their misery, venomous from privation, burning with thirst for wine and liquor, harassed by the infirmities of decrepitude, were now expiating their prolonged sinning.

Anna, with a spontaneous impulse for charity, gave to Rosaria all her money kept for alms-giving and her superfluous clothes as well as her earrings, two gold rings and her coral necklace and she promised still further support. At length she retraced the road to Pescara, in company with Fra Mansueto, and bearing the turtle in her basket.

During their walk, as the houses of Ortona withdrew into the distance, a great sadness descended upon the soul of the woman. Crowds of singing pilgrims were passing in other directions, and their songs, monotonous and slow, remained a long while in the air. Anna listened to them; an overwhelming desire drew her to join them, to follow them, to live thus, making pilgrimages from sanctuary to sanctuary, from country to country, in order to exalt the miracles of every saint, the virtues of every relic, the bounty of every Mary.

“They go to Cucullo,” Fra Mansueto said, pointing with his arm to some distant country. And both began to talk of Saint Domenico, who protected the men from the bite of serpents and the seed from caterpillars; then they spoke of the patron saints. At Bugnara, on the bridge of Rivo, more than a hundred cart-houses, among horses and mules, laden with fruit, were going in a procession to the Madonna of the Snow. The devotees rode on their chargers, with sprigs of spikenard on their heads, with strings of dough on their shoulders, and they laid at the feet of the image their cereal gifts. At Bisenti, many youths, with baskets of grain on their heads, were conducting along the roads an ass that carried on its back a larger basket, and they entered the Church of the Madonna of the Angels, to offer them up, while singing. At Torricella Peligna, men and children, crowned with roses and garlands of roses, went up on a pilgrimage to the Madonna of the Roses, situated upon a cliff where was the foot-prints of Samson. At Loreto Apentino a white ox, fattened during the year with abundance of pasturage, moved in pomp behind the statue of Saint Zopito. A red drapery covered him and a child rode upon him. As the sacred ox entered the church, he gave forth the excrescence of his food and the devotees from this smoking

material presaged future agriculture.

Of such religious usages Anna and Fra Mansueto were speaking, when they reached the mouth of the Alento. The Channel carried the water of spring between the green foliage not yet flowered. And the Capuchin spoke of the Madonna of the Incoronati, where for the festival of Saint John the devotees wreath their heads with vines, and during the night go with great rejoicing to the River Gizio to bathe.

Anna removed her shoes in order to ford the river. She felt now in her soul an immense and loving veneration for everything, for the trees, the grass, the animals, for all that those Catholic customs had sanctified. Thus from the depths of her ignorance and simplicity arose the instinct of idolatry.

Several months after her return, an epidemic of cholera broke out in the country, and the mortality was great. Anna lent her services to the poor sick ones. Fra Mansueto died. Anna felt much grief at this. In the year 1866, at the recurrence of the festival, she wished to take leave and return to her native place forever, because she saw in her sleep every night Saint Thomas who commanded her to depart. So she took the turtle, her clothes and her savings, weeping she kissed the hand of Donna Cristina, and departed upon a cart, together with two begging nuns.

At Ortona she dwelt in the house of her paralytic uncle. She slept upon a straw pallet and ate nothing but bread and vegetables. She dedicated every hour of the day to the practices of the Church, with a marvellous fervour, and her mind gradually lost all ability to do anything save contemplate Christian mysteries, adore symbols and imagine Paradise. She was completely absorbed with divine charity, completely encompassed with that divine passion which the sacerdotals manifest always with the same signs and the same words. She comprehended but that one single language; had but that one single refuge, sweet and solemn, where her whole heart dilated in a pious security of peace and where her eyes moistened with an ineffable sweetness of tears.

She suffered, for the love of Jesus, domestic miseries, was gentle and submissive and never proffered a lament, a reproof, or a threat. Rosaria extracted from her little by little all of her savings, and commenced then to let her go hungry, to overtax her, to call her vicious names and to persecute the turtle with fierce insistency. The old paralytic gave forth continuously a species of hoarse howls, opening his mouth where the tongue trembled and from which dripped continually quantities of saliva. One day, because his greedy wife swallowed before him some liquor and denied him a drink, escaping with the glass, he arose from his chair with an effort and began to walk toward her, his legs wavering, his feet striking the ground with an involuntary rhythmic stroke. Suddenly he moved faster, his trunk bent forward, while hopping with short pursuing steps, as if pushed by an irresistible impulse, until at length he fell face downward upon the edge of the stairs.

Then Anna, in distress, took the turtle and went to ask succour of Donna Veronica Monteferrante. As the poor woman had already done several services for the monastery, the Abbess, pitying her, gave her work as a serving-nun.

Anna, though she had not taken the orders, dressed in the nun's costume: the black tunic, the throat-bands, the head-dress with its ample white brims. She seemed to herself, in that habit, to be sanctified. And at first, when the air flapped the brims around her head with a noise as of wings, she shuddered with a sudden confusion in her veins. Also when the brims struck by the sun reflected on her face the colour of snow, she suddenly felt herself illuminated by a mystic ray.

With the passing of time, her ecstasies became more frequent. The grey-haired virgin was thrilled from time to time by angelic songs, by distant echoes of organs, by rumours and voices not perceptible to other ears. Luminous figures presented themselves to her in the darkness, odours of Paradise carried her out of herself.

Thus a kind of sacred horror began to spread through the monastery as if through the presence of some occult power, as if through the imminence of some supernatural event. As a precaution the new convert was released from every obligation pertaining to servile work. All of her positions, all of her words, all of her glances were observed and commented upon with superstition. And the legend of her sanctity began to flower.

On the first of February in the year of Our Lord 1873, the voice of the virgin Anna became singularly hoarse and deep. Later her power of speech suddenly disappeared. This unexpected dumbness terrified the minds of the nuns. And all, standing around the convert, considered with mystic terror her ecstatic postures, the vague motions of her mute mouth and the immobility of her eyes from which overflowed at intervals inundations of tears. The lineaments of the sick woman, extenuated by long fastings, had now assumed a purity almost of ivory, while the entire outlines of her arteries now seemed to be visible, and projected in such strong relief and palpitated so incessantly, that before that open palpitation of blood a kind of dread seized the nuns, as if they were viewing a body stripped of its skin.

When the month of Mary drew near, a loving diligence prompted the Benedictines to the preparation of an oratory. They scattered throughout the cloisteral garden, all flowering with roses and fruitful with oranges, while they gathered the harvest of early May in order to lay it at the foot of the altar. Anna having recovered her usual state of calmness, descended likewise to help at the pious work. She conveyed often with gestures the thoughts which her obstinate muteness forbade her to express. All of the brides of Our Lord lingered in the sun, walking among the fountains luxuriant with perfume. There was on one side of the garden a door, and as in the souls of the virgins the perfumes awoke suppressed thought, so the sun in penetrating beneath the two arches revived in the plaster the residue of Byzantine gold.

The oratory was ready for the day of the first prayer. The ceremony began after the Vespers. A sister mounted to the organ. Presently from the keys the cry of the Passion penetrated everywhere, all foreheads bowed, the censers gave out the fumes of jasmine and the flames of the tapers palpitated among crowns of flowers. Then arose the canticles,

the litanies full of symbolic appellations and supplicating tenderness. As the voices mounted with increasing strength, Anna, impelled by the immense force of her fervour, screamed. Struck with wonder, she fell supine, agitating her arms and trying to arise. The litanies stopped. The sisters, several almost terrified, had remained an instant immobile while others gave assistance to the sick woman. The miracle seemed to them most unexpected, brilliant and supreme.

Then, little by little, stupor, uncertain murmurs and vacillation were succeeded by a rejoicing without limit, a chorus of clamorous exaltations and a mingled drowsiness as of inebriety. Anna, on her knees, still absorbed in the rapture of the miracle, was not conscious of what was happening around her. But when the canticles with greater vehemence were begun again, she sang too. Her notes from the descending waves of the chorus, at intervals emerged, since the devotees diminished the force of their voices in order to hear that one which by divine grace had been restored. And the Virgin became from time to time the censer of gold from which they exhaled sweet balsam, she was the lamp that by day and night lighted the sanctuary, the urn that enclosed the manna from heaven, the flame that burned without consuming, the stem of Jesse that bore the most beautiful of all flowers.

Afterwards the fame of the miracle spread from the monastery throughout the entire country of Ortona and from the country to all adjoining lands, growing as it travelled. And the monastery rose to great respect. Donna Blandina Onofrii, the magnificent, presented to the Madonna of the Oratorio a vest of brocaded silver and a rare necklace of turquoise came from the island of Smyrna. The other Ortosian ladies gave other minor gifts. The Archbishop of Orsagna made with pomp a congratulatory visit, in which he exchanged words of eloquence with Anna, who “from the purity of her life had been rendered worthy of celestial gifts.”

In August of the year 1876 new prodigies arrived. The infirm woman, when she approached vespers, fell in a state of cataleptic ecstasy; from which she arose later almost with violence. On her feet, while preserving always the same position, she began to talk, at first slowly and then gradually accelerating, as if beneath the urgency of a mystic inspiration. Her eloquence was but a tumultuous medley of words, of phrases, of entire selections learned before, which now in her unconsciousness reproduced themselves, growing fragmentary or combining without sequence.

She repeated native dialectic expressions mingled with courtly forms, and with the hyperboles of Biblical language as well as extraordinary conjunctions of syllables and scarcely audible harmonies of songs. But the profound trembling of her voice, the sudden changes of inflection, the alternate ascending and descending of the tone, the spirituality of the ecstatic figure, the mystery of the hour, all helped to make a profound impression upon the onlookers.

These effects repeated themselves daily, with a periodic regularity. At vespers in the oratorio they lit the lamps; the nuns made a kneeling circle, and the sacred representation began. As the infirm woman entered into the cataleptic ecstasies, vague preludes on the organ lifted the souls of the worshippers to a higher sphere. The light of the lamps was

diffused on high, giving forth an uncertain flicker, and a fading sweetness to the appearance of things. At a certain point the organ was silent. The respiration of the infirm woman became deeper, her arms were stretched so that in the emaciated wrists the tendons vibrated like the strings of an instrument. Then suddenly, the sick woman bounded to her feet, crossed her arms on her breast, while resting in the position of the Caryatides of a Baptistery. Her voice resounded in the silence, now sweetly, now lugubriously, now placid, almost always incomprehensible.

At the beginning of the year 1877 these paroxysms diminished in frequency, they occurred two or three times a week and then totally disappeared, leaving the body of the woman in a miserable state of weakness. Then several years passed, in which the poor idiot lived in atrocious suffering, with her limbs rendered inert from muscular spasms. She was no longer able to keep herself clean, she ate only soft bread and a few herbs and wore around her neck and on her breast a large quantity of little crosses, relics and other images. She spoke stutteringly through lack of teeth and her hair fell out, her eyes were already glazed like those of an old beast of burden about to die.

One time, in May, while she was suffering, deposited under the portal, and the sisters were gathering the roses for Maria, there passed before her the turtle which still dragged its pacific and innocent life through the cloisteral garden. The old woman saw it move and little by little recede. It awakened no recollection in her mind. The turtle lost itself among the bunches of thyme.

But the sisters regarded her imbecility and the infirmity of the woman as one of those supreme proofs of martyrdom to which the Lord calls the elect in order to sanctify and glorify them later in Paradise and they surrounded her with veneration and care.

In the summer of the year 1881, there appeared signs of approaching death. Consumed and maimed, that miserable body no longer resembled a human being. Slow deformations had corrupted the joints of the arms; tumours, large as apples, protruded from her sides, on her shoulder and on the back of her head.

The morning of the 10th day of September, about the eighth hour, a trembling of the earth shook Ortona to its foundations. Many buildings fell, the roofs and walls of others were injured, and still others were bent and twisted. All of the good people of Ortona, with weeping, with cries, with invocations, with great invoking of saints and madonnas, came out of their doors and assembled on the plain of San Rocco, fearing greater perils. The nuns, seized with panic, broke from the cloister and ran into the streets, struggling and seeking safety. Four of them bore Anna upon a table. And all drew toward the plain, in the direction of the uninjured people.

As they arrived in sight of the people, spontaneous shouts arose, since the presence of these religious souls seemed propitious. On all sides lay the sick, the aged and infirm, children in swaddling clothes, women stupid from fear. A beautiful morning sun shed lustre upon the tumultuous waves of the sea and upon the vineyards; and along the lower coast the sailors ran, seeking their wives, calling their children by name, out of breath, and hoarse from climbing; and from Caldara there began to arrive herds of sheep and oxen with their keepers, flocks of turkey-cocks with their feminine guardians, and cart-houses,

since all feared solitude and men and beasts in the turmoil became comrades.

Anna, resting upon the ground, beneath an olive tree, perceiving death to be near, was mourning with a weak murmur, because she did not wish to die without the Sacrament, and the nuns around her administered comfort to her, and the bystanders looked at her piously. Now, suddenly among the people spread the news that from the Porta Caldara had issued the image of the Apostle. Hope revived and hymns of thanksgiving mounted to the sky. As from afar vibrated an unexpected flash, the women knelt and tearfully with their hair dishevelled, began to walk upon their knees, towards the flash, while intoning psalms.

Anna became agonised. Sustained by two sisters, she heard the prayers, heard the announcement, and perhaps under her last illusions, she saw the Apostle approaching, for over her hollow face there passed a smile of joy. Several bubbles of saliva appeared upon her lips, a violent undulation of her body occurred, extended visibly to the extremities of her body, while upon her eyes the eyelids fell, reddish as from thin blood, and her head shrank into her shoulders. Thus the virgin Anna finally expired.

When the flash appeared more closely to the adoring women, there shone in the sun the form of a beast of burden carrying balanced upon its back, according to the custom, an ornament of metal.

THE END



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Transcriber's Notes

Original spelling and punctuation have been preserved as much as possible.
Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note.

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