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THE PRIEST'S HAT

EMILIO DE MARCHI

TRANSLATED BY F. A. Y. BROWN



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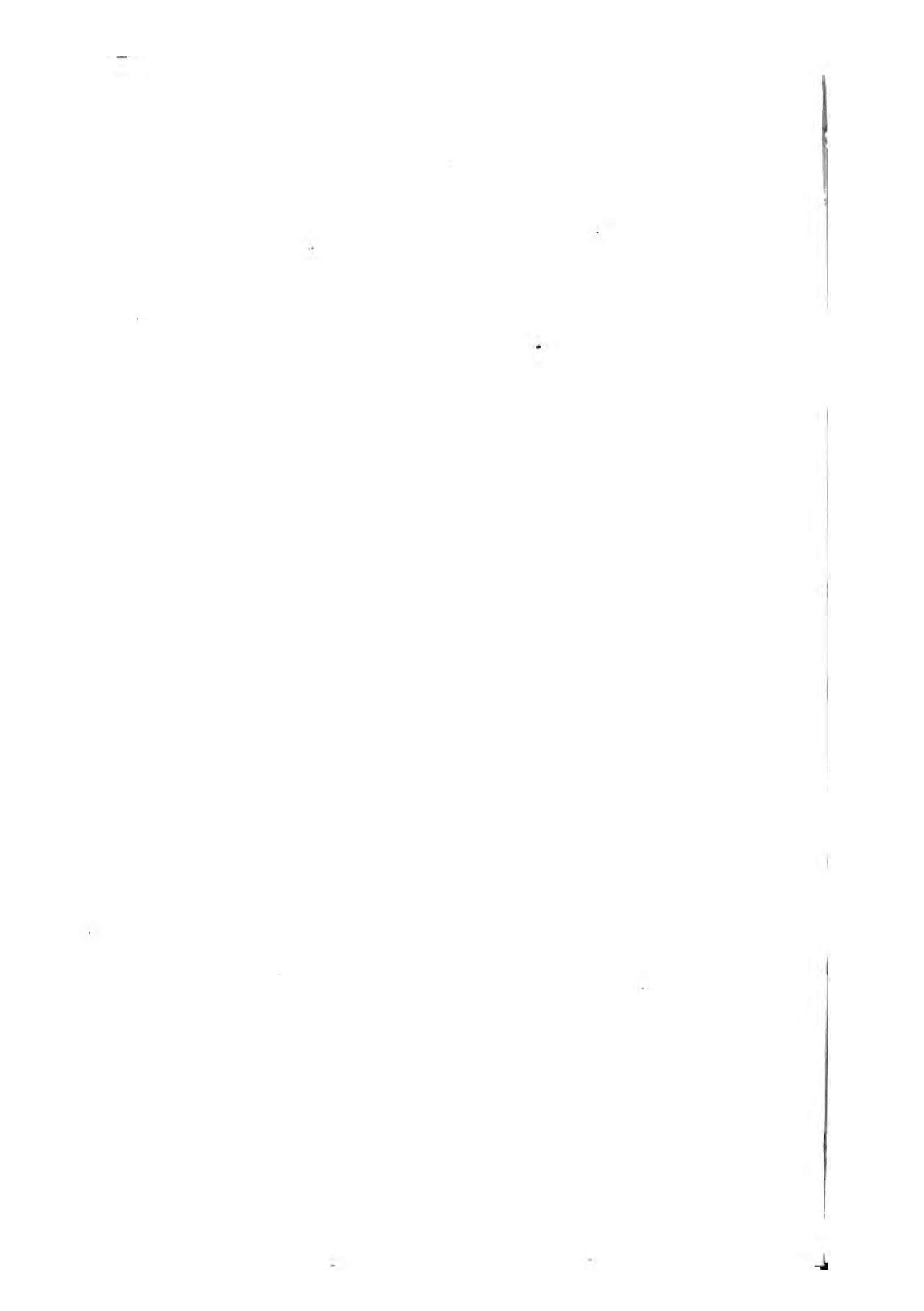




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THE PRIEST'S HAT



THE PRIEST'S HAT

A Novel by
EMILIO de MARCHI

Translated, with notes, by
FREDERICK A. Y. BROWN

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

EMILIO DE MARCHI, the author of this *Cappello del Prete* and other works, amongst which may specially be mentioned four novels, *Demetrio Pianelli*, *Arabella*, *Giacomo l'Idealista*, *Col fucce non si scherza*, was born in Milan in 1851, and lived there till his death on February 6th, 1901, teaching literature and filling the office of Secretary to the Scientific and Literary Academy of Milan.

He was loved and respected by all who knew him and were able to appreciate his noble qualities of mind and heart; but his modest and retiring nature led him to dedicate himself chiefly to family life and to his intimate friends, and prevented the outside world from fully appreciating the merit of his literary work, which, in its simplicity of style and conception, reflects the author's honest and ingenuous mind.

After his death the public realized that they had lost a precious friend and guide who had given his whole life to duty without thought of reward, and several successive editions of his works were called for by those who had probably not heard of him during his lifetime.

Benedetto Croce, who is acknowledged to be the leading Italian literary critic of the present day (1910),

says of him: "I do not believe that Emilio de Marchi ever wrote a page of 'mere literature'."¹

De Marchi belonged to the Lombard literary school, of which he wrote that: "it recognized Manzoni as its master, and, through Manzoni, had its origin with Giuseppe Parini, the greatest of our school, who understood literature as it should be, not an amusement for the idle, but an incentive to a noble life."

The *Cappello del Prete* was published in 1888. Its story is founded on fact; the crime of a Count Faella d'Imola, who committed suicide in prison, on the eve of his sentence.

¹ "Sulla letteratura Italiana nella seconda meta del secolo xix," published at Naples in *La Critica*, vol. iv, no. xix, p. 260,

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THIS is far from being an experimental first novel ; but it is an experiment, and should be so considered.

Two reasons induced the author to write it.

First : to see if it is really necessary to go to France and thence import the " newspaper " novel, with its well-known merits of morality and common sense ; or whether, given a little goodwill, we ourselves cannot provide amply and reasonably for the requirements of the great public.

Secondly : to investigate how much vitality, honesty and logic there may be in this Great Public, which is so often slandered and described as a voracious wild beast, living on paradox, filth and nakedness, set before it as in a trough by the newspapers, with their circulation of a hundred thousand copies.

The experiment has proved already that we can write at least as well as other people, and perhaps in time may do even better ; and also that the Public is less vulgar than the books our greed and ignorance have led us to write for it.

Published in two papers of different kind, in two towns almost at the opposite ends of Italy, the *Italia* of Milan and the *Corriere* of Naples, this novel, *The Priest's*

Hat, written without sensationalism and with the help only of the usual tricks of imagination and description, has already succeeded beyond the author's hopes. Messieurs the " hundred thousand " have read it willingly and are said to have been interested and amused.

The author, on his side, having been spiritually in touch with the Great Public, has repeatedly been attracted by the mighty power which emanates from the multitude ; and has asked his heart, more than once, whether Italian writers would not do well to make more use of this natural force to reinvigorate the consumptive constitution of our Art.

He has wondered also if it would not be useful and patriotic to take advantage of this living force to arouse not merely curiosity, but some lively idea of beauty for the aid and support of our souls.

Art is divine ; but there is no harm, from time to time, in writing for our readers.

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PART ONE



I

THE BARON AND THE PRIEST

THE Baron Carlo Coriolano di Santafusca did not believe in God, and still less in the Devil ; nor, though he was a good Neapolitan, in witches and magic.

At twenty he had thought of becoming a monk, but having met a learned French scientist, one Dr. Panterre, persecuted by Napoleon the III's government for his materialist and anarchist propaganda, with the rapid and violent fancy natural to a southerner, he fell in love with the doctrines of this strange conspirator, who was terribly fascinating, with his curious long head and his hawk's eyes.

For some years Santafusca—nicknamed " the Baron "—read books and studied science, but he would not have been himself if, for love of science, he had renounced pretty women, cards, good Vesuvian wine and his dear friends. The libertine overpowered the monk and the nihilist, and from the mixture of these three proceeded " the Baron ", unique of his kind, a gamester, a smoker and a blasphemer against the eternal Nothing ; but nevertheless a pleasant companion, idolized by women, bold as a negro, and from time to time fantastic as a brahmin.

We are speaking here of the Baron in his first manner when he was no more than thirty. Naples at that time worshipped Garibaldi and displayed the national white, red and green. Women embraced the handsome soldiers in the streets, and held up their children to be baptized by Garibaldi in the sacred name of Italy. Lamps were lit and flower wreaths hung before the hero's portrait, as before S. Gennaro and the Holy Virgin.

Santafusca took a short and brilliant part in the last skirmishes of those times, and was wounded on the forehead, which left him with a scar above one eyebrow . . . but those times were gone ; and now the man was forty-five, with a great black beard, a face bronzed by the sun and by strong drink, and with a great wish to enjoy life ; but in absolute poverty.

He had no credit with his friends, or his relations, whom he had disgusted by his dissipated life and his godless wickedness.

To the monk, the nihilist and the libertine, a desperate starveling was now added, who at forty-five had to beg ten lire from his housekeeper, if he wished to dine and have a good drink.

His name was posted at his club as a defaulter, and as he no longer paid his gaming debts, he was avoided like a leper.

Yes, the Baron Carlo Coriolano de Santafusca felt a leper indeed that day when the Canon Administrator of the Holy Fund for Orphan Girls sent to tell him for the last time that if he did not, in the course of next week,

return a certain certificate for fifteen thousand lire the Administrative Board would lay the facts before the Public Prosecutor.

By ancient right the Santafusca family took part in the Administration of the Holy Fund and, as patron and member of the Board, the Baron, when short of cash, had repeatedly fished in the Institution's safe, giving false or worthless security. Now "the knots had come to the comb".

The Canon's words were explicit: "If your Excellency does not restore the certificate for 15,000 lire belonging to this pious House, the Council will be regretfully obliged to bring the matter before the Tribunal."

The Baron would never go before the Tribunal; that was certain. It was Easter Monday and there was still nearly a fortnight before the fatal date. In a fortnight a man of talent, who does not wish to blow his brains out, is bound to find some way to avoid going to prison.

What prison could hold him? Are there no more forests in Calabria, and has the race of brigands quite disappeared?

It would not be the first time that a Santafusca had been an outlaw; and an ancestor of his, Don Nicolo, had in the old days been for six months with Fra Diavolo, upon the Majella rocks; but, for all that, the Baron felt that a fortnight is hardly time for a man even to become a brigand.

It was necessary, therefore, to find some other expedient, quicker and less melodramatic. Should he run away? It was no use thinking of that, because for a poor man travelling is not easy. A loan? But from whom? No dog would lend him a farthing! Try his luck with the cards? No one would cut the pack with him, and besides a player does not always win.

Nothing was left but his villa at Santafusca, some five kilometres from Naples; this might still yield a few thousand lire, provided one sold it all to the very last nail; for one third was already mortgaged to the Marquess of Vico Spiano; one third was a ruin; and the remaining third at least gave him a refuge, a roof, an asylum for a poor man.

Even by selling all that was left, he would not be able to get together fifteen thousand lire, and that would make him simply a vagabond, naked as he was born, without so much as a pillow on which to lay his head.

Moreover, if a Baron of Santafusca still counted for something in the world, and could still manage to find a hundred lire to satisfy his hunger and thirst, this tarnished credit came to him from that old palace, which still imposed some respect on people, and supported, by the chain of tradition, a man now almost reduced to play the part of pantaloon.

It was necessary to find the fifteen thousand lire, and he had reached Holy Thursday without any result.

At last he bethought himself of Priest Cirillo.

.

Who was Priest Cirillo?

There was no old woman, no fishwife nor scoundrel of the Pendino or Mercato quarters, who did not know this priest, dwelling as he did in the poorest neighbourhood, in a garret shut in by the roof-tops, where the blessed sunlight never penetrates, where vice reigns, amid the stench of the fish, cooked by the rabble at their doorways or in the lane itself.

To see him walk in the streets, you would not have given the rind of an orange for that little old priest, all hat, dressed in a dusty coat, under a greenish well-worn cloak which let the wind through like a sieve, and with a face coloured just like fried fish.

His hands were long, thin, and shining, like olive-wood spindles, with nails stronger than the hooks used in harbour to move the barrels and sacks of codfish.

His little legs, meagre as Saints' shinbones, ended in two down-at-heel shoes, as big as the lighters which trade between Naples and Messina.

Priest Cirillo was full of money, which he had scraped together partly by usury, by lending to the grocers, fishmongers and bullies of the quarter, but principally by his winnings in the Lottery.¹ People said that the priest had power over the numbers, and with the help of certain cabalistic calculations which he had found in an old book, could win at the Lottery as often as he pleased. To some people indeed he had given good

¹ See Note 2.

numbers, but the magician was jealous and did not let everyone make use of him.

It is in Priest Cirillo's house that we now find the Baron who had not wasted his time during the Easter holidays.

The priest offered his guest a wooden chair with a ragged straw bottom ; shut the door carefully ; and then came back to sit at a table laden with papers and old books.

The Baron said : " Have you considered the matter, Don Cirillo ? "

" I have."

" Have you seen the Villa ? "

" I have seen it, your Excellency."

" Do you like it ? "

" I don't much like it, but I am willing to buy it. I will give twenty thousand lire, your Excellency."

" You would make a hermit swear, Don Cirillo ! We talked at first of forty thousand lire ; then of thirty, now of twenty thousand ! By the blood of . . ."

The Baron began to curse and swear.

" Well, then, I will give you thirty," interrupted the Priest, who did not like foul language, " but you must prove to me that the house is free from mortgages."

" I have sworn to you that it is as free as my hand, and a nobleman does not swear twice."

" A nobleman need not swear at all. The title-deeds are enough."

" You may take your notary with you."

“ I am not buying the Villa for myself or with my own money ! What should I do with a Villa, poor servant of God as I am ? ”

“ Oh ! Who believes that ? They say your mattress is full of gold ! ”

“ Look round you then, in God’s name ! Is this the house of Dives ? ”

“ People say that you can command the Lottery numbers. ”

“ That is another calumny invented by ignorant and malicious people. If I could command the numbers, I should be rich ; and if I were rich, I should not live on a small stipend and burial fees, amongst people who persecute me. ”

“ Is it not true that you win a ‘ terno ’ or a ‘ quaterno ’ every week ? ”

“ God’s patience ! How can you believe such tales, Excellency, you, a man of the world ? Once only, to save myself from my enemies’ threats, I suggested good numbers, which happened to win, and from that day I have had no peace, even at the altar. Yes ! even in the church I hear the women’s voices saying : ‘ Oh ! for the love of God, give me three numbers ! For the blessed San Gennaro’s Sake ’. ”

Priest Cirillo panted as he spoke ; evidently he was frightened and his ten wooden fingers trembled in mid-air as he held them open.

“ I can save you from these persecutions, ” said the Baron.

“ Last January a band of hooligans kidnapped me and kept me shut up in a cave, where they threatened me with death and beat me with chains, to make me give them the numbers.”

“ Did you do so ? ”

“ I called on the Madonna del Carmine, and the Holy Spirit to inspire and help me. I suggested certain numbers.”

“ Did they come out ? ”

“ Yes ! They all came out.”

The Baron lifted his head in wonderment. It seemed indeed as though he were in a magician's house.

“ My safety was due to divine goodness, and not to cabalistic science, as people think : but since that day I have no peace. My staircase is always besieged by poor creatures wanting ‘ the numbers ’, and I have often to take refuge in church, to save myself from being again captured, chained and tortured.”

“ Well ! I will help you, Don Cirillo ; but you must be just and keep to the forty thousand lire.”

“ If you help me, I will help you, Excellency ! Save me from the hands of these wicked men, and I will save you from . . . prison ! ”

The Baron moved in his chair and looked round him with eyes of terror, slightly raising a cane with a silver handle, which from time to time he pressed to his lips.

“ Is it not true that on the first Sunday after Easter

you must return a sum which you cannot find on earth or in heaven ? ”

“ You are an inquisitor ! ” murmured the Baron, with a frown.

“ I have to get information, have I not ? But I will help you all the same. Indeed I say, let us help each other. You want fifteen thousand lire and I will give you thirty. I would give you forty, if I had not found out Marquess Vico Spiano’s mortgage.”

“ People are right : you are a great astrologer, if not a magician,” said the Baron, laughing, and raising his stick again a little.

“ I was bound to take my precautions, blessed one ! Is it not true that I am helping you ? I do not take the Villa for myself, and, if the buyer wishes to live there, he will have to spend as much again in repairing it. Of course I am forced to make a small profit, for the sake of the poor people who will be my heirs ; but for me the real gain is that I shall be able to live in the country, in safety from persecution and where I shall also be able to look after my sinful soul.”

“ I am sure you will do your best to save my soul also,” said the Baron, softening his voice and feigning a sudden compunction. “ Yes ! it is true that I am ruined, and that I have nothing left but Santafusca, the last plank from the shipwreck. If you do not help me, I shall have to blow out my brains.”

The Baron took out his handkerchief and passed it three times over his eyes, to the great dismay of Priest

Cirillo, who had never seen anybody cry. And then that impious sinner, that accursed blasphemer, that abandoned libertine on the edge of a terrible precipice, prayed him, God's servant, to have pity on his soul!

Something tender and compassionate moved beneath the metallic sheath of that avaricious heart; with a softened voice he answered: "I will save you, body and soul, Baron of Santafusca; and if I can dispose of your Villa at a profit, I am a just man and will remember your needs. Now you must leave Naples at once, and tomorrow I will take the fifteen thousand lire to the Canon. On Thursday the 4th, I will come to the Villa and will bring you the balance; then I can bid adieu to this cursed town which has become my hell! I need only a few days to put my affairs in order; may God help me to save you and myself also."

"I know that God has sent you to me," said the Baron, still pretending that his soul was mortified and torn with grief. "I shall wait for you at the Villa; take care that no one sees you go from here. They would follow you even to paradise to have the numbers."

"I know. I have planned already how to hoodwink curiosity."

"But bring the money, for God's sake! for I am dying of hunger."

"You should look out for a notary."

"Do you know Don Nunziante?"

"I know him well. He is an honest man."

“ I will take him with me and we will sign the deed. Good-bye, Don Cirillo.”

“ God be with you, Excellency. We shall meet on Thursday.”

Priest Cirillo shut the door hastily, lest his plans should be overheard, and rubbed his hands gaily, as a man who feels he has done a good stroke of business. And indeed this cunning little old man had well cultivated “ the devil’s garden ”.¹ He thought to himself : the Baron needs money and cannot hold out over the bargain. Monsignor the Archbishop wants the Villa for a school and a theological college. Monsignor the Vicar has been authorized to open negotiations with the Baron, and would have done so already if the functions of Holy Week had not taken up the worthy prelate’s time. The Holy Treasury will be willing to spend as much as a hundred thousand lire, because the position is splendid ; not too near and not too far from the town ; it will serve also as a country house for His Eminence. If I can manage to finish the deal by Sunday, as soon as I am master of the property and have paid off the Marquess of Spiano’s mortgage I have, as they say, ‘ the right end of the stick ’. Thirty and ten make forty thousand lire ; in a few days I can make that into a hundred thousand. Even if I spent fifty thousand, it would be a brilliant affair !

¹ The Italians say “ Ill weeds grow in the Devil’s garden ” ; as we say “ Ill weeds grow apace ”.

Shut up in his garret, in all the squalor of sordid avarice, the old priest's greedy soul was radiant. Crouching and rubbing his hands, he thought he might even ask the Archbishop a hundred and twenty thousand lire and stipulate that he should be allowed a room in the college, a daily mass, a seat at the dinner table and his house linen.

He reflected also that he might cut down the Marchese's account by pointing out that the Baron was a ruined man ; and then, with the excuse of saving a soul, he might persuade the Canon of the Holy Orphans' fund to take one half of the sum due and hush up the business.

Priest Cirillo saw his " pile " grow on all sides, and in the yellow light from the window his *fried-fish* face took on a phosphorescence like an old gold coin. The Baron must " drink or drown " !

He pulled out a big folio volume, a " Summa Teologica " of the great Aquinas, which served him as a register and a box, and began, with his yellow nails, to go over the long list of his loans ; considering which he could call in at once and which he could turn over to a usurer, one Cruschello, with whom he had done business for years.

He looked eagerly down the columns in which were noted the numbers of his certificates, Bank of Naples, State funds, land bonds, Southern railways, Neapolitan tramways, etc., and between them many receipts and pawnbrokers' tickets, securities, small mortgages, bills,

I.O.U.'s; which replaced a torn-out chapter, that in which the Angelic Doctor discourses of the "habitus operativus".

He collected and strapped together all his treasure of greasy papers, tied up the book with a bit of string, and hid it in a strong box which he kept under his bed, fastened to the wall by a chain.

He put on his cloak and his old three-cornered hat, and went out, cautiously as usual, to spend an hour with Cruschetto.

This time he did not care about the people; indeed the old schemer was inclined to indulge in a laugh at his persecutors.

"Oh! Don Cirillo! oh holy priest! give me three numbers and may the Madonna of the Carmine assist you," said a draggled old woman who sat spinning before a little door.

"I say, priest! When will you give me the numbers?" cried a water-seller, the father of seven small children.

"I would if I had them, but they are not certain," answered the priest.

"Give me them, give me them!"

"My horoscope has not succeeded this week. There is Saturn in the sky, interfering with Capricorn." Priest Cirillo was laughing in his sleeve at the trick he was playing the witches and bullies in the lane. "However, try 12 and 77, but for small stakes, because I see them dimly."

"God bless you, holy man!"

And the holy man laughed as he hurried through the streets, his cloak flying and his hat waving in the air ; and reflected that, before the lottery was drawn, he would be an hour's journey from Naples and would indeed have won his prize ! The poor fellow never dreamt that he was running into the wolf's jaws.

II

THE TRAP

THE Baron of Santafusca was wondering how he could make a profit out of Priest Cirillo's avarice ; just as Priest Cirillo had done out of his necessity.

Many plans passed through his head, but one stood out black, amongst its grey companions. At first he drove it away ; but when it still came back he looked it in the face. It was a plan clothed in black, like the priest.

What had Priest Cirillo said ?

That he wished to leave, indeed to escape from, Naples secretly ; that on Thursday the 4th he would come to the Villa with the money in his pocket to close the contract with the notary ; that he would not go back to Naples because there were people who threatened his life continually in order to get " the numbers ".

That was what the priest had said.

One day a band of ruffians had seized him, and God's servant would really have been killed if Heaven and the Holy Spirit had not come to his aid.

Out of these elements a magnificent plan might be put together, provided one was not over-scrupulous and prejudiced.

The Baron felt he must collect his thoughts, and hastened home in a fever of hope and imagination.

He had lived, for some years now, in a little flat of a few rooms, in Speranzella street ; and had with him only an old woman who had been his governess, in the days when the Santafuscas were somebody !

When ruin came Donna Maddalena had hung on to this last relic of a glorious family, with the eagerness of a drowning man who clings to a rock. Even if one must die of hunger on a naked rock, it is better to suffer one day more, rather than die at once.

The Baron had not had the courage to get rid of this poor woman who kept house for him ; or of Salvatore, the last labourer at the Villa, an old man of seventy, half broken by age and infirmities.

Donna Maddalena and Salvatore were all that remained of the old splendour ; all the rest was sold or mortgaged. Neither of them received any wages, but they both lived, poorly enough, on the remains of the house which was falling in ruin over their heads.

Donna Maddalena with her simple trustfulness had put all her savings into the hands of Don Coriolano, who lost, in one night's play, all that the poor governess had saved in forty years of simple life and economy. Now she had nothing ; and daily she must beg her lord and master not to let her die of hunger. Her prayers were not reproofs, but humble and submissive supplications, the devotion and love of a tender mother for a dear spoilt child. To the humble governess everything

Don Coriolano did was beautiful, grand, worthy of praise and pardon.

It must be said that the Baron preserved for his old governess a feeling which time and vice had never destroyed.

Maddalena's wailing voice was still able to move that hardened conscience, long closed to every other affection. A sweet and pitiful echo still remained hidden in the old and ruined building of his heart, and Maddalena knew that she never spoke in vain.

Was he not a scoundrel fit for the gallows (he often asked himself), to rob that poor creature of her money, to let her die in the house, of hunger and solitude ?

And as he returned home from his talk with the priest, he compared this poor victim, who lived on sighs, with the priest who had his mattress stuffed full of money.

During forty years she had shared the destiny of an ancient house, falling in ruins herself along with its walls, never complaining, except when hunger overcame her patience, holding high the flag of honour as long as breath was left her ; while the other, the priest, was undermining those very walls, and trying to take a Santafusca by the throat.

Maddalena had closed his poor mother's eyes, thought the man, as he went upstairs ; and he could do nothing more for her. If he went to prison, the poor woman would die of hunger in the street.

The Santafuscas had the blood of Norman kings in their veins ; so said the chronicles. The last of the

Barons might well die as a brigand, with a bullet through his head ; but it would be shameful to let his blood be sucked from him by a vampire.

By degrees, as his thoughts turned on this axis, the Baron's heart warmed and his courage rose.

What was a vile little priest, compared with him ?

The priest would come with a great deal of money ; perhaps with a list of all his treasures hidden in the mattress.

The Villa was deserted, Salvatore almost deaf, and half-witted.

On Sunday he had to repay the money to the Holy Fund ; if not, *marche*, to prison !

Maddalena was dying of hunger.

In all the world there was but one heart that loved him sincerely and disinterestedly, and that was Maddalena's.

The Villa was in a solitary place and for the last ten years hardly anyone went there.

Money had always been wanted to repair it, and now it belonged to the rats, and to the goats which Salvatore kept in the old garden.

At Santafusca no one knew Priest Cirillo.

No one in town would have observed his departure, and so . . . and so . . .

If you take his money from him, what is this human skeleton dressed as a priest ? He is not a man, but a money-bag. I save my ancestors' honour, I save myself from prison, I save Maddalena from hunger, I pay my debts, I feed many people who are in want, I give alms,

I restore the balance of justice, I accomplish nature's laws !

It is impossible to say how often the Baron thought over all these things, during the few days between Monday and the fatal Thursday the 4th of April.

Time seemed to stand still ; especially as he stayed at home nearly all day long, there in the little study, in the silence of a deserted house, crouching in a corner and weaving this lurid web.

.

Every day, every hour, almost every minute he became more and more persuaded that no other resource was left him, and that some power stronger than himself was driving him towards a great event ; I mean, of course, that he should lay a trap for the priest and . . .

The difficulty was to do the thing without excitement, to plan it carefully and coolly.

He was a man free from prejudice. If he had thought that to kill a man was to commit a crime against nature, or against his direct and immediate superior and master, he would not have done it ; if for no other reason, for the sake of a quiet life and a certain sense of propriety and order.

But he was absolutely certain that man is a handful of earth ; that earth returns to earth and is absorbed in it again. Conscience—Dr. Panterre had said—is a hieroglyphic, written with chalk on a blackboard. It is rubbed out as easily as it is written. Conscience is the luxury,

the elegance of the fortunate man. And God? God is the head of a pin stuck into Heaven's cushion!

As far as conscience is concerned the Baron was quite tranquil.

If he had expected to play the part of Macbeth, or to lose his sleep like old Aristodemus, he would not have stirred in the matter, but he felt sure that he would not imitate them; he was not an actor like Rossi or Salvini.¹

There was only one danger in the business; that was to be in too great a hurry and so get compromised with the police. Society and women are alike in this: they are not angry at being deceived, until they know it. If you keep them in ignorance, women will love you as well as before.

It would be necessary to act prudently, so that Priest Cirillo should disappear noiselessly, like a stone which you let go at the water's surface, and which falls gently to the bottom of the pool.

.

Monday, Tuesday and part of Wednesday went by and still these thoughts persisted. Then the Baron began to suffer from too much reflection, and found that he was uneasy in Naples. Several times he caught himself gesticulating in the street, or, with two fingers outstretched, pondering on a dilemma which arose in his brain; at other times a feverish restlessness in his legs kept him on the move, without a purpose, amongst the

¹ See Note 3.

crowd. He almost began to fear that people would read his thoughts in his wrinkled forehead. On Wednesday morning, impatient, agitated and feverish, he took his pen and dashed off these words :

“ MY DEAR DON CIRILLO,

I have left Naples to-day to give some orders at the Villa. Don Nunziante has gone with me ; he knows about the contract and says that you are doing a fine piece of business. Never mind ! I must suffer for my sins. We did not mention the park which covers more than twenty acres. I would sell you that also if you have the money. But I must have payment immediately because my evil demon made me lose money again last night. I expect you to-morrow.

The train leaves at 12.30 and you will be at the Villa at one.

From the station take the great plane-tree avenue and I will have the gate opened for you. At the Villa you can sleep comfortably.

Au revoir ! ”

At ten he posted the letter, almost wishing to leave part of the responsibility to luck, and by the 12.20 train he started alone for Santafusca.

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Priest Cirillo lost no time.

He also had many things to attend to and arrange so as to escape, without attracting attention, from a persecution he could no longer bear.

He found Cruschello and settled many accounts, letting him gain more than he deserved ; but he was obliged to

be open-handed in order to encourage him to pay and finish up quickly.

Then he went to the S. Giacomo savings-bank and withdrew many bonds payable to bearer which he had deposited there for safety. These represented the accumulation of an old inheritance and of his secret speculations.

Then he wrote a note to his landlord, telling him that urgent family affairs obliged him to leave Naples suddenly; as his return was uncertain he had left the rent and the door-key with his nephew Gennariello, the cobbler, who would remove his things according to his instructions.

Then he hurried to the office of the Holy Fund to put forward the poor Baron's case. He found the Secretary, and with tears in his eyes proved to him that the libertine was on the edge of a precipice. It would not be right by being too severe and inexorable to drive a poor Christian to despair. He had come at the Baron's request to arrange matters. A scandal would only injure the good reputation of the Institution.

Priest Cirillo said so much that he persuaded the Council to accept eight thousand lire as a settlement outright and to cancel the Baron of Santafusca's debt. He paid the money, took a receipt for fifteen thousand lire, and went home happy and triumphant.

The first little business had not gone badly.

Next day he went to the Chapter for information from the priest-chancellor as to the intentions of the archiepiscopal Treasury, and the sum which His

Eminence was disposed to spend on the purchase of a new property.

And they settled it in this way : Don Cirillo would write in the course of the week to propose an excellent purchase which he had nearly arranged ; for the sake of the Church and religion he would not drive a hard bargain. He would not name the spot just now, nor the owner of the place ; and then he went off to settle the affair of the mortgage with the Marchese Vico Spiano. Not finding the Marchese at home, he left a letter. The same evening he received an answer from the Spiano administration which seemed to promise a reasonable settlement.

With so much to do the time passed much quicker for Priest Cirillo than for the Baron of Santafusca ; and God's good servant reached Thursday, the 4th of April, almost without perceiving it.

Usually he went out towards nine o'clock to say mass at the Proto Salvo church.

That day he went out at daybreak when people are occupied with preparation for the day's work. He passed through the low part of the town, and with his big volume of Saint Thomas, full of securities, under his arm he walked towards the harbour where he hoped not to be recognized. To avoid being seen he did not, that day, say his usual mass, but went instead to take a cup of chocolate in a little cafe far away towards the Custom house.

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When Gennariello opened his booth, Priest Cirillo handed him the key and the letter, saying :

“ You are to keep the key till I come back and you will take this letter to Don Ciccio Scuotto the attorney, who lives near the Church of S. Giovanni a Mare. I have to accompany a great man, a senator who has died, to Miano cemetery where he is to be buried in the family tomb, and I don't wish to take the key with me.”

“ Shall I clean your shoes, Uncle Cirillo ? ”

“ Yes, out of respect for the deceased.”

“ I'll put in a stitch or two, if you have time.”

“ I have time, and my shoes laugh too widely for a funeral.”

The priest laughed also at his own words, and let Gennariello mend the holes.

“ I will remember your poor mother's soul in my prayers, Gennariello.”

“ Suppose you give me two good numbers. You give them to others and neglect your own flesh and blood.”

“ We don't know ourselves what we do or what we say, Gennariello. We follow the suggestions of inspiration.”

“ Well, I wish inspiration would come to you for me also ! ”

“ Try playing 23 and 40. . . .”

“ Give me another, blessed man ! Blessings on the Holy Trinity ! ”

“Play 66 also, but not for high stakes, because the numbers are in the shade of Capricorn.”

Gennariello thanked him heartily, believing in him fully, and made the old magician's shoes shine like mirrors.

Priest Cirillo drew his cloak round him, squeezed the volume of Saint Thomas under his arm and went out. The sea wind blew the cloak out behind his back like a sail. Not knowing how to pass the time, which cannot be tricked as men are, he went into the church of the Ospedaletto to hear a mass.

A few people were collected round the altar, listening to a mass for the dead, said by a thin and haggard monk with a cavernous voice who read from a thin, black-edged book.

The light, beating on the yellowish curtains, filled the nave of the church with a sombre air, in which the chandeliers, the lamps and the picture-frames sparkled.

A great peace reigned in the deep and dark corners of the chapels, where the statues of the saints lift their hands to Heaven, and where the dusty statues slumber and the old sepulchres lurk.

“Et lux perpetua luceat ei,” said the haggard monk and, as he turned to give the blessing, he fixed his white and sunken eyes on Don Cirillo.

Crouching at the foot of the marble balustrade, a woman, the deceased's widow perhaps, broke the silence of the cupola with her sobs. She was answered by a

hoarse sound from a lamp which needed oil, there on the right, where a narrow staircase led to the ossary of executed criminals.

Priest Cirillo felt a heavy sadness overwhelm his soul, and the strength of his egoism faltered. He had perhaps been too much attached to earthly goods, and had devoted too little time to edification of souls and moral perfection. Some day the Almighty would require from him an account of the talent entrusted to him; He does not recognize State certificates or accepted bills; He requires payment with the gold of good deeds.

When had he thought for one moment of death and eternal life?

Priest Cirillo swore, with fervid faith, that this should be the last day of his usurer's career. Once he had entered into possession of the Villa, and had concluded the contract with the Chapter, he would think only of his brothers' welfare, and the study of eternal truth. He would be able to distribute alms widely, out of the income derived from his savings, and he would then make a will in favour of the poor and of orphan girls. In the peace of the country, beneath the shade of the olives, amid the joyous chirping of the grasshoppers, in sight of the mountains and the distant sea, in a little white room, Priest Cirillo dreamt of a golden sunset, the glorious sunset of the just man.

"Et libera nos a malo," said he, making a large and precise sign of the cross. He rose and, in order effectually to cover his tracks, he went out by a side door which

opened on a narrow lane. He was moving off, wrapped in his repentance, when he heard his name called :

“ Don Cirillo, Don Cirillo ! for charity’s sake ! ”

“ Who is there ? What do you want ? ”

“ I am Filippino, the hatter ; don’t you recognize me ? ”

“ Are you going to remind me of my little debt ? Don’t you trust me ? ”

“ May I die if I have thought of that ! But I am a ruined man. The bailiff has been in my house to-day, and has threatened to seize my belongings. My wife is ill with erysipelas, and my four children dying of hunger.”

“ How can I prevent this ? ”

“ Charity, Don Cirillo ! At least save us from hunger.”

“ I am a poor man, Filippino. I cannot help you just now.”

“ Listen ! I have a fine new hat, which I had put aside for you. I made it for Monsignor the Vicar, but it was too tight for him. Take it, Don Cirillo, before the bailiff carries it off with the rest, and give me enough to buy medicine for my Chiarina.”

Priest Cirillo reflected that as he was not coming back to Naples a new hat might be useful to him. In his heart he still heard the voice of repentance ; and as Filippino’s shop was at the corner of the little square nearby he went there and put a few lire on the counter.

“ Give me at least twelve lire, Don Cirillo. It is a new hat with silk ribands ; as light as a feather.”

“ I won't give any more ; bless you ! ”

“ You owe me a small account as well. ”

Priest Cirillo reflected that it certainly was not honest to leave debts behind him, so he said :

“ I will give you eleven lire and call it quits. For the old debts will you have three good numbers ? ”

“ Will you give me really good ones ? ”

“ I think I feel inspired. They are passing to-day into the sign of Capricorn ; note them down, for I think they are really good. ”

“ May it be the Lord of Heaven who inspires you ! ” exclaimed Filippino, taking up his pen.

“ Write 4 (this was the day of his happy departure from Naples), 30 (the price of the Villa). And then 90, which means good luck to you and your Chiarina ! Good-bye, Filippino, I am going to accompany a dead man to Miano. Good-bye ! ”

And wearing his beautiful new hat, his mind more at rest, the priest, after a tour through the lanes, reached the station just as twelve o'clock was striking.

Twenty minutes later he slunk into a third-class compartment, squeezing under his arm San Tomaso and all his wisdom. No one had seen him start, and everyone thought he was going to Miano to accompany a dead body. And indeed he had the body with him, under his cloak, but it was the sort of body that brings new life to the living.

“ Good-bye ! I've done with you, City of Envy, of the 'comarra', of Ignorance ! ” he cried in his heart

when the train moved ; and from the depths of his memory there floated up a Latin verse which he had learnt as a boy, which says :

“ *Beatus ille qui procul negotiis . . .* ”

The day was fine, serene, fresh, a real gay April day. But this time the priest was not a good astrologer.

III

ON THE EVE OF THE CRIME

THE Baron was anxiously waiting for his saviour.

The mansion of the Santafusca family, built in the massive and heavy style of the early seventeenth century, given over for years to ivy, heather and nettles, still preserved, in spite of decay, some remnants of its former splendour.

A long avenue of old plane-trees led to the house, across a walled park, where time and neglect had sown every kind of grass and weed, even on the steps of the double staircase which led, in swelling rococo curves, on to the terrace.

Nor were green plants the only invaders. Ivy and wisteria and the wild vine had crept up the walls of the house, almost to the roof, weaving wide curtains along the walls, piercing the cracks of the shutters, clinging to the window bolts, blocking the doorways.

Some old fragments of statues, which had once represented Jupiter or Mercury, now only showed as formless masses of twigs and brambles in which the black stone lay dead and buried ; and the grass grew through the rotten slates of the terrace, a delight to the lizards.

The interior was even more squalid.

All the old furniture, the vases, coats-of-arms, chandeliers and valuable pictures, had disappeared long ago; not to pay the owner's debts, but just to patch some hole in the old leaky ship. For many years now silence and poverty made desolation where, forty years earlier, the noise and splendour and pride of one of the great families of the kingdom had reigned.

I am not speaking of the festivals at the beginning of the century, and the triumphs of the preceding century, when the Santafusca ruled neither more nor less than the Bourbons at Naples.

In those times the old peasants had heard talk of the noisy and princely shooting parties of Baron Nicola, who always went about armed with a pistol, and there were stories of tremendous adventures of violence and voluptuous orgies and crimes.

What remained of all that power? Nothing; less than nothing indeed, for Baron Coriolano was now worth less than the fragments of a statue. Not only was he a debtor for the air he breathed, but prison was his creditor.

He turned these things over in his mind, on the morning of the famous Thursday, whilst he waited for his priest, walking up and down in the cold and bare corridor which led to the terrace.

Of all the ancient magnificence, nothing remained to-day but some rags of brocade hung on the walls, some scraps of gilt moulding, the painted ceilings, some good mosaic; all over-powered by sadness, by loneliness and ruin.

Except for a couple of small rooms on the ground-floor, where Santafusca had hidden a bed and four chairs for himself, more like a den of refuge than a place of repose, the rest of the house was completely empty. All the shutters, all the doors, were closed, and the cold and damp made those vast halls like great caverns, in which the echo of steps resounded, and mysterious shadows flitted past.

Where the darkness was thickest because a great quantity of small branches had spread like a curtain over the shutters, the bats had made their filthy nest, and the Baron did not dare to approach it for fear of awakening that loathsome assembly.

He appeared at the Villa from time to time, like an evil spirit, when he was in his blackest mood and specially furious with his ill luck ; but he never stayed more than a day or two, just long enough to take away whatever could still be prized off from the old splendours ; and he went as he came, without seeing anyone, after sharing Salvatore's frugal dinner.

Salvatore, weakened by a stroke of apoplexy, seventy years old, almost blind and half-witted, spent his time in that desert with his black dog and some goats, which he allowed to feed in the park. He lived, like an old rat, on rubbish ; selling the grass which the goats did not eat ; growing a few leaves of lettuce, and picking up the figs and almonds which fell from the trees. The goats and a few hens provided him with dinner and supper.

Infirm as he was, he only recognized the Baron by

the sound of his voice and by his black beard. Then, some of his former strength awoke in the old man, and Salvatore moved his arms and legs, more or less according to his old habit of obedience and respect, like a torn old canvas which still clings to the frame it knew in better days.

The Baron arrived, as we have said, on Wednesday and slept at the Villa that night.

Sleep is perhaps not the right word, for he had too much to think of to be able to close his eyes in sleep. But neither was it open-eyed wakefulness. Alone in that great deserted place, on the eve of such an important event, on one side driven by fear and debts, on the other by diabolical suggestions, eager to bring off a great coup, but still afraid of not having foreseen every emergency, that profound silence, those endless hours, that hard bed stuffed with faggots, all this could hardly let him sleep.

But, on the other hand, his mind was lost in dreams far removed from reality.

The priest was rich and timid; if threatened and tortured, he would buy safety with his blood, that is to say with his money. But how was one to do it? And afterwards? And if the priest denounced him? The only safe solution was to kill him.

And how could that be done? How to catch him? The old man was suspicious. Not finding the notary, as had been agreed, he would not produce the money; perhaps he would come without money, or with securities

made out in his own name. It would be necessary to act prudently and craftily in this respect also, to receive him gaily, get him to talk, show him the mansion, the great drawing-room above, the kitchen, the stables, the cellar . . . he repeated his idea, underlining, so to speak, the word . . . the cellar.

If he could persuade the priest to go down a dozen steps, below the first great wooden door, once shut up down there neither God, nor Christ nor Satan could help him. Once the door was shut, good-bye to him ! . . .

There were endless labyrinths there, remains of an old medieval castle, on which the new Villa had been built, and no one ever dared to set foot in them.

It was indeed the land of Nothing and Nobody, where the things that were no longer exist. But it was necessary to persuade the priest to go down, and first of all it was necessary to make sure that he had the money about him, or else to get from him a power of attorney, a bill, something . . .

The Baron groaned loudly and turned in his bed.

Now he began to dream. Dark places, dens, caverns, stables, coach-houses, grottoes, basements, stores for casks and wood, wells, passages, garrets, black underground places, black and damp stairs, many strong large cobwebs which clung to him, wrapped him up, prevented him from walking or moving his arms, and a grotesque struggle between himself and a huge black spider, which was, in fact, his priest.

“ Oh ! ” he cried out once, sitting up in bed. It

was dawn. The birds were chirping in the garden and in the wood.

For a moment it seemed as if some sweet recollection of his infancy, passing near him, had brushed his face with its wings ; his thoughts felt rejuvenated, refreshed. Ah ! those lovely mornings, when he rose betimes and ran out to breathe the pure air, to refresh himself in the dew which dropped from the flowering roses ! and when he went out with his owl ; and when he knelt at the sweet sound of the Ave Maria. Maria. . . . The same bell still rang at dawn. Don Antonio, the priest who had baptized him, was still there. . . .

But the problem of life had been easy then. There were no carabinieri hiding behind the door ; he did not know then what the Public Prosecutor¹ was. Now all that was changed. If the priest did not bring him the money, two days hence a Santafusca would be denounced to the Prosecutor. That was certain, and for a nobleman, infamy is worse than death.

Why not kill himself ? Why not escape thus out of these terrible complications ?

Certainly it would be better to kill oneself than to be handcuffed by the police. At this thought the blood of the old Santafuscas boiled in his veins, cried aloud, rushed to his head, the livid walls were red-tinged and all the plants in the garden looked red too.

¹ The Italian "Procuratore del Re", an examining magistrate, equivalent to the French "juge d'instruction".

IV

THE CRIME

“ SALVATORE,” cried the Baron a third time, from the terrace above, making a trumpet of his hands.

The old servant, who was in the avenue, resting on his stick, intent on watching his goats, at last heard his master’s loud voice ; he shook himself and, swaying his body, panting like an old bellows, hurried to receive his orders.

“ You are to take this letter to the parish priest of San Fedele.”

“ Up there ? ” asked Salvatore, pointing his finger at a place, high up in the hills, five or six miles away.

“ Yes ! I can trust no one but you. Stop and sleep there to-night if the road is long.”

“ I can manage to get back to-night.”

The Baron stopped to think a moment. He had six or seven hours before him, before the old man could get back.

“ There,” he said, “ that is for tobacco,” and he put two lire into his hand, the very last of the money Maddalena had lent him.

Salvatore kissed the tops of his fingers, and went off with a tottering step towards the stables, where the road to the village passed.

His master walked sadly up and down alone for an hour, thinking of his desperate poverty.

He had not a penny in his pocket, no credit with his friends, nothing to sell, except what he was now going to sell to the priest. But the priest's few thousand lire would all go to pay off his most pressing debts. After that he was poor and broken for ever, driven perhaps to rob or beg for his livelihood.

The sheep was a fool, not the wolf !

And from time to time he looked through the window, towards the long avenue of plane-trees, to see if his priest was coming.

In the struggle for life the strongest wins. That is an elementary rule of life. It wasn't as if he had scruples ; as if he would fear a dead man's ghost ! bah ! . . . to a scientific intelligence all the world is made of the same dough, and the living and the dead ferment in the same leaven.

A shrill whistle sounded from the green plain below, and after the whistle the wind brought the roar of the Naples train. The parish steeple-clock struck one.

" Will he come ? " asked a terrified voice.

No one answered that voice.

Although he was not superstitious, the Baron was inclined just now to believe in signs. If the priest came it was a sign that he must act.

The whistle sounded again as the train started.

From the station to the gate of the Villa was a ten minutes' walk, but the priest walked like a snail !

“ He has not come ! ” said the Baron with a sign of joy.

He already began to think of leaving.

“ What was he doing in this desert ? What had he come here for ? ”

He was hungry.

For some time he had felt a pain in his chest and had not realized that it was hunger. Now he perceived it all at once and a shudder ran through him.

Was it really hunger ?

When on earth had one of his family felt this disease ? He had a sensation of cramp in his chest.

When ? . . .

The Baron fixed his gaze towards the end of the avenue where he thought he saw something black moving.

“ When ? ” he continued to repeat with an obstinate voice, but his eyes were fixed and staring.

His priest was coming, step by step, up the avenue with his cloak gathered round him and his arm close against his book ; with his fine new hat flapping in the breeze.

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Salvatore, passing before the parsonage, saw Don Antonio the parish priest, in his shirt-sleeves, busy washing the faces of the four silver saints which were to shine on the altar on the first Sunday after Easter, one of the principal holidays of the village.

The good little old man's life was all in his parish

work. During forty years his thoughts had not travelled beyond the limits of the parish, and the greater part of three generations of parishioners had passed through his hands.

Don Antonio, having placed the four saints on the stone bench, in the full sunlight, was preparing in a pan a mixture of pounded pumice stone and plaster of Paris, which he passed over the saints' faces as if he were lathering them with shaving soap.

When he saw Salvatore coming, he began to laugh at himself and his occupation.

"Salvatore, do not say that I am shaving the saints. But the smoke and dust deface these poor images which are getting as black as if they were tin. And yet this is guaranteed silver foil. They cost the Parish, *in illo tempore*, forty piastres each. Where are you going, in this sun, Salvatore?"

Salvatore only understood the question and answered:

"I am going up there to S. Fedele. The Baron has come."

"Come, has he? Is it true then, as I have been told, that His Excellency is going to sell the Villa to the Archbishop? When Monsignor the Vicar passed this way he stopped for an hour in my house and told me that Santafusca would be a good place for a school, and also for a country house. What do you think about it, Salvatore?"

"A priest once came to me to see the place, but we did not talk much about it."

“Does not this visit show that negotiations are on foot?”

“I don't know,” said the old man, who did not feel inclined to talk. And he went on slowly along the path.

“Go slowly, because the stones are hard, and the sun is harder still.”

Don Antonio, who on the contrary liked innocent chatter and talked to himself in default of someone else, went on talking to his saints:

“Certainly it would be most fortunate for Santa-fusca, if that came off. Fancy! To have the honour of receiving His Eminence! You also, my poor saints, would be better off, and I would make you fine golden rays, like those I once saw at the Bishop's palace at Naples.”

“Is it the time to dry these saints' faces, your reverence?” said Martino, the bell-ringer, a wiseacre who had been a Capuchin monk and was fond of discussing points of conscience and of rite with Don Antonio.

“Wait till the sun has dried the paste; then you can work at it. They will come out as brilliant as the stars.”

“I should like to put a case of conscience to you, Don Antonio. If a gourd, forcing its way through the hedge, comes over from my neighbour's garden to mine, can I gather it without sin? The beadle says I can, and the law also is in my favour.”

“The law favours you because the gourd covers

your ground and prevents you from planting your beans ; but if I am to consider the gourd in respect of your conscience, that is another pair of sleeves ! ”

Don Antonio laughed gaily at his dictum, and his snow-white hair shone in the sun, like the saints' faces after Martino's rubbing.

“ What do you mean to say, Don Antonio, by this ‘ hypothose ’ of the gourd on my conscience ? ”

“ I mean to say that a good Christian should not so much consider his right, as his duty. You did not sow the gourd, and if it has come into your garden it is your fault, since you did not make the hedge properly. But it does not draw life from your ground. You should go to your neighbour and say to him : ‘ your gourd is on my ground ; either you gather it or I will. ’ Gourds taste better to those who behave fairly. ”

“ You always have good maxims : you are like King Solomon. ”

“ Without the Queen of Shebe . . . ” added the little old man, laughing heartily. Then he said :

“ The Baron has come. ”

“ What has that savage come for ? ”

“ You want to shave His Excellency and you forget that God has made you a bell-ringer. I hope that Santa-fusca will see better days. Think what good fortune it would be for us all and for our church and for your bells, if what Monsignor the Vicar led us to hope really came about. ”

“ May God and Saint Michael will it ! I dreamt that

I saw you with a gold mantle, and with a mitre on your head."

" Dreams come from God. He spoke through dreams to Jacob and Pharaoh and to Joseph, the husband of Mary. It's true that you are only Martino, the bell-ringer ! "

" If His Eminence came here, he would say mass in our church. "

" Certainly ! "

" And do you believe that the Baron will sell him the Villa ? "

" Make me a prophet and I will make you rich. "

" He ought to give the church a golden pallium. "

" Let us hope first for the edification of his soul ; after that, if we are in time, we will think of the pallium, and the canopy which the rats have gnawed. "

" That always happens, when the nut harvest fails. The rats, having no nuts, get wicked and gnaw the holy things. You ought to curse them one day. "

" Why, poor beasts ? Don't we spoil holy things too, when we are driven by strong appetite ? We are worse than the rats, for we are not always content with nuts. "

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While the parish priest and the bell-ringer chatted in front of the parsonage in the quiet midday heat, the Baron killed priest Cirillo. This is how his plan succeeded.

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The Baron went to meet the priest with an air of gaiety, and enquired after his health and whether he had had a good journey.

Then he added :

“ Come, Don Cirillo ; I have just sent for Don Nunziente, who has gone to the village about a contract. Come ! I will make you as welcome as I can, sportsman’s fashion ! ”

And as he spoke, they went into the house and sat down in the little room on the ground-floor, at a rickety old table on two rickety old chairs.

“ You will find the house empty, but that will make it all the easier to see its substantial value. You are doing a fine stroke of business, Don Cirillo ; and if it were not for my needs, which have me by the throat, I might make four times as much, a year or six months hence. Have you brought me the money ? ”

“ Thirty thousand, as I promised,” answered the priest in a low voice, looking round him suspiciously.

“ I have not mentioned the peasants’ quarters, which are outside the wall. I could sell those houses to the village for the schools, and I have sent Don Nunziente to speak to the Municipal Board, which meets to-day at two. But I am willing to give you the preference if you treat me generously.”

“ And am I not behaving generously ? I am giving thirty thousand lire for a house I do not know.”

“ Excuse me, I don’t wish to ruin you. You shall give me nothing till you have seen with your own eyes

that the house alone, considered merely as a heap of bricks, is worth more than that. In fact I propose, while we are waiting for Don Nunziente, that we take a turn round the place. And then I will take you to see the peasants' houses" The Baron said these last words without looking at the priest's face, his eyes fixed, glued to the windows.

"I have come to look round," said the priest quietly, pressing his book to his heart.

"And are you not going back to Naples?"

"Never again, for *omnia sæcula!*" said the priest, with a determination that went to His Excellency's heart. "I shall stay as your guest as long as the house is yours, and you will be my guest when the house is mine. But at Naples they will see me no more."

"And if they come to look for you?"

"No one knows that I have left, or where I was going."

"But you have so many reasons for going back often to Naples. Priest Cirillo's body is here, but his soul is at . . . at the Bank of Naples." The Baron tried to laugh this time, though he felt his jaws stiff and rigid.

"You do me too much honour, Baron, by thinking me so rich; I have brought with me the few savings of a poor and modest life, and I hope to find in this quiet countryside the peace and repose which is the reward of a simple and unambitious life."

"You will find peace," said the Baron, as if he paid him a compliment; but his words rang as if spoken in an empty vault.

“ Well, let’s see the house, as we are here. I have already observed that it will all have to be rebuilt,” said the priest, rising.

“ Come ; I’ll show you the cellars too, if you like. Will you leave your cloak ? ”

“ No, I prefer——” Priest Cirillo broke off with the nervous motion of an old miser who tries to hide his treasure, drawing his cloak round him. But he could not prevent the Baron’s seeing the edge of the book sticking out, and out of the edge a bundle of nice green certificates of Italian Bonds.

“ I will begin by showing you the gallery. There was once a fine collection of pictures here,” began the Baron, walking closely behind the priest who, already sure of a rich profit, was looking in silent wonder at the painted ceilings, the framed windows, and the good mosaics.

“ This was the dining-room. There is a room for fifty guests.”

“ Who knows what good dinners have been eaten here ! ”

The idea of dinner awoke the idea of hunger, and the Baron felt a return of the pangs oppressing his chest.

He was walking behind the priest like his shadow. His strong muscles were trembling with fear and ferocity, but his stronger will kept these feelings in restraint. His eager eyes followed the line of tendons at the back of the priest’s thin neck. If he stretched out his hands now and clutched that neck in his strong fingers, Don Cirillo would not have time even to say “ Christ ”.

“ This is the reception hall . . . it is dark, but you can see it sufficiently.”

The priest let himself be led very easily, as if his fate beckoned him ; it was he who felt the wish to see everything, to go downstairs into the very darkest passages where the Baron would not have dared to go alone. It was he who, drawn on by the greed of gain, wished to see and calculate how many times the thirty thousand lire were represented by the massive walls ; and he drew his murderer after him, almost blinded by a blood-giddiness, no longer understanding what malignant power was dragging him down.

“ This is the kitchen.”

“ Grand ! ” said the priest in a burst of satisfaction. And he calculated that it would do admirably for a school for a hundred pupils.

The Baron had ceased to think ; now he could scarcely see his priest. As when in love the moment for the last embrace approaches, the blood boils and seems to rush headlong through the veins, and one life mingles already with another ; so while the victim was approaching his couch, the Baron felt his fierce voluptuousness increase.

“ This leads to the stables . . . and then to the cellars. . . . ”

If Priest Cirillo had not been so blinded by his avarice, he would have seen that the Baron's eyes began to look sinister and bloodshot, and he would have turned at the sound of a voice getting ever more dull and dead, like a drum beating for a funeral. But he wanted to

see everything and, thinking of the profit to be made out of the stables by converting them into great schoolrooms, he led the way past the stables and so into a little courtyard, surrounded on three sides by high walls. Here there was a quantity of building material ; bricks, sand and lime ; piled up near a cistern and drain which the Baron had dug out many years before, to collect rain-water for the stables. But the money had run short and the works had been stopped.

Priest Cirillo, anxious to see everything, approached the cistern and stretched his head out to look down.

It was as if he had given a signal.

The Baron leapt towards him, and, without thinking what he had planned, driven as if by the fury of a hundred men, he lifted a great iron crow-bar, lying on the ground where the workmen had forgotten it, and brought it down on the back of the priest's head with such force that the poor martyr fell, as if crushed, on the heap and, without a groan, rolled almost into the cistern.

The Baron dealt him another blow which would have smashed a head of bronze, and the wretched man's little skull broke like an old walnut. The book fell and a lot of certificates were scattered on the bricks.

The Baron saw with the certificates many banknotes of all colours ; these he seized and thrust into his pocket, cramming them down till his pocket was full. Then with the crow-bar he pushed the dead man and the book into the cistern, ten feet deep. The body sank into the mud with a soft pasty splash.

He seized a spade lying there and shovelled in sand and sand, and then lime and more sand.

He worked with the energy of ten men. Then, with all the strength of his mighty arms, he heaved up a great stone, already prepared to cover the mouth of the cistern. He placed it and filled it, as you stick a sheet of paper on a broken pane. Then he took the spade again, and heaped sand on the stone, and bricks and more sand, until he had made a great pile ; and then at last he looked around him. . . .

He was alone ! His forehead was covered with cold sweat. Surrounded by a high wall on three sides, he had nothing before him but the opening to a dark stable. He listened, but all around there was a great silence. Only a lizard had stopped on the wall and lifted its head, as if fascinated. Nothing else ; only a great silence.

Terrified at this deathly silence, he crossed the coach-house hurriedly and, passing by the stable buildings, was making for the garden, when he felt that he must go back and see the place again. Yes—the lime, the sand, the stone, all the bricks, everything was in place. And Priest Cirillo would never go back to Naples !

It seemed to him that the crow-bar, thrown across the rubbish, might attract attention, and he still had the strength to stoop down and thrust it into the heap of lime, almost as far as it would go.

Then, feeling his strength failing him, he went out into the garden, ran down the plane-tree avenue, then

up again, and so came running into a field full of thick grass and sunlight, where Salvatore's goats were grazing. Here he stopped, his feet sinking into the soft earth, and began to look stupidly at the goats which, ruminating, stared stupidly back at him.

V

AFTER THE CRIME—SENSATIONS

EVERYWHERE there was warmth and peace. Butterflies and dragonflies fluttered with transparent wings over the flowers. A bright April sun warmed the earth and let up all the varied green of the olives, the sycamores and laurels. Nature seemed to doze quietly, just as if Priest Cirillo were not dead. The weight of the world was not diminished by that fact.

The Baron fancied that it might all be a dream ; but no ! the bundle beneath his arm was no dream ; that stood for money, safety, honour, freedom, life ; for everything instead of nothing.

He remained for a couple of minutes with his feet sinking in the soft earth, as if a great weight pulled him down, then he felt that he must break the charm and drive away the shudders he felt gathering within him.

“ These are only sensations ! ” he said aloud, answering his own heart.

He wanted to remind himself that sensations pass, and that facts remain.

It had all succeeded perfectly. No one had seen the priest leave Naples, no one had seen him arrive at the Villa, no one knew why he had gone nor where he would

sleep. The Villa now could be shut up for the next thirty years ; and if the lizards told no tales, who would go, without the owner's permission, to shift a mass of stones and sand and look for a man whom no one wished to find ? There was only Salvatore left ; and that poor old imbecile was not troubled with curiosity.

A loud and gay peal of bells suddenly roused the Baron from his meditations. It was Martino ringing a festive peal for the first Sunday after Easter. The sky and the hills seemed to resound with music as if the bells were at play, chasing each other in the air.

His Excellency the Baron of Santafusca, his mind once more busy with his affairs, could not undergo the enormous tedium of waiting for Salvatore till evening. He shut the rooms in the Villa, shut the gate towards the avenue, and then passing through the stable gate, raised his eyes quickly towards the top of the wall which surrounded the little courtyard. He raised them instinctively—not at all because he expected to see the yellow face of the priest looking over the tiles.

He shut that gate also. So now Priest Cirillo could not escape. To avoid exciting any suspicion, he struck across the fields and, crossing the hill by a short cut he knew well, went to post himself on Salvatore's path, as he began to climb the hill comfortably by the longer way.

He sat on a low wall and lit a cigar, like a good countryman who rests after heavy work. From the place where he sat he could see all the town and the splendid Bay

like a fragment of paradise on earth, shut in between two azure basins, formed by the sky and the sea.

In the distance Vesuvius sent up a plume of smoke, and the amphitheatre of the town with the villages scattered at its feet lay white in the dry light of the air, full of warm scents.

Towards the left, behind a thick laurel grove, the grey frame of the Villa stood out, saddened by the shade of a passing cloud.

“These are sensations!” said his voice again, as if the spirit of an anatomist spoke in him; his frowning look stretched towards the horizon.

He relit his good havannah and blew the smoke towards the sky, with the happy carelessness of a man who walks out into the garden from his dining-room after dinner.

Nature was beautiful, sweet, shining, tranquil, as if nothing had happened.

Martino rang a holiday peal gaily, wildly, and the far echoes danced to the sound of his music.

“And sensations pass, but facts remain!” his inner voice repeated, whilst his arm crept down to touch that other “body” which swelled his pocket. How much had that priest with him? He had not had time to count, but he was sure he had seen a great sum, a treasure, which he now felt on him; yet he did not dare to look at it for fear of breaking the dream and finding himself awake, at the due date of payment and with the police at the door.

Salvatore appeared at the turning, dragging his feet along the stony path; he almost reached his master without observing him. Indeed he would have passed him, if the Baron had not touched his elbow.

The old man awoke from his sleepy thoughts and opened his mouth with an Oh! which expressed no surprise.

“I must leave at once,” said the Baron, “and I have brought you the key of the gate. I have fastened everything. If anybody should come to look at the Villa, with the excuse that they have a buyer, say that it is not for sale; indeed, say at once that it is sold and that you have orders not to open it for anyone. Have you understood?”

The Baron spoke so clearly and Salvatore was so attentive that he did understand. The man put his hand to his breast and said:

“No one shall go in, Your Excellency, my master.”

In his humble and submissive bearing one could discern the vassal of old time, ready to give his life for his feudal lord. The Baron felt that, in this matter least, he could sleep quietly, and he added:

“Give me back the letter. I will send it myself by post; and do you go home, Salvatore, for you are old and need rest.”

“Oh, Excellency!”

“I will send you some money, so that you may lead less of a dog’s life.”

“Oh, most illustrious! . . .”

While he said these few compassionate words the Baron's heart was invaded by a warm and tender feeling. Salvatore and Maddalena had carried him in their arms and in their hearts still dwelt the better part of their "young master"; it had not died in them, even though the "young master" had slain it in himself.

He stopped to watch the poor old man, who was obediently returning towards the Villa, to keep company with *the other one*; and a misty veil darkened his sight for a moment. The mist melted; the Baron felt his eyes moist with tears.

Martino began his gay ringing again.

"These are sensations!" once more said the voice of the secret anatomist, which the Baron recognized as that of Doctor Panterre, the famous nihilist. As sunset was approaching, he rose, shook his head, as a lion shakes his mane when he leaves his lair, and looked at his watch. It was four o'clock.

The priest had arrived at one.

How much had happened in those few hours!

The Baron felt that in them he had lived at least ten years of his life.

The train for Naples was due at four thirty-five. He took another cross-road and, avoiding Santafusca, he reached the carriage road. He turned at first towards the sea, went round a farm, and came on to the high road again, walking fast all the time, like a busy man who takes his own route, till the engine's whistle told him that the train was approaching the station.

He waited a little longer, to fill up all the time, and ran into the station just in time to get into the rear of the train. He showed his return ticket and flung himself into the last compartment, which was still open.

In the car there were only two young newly-married people, Swiss or Germans, who were probably going to pass their honeymoon in the arms of the Siren of the Sea. They clung closely to each other, in the midst of a mountain of little portmanteaux, baskets, shawls, and umbrellas; shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, their eyes lost in the infinite splendour of the sea, dazzled by the light which increased at sundown, murmuring little words which contained the sweetness of the German "Liebe".

The girl was blonde, with rosy cheeks and blue eyes, full of virgin innocence. The soul of the romantic creature had no stain, and God was reflected in it as in a mirror.

The Baron threw the end of his cigar out of the window, turned his back on the happy couple and spat on the ground, in his assumed character of a rough sportsman. He held on to the open window with both hands and rested his face on them, supporting himself like a tired-out man; and his staring swollen eyes looked out without seeing anything but a great blaze of flying colours.

As long as the train, which was late, rushed on, the roar and the shaking, the things flying past, his own panting due to his race to catch the train, the throbbing of his pulse, the hurried palpitations of his heart, already

attacked by hypertrophy, left him no time to think. Indeed for a quarter of an hour he completely forgot himself, being absorbed in his physical emotions. But as the train slowed down he began to recover, and came to himself completely as they reached the station. He was astonished to feel so sure of himself and so much at ease. He got out and walked towards the town with the step of a resolute man. As he once more saw houses and shops and people, and his own friends, the feeling of his normal life came back to him.

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Before going home, buttoning his coat up to his chin, he stopped at Compariello's Bar, frequented by the elegant idlers of Via Toledo, to drink an iced vermouth and seltzer.

He stayed there some time, listening to the gay chatter of the young Marquis d'Usilli, the director of the Veloce Club, a past master of light anecdotes.

Usilli, knowing that the Fenice Club had "posted" the Baron, took him aside and said to him in an undertone :

" I am sorry, Santa, that we had to go so far. I defended you, but you were blackballed by twenty-three votes to twelve. Would you like a little money to try your luck again ? I could find you as much as twenty thousand on favourable terms."

" That's just like people ! Everyone offers me money, now that I do not want it."

“ Well, I don’t suppose you have found a gold mine. I know, Santa, that you are in a tight corner. Trust a friend, won’t you? Is what they say about you true? ”

“ What are they saying? ” asked the Baron angrily.

“ That you can’t repay fifteen thousand lire to the Orphan Girls’ Holy Fund.”

“ I hope to be granted a delay . . . ” the Baron muttered, lowering his eyes. “ But let’s hear about Marinella. What is the little wretch doing? Since luck has forsaken me, she says I am an ugly brute. Is Lellina still faithful to Di Spiano? Or does Spiano pay and you . . . ”

“ What are you talking about, Santa. I don’t care for Lellina. Will you have an absinthe? ”

“ Marinella loves me! ” said the Baron, gulping down a glass of absinthe, green as an emerald, which strengthened his voice. “ Marinella only hates my ill luck. But I will make terms with the devil, like old Faust. I’ll sell him my soul for a winning hand of trumps. Or do you think that’s asking too much for the soul of a hardened sinner? Shall we try anyway which of us is to pay for the absinthe? Wait a bit! Let me call up my familiar spirit! ”

The two gentlemen went to the roulette of the bar.

The Marquis d’Usilli set the ball spinning and scored three.

The Baron scored ten thousand.

“ Do you see I have the devil on my side? ”

"That's a fluke. Now you'll see what my guardian angel gives me. . . ."

A roar of laughter followed these words.

Usilli scored one.

Santafusca set the ball spinning with his little finger and made 100,000.

"That's what always happens when one plays for love. But if you had a hundred lire in your pocket, Santafusca, you would see that your devil would steal it at once."

"Who will play me a hundred lire on my devil's horns?" asked the Baron, looking round him.

"I'll take you on, Santa. Play" said the Marquis Spiano, who had just come in and had seen the game.

"All right, Spiano. We will play for a hundred lire this time."

Usilli scored three.

The Baron made 500,000.

More laughter and shouting.

"I won't take your money now," said the lucky winner, "but promise that you will play me at least a hundred lire this evening at piquet or "scopa".¹

Usilli booked the bet for that evening. Santafusca drank again and, excited by the talk, the liquor, and his luck, recovered much of his former charm and spirit, which had been buried beneath the ruins of his fortune. He drowned his thoughts so thoroughly that as he went

¹ A card game played by all classes throughout Italy. It is not a gambler's game and is usually played for small stakes, or none at all.

out and down into Toledo, amongst the crush of carriages and people, he almost succeeded in forgetting his priest.

It was only as he reached home that he again felt a stab of pain. It was almost night when Maddalena came to open the door.

“ Oh ! Excellency, welcome home. What luck ? ”

“ Take the lamp to my room,” grumbled the master. And whilst Maddalena hastened to light the lamp, he stood a moment in the grip of his sensations which were struggling with the imps of alcohol. “ Fool ! ” he exclaimed under his breath, meaning perhaps Usilli ; but that is not certain.

“ The lamp is lighted.”

Maddalena, imagining from her master's face that he had lost once more, went back to crouch on her wooden chair, where she would sit for hours at a time, trying to forget her hunger, looking at the houses, and now and then falling asleep.

The Baron pushed the door of his room to and turned the key.

He was alone and safe, and could at last lay hands on his treasure. But he had still to pull himself together and collect his strength. He seemed to have returned from an endless journey, from beyond the sea, after three or four years' absence ; and yet only twenty-four or thirty hours had passed since he left. He let these feelings pass off also, lit a cigar, and dropped into an armchair, after putting his bundle of papers on the writing-table.

It was time, he thought, to get his reason into order.

If he had expected, on coming home, to find the ghost of the dead man seated on a chair, he would not have undertaken the ugly business. But he was only a man drawn into violence by chance. He was sorry for the poor devil who had lost his life in the affair: but, after all, skin for skin, his skin was worth something too.

It was natural that he should feel afraid at first. You do not kill a man, without giving your blood a turn. Nature has her rights, but they are limited to a nausea which the Baron was willing to put up with, till it passed off by degrees.

Priest Cirillo was a carcass, already consecrated to death. Time would have destroyed by degrees what a man destroyed suddenly. It was therefore only a question of months and days, which disappear in a number of years, and are nothing in endless time.

“If there really were a God on the other side”—thought the Baron in spite of himself—“who, from his gilt cardboard throne, judged these affairs, I should, of course, be in a hole at the day of judgment; and I shouldn't care to see my priest rise out of his cistern. But since I am convinced that there is nothing over there, and that heaven is just a garret where we put away the ideas we have no further use for, whom and what should I fear? shadows? dreams? the devil? priests' nonsense? Therefore, as far as that is concerned, we can live in peace. Priest Cirillo has only paid his debt to nature, rather before his time; and really he

deserved it because he was a miser, a leech who sucked poor men's blood ; in fact, he was actually trying to strangle me, taking me by the throat when I was in the throes of want."

The Baron had to repeat these things to himself, so as to nail them down firmly in his mind.

"The great fight for life has been fought between him and me. The strongest, as always happens, was victorious ; see Charles Darwin."

The Baron turned his head and continued to think.

"The danger, the fear, the terrible fear, the eternal punishment, is that the matter might fall into the hands of the police. Society is so much interested in men's rights, that it eagerly persecutes those who violate them. Every weak man finds his defence and protection in the respect for rights and laws, and the egoism of individuals combines to create this great social egoism which we call law."

And he tried to nail down this thought also.

"He is a dangerous corpse. But you," he thought, blowing the smoke towards the ceiling, "you have taken every precaution ; the magistrate, the newspaper men, the gendarmes and the public will not be disturbed by you. Society is like a deceived woman ; ' what the eye doth not see, the heart doth not grieve for '."

And while his mind revolved in this circle, he felt his blood by degrees running more smoothly and his heart beating more quietly ; his ideas became gradually clearer and more precise.

How many other fears and superstitions, no less foolish and useless, had troubled his childhood, when Maddalena had told him stories of magicians and sprites and dead people who danced in churchyards.

Are we not always rather like children on the knees of superstition ?

“ Come, let's make up our accounts.”

He shook his head, he shook his body, he rubbed his forehead and began to undo the bundle of money.

Besides the money for the contract (about forty thousand lire), the priest had brought with him many bonds, and a long list of numbers and particulars of other securities payable to bearer, all represented by a receipt. The Baron only had to go to the Bank, give up the receipt, and withdraw the papers.

Among the securities he found the receipt given Don Cirillo by the President of the Holy Fund, in settlement of the fifteen thousand lire which Santafusca had owed the Fund.

The priest had not only saved him the trouble of going to the Administrators, but had also saved him the bother of explaining where the money came from.

He found also a letter from Vico Spiano, saying :

“ My secretary informs me that you are disposed to take over a mortgage of L. 10,000 which I hold on the Villa of Santafusca. I have no objection to the transfer, but beg you will settle it with the Baron and with my accountant, Mr. Omboni.”

The Baron reflected that here was a circumstance

which might lead to enquiries. The Marquis of Spiano was too careless to trouble about business ; but he would be ready enough to take ready money in exchange for a mortgage which brought him in nothing. If the priest had spoken to him of the mortgage and of his wish to buy the Villa, it was very natural and likely that the marquis would, sooner or later, look up this Don Cirillo. Not finding him in Naples (the priest's address was on the letter) he might think that Santafusca would know something about him, and would therefore speak to him on the matter when they met. That was a little hole it would be wise to fill up, so as to make the fortress of his defence more safe and solid. How was that to be done ?

Two sharp taps, coming suddenly on the door, made him jump.

“ Who is there ? ” he cried in a strangled voice, stretching his hands instinctively over the papers.

“ I wanted to tell Your Excellency that half an hour ago a priest was here, asking for Your Excellency.”

It was the shaky, wailing voice of Maddalena outside the door.

“ What priest ? I know no priests . . . ” the Baron replied loudly.

“ He said he would come back.”

A silence followed these words. Maddalena shuffled away. The Baron had sat there, stiff and rigid, his fingers open and curved over the money.

Then he locked all the money and securities in a

drawer of the writing-table, except for a few hundred lire which he took with him to try his luck. He dressed carefully, as he always did on great occasions, and putting his travelling clothes into a trunk he locked it and took the key with him. He fastened the room door, and putting the key in his pocket, he said to Maddalena :

“ To-night I shall not be coming home.”

“ Take care of your health, Excellency,” said the good old woman, in her tearful voice.

“ Don't worry about me. To-morrow I shall bring you some money.”

And stopping on the threshold, after a moment's pause, he added :

“ Didn't that priest say what he wanted ? ”

“ He said nothing more.”

The Baron went out.

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It was seven o'clock before he remembered that he was hungry. He had eaten nothing all day, and now he felt almost giddy ; his legs and arms were tired . . . especially his arms.

He thought he might dine at the Caffè d'Europa.

Ten minutes later a waiter, neat and trim, was taking his order in a handsome room decked with mirrors and bright with gilding. Many strangers and a few diplomats were finishing their dinner at a long table. In a neighbouring room a young German couple were whispering soft nothings across a pomegranate, which they were

peeling as they sat opposite each other. The murderer had entered with a resolute step, and the proud eye of a man accustomed to win; and was welcomed with respectful attention by the waiter, himself as smart as a young bridegroom.

The Baron was known at the Europa as a man who was liberal to waiters, no matter how much he might owe the landlord. He looked through the menu, selected two or three dishes and called for wine.

The warm air, full of rich scents, the handsome rooms, the bright glasses, and the bouquet of a good bottle of medoc, soon carried the Baron far away from his priest. His thoughts began to leave their groove, and "the business" grey misty in his memory; like a confused dream, when the light of morning streams into the room.

At ten o'clock, after he had looked in at the San Carlo theatre, where they were giving "Aida" fairly well, he remembered that Usilli was waiting for him at the club.

He was received coldly and rather contemptuously by the few men sitting at the tables; but Usilli, who had taken him under his protection, said aloud:

"My friends! Santafusca is an honest man, and has come to win another hundred lire from me, and to try his luck again. He says he has the devil on his side."

"Only a little devil, that last one," said the Baron, laughing rather forcedly, and those who were winning joined in the laugh.

At eleven o'clock he had already won ten thousand lire.

Usilli, piqued and flushed with impatience, was betting like a madman, and losing continually.

It looked indeed as if the Baron, like old Faust, had sold his soul to the Devil.

At one o'clock in the morning the Baron was playing still . . . and winning.

VI

FILIPPINO THE HATTER

FILIPPINO, the poor hatter, beset by creditors and bailiffs, carefully noted the three numbers given him by the priest : 4, 30, 90.

Then he went into his sick wife's room to consult her.

Donna Chiarina, a gentle creature, devoted to God, recognized Heaven's aid in this meeting with the priest, and decided that Filippino should even sell her gold bracelet to procure money to stake on the numbers.

When a ship is sinking, everything is thrown overboard in order to save it. If, after all, it founders, that is God's will.

So thought Filippino, a dried-up man who looked as if he had been baked in the oven ; a simple fellow who knew little beyond his daily work.

All that Friday and during most of Saturday, a strict fast was observed in the house, so as to secure Heaven's blessing. The children were giddy with hunger and felt the sun and all the planets whirling round in their heads.

Donna Chiarina, who could not leave her bed, told her rosary all the time.

Friday passed, though it seemed eternal. Part of

Saturday passed also, and before three o'clock in the afternoon, Filippino, saying good-bye to his wife and escorted by his four children, went off to Santa Chiara Street to see the numbers drawn.

Many people had collected in the court, in the great doorway, and in a neighbouring lane ; chiefly workmen, fish-sellers, water-sellers, women old and young ; all poor people, who hang their hope on a string each Monday and live through the week on dry bread, seasoned by pointing it towards their hope.

Hope is nothing, but it gives things a good flavour.

Donna Chiarina lit two tapers before a miraculous image of our Lady of Loreto and prayed continually, with such fervour that she might have burst open the gates of paradise.

"Hush ! hush ! there they are . . . here they come. . . ."

"Who ?"

"The authorities, the boy, the policemen."

"To-day the earthquake numbers will come out."

"There is the suicide of the Englishman who hanged himself at the hotel."

"No. 18 is to-day's number, you will see, Nunziatella."

This was how the people talked, crowded together, tortured by greed and curiosity.

Many hopes are set alight and burn the heart like a live coal ; then come the last doubts, the last discouragements ; people talk and laugh to drown their cares.

Silently the small boy, blindfolded and with bare

arms, plunges his hand into the urn and draws out a little roll of paper which he passes to the Inspector ; it is entered in a book, it is stuck up on a board and the town-crier calls out :

“ Four ! ”

“ Papa ! Papa ! Four ! ” cry the children, during the murmur which follows the announcement of the first number.

“ That’s nothing, children. Anybody can hold one number, just as you can hold a dead fish in your hands. The thing is to get the three numbers.”

So says Filippino ; but his heart beat furiously when he heard that first number announced.

Then came another minute’s silence. The boy plunges his hand into the urn again, draws out a number, which is registered, placarded, and the crier calls :

“ Thirty ! ”

“ Papa, Papa, Papa ! ” . . . scream the four children, like four young eagles.

Filippino, whose voice and whose soul are both a-tremble, whilst the murmurs of the crowd increase, feeling that he is losing his head, collects his thoughts with an effort and scolds his children :

“ Hold your tongues, you young idiots ! What do two numbers matter ? You can have the head and the tail of the fish, without having the fish. Luck is like the sea-wave, which pushes you towards the shore, but never lets you land, and sometimes smashes you against the rock. Do you make out for sure, Angiolillo, that it is really thirty ? ”

Filippino hoisted the smallest of the children in his arms so that he could read the number over the people's heads; the father's eyes were in a mist.

"It is thirty! I know it quite well!" the child cried.

"Well! that's no good whatever. We must win the whole three numbers; otherwise it's like winning a handful of flies."

"They say that the government takes the dangerous numbers out of the urn," said a big smith to a handsome girl from the Market.

"The lottery is a trap," she answered.

"Like love, my dear," said the smith, who wanted to see that pretty cheek blush.

Filippino tried to attend to this conversation so as to relieve the strain, to quiet his nerves, to kill time. If his Chiarina had been there . . . but the good woman just then was dreaming she had found a swallow's nest. Meanwhile he kept pulling at Angiolillo's little curls as if he wanted to pull them off.

The boy thrust his hand into the urn for the third time. He drew out the number, which was entered, published, and the town-crier, this time with a voice like a cannon-shot, shouted:

"Ninety!"

Filippino kept on saying mechanically:

"Flies, flies, flies. . . ."

A hurricane of voices greeted the appearance of 90, the great lord of the lottery, the illustrious number, which in its pontifical majesty comes at the tail-end of

the procession, the last of the series, the symbol of abundance !

“ Papa, little papa, ninety, the three numbers, look, Papa. . . .”

But the children got no answer. Filippino, as if he had been clubbed on the neck, waved his head, rolled his eyes, screwed up his mouth and kept on repeating :

“ Flies, flies ! ”

Around him was the mist which enveloped our Lord on the Mount. His legs refused to carry him. He heard the children who were yelling and climbing up him, but he could see nothing.

“ Help, help ! ”

“ What’s the matter ? ”

“ He is ill ! ”

“ Who is he ? ”

“ An epileptic ! ”

“ He has drawn the three numbers.”

“ It’s the heat.”

“ Carry him out.”

“ Call a cab.”

“ Make way, make way ! ”

Some municipal guards hurry up. Filippino is lifted and carried out of the crowd, followed by a train of people who question, exclaim, give their opinion, make comments and embroider on the information they receive.

Angiolillo has flown home like a bird, to take the news to mother.

Half an hour later the Market is talking of nothing

else. Filippino, the hatter, had won a "terno" on three numbers given him by Priest Cirillo in exchange for a hat.

Before nightfall the names of Filippino the hatter and Priest Cirillo were in everyone's mouth.

"It's a big prize. Some say one hundred, some two, some three hundred thousand lire. Don Nunziente has seen the ticket and knows that Filippino has staked the very existence of his children. Could not the priest have favoured us all a little?"

The wasps' nest, stimulated by wonder, envy, annoyance passion, raised a small revolution in the little streets, in the little shops, in the fish-marts, and most of all in the Market, where the priest's house was.

Gennariello, the cobbler, now appeared on the scene. He had received the house key from his uncle, whom he had not seen for two days. Don Ciccio Scotto, the famous "paglietta" or poor man's lawyer, who had received Don Cirillo's letter, also appeared towards evening. He opened the house, amid a great turmoil of unkempt women who were discussing the news. The priest had left his house on Thursday: Ciamminella had seen him go out at daybreak, and he had not returned.

Gennariello, who had borrowed money to play the numbers given him by his uncle the priest, appeared as if stunned all that evening, and nobody could get a word out of him.

People pitied him

“There! trust to relations’ charity, poor martyr. He gave you the wrong numbers because you are his sister’s son, and then gave the good ones to Donna Chiarina’s husband.”

“‘Fresh and loving bride’,” hummed the water-seller. “Who will not willingly give a present to a pretty little woman?”

“The devil takes a hand in these things, Ciamminella. I wouldn’t touch a penny of that money!”

“Nor I, Carmela. He who buys luck sells his soul.”

The crowd and excitement were no less before Filippino’s shop. The poor man, brought home half dead, found his wife half dead in her bed. The whole Sunday was a day of sighs, exclamations and swoonings, with a great consumption of peppermint and orange flower water. Fortunately, being Sunday, the shop was shut. People stood about in the little square all day long, looking at the shutters, the blinds, and the hatter’s sign, as they do on the spot where a bloody murder has taken place; so that the doctor had to come in through the neighbour’s door, breaking down the brick division wall.

Don Nunziante, the notary, representing Filippino, succeeded in getting information from Commendatore Berti, the Director-General of the Royal Lottery, as to the amount of the prize and the method of drawing the money, and came at dinner-time to say that by correct calculation, after deduction on account of income tax,

etc., Filippino Mantica had a right to 455,000 lire ; not quite half a million, but not much less. The Mantica couple listened to this huge figure with a feeling of dread.

They were afraid that it was a feverish dream, or that there was some sorcery in it. This stupefaction, this sleep-walking, lasted till Monday, when the doctor persuaded them to be let a cupful of blood.

But we must now go back, and follow the Baron, step by step.

VII

TOO MUCH LUCK

THE Baron, as we have said, was playing and winning constantly. And while he dealt the cards to the Marchese Vico Spiano, he took the opportunity of turning the conversation on to the question of the mortgage. Without raising his eyes from the cards, he said :

“ A priest came to me yesterday to say that you had promised to transfer the mortgage on Santafusca to him.”

“ That is so. My agent spoke to me about it, and told me it would suit me. I have written to the priest, but I have not seen him again.”

“ I can guess who it may be,” added the Baron, spreading his cards quietly on the table. “ As a matter of fact, I had some idea of selling those four walls to pay off my debts. But now luck is ‘ changing style ’, as Petrarch says. If you have time, I can take up the mortgage myself . . .” and the Baron laughed, raising his eyes to the clock. It was only two in the morning, and the gamblers were amusing themselves so well that they were not inclined to leave off so early.

“ All right. I will stay till I lose the amount of my mortgage,” said the Marquis of Spiano. “ I’ll stake the amount of my claim.”

“As the Devil is on my side, I won't take advantage of the position. Let's turn these four cards. Here is the queen of clubs. Are you sleepy, Vico?”

“Rather.”

“Let's make up our accounts. You owe me eight hundred lire. That's hardly enough to pay off the mortgage. But if you like to risk the whole mortgage on the pack, I leave the cut to you. Here is my money.”

The Marquis took the pack, cut, and lost.

“Now we are quits,” said the Baron, laughing in his beard. “You can send me the deed at your leisure. The shades of the old Santafusca will rejoice. That mortgage was like an oil stain on an old piece of tapestry. . . .”

Soon after this, the Baron, tired, worn out by fatigue, by his emotions and the excitement of play, fell asleep on a sofa in the club-room, and his sleep was heavy, overpowering, and sticky as pitch.

His mind was troubled by rapid disconnected visions which could hardly be called dreams; it revolved in the dark depth of a syllogism which issued from the blackest caverns of his brain and appeared broken, torn, partly veiled. The effort he was obliged to make cost him unbearable anguish. In the midst of loathsome phantasms full of cobwebs, he had to put together the fragments of an inconclusive argument, which fell on his head with the heavy flight of a monstrous bird. There passed by him, in that leaden sleep, things bright and things black, stretches of sea, stretches of wall,

white marks of quicklime, broken subterranean cellar stairs ; amongst all which things his syllogism wandered with the look of a priest, who was hunting for something, turning over the sweepings. And that priest was simply Doctor Panterre, dressed as a priest for fun, with those big jowls of his, who laughed . . . and then the idea returned which stuck so painfully in the folds of his brain, and said : " A man's value and a lizard's is one and the same."

And thus he lay, snoring like a bear, till nine in the morning.

When he opened his eyes and looked about him he could not remember where he was. The pale light of a rainy day came in at the great windows, and poured its sadness on the card-tables, on the scattered chairs, and on the atmosphere of this cold and deserted room, which a few hours earlier had resounded with laughter, chatter, and oaths.

On a silver plate lay the gold pieces and banknotes which represented the Baron's winnings ; just as he had left them on the table before shutting his eyes.

The sight of all that money brought back to the gambler's memory the impressions of the night before ; he recognized where he was, he remembered having played desperately, and a faint echo of the noise and chatter of that night awoke in his confused brain.

Although he had slept longer than usual, he felt his eyes misty ; a bitter taste was in his mouth, and a feeling of sadness throughout his body which he could not

account for. Then, little by little, and rising, as it were, from sensation to sensation, as if he mounted a steep ladder, he remembered that he had dined at the Europa, that he had met Usilli, that he had travelled the day before, that he had . . . As he reached the top of his recollections, he started, looked round him with terror, sat down, felt his pulse throbbing in his temples and his heart shrinking and contracting.

Fortunately he was alone.

He must let these sensations subside also. Life is a river which after a hurricane runs turbid ; but let the water pass and by degrees the river will run clear.

He rang the bell, and when Raffaello, the porter, appeared he ordered a cup of coffee, with plenty of rum.

He stayed there a little while, talking with Raffaello about one thing and another, so as to recover his voice and pull himself together.

He gathered up the money without counting it ; thinking in his heart that, if luck had come his way only a day earlier, he might have been spared killing the priest.

“ Heaven and hell are at the bottom of a bag. You put your hand in and draw by chance. . . . ”

Thus he grumbled as he went down the main staircase. He felt tired . . . especially in the arms.

When he reached the door, he stood looking carelessly at the stream of people crossing in all directions, with the straight and rapid step of those who know where they are going and what they are doing. It had stopped

raining, but the air was grey, heavy with mist. The streets were dark and muddy.

He felt a complete lack of will. He didn't know whether to go home, or to go and call on Marinella, or to have breakfast. He was not hungry, and his mouth tasted sour and thick.

Cabs passed, two-wheel carts, omnibuses full of people; everyone had some thought in his head, some wish in his mind, something to say, to fetch or to carry. He felt like a lost man amongst these people, as if the fatigue of killing that priest had used up all the freshness of his life, and condemned him to live like a dried-up man, in a shrivelled husk.

A strange inclination led him towards the populous quarters of the Market; but at a certain point he stopped. It seemed to him that Naples was full of priests. He had never seen so many. They came round every corner. Perhaps he was noticing it for the first time. What a lot of priests!

He began to look at the prints and photographs in a bookseller's shop-window, and indulged himself by buying Stanley's travels in Central Africa. He wanted to emigrate, at least in thought, till things had settled down—till life had run clear again.

But already he was feeling that it is easier to kill a man than to get rid of a prejudice.

He could not be contented to live like this, minute by minute, like a watch. He must do something to give life a good shake and make all the dead leaves fall at once.

VIII

THE HAT

FOUR or five days after the terrible deed which we have described, Don Antonio, the parish priest of Santafusca, was in his garden busily watering his roses and reproaching the ants, who did not behave properly towards a man who might have used fire and sulphur against them.

Priest Cirillo slept silently in his cistern, beneath the heap of bricks.

The lovely morning sun, passing through the leaves of the trellis, covered the walk and the old parish priest with golden patches, trembling like little flames.

Still robust at seventy, Don Antonio savoured the delight of the morning breeze. The morning is the youth of the day, a youth which comes back daily ; whereas the other, alas ! once gone, returns no more.

However, the good old man, who felt the dew from his flowers sprinkled on his silver hair, thought that in the love of God one is always young enough, and that a good man's heart does not grow old.

He was thinking thus, with his watering-pot in his hand, when Martino came running up to tell him that Salvatore had fallen down on the road, and was very ill. Don Antonio had better run down towards the Villa

with the holy oil, if indeed it was not too late, and he would run to ring the church bell.

Don Antonio hurriedly left his ants, ran to the church, took his three-cornered hat to protect himself from the sun, pocketed his stole and the vessel for the holy unction and hurried down towards the Villa as fast as his legs would carry him, following some peasants who had helped to carry Salvatore home.

The poor fellow was really dying. A second stroke had proved too much for his strength, already feeble. Salvatore lived at the Villa, in a little room on the ground floor which in the old days had served as a refuge for the birds in their moulting season. A few rags, an old chest-of-drawers, a couple of chairs, a straw mattress, these were all his wealth. Above the bed hung an old gun, which for ten years had not even killed a sparrow. Rust was silently destroying it.

The dying man only murmured a few disconnected words, but Don Antonio, remembering that he had confessed the year before, and that since that he had not even thought of sin, gave him absolution *in articulo mortis* and closed his eyes *in vitam aeternam, amen*.

Martino remained to watch the corpse, together with the communal messenger.

“There is a man who has reached the harbour,” said the old priest to himself, as he went towards the vicarage. And turning over in his mind how to give him a humble funeral, and how he should write the sad news to the Baron, as he went slowly up the narrow path he

saw on the ground the shadow of his hat, sharply outlined by the sun ; and he stopped. He turned his head about a bit to show the shadow on the earth ; and it seemed to him that it was not the usual shadow ; not the shadow that for so many years had accompanied him when he walked in the sun.

The difference lay in the brim. Whereas usually his large triangle, with its wings spread like a sail before the wind, almost filled the whole path with its shadow, looking like a great bird, crossing a stretch of sea with tired wings ; now the bird seemed lighter and more graceful, seemed in fact to be the son of the old bird.

Not knowing how to explain this strange phenomenon, Don Antonio took off his three-cornered hat, and saw that there had been an exchange. It was no longer the old hat, with the old fur, the worn edges, the red stains ; but a charming new hat, just out of the maker's hands, with silk ribbons and a blue silk lining like the " monsignore's " cap ; a real " monsignore's " hat.

" What is the meaning of this ? " exclaimed Don Antonio, " I have read in the holy writings, that a raven brought a loaf of bread to the prophet Elias ; but I have never heard that God sent new hats to poor priests."

The oddest thing was that the hat seemed made exactly to fit his head, as if God had actually taken his measure.

Not knowing how to explain the mystery, but feeling sure that the exchange had taken place in the dead man's

room, he said nothing to Martino just then ; but when he went back for the funeral, he looked round, and saw that, sure enough, his rusty old hat had been left on a chair in a corner of the room ; and that he had taken the new one off a chest-of-drawers, where you could still see the mark of it in the dust.

Conscience should have made him leave the new one in its place, and take his own again ; but as he went out with the corpse, whether by accident, or by a wicked suggestion of the evil spirit who delights to overcome a scrupulous conscience, the fact is that the good priest once more took the new hat and left the old one on the chair.

“ This is not stealing,” his conscience said, whilst the funeral moved towards the cemetery, “ because it’s not theft to take a hat from a poor dead man. Down there, underground, there is no fear of his getting sun-stroke. Besides, I ought to be paid in some way for the funeral. Salvatore leaves nothing but his dog behind him, and if I wait for the old libertine, his master, I may whistle for my payment. Still it is doubtful,” murmured his discontented and unquiet conscience, “ whether the hat did belong to Salvatore, or whether it was in the room by chance, or had been lent to him. Anyhow I have left my old hat in the place of the new one, and when the owner observes the exchange, he can come to the vicarage to claim his property.”

Having quieted his conscience with this reflection, he mentioned it the same evening to Martino, the ex-

capuchin monk, who was good at solving cases of conscience ; and he also thought Don Antonio was justified in using a hat which, after all, belonged to no one. However, to dispose of the last remains of conscience, the priest was liberal in the " offices " and said a mass for the dead, for the relief of Salvatore's poor soul.

And he kept the hat.

Salvatore had died without saying how it came to be in his room.

His dog might have explained that when he went as usual to hunt about in the straw in the stable he had found it in a corner and taken it to his master, as he always did the birds which Salvatore shot.

But dogs do not speak.

IX

THE PRIEST'S RESURRECTION

THE Baron was right. After the first three days the sensations began to clear away ; by degrees he took up his old way of life, and, as a strong and practical man, he found himself able to look his crime in the face as an incident no worse than the rest.

The Marchese Spiano sent him the mortgage, which the Baron threw into the fire with the priest's letters and other papers of no value. So he could sleep quietly in this respect also. He also burnt the securities drawn up in the priest's name, but this left him still with a boxful. Besides his winnings at the Club, he could have sent to the Bank of Naples and cashed nearly ninety thousand lire's worth of State certificates payable to bearer ; there was no fear of the priest stopping the numbers of the certificates. Dead people don't come forward willingly !

At the Club he was welcomed ; and Marinella had never been so fond of him.

" You ought to take me to Paris, Baron," said the gracious nymph, encircling him with her splendid arms.

" Why not, Nelluccia ? That's a plan we might consider."

A journey to Paris, a change of air, would do no harm to a man who still found some difficulty in recovering his normal self. He did not love Marinella, except for the pleasure she gave him ; and she was a foolish creature who would not bore him with useless questions and metaphysical discursions. Friday, Saturday, Sunday passed, Monday followed, and no one appeared to ask him for news of the priest.

From time to time, when the blue devils seized him, he took a bath of philosophy ; that is, he endeavoured to call to mind the principles on which the earth rests, like a bucket on a three-legged stool ; namely, that everything is of the same value ; that a man is worth no more than a lizard ; that material things are everything ; and that as nothing exists which can be destroyed he had only modified the existence of the . . .

He made a habit of slurring over that word, so as in course of time to suppress him altogether.

One day he was reading the *Treatise on Things* by the celebrated Dr. Panterre, the terrible nihilist, and was delighted to find, formulated in splendid aphorisms, those proofs and consolations which his mind had only dimly perceived.

“ A cannon ball, travelling at the rate of 500 metres a second,” said a chapter of the famous book, “ from the earth to the sun, would take nine and a half years to reach the latter. And the sun is the nearest star. To reach another star, the nearest after that, the ball would take more than nine million years. And to reach the

furthest visible star? Eighteen thousand million years! Try to write down these appalling numbers; try to imagine them! and beyond that star of the sixteenth dimension, the telescope discovers clusters of nebulae which are perhaps universes of stars. Ah, sweet philosopher, what is your life in this space?"

"All humanity together, looked at from a hundred miles' distance, is nothing but a microscopic fungus which has collected on the dampest part of a crust."

"If the sun, by some caprice, travelled away from us for one single day, all this fine flowery globe would change, in a twinkling, to a lump of ice. Who would find, in that ice, your armies, oh! Emperor of all the Russias? How powerful a lens would be needed to discover, beneath a mass of ice, your volumes on Pure Reason, oh! pretentious philosopher of Königsberg? In these vast proportions, based on the zodiac, of what importance is my duty towards my neighbour?"

The Baron as he read these aphorisms felt his conscience expand and float in the immensity of space and time. A deep tranquillity, like the dumb fatalism of the Orient, replaced the tedium and vexations of thought, imprisoned in the web of common life. Proudly and magnificently he took his ease in that space of millions and millions of terrestrial rays in which he saw the thin little body of that old priest sink.

And he would have gone to sleep once more in his metaphysical vision, if Maddalena had not suddenly

knocked twice at the door sharply with her knuckles. The Baron started.

“Excellency! That priest has been here again this morning.”

“What does he want?” said the Baron in a hoarse voice.

“He wants to speak to Your Excellency.”

“Did he say who he was?”

“He wouldn't say. He will come back.”

The Baron began to feel bored with this other priest who buzzed about him like a house-fly. He knew no priest except . . . Who could this be, who had already called twice to look for him at home and who refused to give his name? not that he feared the ghost of Priest Cirillo: as we know, the Baron was no Macbeth.

Still, Priest Cirillo might have friends who knew of his intentions; suppose these friends came to ask about him? . . .

His eye, fixed and crystallized in this thought, had fallen on a page of an American almanac fastened to one of the window shutters which still bore the large black number—4—the day of the great event.

That 4 seemed like an accusation; and the Baron got up to destroy it, when he heard the voice of Madalena again, saying:

“Excellency, here is a letter.”

Every little event now was a cause of apprehension or fear for the wretched man; much water had still to

pass before he could see to the bottom of things with a serene spirit.

He forgot the almanac, and hurried to get the letter.

It had come by post and was stamped at Santafusca.

His hand shook so that the letter slipped through his fingers and fell on the floor. He shut the door hastily, picked up the letter and, repressing a wave of anxiety in his breast which threatened to choke him, let himself drop into an armchair ; tore open the envelope, opened the sheet of paper. . . .

Of course he didn't imagine that the priest was sending him a receipted account ; but how many thoughts crowded into his brain in that one minute ! And every thought united to form the one question ; have they already found him ?

The letter was signed : " Jervolino, secretary."

It was, in fact, the Communal Secretary of Santafusca, announcing the death of his faithful servant Salvatore, from an apoplectic stroke on the public road ; and the letter stated that the writer had closed the gate of the Villa, and taken charge of the only key, which would be kept in the hall of the Communal Council, awaiting those further instructions which His Excellency would graciously impart.

Nothing about the priest.

In fact the tone of the letter could hardly be more reassuring.

" That's all right ! " exclaimed the Baron on a full

note, like a baritone trying his voice, and he felt his spirit at rest once more.

“ Poor Salvatore ! ” he added, bending his head and raising his hand to his eyes. His grief was sincere, since his soul was not closed to all the memories of his youth, of days when he used to go out shooting on the hills with Salvatore.

The poor old man had chosen to die on the road . . . as if he could not bear to close his eyes in a house accursed.

This was poetry perhaps, or rhetoric which had somehow clung in his mind ; but he could not avoid these thoughts. On the whole he consoled himself with the reflection that it was all just as well. With Salvatore dead and the Villa closed, with no suspicion anywhere, the priest simply could not be more securely buried.

He would write and have the key sent him, and *amen* ! the place could be left uninhabited and shut away from curious eyes.

A new vigour seized him. Everything was going like clockwork, and it all proved that, in this world, chance is still stronger than any forecast.

That he might enjoy a fine day with Marinella, with whom he had promised to dine, he went to be “ beautified ” at Granella’s. Granella was the barber and perfumer and his window showed many Exhibition medals ; his respect for the Baron increased in direct proportion to the quantity of perfumes he bought for Marinella.

He had another reason for going to the shop, namely to make Granella talk ; for Figaro’s worthy heir was the

walking newspaper of the town, and he wanted, through this channel, to hear what the public were saying.

“ Well, what news, Granella ? ” he asked when he was seated and swathed in spotless linen, like a priest of the ancient times.

“ Much news of interest ; the ministry has fallen ; Bismarck has received the Russian Ambassador, and it seems that war with Turkey is inevitable ; my landlord is dead and Filippino Mantica has won half a million at the lottery.”

“ Who is this Filippino ? ” asked the Baron, who was listening with heartfelt attention. But he saw that his priest was dead all right.

“ Who is he ? To-day he is the happiest man in the world. Saturday morning he was the poorest hatter in Naples.”

“ And he won, you say. . . .”

“ There are winnings and winnings. This is upsetting the Royal Lottery. To think that, if I had half a million I shouldn't be a barber ! ”

“ Try it.”

“ Oh ! if I buy three numbers, the Devil devours them.”

The Baron laughed. It was the first time for days he had laughed heartily. Nothing about his priest. Naples, then, had noticed nothing. It was as if a fly had disappeared.

“ But the best of all, Your Excellency, is what people say about this hatter.”

“What do they say?”

“It is said, (and I repeat the thing without embroidery!), that the hatter has a young and pretty wife, who received the three numbers from . . .”

“From whom?”

“Guess!”

“How can I guess? From a lover?”

“From a priest!”

“Ugh. . . .”

“Yes! from a cabalist, a necromancer, who lives down there in the Market quarter, who knows algebra and gives these numbers to pretty little women!”

“And who is he?”

“See! the whole story is in yesterday's *Piccolo*. All Naples is talking about it. Where is it? Ah, here it is. Read it! It will amuse you. Will your Excellency have cosmetic or brilliantine?”

The Baron took the paper, opened it, and right at the top of the first page, he saw written as the heading to an article, in capital letters, these exact words:

PRIEST CIRILLO



X

FIRST TERRORS

IT is difficult to say what the murderer felt on seeing in large type a name he thought he had rubbed from off the face of the earth. If he had not been in an arm-chair, he would have fallen helplessly to the ground. He felt a great weight all over his body ; his blood ran first as hot as molten lead, then as heavy as mercury ; and it was only because of his extraordinary moral energy, fortified by metaphysics, that he did not betray himself by some unwise gesture or by a cry !

Luckily Granella's attention was taken off by some people who came into the shop just then, and he did not observe the livid pallor which overspread the Baron's face. The Baron shut his eyes for a moment, and had time to pull himself together and make his face a mask. But when he looked in the glass he saw that he looked like a dead man.

This is what the *Piccolo* said :

“ The great event in Naples is the lottery prize of near half a million, won by the hatter Filippino Mantica, which has revolutionized the Pendino and Market quarters, where the hatter is well known, and Priest Cirillo, usually called ‘ the Priest ’, even better.

Who is this Priest Cirillo ? A necromancer, a magician,

a cabalist, a Nostradamus, who has the secret of the numbers and wins when he likes, and makes those who please him win also.

The fame of Priest Cirillo began last year, when he saved his skin from the clutches of some roughs by giving them three numbers, all of which came out. These kindly roughs were so grateful for past favours that they threatened to catch him again. It's good to hold a man who coins millions with the lottery numbers !

The priest kept them off with the excuse that he only saw clearly once a year at the conjunction of the planets ; in which, it seems, lies the secret of the numbers.

'The priest lays the golden egg only once a year,' said an old woman, a rag picker, to whom we referred for an explanation of the event. This woman lives in the same house in which Priest Cirillo lived ; we say lived, because the priest has foreseen the excitement and has sailed in time for unknown shores. *Fuge rumores . . .*'

"Isn't that a good story, Your Excellency ?" asked Granella.

The Baron did not answer, and skimmed through the page of the newspaper describing the hatter's house, his family, the number of his children, the use he intended to make of his money, etc. Of the priest it only said that he had taken flight.

"You ought to know something of the priest, Don Ciccio," said Granella, turning to a little old man who was in the shop waiting his turn.

This was that same Don Ciccio Scuotto, the landlord, to whom the priest had sent the letter. Everyone knew him as the great "paglietta" or attorney of the priests

and the poor ; a shrewd, tenacious man, who hated the liberal newspapers, and the abandoned times we live in.

“ I know positively that he has gone away ; but don't you believe the newspapers, which delight in deceiving people. Read the *Popolo Cattolico*, the only paper authorized by the Archbishop. There you will find the truth. The priest was my friend and paid his rent punctually.”

“ Did he pay you with three good numbers ? ” exclaimed another man, laughing, whom Granella had saluted as Don Nunziante.

The Baron, who kept his ears open, looked into the glass and recognized in the man with the fat paunch and the spongy nose the notary he was to have taken with him to Santafusca, to draw up the deed with the priest. He had had occasion to make use of him sometimes, as he lent his services willingly to people in troubled waters, and advanced money at a reasonable interest.

Don Ciccio and Don Nunziante were old friends and rivals, who lent each other a hand, when their interests did not clash. They both knew Priest Cirillo.

People, when they saw the lawyer, the notary and the priest together, used to say :

“ There go Don Saw, Don Maw, and Don Claw ! ”

A good client passed through their hands as through a sieve. These two good men who sat in Granella's shop were dressed in old-fashioned style ; wide coats with large pockets, always full of papers.

Don Nunziante, however, was a large man with broad

shoulders and a loud voice ; whereas the lawyer was small, sour, grasping, thin as a whistle, nervous as an electric bell ; he always wore a white hat with the fur ruffled up.

“ People say that he has gone to Rome, to take the offering to the Pope,” said Don Nunziante. “ Priest Cirillo learned necromancy to rob the Government and give the money to the Pope. Isn't that true, Don Ciccio ? ”

“ You speak like a liberal journal,” replied the lawyer sourly. “ Necromancy is a diabolic art, and the Church requires no such support. *Et portae inferni non prævalebunt . . .* do you still remember your latin ? ”

“ Has he written you to say where he is ? ”

“ He has written and he has not written,” said the ruffled Don Ciccio with a haughty air. “ What irritates me is to see contempt of holy things, which should be respected.”

“ Tell us at least if you think he will come back. People are supposing all sorts of things, each worse than the other.”

“ People, people, people . . . people ! ” Don Ciccio took a half turn round the room, accompanying each exclamation with a smile, full of bitter annoyance. He gave his waistcoat a sharp pull and passed his sleeve over the fur of his white hat, as he hung it on a nail. The hat hung, its fur rougher than ever, and seemed to share in its owner's sharp disdain of the people and the liberals.

“ Your Excellency is done.”

The Baron, who meanwhile had forgotten where he was, shook himself, got up heavily from his armchair, assumed an aristocratic reserve, and moved gravely towards the door. Don Nunziente, who recognized him, bowed respectfully and hurried to lift the curtain. The Baron went out stiffly, all of a piece, and began to walk towards an unknown goal, with no other object than to stretch his limbs and stir his blood. He had been overcome with terror when at first he thought the crime was discovered, and now he was all to pieces.

There are sudden earthquake shocks which demolish any building, and bend any iron bar. Raising his eyes to heaven, he tried to replace himself mentally in infinite space. It was stupid to suffer so much on account of a few words printed in a newspaper ; and once again he felt that his old energy was not dead within him.

Little by little, as the lively air in the streets fanned his face, he began to see that his position was not only safe, but stronger than ever.

This business of the three numbers and the half million came at the right moment to call the attention of people and papers to Priest Cirillo ; and explained, at the same time, his sudden disappearance.

Priest Cirillo had taken flight to avoid the persecution of the ignorant and the wicked, and had every inducement to remain hidden.

When a little time had passed, no one would remember him. Even if his body were found, did not people already think he had fallen into the hands of the roughs ?

Led by these thoughts, the Baron found himself unconsciously in the Market. It seemed to him a good idea to enquire for Priest Cirillo from a woman who was suckling her child on the threshold of the house where the priest lived.

"Does Priest Cirillo live here?" he asked, casting a hasty glance up the dark and damp staircase.

"He has left, Your Excellency," said the woman.

"Where is he?"

"God only knows!"

The woman made one of those rapid gestures by which the Neapolitans express all they think, or don't think.

It did not seem to him that there was so much excitement in the Market as the *Piccolo* made out. At Naples impressions are strong and fleeting; rays of sun on the water which are blinding but give out no heat. This dead man of his, in short, had floated up for a moment but was bound to sink again to the bottom like a drowned man, and never more awake till the day of judgment—that is—never!

In this conviction he returned with a light step and an air almost of challenge towards the people he met, who were really thinking of Priest Cirillo much less than the Baron imagined.

He bought all yesterday's newspapers, including the *Popolo Cattolico*, and hurried home with an eager desire to read what was said of "his" priest. It was not fear, but simply natural curiosity.

XI

THE REMORSE OF CONSCIENCE

DON ANTONIO lighted the lamp before the Sacrament a second time ; half an hour later he found it had gone out again, as if a malignant and envious sprite had blown it out.

Going into the church, once he tripped on the vestry step, and another time he upset the holy vessels.

Those were ugly signs.

He felt he must talk it over with Martino.

“ I think they are warnings from heaven, Martino, because I have loaded my conscience with things that are not mine.”

Martino opened his broad fingers like a V and, touching one finger after another, said to him :

“ Either the hat was Salvatore’s, in which case you are doing right to repay yourself the cost of the funeral ; or it was not Salvatore’s . . . but whose could it be, if it was not his ? ”

“ That is just what I want to know. Whose can it be ? ”

“ It couldn’t be any but a priest’s hat ! ”

“ It is not a soldier’s certainly,” said Don Antonio, and this remark was followed by a fat laugh, which

gurgled down his throat, and died away in his paunch with a tinkle.

“ May Salvatore not have bought it from a priest ? ”

“ What for ? ”

“ As an act of charity.”

“ That's not possible. You see it is a new hat, fit for a Monsignore.”

“ Ah ! I have an idea ! Suppose it belonged to Monsignore the Vicar, that reverend prelate who once came to see the villa ? ”

“ I think it may be so, from its silk ribands.”

“ I would bet it is so ! ”

“ But do you think it possible he would forget his hat ? How can that be ? It has sometimes happened to me to forget my breviary, but my hat ! At all events I may as well write a letter to Monsignore the Vicar, to relieve my conscience of this trifle.”

“ Your Reverence will certainly do well, for the sake of your soul.”

Next day Don Antonio poured a few drops of wine into the inkstand, where his last sermon had dried up a month before, took his pen in hand and said, as he began his fine letter :

“ Peace and the soul's repose are worth more than any wordly possessions, and it is better to go to heaven bare-headed than to hell with the Devil's hat.”

After having read three pages of Segneri¹ to accustom his ear to the sound of fine phrasing, in less than an hour Don Antonio succeeded in putting together this letter :

¹ Pao Segneri, a Jesuit preacher (1624-1694).

"Y. R. MONSIGNORE VICARIO, MY MOST REVEREND MASTER!

The sweet memory which I preserve of your most illustrious Reverence, and the fatherly kindness with which I was, on a late occasion, forgiven and encouraged by your aforesaid Illustrious Reverence, embolden me to have recourse to you, in a case in which my conscience floats like a boat amongst the rocks in a tempest-tossed sea. I need not declare the devotion of the undersigned to the pure principles proclaimed from St. Peter's throne, and to their visible interpreters, amongst whom, a torch of seven flames, is the Most Eminent Pastor who governs the Parthenopean Metropolis, etc., etc."

And in this style, he proceeded to relate the story of the hat found in Salvatore's room ; the exchange of hats ; his conscientious doubts ; the signs from heaven ; and he asked whether, in the Chapter, anything was known of a prelate who, by oblivion, or by any other accident, had forgotten, or left, or lost, the hat.

Two or three days afterwards, Monsignore Vicar answered, with much wit, that it had happened more than once to him and to his colleagues to lose their heads, but none of them remembered that they had lost their hats.

And he ended with sincere praise for the simplicity and virtue of Don Antonio, whose apostolic ministry was not altogether unknown to his Eminence.

Don Antonio was very much pleased with these words of encouragement, which came to him from so lofty a throne, and read the letter twice to Martino, who said :

" I see in these words a great sign, my Don Antonio ; and I hope this hat will be for you the beginning of great good fortune."

“Do you mean to say that I shall get a cardinal's hat?”

Happy and smiling in his overflowing goodness, the old curate took his gardening scissors and began to clip a little yew hedge which surrounded the salad bed.

“I don't say a cardinal's hat; but there are hats and hats. Monsignori, for instance, have a blue tassel in the middle of theirs!”

“Hold your tongue, you joker. You make these hyacinths blush for shame! It seems to me that we are still in our first difficulty; and in my opinion, speaking with reverence, Monsignore Vicar should have solved the question as to whether a priest may pay himself, as a miller would, by keeping a thing the owner has not explicitly given him.”

“When a thing belongs to no one, it belongs to God,” observed Martino. “Moreover, I have looked for your old hat at the Villa, and it is no longer there. A nephew of Salvatore's, who keeps a tavern at Falda, came and carried off the old hat with other things in a bag.”

“So that, between two hats, I am like Buridan's ass between two bundles of hay!”

“Certainly you cannot go bareheaded out on the hills or in the village.”

“It is a fact that I cannot go about bareheaded. Tomorrow I have a funeral at San Fedele, and I cannot go there hatless with this sun.”

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That is how Don Antonio, having put his conscience at rest, became accustomed to use the Devil's hat. At the funeral, where many priests came together, they all admired the lightness of its cloth and the elegance of its cut, which blended the canonical with the mundane :

Sacra mixta profanis.

“ What did you give, Don Antonio, for this dandy hat ? ”

“ Ah ! ah ! one doesn't often see these mushrooms on our hills.”

“ These are the hats which the monsignori of the cathedral wear when they walk about in Toledo.”

“ Don Antonio has come into money from some countess, his penitent ! ”

“ Do golden olives grow on the trees at Santafusca ? ”

Don Antonio, red with confusion, tried to laugh ; let them jeer as they would, he lacked the courage to tell them he had taken it from the room of a dying penitent.

One little priest, more pertinacious than the rest, took him on one side and said :

“ What did you give for it ? ”

Don Antonio fenced a little, and to avoid making much talk about it, he made signs ; showing the five fingers of one open hand, three times. He did not tell it with his mouth, but it was a lie, a downright lie which you could hold with a pair of tongs.

Going home with his soul embittered, he said to himself as he walked along : “ There, priest, now the thief is a liar. One begins with compromising for a mote,

and one ends by swallowing a beam. It is not enough to preach virtue in order to become virtuous. We always find a sophism to thrust into the mouth of conscience when it barks. You, my old sinner, are trying God's patience too much !”

Punishment followed promptly. Before he got home a tremendous hail-storm broke and scattered all his pretty roses.

.

From that moment it seemed as if everything went wrong ; as if the Devil's hat had brought a curse into the house. At night, the black shadow on the wall, on which the moonlight made patterns, awoke him and would not let him get to sleep again.

Things could not go on like this ! He would throw it out of the window !

And he was on the point of doing so, when he noticed on the crown inside a round label, which read :

“ *Filippino Mantica, hatter, 34 Market, Naples.*”

“ We are often fatuous in our presumption,” said he to Martino in the vestry. “ We have wondered so much whose the hat might be, and here it is written on it.”

“ The owner's name is written on it ? ”

“ Not the owner's, but the maker's name, and the number of his shop. As the hat is new, this Filippino will know to whom he sold it, and I shall purify my house from other people's things.”

“ You are a just man, according to the Old Testament,”

said the bell-ringer, much edified ; and he promised to look for a nice wooden or cardboard box, and undertook to carry the hat himself to the railway station.

As happens in small places, the legend of the Devil's hat and the priest's righteousness, spread abroad by the ex-capuchin bell-ringer, went the round of the houses and stalls, and all praised God who had sent them a Pastor such as they were in the Old Testament.

XII

THE SPECTRE OF THE HAT

FOR some time the Baron led a life of retirement and had thoughts of going to some distant land, either with Marinella or alone, to enjoy the fruit of his speculations.

However much he tried to lead his Naples life as before, he was always aware of some obstacle which fettered his freedom. Every cry, every remark, every priest he met in the street, every joke about priests, caused him uneasiness, suspense, suspicion, if not fear.

He read the newspapers daily, and was consoled to see that, after the little episode of the numbers, his priest disappeared again quietly into the shadows. The papers no longer talked of Priest Cirillo. He might never have existed, and if they once mentioned the Baron of Santafusca, it was to announce his election as President of the Sports Club. The punctilious way in which the Baron had met his debts of honour had reinstated him in the esteem of his fellows.

Ten long endless days had now passed, and there was every reason to believe that ten, twenty years might pass as well, years in which the name of Priest Cirillo would be dissolved completely, like an icicle in the sea.

One morning Maddalena came in for the third time, to announce the visit of a priest.

“ Look here ! ” the Baron shouted this time, “ can’t you send him to the Devil ? ”

“ He is here ! ” said Maddalena, scared.

“ What does he want ? ”

“ To speak with Your Excellency.”

The Baron hesitated a little because of some remains of superstition.

“ All right, show him in.”

“ Let’s see him,” he added to himself, “ this tiresome house-fly, who has been buzzing round me for a week.”

Whilst he challenged this mysterious person to show himself, the Baron felt he needed unusual courage to face a priest. We must not imagine he was afraid of seeing Priest Cirillo walk in. These are things one reads of in fairy-tales ; but who believe them nowadays ? He could however have done without this visit, just from an instinctive dislike of black.

He listened to the voice of Maddalena, who was begging the mysterious visitor to come in. He heard a delicate, sliding little step on the floor ; then the door opened slowly, inch by inch.

“ *Licet ?* ” said a voice as mild as honey.

“ Come in ! ” cried the Baron loudly, as though he were commanding a squadron of cavalry.

A little round, soft priest came in, with a buttery face, with clean fresh clothes, with two little fat dimpled hands and the airs of a Grand Chamberlain. He bowed, half closing his eyes, and chewing his words, as if he were masticating cooked prunes, said :

“ Have I the honour to speak with his Excellency, Baron Coriolano di Santafusca ? ”

“ Precisely, and I have the honour . . . ”

“ I am Monsignore the Vicar, and I am charged with a respectful request for your Excellency, from his Eminence Monsignore the Archbishop. ”

“ Pray sit down. ”

The Baron stepped forward, placed an armchair for his guest and brought another for himself. The gracious Monsignore would not sit down first ; the Baron insisted that he should and, after a little backing and filling, out of respect and in obedience to his Excellency, the priest gave way to the amiable insistence ; sat down ; placed his neat little three-cornered hat on the edge of the writing-table, washed his hands in the air twice and, opening them suddenly like two sunflowers, said :

“ There ! I have come to enquire from your Excellency (provided this indiscretion is allowable), what amount of truth there is in the report that you wish to sell your Villa of Santafusca. ”

“ There is no truth in the report, ” said his Excellency resolutely.

“ I will explain the reason of my request. His Eminence is looking for a large building in the neighbourhood of Naples suitable for a seminary, or theological college, which might serve at the same time as a country residence for the Holy Chapter. ”

“ I have no intention of selling Santafusca, ” repeated the Baron.

“That is strange, because at the Archbishopric we were assured that a priest from Naples had already given Your Excellency an advance for the purchase not only of the Villa, but also of the grounds.”

“Huh!” grunted the Baron, collecting all his wits. And he thought: “That cursed priest always turns up!”

“The fact seemed all the more probable, because the person who was to have bought, and who said he had partly bought, the property, was a rich man and came several times himself to make proposals to the Chancellor of the Holy Treasury.”

“Ah! You, Monsignore, allude perhaps to Priest . . . Cirillo? . . .”

The Baron pronounced these words all on one note, like a recitative. It was the first time that the name of the murdered Priest Cirillo had passed his lips, and it seemed to him that the name resounded like a trumpet call. Sensations! He did not lose his stirrups, however; indeed, he found he was glad to talk of the dead man as though he were alive.

“Precisely, Don Cirillo,” answered Monsignore.

“It is true,” continued the Baron, in a natural tone, “that the priest came to me several times, and we were to have arranged a trip together. I was, at that time, in great straits about money. Then, all of a sudden, the priest went away. They say he is afraid to live in Naples, because he is supposed to be a necromancer, a wizard, a diviner, or something.” Here the Baron laughed. “The ‘camorra’ is mixed up with it, the lottery, a prize of

half a million ; the *Piccolo* mentioned it, and I think, also the *Popolo Cattolico*. Those are the facts of the matter, Monsignore !”

Now, as it happens, Monsignore never read newspapers ; he preferred, when at leisure, to have a little sleep in his armchair instead of listening to the Vestry bickerings. You can fancy how astonished he was to hear that there was in Naples a priest who was a necromancer, a wizard, a “ camorrista ” who had won half a million, a priest who had disappeared !

The Baron noticed the surprise on the prelate's face and in his eyes, and hastened to smooth down the effect of his words.

“ I only saw the priest once, but since I have now been able to provide otherwise for my requirements, I do not intend to sell the house of my forefathers.”

“ We much regret it. Santafusca corresponded to our ideal, and the Treasury would have agreed to any sacrifice. The Chancellor had almost promised Priest Cirillo a hundred thousand lire for the house alone, but now we should be disposed to give even more.”

“ The priest was doing a fat business ! ” exclaimed the Baron, half to himself.

“ The house requires much restoration ; indeed we should have to build a whole new wing.”

“ I have no intention of making a speculation of it,” answered the Baron rather roughly ; his very bones shivered at the idea of anybody disturbing the earth of Santafusca.

“ We respect Your Excellency’s noble feelings. We are sorry for ourselves, but pray believe that should you change your mind, you would find us disposed to meet your views. Meanwhile it will be an advantage to both parties to eliminate this necromantic priest who speculates, with little religious spirit, on the requirements of the Church.”

Monsignore the Vicar made such a proper gesture as he said “ eliminate ” that it could not have offended a fly.

“ So indeed it seemed to me : I shall certainly do as you suggest, if . . . but, as I have said, I have no intention of selling.”

“ I now only have to beg you to excuse my having troubled you, Excellency. If you should wish to hear a first offer, please remember that we would go as far as a hundred and sixty thousand.”

“ A hundred and sixty thousand ! ” stammered the Baron, who saw money raining on him from all sides. Why was this offer not made him on the 3rd ? Chance, chance, chance . . . all chance.

“ I shall remember, we shall see about it. . . . ”

.

Monsignore the Vicar, as he got up, stretched out his hand towards his hat which he had left on the edge of the writing-table ; and either because he stumbled on the carpet, or because he wished to be over-ceremonious, he somehow nearly lost his balance and grabbed at the rim

of his hat ; the hat then sprang up as if it had had an electric shock, fell off the writing-table, turned on its side and ended by rolling up against the wall. Monsignore, quite shocked by his own clumsiness, hurried to pick up his hat from the ground, curving his body, as the other had done when he bent down to look into the cistern.

The Baron rested his two arms, stiff as ramrods, on the back of the armchair and, with a cold and fatuous smile, watched the illustrious prelate backing and bowing himself out, with his face as red as a poppy.

Even when the door was shut with that ceremonious care with which Monsignore did everything, the Baron could not tear his eyes from the wall to which the hat had rolled ; nor move himself from the armchair, to which he was tied by a thought as hard and cutting as an iron wire.

It was not the mental vision of a horrible spectacle which had renewed his fear. No ! We know that visions fade out and vanish like smoke ; but the odd incident of the hat rolling like a wheel started a train of thought which, among all his other terrors, had never yet been aroused ; a very simple, commonplace reflection, dreadfully commonplace, which made the man's hair stand on end at the very moment he thought himself safe in harbour.

The other also had a hat on his head. At the first blow of the crowbar, the hat had leaped, spinning, into the air and had fallen on the pile of bricks ; *What had become of that hat ?*

XIII

FEARS

WHAT had become of that hat ?

The Baron endeavoured to recall, one by one, all the impressions of that terrible moment. He had thrown the priest into the cistern, he had thrown in sand and lime and more sand, and then the stone was placed above it and then more stuff on the stone. He had hidden the crowbar in the lime ; but as for the hat. . . . Recalling the scene in the courtyard, lighting up the dreadful place with flashes of imagination, he seemed to have seen it between the bricks and the wall, standing up like a black mark on red ; but by some fatal oversight he had not thought of removing it, of destroying it . . . so that it must be there still between the bricks and the wall, a black mark on the red, like some ill-omened bird of prey !

The Baron began to see it clearly, as if he had it before him. . . .

Repetition had suddenly revived one of those latent sensations, which, according to the celebrated Panterre, sink in and sleep, even for years, in the folds of the brain, till a more lively sensation awakens them and brings them suddenly to the surface.

The great criminal did not understand how he could have left such dangerous evidence on the scene of his

crime. He refused to believe in the treachery of an extraneous and superior force. Doctor Panterre had a chapter on certain phenomena of cerebral inertness and insensibility, which would explain this terrible forgetfulness.

Anyhow, the priest's hat stood up from the heap, large, black, filthy, hairy, like an obscene bat, like an accusing spectre.

The Baron hurried to the door and locked it, as if he feared that his thoughts might fly out that way.

He must make up his accounts again. He had thought he had finished everything by killing a man, and now all was yet to be done, if indeed he was still in time!

If the hat had remained on the cistern, as though saying *hic jacet presbyter*, most likely Salvatore, as he went his rounds in the house, would have found it.

But Salvatore was dead.

When did he die? He looked amongst the newspapers heaped up on the writing-table for the secretary's letter, which seemed to have disappeared. He hunted till he found it (and whilst his hands searched, his mind was at work also); he opened it, it was dated the 9th; Salvatore had died on the 8th. To-day was . . .

The Baron raised his eyes to the almanac, and again saw the number

Surely he had already torn down that cursed number? Who had amused himself by sticking it in front of him?

Oh ! are we to believe in spirits ? The 4, also, had the shape of the hat.

Bah ! terrors of a feverish man ! The Baron felt fever, a burning fever, coming on. He sat down in a corner, took his head between his hands and prescribed for himself calmness, coolness, positiveness ; in short, the objectivity of reflection.

After all, what was that rag of a hat compared with the sidereal universe ? Could he possibly suffer for such a small matter ?

No, no, things must be looked at with a philosophic eye ; one should reason, reason above all things.

The priest had been killed on the 4th, Salvatore had died on the 8th. To-day was the 15th or 16th of April. Ten or twelve full days had therefore passed and there was no sign that the hat had been found. . . . That is, it might have been found by someone, but no one had thought it might belong to Priest Cirillo ; no one suspected that Priest Cirillo was dead. However, that hat remaining above ground was a danger . . . because people were curious by nature . . . people . . . people. . . .

This expression recalled to his mind the face of Don Ciccio, and with Don Ciccio the idea suddenly came to him of the prize drawn by Filippino, the hatter. Some newspaper had said that the priest had given him the three numbers in exchange for a hat.

The Baron sprang to his feet. He felt his head in flames. He poured water into the basin and put his head into it.

It was horribly grotesque that a man such as he should suffer so much on account of a hat. This was Macbeth, with a vengeance !

When the first tumult was over, he began to reason more clearly and to build up a plan.

Amongst the many ideas which came to him was that of not awaiting punishment, but of taking flight for other shores ; but at last his mind succeeded in formulating a more rational and practical solution.

If people had already found the hat, then the details of the crime were already in the hands of justice, in which case any attempt at flight was dangerous ; however far he might go, the arm of justice is long, and to fly would be to accuse oneself. If, on the other hand, the hat was still there on the spot, as was probable, it would be wiser to go back and remove this signpost which, if discovered, might entail a long nuisance of lawsuits and cross-examinations.

When, as I have said, the first tumult, which might have split any other head, had passed, his robust moral constitution took the ascendant and he almost began to laugh at this comedy.

“ What a fool I am ! ” he said. “ Even if they found not one, but a hundred hats, who could say that Priest Cirillo has been killed ? And if they found not one but a hundred priests, who could prove that it was I who killed Priest Cirillo ? Are there not in Naples a hundred roughs whose business it is to undertake these jobs ? The important thing is to arrange that people should not

wander about the Villa too much. The secretary still has charge of the key, and as the garden is cool and shady it is quite natural that the good inhabitants of Santafusca should go, in the heat of the day, to take their noontide sleep in the shade of the old sycamores.”

At this idea the Baron felt the blood rushing again to his head. If his idea was right, the Santafusca people had been frequenting the Villa for at least eight days.

First, there had been Salvatore’s funeral, and, as the stables were open, it was quite possible that the boys, going in as far as that out of curiosity, had found the priest’s hat.

He felt that he must go out and breathe the fresh air of the streets. Indoors the air was too full of evil thoughts. However much he tried not to think of the hat, a hundred things he met in the streets recalled it to his mind. The sight of a priest, for instance, was enough. . . . If he saw one in the distance turn down a lane, he hurried to follow him across the streets, through the crowd and beyond the houses, as far as the seashore.

It would be quite natural that the boys, on finding the priest’s hat, should pick it up and carry it to the village. Great surprise! A hat? Whose is it? Where have you found it? In the Villa. Where? On a heap of bricks. Let us take it to the vicarage. There Don Antonio has perhaps read in the *Popolo Cattolico* of Priest Cirillo’s disappearance. Could it be the priest’s hat? Let’s take it to the commander of the carabinieri, or to the police-magistrate. . . .

The Baron, as he thought of these things, could imagine the scene being acted before him, and he also seemed to run with the crowd of peasants, whose voices he could almost hear sounding in his ears. The boys for fun would put the hat on a stick, and all the village would go to the police court, displaying this flag. . . .

And meanwhile he himself ran, as if he wanted to catch those ragamuffins, box their ears, carry off the hat. . . .

All at once, beset by these thoughts, he found himself on the road leading to Santafusca, half an hour's walk from the Villa. A mysterious force had impelled him towards Porta Capuana, and so from street to street, from lane to lane, until he found himself almost in sight of the well-known church steeple. When he stopped suddenly he saw himself covered with dust, drenched in perspiration, his dress in disorder ; and he was alarmed at his folly. . . . He turned back to the town and went to Compariello's to recruit his strength. Absinthe cleared his head and restored him to a proper sense of things. He would go to the Villa, but not on foot like a vagabond ; he would go there in proper form, or with a crew of his gay sportsmen, with his pretty friends from Naples, with Marinella.

He felt a strong temptation to defy the world and the Eternal Father, like Mephistopheles. But then he remembered that the country-folk already considered him a libertine ; it was better not to trouble their simple minds with a scandal ; he would only make himself hateful to them and it would seem an offence to the memory

of poor Salvatore. Better to go alone, to give an eye to his own business, to show himself full of good intentions for the future, to spend some money in charity.

These conflicting thoughts occupied his mind for two days, whilst, out-of-doors, he took care to appear the gay and thoughtless man he had always been, whether he went to the Sports Club, or sat with Marinella, or dined at the Europa with friends. Usilli once observed to him :

“ Santa, you drink too much green poison, and you smoke too much ! ”

But the Baron drank and smoked without knowing what he did.

On the third day, feeling he could not go on living in this uncertainty (though the people and the papers gave no sign whatever of troubling about the matter), he went to Biagi's livery stables where he was well known, hired a smart horse and, mounting, rode through the most crowded streets of Naples, making the animal curvet wherever the crowd was thickest, purposely provoking the curses of the cab-drivers and the street-sellers. He wished to show Naples that he was in triumphant health and spirits, as if nothing had happened which the Baron of Santafusca could feel unworthy of himself.

To say truth, there was not a soul in Naples who was thinking of Priest Cirillo or his hat except perhaps, now and again, Filippino and his family ; but the Baron had the impression that the world could only think his

thoughts, and he fancied that he was bound to show himself gay and at ease. So much so that his friends found him rather tiresome.

When he reached the open country he dug in the spurs and galloped for half an hour, bending over the neck of his spirited horse, who wondered at this haste. But the Baron did not want his blood to cool from too much consideration.

The day was grey, overcast with thick, heavy clouds. A strong sea-wind was blowing. Soon it began to rain, with thunder and lightning on the hills.

When he was almost in sight of the village, he brought his horse to a walk, and indeed it was high time. The poor beast, who had no crime on his conscience, had almost enough of galloping on others' behalf.

He rode on at a foot's pace, in a thin rain, cold and persistent; suddenly, on raising his eyes, he found himself opposite the Villa, spreading across the hillside, and looking more livid and sad than usual in the grey air, through the close veil of rain.

At sight of that house, which recalled so long a sequel of domestic incidents, and which now held within its grey walls a matter of such enormous importance, the Baron paused to draw breath, and let his head drop forward with the deep dejection of a man condemned.

What was the cause of this sadness?

Was it due to the sky and the rain?

To his thoughts and his conscience?

If he could have stopped thinking. . .

He felt that, so far as he alone was concerned, he would in time be able to bear the consequences of what had happened ; but it was necessary to avoid attracting attention. That cursed hat must be found.

He had reached the point when he could not distinguish clearly between the dead man and the hat. Of these two threatening and inimical figures, Priest Cirillo was not now the worst.

The priest—so the sinner felt confusedly—the priest might, in his charity, pardon ; the hat would not.

These new thoughts, born of his proximity to the deed, gave fresh ground to those other thoughts which had racked him at home. His horse stood still. The storm was coming up heavier than ever from behind the mountains. A great funereal curtain of cloud draped the hills and the seashore, and the rain came down gustily in thin lines, while lightning flashes terrified the horse.

The Baron, lifting his eyes to the imposing spectacle of Nature in wrath, to the region on high of thunder and lightning, felt like a straw at the mercy of the elements. The sensing of a Fatality which creates and directs men and things, dispersed, as in a flash of lightning, all the romantic spectres of his childish superstition. Who blames the lightning when it kills the poor labourer alongside his plough ? Men and lightning alike are but the blind executors of universal force. . . . Forward !

The horse whinnied and shook his mane, and His

Excellency the Baron Coriolano di Santafusca rode through the houses of the village with the step and air of a conqueror.

The noise of the horseshoes on the cobble-stones drew the people's attention. Everyone recognized the Baron and he felt proud they should see him. Heads and caps, male and female, poked out of the little shops and the little windows ; the folk who were in the street bowed down to the ground.

The Baron went beneath a little porch and stopped his horse to let the bad weather pass over. The rain poured down, mixed with hail, and rattled on the roofs, the walls and the roads, boiling and bubbling in the narrow gutters.

"Which of you will call the Secretary?" said His Excellency.

A little boy was off like a hare, and two minutes later, Jervolino, the secretary, came in his slippers, jumping over the pools of rain-water and presented his respects to the Baron.

He, meanwhile, had been asking news of the people present, enquiring about Salvatore's death and about the olive and wine crops.

The oldest inhabitants answered him, in their picturesque language, that the good times were dead ; that the frost had eaten the oranges ; that the sons no longer earned their sweethearts' earrings in the coral fishery ; and that the "government" took everything away from them in taxes.

Beneath their rough red caps, and the dark tan caused by the sun and the lapse of time, the Baron recognized some of the companions of his childhood, those happy days when play made them all equal. He promised better times for Santafusca and hinted that he might, sooner or later, settle there again.

“God and the Madonna grant it,” they exclaimed with such sincerity, all of them, men and women alike, that he was almost touched by it.

Martino had run to give the great news to Don Antonio, who was just sitting down to table and, as the rain was ceasing, the good priest too came down from the vicarage to pay his respects to His Excellency. To such a great lord he did not dare show himself in his green and dusty-wideawake, or in the woollen nightcap which he wore at home ; but as the new hat had not yet gone, for the honour rather of his ministry than of himself, he went to meet His Excellency in the dead man’s hat.

XIV

A VISIT TO THE DEAD MAN

A SLIGHT cloud passed over the Baron's face at the sight of the venerable little man who had baptized him, and who was now approaching him in a reverent attitude, with the intention of kissing his hand.

"What are you doing, Don Antonio?" exclaimed the Baron, withdrawing his hand with a shudder, as the old pastor took it between his own.

How he would have liked to awake, as from a bad dream, and find himself really the lord, the protector, the benefactor, the blessing of the village, the representative of Providence, the defender of the weak, the support of the afflicted.

In the nausea that arises from evil deeds, man looks to virtue as a harbour of refuge and repose. Perhaps there is a terrestrial paradise beyond that harbour, but he who does not acknowledge it does not deserve it.

These ideas passed through his mind confusedly, as in a mist, while he moved towards the Villa preceded by the Secretary.

As they walked along Jervolino informed him that a certain Giorgio, who said he was Salvatore's nephew, had been to him with a letter which his uncle had written

him a month before he died, in which he named him his heir to various little things and to an old gun.

“ I know the young man, and I know Salvatore intended to leave him these few things ; so that I ventured to hand them over to him the day before yesterday. Have I done wrong, Your Excellency ? ”

“ You have done quite right,” said the Baron. “ Where does this young man live ? ”

“ At Falda, up there, Excellency ; he keeps a tavern called the Vesuvio.”

The Baron jumped off his horse, tied him to a railing and thanked the Secretary, putting a five-franc piece into his hand as a reward for his services.

The man accepted it with a bow and protested his devotion. And then he went away.

The other, as the rain had ceased, remained a few moments on the space in front of the house, his eyes fixed on the horizon, where the heavy broken clouds showed some strips of clear sky. His feet, sunk into the wet sand, seemed dead. He asked himself why he had come. He no longer remembered why. When he recollected it once more he felt a cold shudder, and the task seemed more arduous . . . than the other time. Now he had to go back to the scene of what had happened ; there, twelve or fifteen paces beyond the stable entrance—and see if there was a hat ; and his feet felt dead, his legs like lead, his heart cold and small and hard as a stone.

“ What a fool I am ! ” he exclaimed, shaking his head five or six times, and he turned towards the Villa. He

opened the venetian blinds of the terrace with a little key, and stood awhile in the gallery on the ground floor, where he had waited for Priest Cirillo that other time.

From the speeches made to him and the hearty welcome he had received, he felt sure that no one at Santafusca knew anything of the priest or his hat. A sorrowful hope was rising in his heart ; and an almost tender feeling strove to break through the hardened crust of his old scepticism.

Spring was in its prime. Flowers were springing up everywhere, in the meadows, on the hedges and trees. The paths which shone in the sun gave out a warm smell of wet earth ; and a great peace, the gay and pensive midday peace, flooded the old palace of the Santafusca.

What had he promised the good peasants ? What good times could spring from the body of Priest Cirillo ? Oh ! if the simple people could have realized who the man was, before whom they bowed with such respect ! If Don Antonio could have known what that right hand had done, which he had wished to kiss ! . . . From the gallery his gaze penetrated further, through the open doorways and the long dark series of abandoned halls, filled only with memories and bats !

The place fitted with his thoughts, and led him to confuse the past and the present, to live contemporaneously in two different times, to confuse what was done with what had to be done ; so that, by a strange aberration of his brain, he twice raised his eyes to see if Priest Cirillo had appeared at the end of the avenue.

“Suppose he were to appear!” he said once, out loud: and a wavering echo ran along the bare walls.

“If he lived and I were really what I promised—I would try to be!”

A wave of joy filled his soul at this flight of imagination. But this wave ebbed immediately, wailing and leaving the rocks of his accursed conscience bare. On those rocks lay a corpse.

Could he have provided for his safety and his peace, he felt that he would have had the courage to begin a new and better life; thoughts of it glimmered confusedly in the midst of his savage pride. From his crime itself, buried in the bowels of the earth, he might have drawn the impulse towards good, like Manzoni’s “Innominato,” a black soul, sold to the Devil, who found in repentance and good works his moral regeneration.

But then the “Innominato” had met on his way a good bishop, not a police inspector.

Besides, those days then were not so sophisticated, and no one appeared, armed with the articles of the penal code, calling on him to pay up for all his misdeeds. The tears of repentance sufficed to wash out the stain of a bad conscience.

If a God would have promised to him also, the Baron of Santafusca, an unconditional pardon, he would have knelt before him.

“But does so good a God exist?” said he, wrapping himself in his thoughts as in a black coverlet. “If He

exists, why does He not accept my debt, and give me time to repay it by a life of expiation? I would keep no money for myself, but all my riches should be a treasure for the poor. I would make these fields fruitful, I would work myself, spade in hand, in the heat of the sun, amongst my tenants, sharing with them the bread and water of their scanty table. Why then does God not accept my repayment bit by bit? If He exists, does He not see how sincere are my regret and my intentions? Does He not see how atrociously I suffer? Why does He not create Himself sole judge, in Heaven, of this poor worm of the earth?"

At this point, astonished at the sound of his own words (as if a monk were preaching in him), he stopped suddenly.

He had been pacing up and down the chilly gallery for an hour without perceiving the lapse of time. A great silence, a hot and limpid atmosphere, hung heavily over the dripping green of the garden.

Now he paused before a stranger and more terrifying question than all the others:

"Why not go to Don Antonio and confess everything?"

The sweet figure of the good old man had stirred a number of affections which seemed dead, though really only dulled by the weight of worldly passions.

Perhaps it was the good old man who was speaking in him at that very moment, with the same voice that had baptized and blessed him in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Two o'clock sounded from the parish steeple, and Santafusca recognized the silvery tone which would keep him company and dissipate his fears when, as a child, he lay awake at night ; which awakened him in the morning when dawn breaks and the white line of the horizon calls the birds to preen themselves and chirp.

Those two silvery strokes of the bell seemed to say to him : " Come ! Come ! "

But these were no longer the days when a monk's cowl could save a criminal from the gallows and send him to paradise as a saint.

Don Antonio might feel such terror on hearing the murderer's confession, that it would be the death of him ; or he might find it so difficult to keep the secret that instead of one there would be two unhappy, not to say guilty, men ; neither of whom could recover his peace of mind until the other's death.

After a long and weary meditation, full of ideas and fragments of ideas which had already passed through his mind only to be rejected, the Baron, convinced more than ever that the sole hope of safety lay in himself alone, determined to force himself to go down the steps leading into the garden ; step by step, slowly and heavily, he passed through the house, went in at the stable door, across a low wood-shed, hung with cobwebs ; then one step, two steps more, until he reached the entrance of the little courtyard enclosed between the outer wall and the stable yard.

Here he paused. He had to collect his strength.

The pulses in his temples beat as though they would split open his head. A great silence reigned in that place, a silence that seemed to threaten.

From where he was he could not yet see the heap of sand and bricks surrounding the cistern. It was necessary to take three more steps. Three steps, three terrible steps!

The dead man was there, waiting in that great silence.

Santafusca was on the point of turning back, but another Santafusca held him firm and forced him on with a hundred iron hands.

“Forward! It is life or death!”

He tried to stretch out so as to see the heap from where he stood, but in vain.

He could not see it.

“On, coward!” cried the real Santafusca; and with eyes fixed and staring he dashed forward and looked. . . .

Everything was in its place. The stone, the sand, the bricks, the crow-bar stuck into the lime. Nothing had been disturbed.

But the hat was no longer there.

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From where he stood he could run his eyes over the whole extent of the courtyard, and that eager, absorbing gaze went over the ground two or three times; but he could see nothing behind the slope of the heaped-up

stuff on which the proof of his crime might have fallen.

He must take yet another step towards the dead man.

He took it. And still—nothing !

Whilst his inner judge said “ nothing ”, he heard a rustling of straw from the stable close by, and a dog came out ; a black dog which stood in the doorway and looked at the man with little yellow eyes.

The Baron gave a dull roar, like a strangled bull, and shouted :

“ Get away ! ”

The dog ran away into the straw.

Santafusca recovered his balance, and with a strong effort of will mastered himself.

He had not made a greater effort when he struck the priest.

“ It is Salvatore’s dog,” said his mind ; but his body trembled like a taut wire which a strong hand had jangled.

Feeling his strength leaving him, he became more afraid of his weakness than of the dead man. If he let himself be vanquished and fell down exhausted, he was lost !

Since when was he afraid of dogs ?

How could he say he did not fear Bancho’s ghost, if he was so frightened at the sight of a dog ?

Again he looked round with challenging eyes, into all the corners of the courtyard, into the stable, the wood-

shed . . . Nothing ! But he was afraid to go back, he was afraid of that dog.

God had not accepted his terms ; which proved that God did not exist. Otherwise He would have had compassion.

No, it was necessary to go back to the beginning, and especially to reason . . . to reason.

Salvatore had died two or three days after the deed, of a sudden stroke. In those two or three days of his long idleness he might have passed by the courtyard, and picked up the hat. Or perhaps the dog had brought it to him at home. . . . When this thought struck him the Baron ran out into the garden.

If that cursed dog could have spoken !

If he had found the hat Salvatore would naturally have taken it, for the time being, to his room.

The Baron ran to search the room.

The dead man had left nothing but the chest-of-drawers and the bed with a straw mattress. He opened a drawer and found nothing. He opened another, a third ; he looked under the chest-of-drawers, under the bed ; he felt and searched the mattress all over. . . . Nothing ! Then he went back into the garden.

The dog might very well have taken the hat into the garden, or the old conservatory.

The Baron went round the garden, went into the wood, looked near the fountain, ran into the conservatory where the dog's kennel was, and only found gnawed bones.

Driven by a terrible urge, which gave him no rest, he went into the house and began to run through the empty rooms, looking in every corner ; after so many years in which he had not set his foot on it, he went up the great staircase, littered with rubble ; went through a long series of ruined halls ; up little staircases ; down into places he had never been in, convinced beforehand he would find nothing there, but driven by his fear, by his unreasoning curiosity, by his acute and burning desire to put his hand on that cursed hat which eluded his grasp.

Once he stood still and asked himself :

“ Did I not perhaps bury it with its owner ? ”

And then he asked himself whether, to attain peace of mind, he could bear to remove, by night, the heap of bricks, to remove all that sand, to raise the stone, to look. . . .

But no ! he was too sure that that smashed head had no hat on when it descended to the tomb. . . .

As if these ideas were the plague, the Baron fled before them, mounted his horse, went out and assumed his usual stiff manner when he saw the Secretary coming towards him. The Secretary shut the gate and with much respect handed him the key. The Baron, not wishing to leave in silence, asked :

“ What did you say about Salvatore’s nephew ? ”

“ That I had delivered to him certain things which were in the deceased’s room. . . . ”

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed the Baron, opening his mouth with

an emphatic exclamation. "And where does this young man live?"

"At Falda, Excellency. The 'Vesuvio' tavern."

The horse moved slowly on. A splendid sun shone, and the air, cleansed by the recent rain, sent out a mild and heavenly gleam.

XV

AT FILIPPINO'S HOUSE

ON that day there was much noise and gaiety in the house of Filippino, the ex-hatter.

The fortunate winner had been able to draw a first instalment of his winnings and, by means of two deeds, signed on the same day, had sold his business to a friend, and bought the house he lived in.

In order to celebrate the double, or rather the triple, event, in a room on the first floor a fine table was laid with all good things to eat and drink, served in full dress by the innkeeper of the Golden Pigeon, with great profusion of tarts and ices.

Besides Filippino, Chiarina his spouse, and their children, there sat down to table Fabi, the architect who had valued the building ; Don Ciccio, the famous poor man's lawyer, who had helped Filippino in the legal formalities ; Don Nunziante of the great nose, who, as notary, had drawn up the deeds ; Ciro Stella, who had bought the shop ; and some lady neighbours, friends of the mistress of the house, who sat at the head of the table, finer than the sun, resplendent with pearls and coral and golden ornaments.

When the time came for healths to be proposed,

Gennariello, the cobbler, came in, the unfortunate Gennariello who had sold his tools in order to play the numbers given him by his uncle ; he now went about with a guitar, singing serenades and boat-songs and *tarantellas*, with a white hat as high as a tower, adorned with feathers, flowers and brooms.

To honest people it was a mystery why Priest Cirillo should have betrayed his own blood, and favoured strangers so generously ; the malignant explained it as a weakness of human nature, and some of those present drank with enthusiasm to Donna Chiarina's beautiful and loving eyes. Gennariello bore nobody a grudge, and accompanied his songs with such capers and clown's tricks that the women and children shouted for joy.

They had reached the maximum of gaiety, when the partakers feel they are all alike, all children of one redemption.

"Who would have thought, my Chiaruzza," said Filippino with tender eyes, "when we opened this shop with two hundred borrowed dollars and twelve felt hats ; who would have thought we should come to this ?"

"It is all God's goodness and Priest Cirillo's, Pippo," answered his handsome wife.

"Oh ! why is he not here too, that servant of God ?"

"Has no one yet found out his hiding-place ?" asked Don Nunziante, with his big voice, lifting from his glass a nose more spongy than ever.

"Nothing is known of it."

“ He might have written privately to you, Filippino, or have sent to say : ‘ I am alive, but I prefer to remain in hiding ! ’ ”

“ That is what we say too. Chiarina expected him at any moment, and always kept a goose ready. . . . But, Don Ciccio, what do you know about it ? ”

“ I know less than you, my dearest friends,” exclaimed Don Ciccio, with shining eyes. “ One day Gennariello came to me—you remember, Gennariello ? . . . ”

“ Excellency, yes. My uncle had been with me that morning and I put four stitches into his shoes.”

“ He brought me a letter in which he said : ‘ I am leaving Naples on family business. I enclose thirty francs for the three months rent. Gennariello has the key, and I leave him my things.’ That’s all ! and *insalutato hospite, evolavit*. . . . ”

“ The lottery is a passion which, like all passions, often leads to perdition,” said Don Nunziante.

“ If only I possessed Priest Cirillo’s cabalistic science, I would sell my mathematics for an oyster shell,” exclaimed the architect.

“ Do you know what I found in his house ? ” said Don Ciccio. “ A volume of Cardano and the *Natural Magic* of our immortal Giovanni Battista Porta.”

“ The great author of the *Fisionomia*, who preceded by almost two hundred years the researches of Gall and Lavater,” added Don Nunziante quickly, not wishing to seem less learned than the “ priest’s lawyer ”.

“ And don't you think that the Devil's tail comes into this cabalistic business ? ”

“ Welcome the Devil also, if he has as pretty eyes as Donna Chiarina, my most illustrious mistress,” exclaimed Don Ciccio, raising his glass.

Loud applause. Gennariello took up his song “ sul mare luccica ”.

“ They say that the priest has gone off with a big bundle to the East, amongst the infidels, where he has found an odalisque, who . . . ”

“ Who helps him to unload his bundle.”

“ Uh ! Uh ! Oh ! for shame ! . . . shut up ! ”

“ *In vino veritas !* ”

“ *Maxima debetur pueris reverentia.* ”

“ Gentlemen,” cried Filippino, rising to his feet, and raising a cup full of amber wine. “ Wherever he is, in the East or the West, I propose a hearty toast to the absent and longed-for friend, to our great benefactor, to the saviour of my children, and may his years be heaped up with all happiness ! ”

“ Amiable Chiarina ! ” declaimed Don Nunziante, in falsetto, looking at her through the glass.

“ Bravo ! bravo ! hurrah for Don Cirillo ! ”

The noise became really deafening, but was suddenly interrupted by a boy who came in with a big round cardboard box, doubly tied across with string and secured with large blobs of sealing wax.

This produced a great silence.

“ Who sends this ? ” asked Filippino.

"It came to the shop just now, addressed to you. It comes from the station."

"It's an almond paste cake, papa," cried one of the children.

"If you guess right, Celio, I'll give you the box to lick," said his father, his face still red from the toast. And taking up a table-knife he cut the string, took off the cover, removed a sheet of newspaper, and saw a hat, with a note fastened to the hat-band.

"Who sends it?"

Filippino reads the note; does not understand; reads it again; and partly owing to the handwriting and partly to the amber-coloured wine, can make nothing of it. However, turning to Don Ciccio:

"Try it," said he, "you who have spectacles. What does this hieroglyph say?"

Don Ciccio arranged his goggles on the bridge of his nose, and began to read aloud:

"MOST RESPECTED SIR,

A sacerdotal hat having been lost in this neighbourhood, and inasmuch as all the researches I have carried out have not established to which of God's ministers it may belong, not wishing to load my conscience, avoidably, by retaining articles which do not belong to me, I send it free of carriage to you, according to the address of the factory label, supposing that it may be less difficult for you to trace the rightful owner and deliver it to him.

With entire respect, I remain

Your devoted servant,

DON ANTONIO SPINO,

Parish priest of Santafusca."

"There's an honest man!" exclaimed Don Nunziante.

"Or one whose head is too big for the hat," maliciously observed Don Ciccio.

"What do you say?" exclaimed Filippino, suddenly turning pale, whilst he turned the hat this way and that. "This is the hat I gave lately to Priest Cirillo, on the day he left Naples."

"Eh?" they all exclaimed, opening their mouths, their eyes, their hands, their souls.

"I remember it well, because I had prepared it for Monsignor the Vicar-General, and it turned out too small. Do you remember the register number, Chiarina?"

"It is this, it is this!" said the ex-hatter's wife with a trembling voice.

The guests looked at each other and held their tongues.

They had called up the priest, and his hat had come instead.

These are always signs of misfortune.

Reflection followed spontaneously. If Priest Cirillo had only that hat when he left Naples, it seemed strange that he did not take care of it, especially as it was brand new; unless indeed he had exchanged it for a turban, as the notary had maliciously suggested.

"Here I smell something criminal," said Don Ciccio, standing up, twitching his nostrils slightly as if he really smelt something strange, and pointing a long thin finger at the proof of a crime.

"Oh! Saint Mary of sorrows!" exclaimed Donna Chiarina, white as a lily.

“What do you say about it, Don Ciccio?” repeated the other women.

“I say that I scent a criminal odour in this business, and I have good reasons for saying so.” Don Ciccio seemed even thinner than usual. “Gentlemen!” exclaimed the famous priest’s lawyer, raising his voice as he was accustomed to do in Court, “this hat was found in the neighbourhood of Santafusca, and ‘neighbourhood’, in my opinion, means a road, the open country, a vineyard, a wood; otherwise Don Antonio would have written ‘in my house, in the church, in the vestry’. Signor Filippino Mantica says that the hat was brand new, and we have the gracious deposition of Donna Chiarina which confirms the fact that the hat was sold, or given, brand new, to Priest Cirillo. Whereas I find the mark of a deep dent, red brick marks, and some stains or sprinkling of lime, which here and there has burnt the silk. Therefore, gentlemen, there was quicklime in the neighbourhood, and this dent tells of more than a gust of wind!”

“Oh, my God! Don Ciccio!” exclaimed the woman, raising her two hands to Heaven.

“I am not an astrologer, nor the son of an astrologer,” cried the lawyer, opening his eyes wide, “and if Priest Cirillo came in at this moment, to touch his glass to mine, I certainly would not dare to say that he had been murdered; but I would remind these gentlemen that the priest has been missing for fifteen days, that no one knows where he has taken refuge, that he has given no sign of

life, even to his most intimate friends, that whereas he told Gennariello he was going towards Miano, his hat is found in the neighbourhood of Santafusca, precisely in the opposite direction. What business should he have at Santafusca, he who disliked change, who had no relations or friends in that part of the world? For certainly if anyone had known him up there, Don Antonio would not have looked fruitlessly for the owner of the hat; and if he had merely been seen, someone would naturally have remembered him; but the letter says, explicitly, 'all the researches I have carried out'. Ah! ah! And this man is so unknown to the parish priest, and his colleagues of the neighbouring villages, that no one can give a, so to speak, probable suggestion as to the owner of the hat? And that, whilst all the papers, including the *Popolo Cattolico*, have trumpeted the story of the three numbers and the missing priest? Gentlemen! I repeat that I am not an astrologer, nor the son of an astrologer, but I opine that a man who loses a new hat in a place where no one has seen him is, so to speak, a very problematical man. We must remember that this is not the first time that Priest Cirillo suffers injury and violence from the ill-intentioned, that he is believed to possess hidden riches. We must remember that the news of the great prize won on the numbers suggested by him may have induced some mad, or deluded, man, some brigand or son of a brigand, to proceed to deeds of violence towards an unarmed servant of God. I am not certain, I am lost in this darkness, but,

feeling about, I seem to touch the proof of a crime. . . .”

Don Ciccio had become sad and tragical. With his incisive voice, his long finger stretched out, his stringent reasoning, he made everyone shudder and feel cold down their backs. His white hat was all fluffed up.

Don Nunziante tried to suggest that probably the priest had lost his hat by thrusting his head out of the window in a train, but no one was satisfied with such a simple and probable solution. To come out with such a common and trite reason did not fit in with all the fancies, which heated by the wine and fired by Don Ciccio's words, already began to lend credence to something extraordinary. One should never disturb the hopes of fancy. A terrible story issued, grand and complete, from the hat, as Minerva sprang, great and armed, from Jove's brain. Don Ciccio called together a small council and proposed to carry the business, just as it happened there at table, to the most illustrious signor the public prosecutor, Cavilier Martellini, his friend, indeed his colleague at the University ; a subtle, acute and prudent man ; a distant relation of the Home Secretary.

Meanwhile it was better to say nothing about it to the liberal newspapers which, when a poor priest was in question, would pillory him naked. If it was a crime, God has a long arm ; at the worst, which for those who were not lawyers was the best, the indications furnished by the hat would enable justice to find the owner.

At all events Filippino was bound, in conscience, to spend some money in throwing light on this dark, this

very dark, this more than dark, this darkest business.

Filippino authorized Don Ciccio to take all necessary steps, and was ready to go to the expense of throwing light on this affair. But, in spite of all prudence and reserve, it was not possible to prevent the story of the hat and the priest from leaking out towards evening amongst the neighbours ; and before night some confused rumours of it arrived at the Market quarters, where Priest Cirillo was already almost forgotten.

At dawn a reporter, smarter than the others, already knew enough about it to invent the rest, and to compile a jumble of people's impressions.

XVI

THE SPORTSMAN

WHEN the Baron returned to Naples, he tried for some days not to think of Priest Cirillo or his hat.

One of these two was shut up in a safe place, and the key also was locked in a secret drawer of his writing-table ; the other, the hat . . . but in spite of his efforts not to think about it, he could not make his mind easy on this point. A fragment of the dead man survived in that black scarecrow, and he felt it flit about him. To think that he could not lay hands on it ! He would have been so rich and so tranquil, were it not for that foolish fear !

He tried in vain to stupefy himself with play, at the Club, with Marinella, in society, which he had taken to again with some success.

“ What are you thinking about, Baron ? ” Marinella asked him one day, when he was fixing a glassy stare on that dark and troublesome shadow.

He could not meet a priest wearing a three-cornered hat without fixing his eye on the triangle, with insistent, morbid curiosity ; and once mesmerized by it, he would be drawn to follow it through the crowded streets of Naples, to the door of the canon's house, the church, or the convent.

He tried to explain to himself, scientifically, these strange phenomena of fascination. He had trifled with his excitable temperament; and although he realized that this persecution came not from his conscience but from his nerves and imagination, he could not avoid, as happens with those subject to hallucinations, the torture of his illusions. It is well known that the brain suffers from pain, even in a leg that has been cut off.

For some time now he had suffered from acute attacks of palpitation, and more than once he had had to have recourse to digitalis. He tried bromide also, and felt calmer, fresher. In spite of the hat he was beginning to sleep better, and he found that less smoking did him good.

Indeed, it was in a dream the idea occurred to him, that the hat might have fallen into the hands of Giorgio, Salvatore's nephew, who kept the tavern up there at Falda.

Had not Giorgio come down to collect his uncle's inheritance a few days after his death? Had he not carried off a sack full of things? Why should he have left the hat, when he came, if it was there?

The dream did not seem to him foolish, although he did not believe in dreams. He thought it might be worth while to make a second trip up there, and test the truth of dreams.

To avoid suspicion, he put on a rough sportsman's suit, and with a leather game-bag, and his gun over his shoulder, he took the train one day for the station nearest Falda.

He went up the hill easily, in the fresh morning air, whistling, with his heart almost alive to hope.

What would he not have given for that rag of a hat? What was more desirable and precious than quiet for one's nerves? Far better to be dead, like Priest Cirillo, than to live under the shadow of that hat.

The Vesuvio tavern, with its old red sign, stood on the high-road which rises towards the hills, in a quiet spot, near a grove of plane-trees, which served as a place of rest to the carters and donkey-drivers.

It was not a hotel fit for noble Englishmen, but you could get cool wine there, and old cheese, and tobacco, and also salad prepared, mixed and turned by Giorgio's thick fingers.

Giorgio was a clumsy, solidly-built young man, with a round head and a sluggish brain, a good-humoured fellow, always ready to serve a neighbour when there was a sixpence to be earned. He was busy quartering a sheep, which he had hung up on the window-bars, when he saw a sportsman, without a dog, approaching:

"Have you wine and cheese, young fellow?"

"As much as you please, my good sir," answered Giorgio, and went to dry his blood-stained hands.

The sportsman entered a little room on the ground-floor, and glanced round sharply, as if he were looking for something. Then he sat down in front of a table, letting himself go, like a tired man.

Giorgio soon came back with the wine, cheese and a hard loaf on a plate.

" I seem to know you, young fellow . . . and I don't remember where I have met you."

Giorgio fixed his eyes on the sportsman and said :

" Men do meet, but I don't know that I have ever seen you."

" Are you not a relation of that Salvatore, who lives down there at Santafusca ? "

" I am indeed. He died a few days ago."

" I know he is dead, poor fellow. He was an honest man, a great man for goodness. And now he is dead."

Giorgio put his open hand upon his breast.

" That's what one gains by serving gentlefolk. They suck your blood to the last drop in your veins, and they give your carcass to their dog."

" You mean the Baron, I suppose," said the sportsman, laughing.

" Him and all of them ; but perhaps he is worse than the others. My uncle has not left a penny, after forty or forty-five years of good service ; and ' the Baron ' spends sacks of gold on baggages. But look here ! they say all this will be changed some time."

" Then it's you who came one day to the Villa to take away some things."

" I went there fifteen days ago."

" I am a relation of the parish priest of Santafusca—his sister's son," said the sportsman good-humouredly.

" Don Antonio's ? He is a holy man. . . ."

" And I think I saw you go by in company with the Secretary. . . ."

“Precisely. He had the keys of the room. . . .”

“I knew your poor uncle also. His death filled my heart with sorrow!”

The sportsman said all this sincerely.

“Are you from these parts?”

“I live near Naples, and I often come to Santafusca to shoot; but there is no game this year. . . .”

“It’s a poor year indeed!”

“And as we are talking of these things,” added the sportsman, who seemed a simple, straightforward man, “did you take away a priest’s hat together with the other things?”

“Yes! I have it,” answered Giorgio.

The sportsman spread his arms and legs wide, and gave way to a loud laugh.

“Yes! I have it . . . and what are *you* laughing at?”

The other never stopped laughing, and rolling on the bench, could not stop himself, till he was forced to take his head in both hands.

The immense joy, the deep emotion the sportsman felt at this discovery cannot easily be described. After so many days of anguish and fear, he was about to put his hands on the proof of his crime; and all this had happened as the result of a dream. What would he not have given for that rag of a hat? And now, behold! his good luck had given it him *gratis* . . . and it was all due to a dream!

“Now I’ll explain, young man,” he added, after a

minute. "Don Antonio had left his hat in your poor uncle's room, and only remembered it three or four days later. But when he remembered it, the hat was gone. The holy man was inclined to despair, because he only had that one, and he is poor, you know, he would give away even his shirt to the poor! I was there when the Secretary came; what is his name?"

"Jervolino."

"Precisely, and he said that perhaps you had taken it away with the other things. . . ."

"Well really, that's as good as a comedy. I never thought of it, fancy! There was so little to take away that I thrust everything into the sack higgledy-piggledy!"

"Don Antonio will accuse you of stealing holy things."

"I, a thief! I ought to have thought of it, but I did it innocently."

"Of course I am joking. A thief without knowing it! like Pulcinella in the play."

The sportsman helped himself to wine from the jug, and tossed off a good glassful, which filled his soul with warmth.

If Giorgio had not been a dullard he would have observed that the sportsman's eyes were shining with a bright and speaking light.

"You deserve to go to Hell, for robbing a priest," he repeated to Giorgio, laughing loudly and thumping his fists on the table.

"Heaven preserve me from losing my soul for so little. Now you shall see this fine hat; it's shorn like

our miller's donkey. I saw the hat on the chair, and I thought . . . what did I think? I don't really know. But it's not good enough for a scarecrow. I'll show it you. . . ."

The sportsman was left alone.

Giorgio's wooden shoes beat on a wooden staircase, which climbed the wall. They shuffled on the flooring above the sportsman's head, then Giorgio stopped and hunted in the sack.

Meanwhile the sportsman, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, smiled and showed his teeth, tapping the plate with his fingers. He was going to deal Priest Cirillo a last blow.

Would that black bird of prey stop fluttering round him? He laughed mechanically, but at the same time his sick heart was beating furiously. A fragment of the priest had survived in his hat, and at bottom he was afraid to meet him even in this scarecrow.

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He would have never thought himself such a coward. But perhaps we are all like that, young and old, sailing on life's great ocean!

Giorgio's wooden shoes resounded overhead, and came heavily down the wooden stairs. The sportsman, motionless and self-contained, rested his arms heavily on the table. At last Giorgio, as a joke against the priest, thrust his head through an opening which lighted the space below the stair, with staring eyes and the hat on

his head, and shouted *Hallelujah! Hallelujah!* with a ribald voice.

At that grotesque sight, the sportsman started and upset the wine jug. He almost shrieked with fear; but the innkeeper came out laughing at his own joke. He could not realize the harm he had done to a man already suffering from palpitation of the heart.

But when the first impression had passed, the moment was too interesting for the sportsman for him to think of his weak heart. He therefore managed to force a laugh, whilst his eyes, fascinated and terrified, never left that ugly smashed hat which Giorgio had put before him on the table.

No physiologist, not even the celebrated author of the *Treatise on Things*, could describe the mass of sensations thronging round Baron Santafusca's heart at that moment as he stretched out his hand to take final possession of Priest Cirillo's life. Beneath all the turmoil there lurked a dark pool, deep, full of bitter joy and full of fear! His heart still throbbed, but these were the last "sensations".

Would he not at last recover his peace of mind, now when he felt himself safe?

"Well? do you wish me to take this hat to Don Antonio? It will be a pleasant surprise for my uncle."

"Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's," said Giorgio. "You relieve my house of a bad omen!"

"Provided it will go into my knapsack. Just try. . . ."

"The bird of prey is a big one, but by squeezing his wings a bit . . ." The boorish lout, who was laughing

hoarsely, took the hat, squeezed it up in his hands and stuffed it into the knapsack. The sportsman stood by, stiff and frozen, between the bench and the table.

“Here you are! There are not many sportsmen in the world who shoot such hares as this.”

“What does the bread and cheese and wine come to?”

“Sixpence, my good sir. As to the hat, I give it you for nothing, and beg Don Antonio to absolve me from all my crimes, past and future!”

“I will tell him so.”

Just then two peasants came in, and Giorgio, full of his adventure, told them the story of the hat, whilst he made it jump and dance in his hands. They all laughed at the poor priest, and the bird of prey shut up in the knapsack.

The sportsman laughed too, playing his part; but as soon as he could, without exciting suspicion, he went out, saluted his good friends and went his way, the knapsack on his back, his eyes fixed ahead, staring into infinite space, whilst his head seemed full of mist. He felt exultant, triumphant, like a man who had escaped a dire risk of death.

He walked with long, even steps down the hill, and at each step the knapsack bumped on his shoulder with a harmonious empty sound.

The sound recalled another impression, out of the darkest depths of his memory.

That sonorous rattling sound, like shaken walnuts, brought to his mind a sensation resembling it. . . .

The sportsman hurried on, feeling that it would all disappear when he got out of the valley.

He was carried along, so to speak, on his idea, not seeing a step beyond him, thinking how to destroy for ever that horrid proof of his crime, whether to burn it, or tear it to pieces, or bury it . . . when the sudden bark of a dog, which ran out from behind a house, made him start in terror ; so much so that he sprang to the side of the road, and hid himself behind a heap of stones like a frightened boy. Some masons, working on the roof, noticed how terribly the dog had frightened the sportsman and began laughing and chaffing him.

“Hullo ! Ant hunter,” said one.

“Grasshopper hunter,” another added.

“He is going out dog shooting with a hare !”

“He has a rabbit-skin in his knapsack.”

The furious blood of the Santafuscas boiled in him ; if he had given them a shot apiece it would hardly have satisfied his rage ; but this was a day of patience and expiation. Forward therefore. . . . The fright that that cursed dog had given him with his sudden barking caused a feeling of acute pain in his ribs on the left side.

After walking three-quarters of an hour at a good pace, he came within sight of the station. At a level crossing he asked the pointsman when the next train for Naples would pass.

“In an hour and a half,” said the man, who was mending a child's shoe sitting on a trunk of a tree near

his box, from which came the sound of a woman's voice and a child's cry. Silence and peace reigned over the little building, bathed in the rosy light of the sunset, in the midst of the wide landscape.

"How happy these wretches are!" thought the last of the Santafuscas. The simple good faith with which Giorgio of Falda and the railway man had spoken to him, thinking him one of themselves, had brought him nearer to a world of natural simple needs and affections. The herb happiness only grows in this soil.

"How happy these wretches are!" he thought again, sitting down on the parapet of a little bridge, which crossed a small stream a hundred yards from the station. He had an hour and a quarter to get through; and as the place was almost uninhabited, and no one knew him, he wondered if it were not a good opportunity to hide that cursed hat in some bush, that all trace of it, all shadow of a trace, should vanish for ever.

With this in mind he followed a little path towards some low hazel bushes ending in a desert tract, squalid and volcanic.

It seemed the realm of death. Not a house, not a living soul as far as the eye could reach.

"How happy these wretches are!" he repeated a third time, almost mechanically, whilst his eyes looked everywhere in search of a hole in which to bury what remained of Priest Cirillo. After wandering about for some time, he sat down on a heap of pumice stone, out of which grew a few shoots of broom, and for the first

time he felt very tired. It had been a long day and a great journey ; but the victory was his.

To think that this inspiration had come to him in a dream ! Then Priest Cirillo was justified in believing in dreams. If it were not absurd to entertain such nonsense, one might almost believe that *his* priest had suggested to him, in a dream, the idea of going to Falda.

Had not Priest Cirillo promised, one day, to save him, body and soul ? The souls of the dead bear no grudge ; and if Priest Cirillo, from the other world, could draw a soul from this world to safety's gate, why should he not have done so ? The priest himself was not free from sin, and perhaps he had much to be forgiven.

What do we know, in Heaven's name, of the things of this and the other world ?

In all that had happened to him, had he not been almost forced by necessity to believe in the power of a gracious providence, which arranged things with amazing precision ?

The sun, from the low horizon-line, cast the shadows of the bushes across the parched ground. A vast, whitish sky, too full of light, covered the wide plain in which our sportsman wandered in search of a hole. But he found no holes ready made, and the ground was so open that a man could hardly dig there without raising suspicion in someone. There was too much open sky.

Seeing a ditch full of stagnant rain-water, he stooped down, drew his knapsack round in front of him, looked about. . . . But he dared not throw the knapsack

away. Its shadow, enormous in the setting sun, was like a troublesome witness.

When he stood up he seemed to have grown to giant's size, and heaven's vault seemed almost too low for him. . . .

Then he thought it would be safer to go home, shut himself up in his room, cut this odious relic to pieces and destroy it, bit by bit. He moved off again, returned to the road, and followed it to the pointsman's hut, and the little station ; and when the train came up he jumped into a third-class carriage, glad to travel with the good sons of the people, to some of whom he talked at length of dogs and woodcock and larks. On familiar terms with the people, he forgot " the Baron " and felt the satisfaction of being a sportsman, like so many others, guilty only of killing game ; in short, a good innocent man, for whom all the problems of human happiness are resolved in a glass of wine and a good pipe of tobacco.

He reached Naples after dark and turned towards the suburbs, with the idea of reaching the sea in some deserted place.

Several times he stopped, being tempted to drop the knapsack and the hat in one of those gutters which run from the poor people's houses ; but even there he thought it might be fished up by the boys, who paddle in the gutters like frogs in a marsh.

As " the priest " was surrounded with a kind of legend, it was essential to avoid any sign which could guide people's curiosity towards the traces of the crime. Even the hat now had its little legend.

"The priest" had paid the hatter with three numbers which all came out; all the town had talked of it; all the newspapers had embroidered their comments on it, the host of the "Vesuvio" tavern had taken it to Falda in a sack, and then had given it to a sportsman. . . .

At Falda the anecdote of the hat no doubt now amused the good customers of the "Vesuvio" tavern. The greatest prudence was therefore required not to direct any one's attention to this rag of mortality which contained so much living energy. Indeed it looked as if the priest's spirit were struggling in it, with the jerks and convulsions of a dying bird of prey. He would not bury it even in the sea sand, where the boys go to look for shells and coral.

To burn it was out of the question.

How could one make a bonfire in the middle of the road? Deuce take it! It had been easier to get rid of the priest. . . . The Baron felt that matter is hard, indestructible, whilst a man is extinguished as easily as you blow out a candle. He remembered many aphorisms of the famous Doctor Panterre on this subject, as he walked in the darkness, gesticulating like a madman through the last fishermen's houses along the shore.

The difficulty of the undertaking, the fatigue of his journey, the annoyance that the dirty old hat gave him, with its jerks and constant bumping on his shoulder and its noise as of cracked walnuts; his fear of every shadow; all this tormented him as he wandered self-concentrated in the darkness, the solitude, the deep silence of night.

And perhaps he would have thrown himself down in the road, worn out and dispirited, if he had not, on coming out of a lane, found himself opposite the open sea, with an immense deserted beach, and great foaming waves which beat heavily on the shore and then dispersed, sparkling and chattering gaily in the shingle.

On the left Naples shone with a thousand lights ; and cast a wide reflection in the sky, above the darkness of night.

The night was close, calm and starless ; it seemed made for a crime.

Ten or twelve paces in front of him a little promontory of black rocks and pebbles ran out into the sea.

The Baron was guided by an invisible hand (in which he was beginning to believe fully) towards the rocks, where he found a boat with oars, fastened to a boulder by a chain, and protected from the waves. There was not a soul anywhere near. He got into the boat, unoaded it, dipped the oars and, taking advantage of the return wave, was out in the open in a couple of strokes, alone, wrapped in thick darkness, between a black sea and a black sky, separated from death only by a few rotten boards.

He had fought a great battle with nature, which had followed him with her spectres in vain. At last the strong and prudent man had beaten her !

Half shutting his eyes, as though he feared to see a skull, he thrust his hands into the knapsack, felt the hat, drew it out, threw the knapsack into the bottom of the

boat, fastened the hat securely to the gun with a strap, and, laughing mirthlessly into the darkness, thrust the gun into the water to the muzzle, indulging himself by holding it a moment in his hand so as to enjoy his triumph slowly . . . and then he opened his hand.

The gun and the hat, sinking noiselessly, were lost in the depths of the sea.

“That’s the end of you, priest!” said the Baron aloud, awaking a faint echo hidden in the rocks. It seemed as if the priest said *amen*.

An hour later the Baron re-entered the town in a torrent of rain. He went straight home, took off his sportsman’s clothes, went to bed, and slept heavily and dreamlessly. He needed it. The day had been long and full of shocks. He felt his bones crushed, his strength worn out, and he slept profoundly on his victory.

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The next morning, whilst his Excellency was still sleeping soundly on his victory, the newspaper boys were running through the streets of Naples, yelling, with their hands full of leaflets :

“The priest’s hat!!!!”

“Great discovery! the priest’s hat!”

“Priest Cirillo’s hat!”

“One halfpenny! the priest’s hat!”

The people, especially the poor ones, bought the leaflets, and groups formed in front of the water-sellers’ and the coffee stalls. One read and the other listened,

and then everybody repeated the story of the hat which reached Filippino in a box, with the variations natural to imaginative people who, when they hear an interesting story which happens to be true, must console themselves in some way for their regret at not having invented it.

PART TWO

I

THE HAND OF JUSTICE

THE Baron of Santafusca, having set his mind at rest, could sleep happily, but now woes and tribulations began instead for the other sinner ; I mean to say, (if you have not guessed), for Don Antonio.

The poor priest, one morning at dawn, had not yet finished a grand dream in which the Archbishop had come to Santafusca with a great following of mitred prelates, while in the church, resplendent with silver lamps, he himself was saying mass with a mitre on his head, when Martino knocked loudly at the door.

“What is it ?” exclaimed the old man, raising his head and putting his hand to his nightcap, which was rather tight on his forehead. “It is not time for mass yet.”

“It is not the mass, Don Antonio. Come down. There is . . . there is a police officer, with . . .”

It was evident that Martino’s voice was rather out of control ; Don Antonio might have guessed that his legs were trembling.

“A po-lice offi-cer ? What’s all this ! It is a mistake !”

“It seems not. Come down quickly !”

“I am coming. A police officer ? What have I to do

with the police ? It is certainly a judicial error. Unless it is about that business of Lella's, who stabbed Guasco. Always the knife in the hands of those . . . of those . . .”

And with these words, which he kept repeating mechanically, he came down, without a collar, his dress in disorder, and his eyes still misty.

He found in the parlour, where he used to prepare his sermons in summer, and take a nap now and then between sentences, a grave gentleman dressed in black, with black mustachios, accompanied by a tall carabinieri, perhaps the sergeant, the top of whose hat reached the ceiling.

The priest made three or four bows before finding his voice. The man in black also bowed, whilst the sergeant shut the door.

“ In what way can I be useful to these good gentlemen ? ” said the poor frightened little man, with a gentle inflection of voice.

“ I am obliged to ask you some questions, and perhaps to give you some trouble. Are you Don Antonio Spino ? ”

“ Yes, Sir. Pray sit down.”

“ You wrote some days ago to a certain Filippo Mantica, a hatter in Naples ? ”

“ Precisely.”

“ With the letter was”

“ A box, yes, Sir.”

“ Containing a hat.”

“ A hat, precisely, yes, Sir.”

“ Very well. Now could you favour me with some explanations with regard to this letter ? Do you recognize it as yours ? ”

The police officer presented an open sheet.

“ It is my handwriting . . . that is the letter,” stammered Don Antonio, who did not yet understand what waters he was cruising in.

“ You say here that the hat was found ‘ in this neighbourhood ’. Well ! It is of great importance to the Public Prosecutor to know the precise spot where the hat was found, who found it, when it was found, through whose hands it has passed . . . and this, of course, as circumstantially as possible, because . . . but I will tell you why presently.”

Don Antonio was more and more surprised at each word, and his courage faltered. He remembered that he had not written with great precision, and indeed that things had happened otherwise. That is what follows from not telling the truth. “ There ! ” said his conscience, “ you wished to conceal your sin, and now your sin has come to light. You who would not confess to God must now confess to the police officer and the carabinieri.”

These reflections passed through his mind, all together, rapid and confused. Then he said :

“ I will be frank, good sir ; and I will relate exactly how that hat came into my hands, and why I sent it to Signor Filippino.”

“ I must tell you meanwhile, that I shall note your

deposition, and that Your Reverence may be called upon to confirm it in a public trial."

"A public trial! Oh Heavens! But . . . but . . . is it a question of a lawsuit? Where am I? I am only guilty of a small sin of avarice, and perhaps laziness. I may have lied on one occasion, saying that I had bought it with my own money, and another time I concealed the truth a little by using a generic expression; but I do not see, excuse me, I do not see that it can be a matter of penal . . ."

"Calm yourself, Don Antonio, and state quietly all that you know about this business. The sergeant has no intention of arresting you."

The gentleman dressed in black smiled a little, which somewhat revived the poor priest's faltering courage; he pulled himself together and began a very long, minute, exact account of the whole matter, without neglecting the smallest detail. He stated the day, hour and minute when Martino came to call him to hasten to help Salvatore, the exchange of the hats in the dead man's room, and how he had lost his own hat. He confessed his doubts, his scruples, the talks with Martino, the letter written to Monsignore the Vicar, and he presented Monsignore's answer. He told how he had found the hatter's name, showed the receipt given him by the stationmaster for "a box containing a hat" (he had paid the carriage out of his own pocket), in short he turned over and emptied his whole conscience, as one does with the fag end of a meal sack. He had not

confessed with such ardour and precision since the vigil of his first mass.

The police delegate, who had produced from his pocket a bone inkstand and a pen, wrote it all out in a register in the presence of the carabinieri, who listened with his arms crossed over his breast, and quite filled the little room with his wide shoulders.

He took possession of Monsignore's letter, and of the receipt for the "box containing a hat", which he registered in an appendix under headings A and B, and then he said :

"From all that you have told me, reverend Sir, I see that you have acted in perfect good faith ; but I regret I shall be obliged to give you some further trouble. We have, perhaps, to deal with a crime."

"A crime !" exclaimed Don Antonio with a frightened face.

Martino, who was listening at the door, with his eye at the keyhole, had to rest his hands on his knees.

"This devil of a hat, as you rightly termed it, belonged to an old priest who disappeared from Naples about twenty days ago, since which time no one knows anything of him. As there is reason to suppose that he has been murdered, it is necessary that Don Antonio should give us his help, so that justice may be aided in her researches."

Don Antonio merely opened his hands a little, and remained fixed in his chair with his mouth open, as helpless as a frozen man. The senses of the poor old man had been, so to speak, nailed down, at the frightful

idea of a hat which had been on a murdered brother's head, a hat which, with accursed presumption, he had worn himself, which he had placed in the neighbourhood of the altar.

Was that the mitre he had dreamt of? Was that the cardinal's hat promised him by Martino! The hat was indeed red, but it was red with Christian blood, with consecrated blood. . . .

"You say, Don Antonio, that in the place of the incriminated new hat, you left your old hat. . . ."

Don Antonio nodded assent. His tongue had frozen in his mouth.

"And a young man, who lives at Falda, came to take away the hat with other things?"

Don Antonio assented again with a nod.

The delegate took the sergeant aside, and spoke to him in an undertone. It appears that they were arranging together to send two men immediately to Falda, to arrest the host of the "Vesuvio," who, in the good functionary's mind, seemed to be mixed up in this dark business. The astute functionary began to congratulate himself on having laid his hand on a clue. Few people, when you come to think of it, find two hats where they go to look for one.

Jervolino, the Secretary, was also examined, as well as Martino, the bell-ringer. Jervolino had had the key of the Villa, but now the Baron had it.

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The delegate considered a moment whether he should wait for fresh orders from Naples, before breaking down the gate of the Villa ; but then it struck him that the village was already in a turmoil, that the " camorristi " had secret allies, and that every hour that was lost might make him lose the traces of the priest.

A smith was sent for at once to open the gate.

The delegate assumed all responsibility towards the judges and the Baron of Santafusca.

It took some work to force the rusty old lock of the gate towards the stables, whilst the people, stirred up by Martino, filled the streets and the square, determined to defend their pastor, the patriarch of the Old Testament.

Everyone talked about the hat, and a shepherd boy began to say that he had one day seen a priest go up to the Villa by the plane-tree avenue, but no one paid any attention to what a boy said.

Under the guidance of the curate and the bellringer, the delegate and the guards invaded Salvatore's little room, a brief description of which was taken down.

" The new hat was on the chest-of-drawers, you say ? "

" Yes, Sir."

" And the old hat was on the chair ? "

" Exactly, on the chair."

The delegate noted in his report the chest-of-drawers and the chair, and since he considered he had fulfilled his duty, he left a soldier on guard at the gate with orders to keep the boys and the unkempt women away, and left for Naples by the eleven o'clock train.

Don Antonio that day did not say his usual mass.

Looking thirty years older, he dragged himself home and threw himself into an armchair to groan and sigh.

“ Oh, Lord ! ” he said, “ pity this thy old servant, who has been more than punished for his sin. Thou who wringest the withers and the hearts, weigh my sin in the balance of Thy compassion, and give sentence according to Thy justice. If it seems to Thee that my death is sufficient to atone for the falsehood and the feebleness of spirit of a wretched hour, let me die now and call me to repose in Thy lap. Oh ! if Thou willest that these torments should be the earthly expiation of an old sinner, blessed be Thy hand, oh Lord ! ”

A great sadness hung that day over the village of Santafusca, as if the melancholy and sinister shadow of the accursed hat were covering the church and the houses.

II

THE ORGY

“ Oh ! Marinella,
Star of the night !
lovely and bright !
Oh ! Marinella.”

The Baron, as you see, was in a poetic vein.

The Rhine wine, blood of the Muses, had warned his imagination. When a man sits at table, for a couple of hours, in good company, with four bright glasses before him, and two pretty girls beside him, it is easy to understand how he is apt to become something of a poet.

“ Your turn, Usilli ! Sing to Lellina.”

“ Oh ! my Lellina !
little and fat,
my sweetest cat !
Oh ! my Lellina ! ”

“ You stupid idiots ! ” cried Lellina, pouring a cup of good Syracuse wine down the back of the Marquis Charles Emanuel Louis of Spiano, Knight of Malta.

The Baron lifted his voice to the classic air of the witches' Sabbath in Boito's "Mefistofele".

“ Oh ! Maddalena.
Do me no wrong !
Sing me a song !
Oh ! Maddalena.”

The little villa of the *Favorita*, perched on a rock above the sea, was like a basket of perforated wood in the midst of a forest of laurels and orange trees.

Vico di Spiano, with whom money matters had gone well lately, had bought it to present, for the time being, to Lellina, a little kitten full of caprices and aspirations. To-day he had asked his good friends "sans façons" to a family lunch, and he promised to do something more, if *Andreina* won a prize at the races which were coming on presently.

Andreina was a horse.

Lellina was a kitten.

" Oh ! my Lellina !
Sing me a song !
Do me no wrong,
Oh ! Marinella !
Star of the night !
Lovely and bright ! "

Usilli had brought a case of champagne, of a first-class brand, which he had bought at fifty francs a bottle from a groom of the Duke of Saxony who had come to pass the winter (the groom, not the duke), in a villa at Mergellina. The wine was genuine champagne fit for a prince's table, and quite probably the groom had stolen it from his master.

" Stolen wine is the sweetest ! "

The corks popped from the silver necks of the bottles like shot from a quick-firing gun, and shot into the sea. A flood, blond and foamy as Marinella's hair, filled the cups and dishes, and even sprinkled the girls' bare shoulders, who plunged shrieking into that sweet sparkling

bath ; whilst the Baron, who was further gone than the rest, raised his glass towards the blue light of the sea and said he was celebrating holy mass.

Although he had come with every intention of not chattering too much, and keeping watch over himself, he could not prevent the Rhine wine and the champagne from having their say also. Happy and silly with tipsy hilarity, he looked through the glass and rejoiced that he saw nothing, not even a black spot.

From the Villa's lofty terrace, the eye could behold the entire surface of the sea below, looking like a wide blue saucer for the blue cup of the firmament. Nature's life throbbed in the phosphorescent dancing of the little waves beneath the sun ; it was the life the Baron felt in him too as he clasped Marinella in his arms.

Who could fish up an ugly priest's hat out of those six hundred leagues of sea ?

" You have promised a hundred times to take me to Santafusca, but you are a fraud of a baron," said Marinella.

" I have sold it."

" Have you sold it to the priest ?" asked Vico di Spiano.

" What priest ?"

" The priest of the mortgage."

" Yes, I have sold it to the Archbishop."

" Oh ! a propos of priests," said Marinella, " have you read last night's *Piccolo* ? They have found the priest."

" What priest ?" asked the Baron carelessly.

“The priest of the hat. Haven't you read the *Piccolo*?”

“Get along with you, you little madcap, I'll buy you a finer villa than this one,” said the Baron, only half understanding.

“Oh! look at that great bird up there!” cried the woman, pointing high up in the sky.

“It's an eagle.”

“It's a hawk.”

“It's a crane.”

In the clearest part of the sky a black thing was wheeling, a big sea-bird. The Baron, who was unsteady on his legs, laughed uproariously and said: “It's the priest's hat.” And he stood for a moment, with his finger pointing to heaven, as if in defiance.

I don't know how it happened that the *Piccolo* was on the table. The Baron, who was already giddy, lighted a big havannah, pushed an armchair on to the terrace, sat down in it, stretching his legs out and puffing great clouds of smoke towards heaven.

In the middle of the page he saw printed in large letters:

THE PRIEST'S HAT

He saw it, but he showed no surprise. It seemed to him such a foolish and everyday thing that it was not worth while troubling about it. He read the first lines, just from curiosity, and his head swam so that the words were mixed up in a jumble of black and red.

A spark of sanity still strove to fix his drunken attention on the significance of what he read ; but his brain was laden with fumes. The wine, the goose-pie, the tart, the lobster he had eaten made everything spin round him suddenly like a mill-wheel.

The Baron felt his chest constricted and his head was splitting. Through the cloud of smoke the great black lettering stood out, followed by other black lines in which the name of the Priest Cirillo was distinct, the hat, the hatter, Santafusca, the box. . . .

He did not understand the meaning of it all, but an atom of intelligence remained, as if stuck on a pin, to suffer atrociously from all these diabolical hieroglyphs. He blew great puffs of smoke, and drops of cold sweat appeared on his forehead, which had become pale and icy cold.

All the time the girls, lying back in their chairs, went on shrieking their foolish chorus :

“ Sing me a song !
Do me no wrong !
Star of the night !
Lovely and bright !”

Not to be able to read. What a curse not to be able to understand how that box and the hatter came in !

With a great and laborious effort of mind he succeeded at last in deciphering this phrase :

“ The affair is now in the hands of the Public Prosecutor.”

Was it a drunken nightmare? He turned his eyes towards the dining-room and recognized the place, his friends, the women sprawling, half dressed, cigarettes in their mouths. He turned his eyes the other way and saw the trembling blue sheen of the infinite sea, in which he had hidden his secret. He tried shaking the black and white sheet of paper he held in his hands. He felt it rustle and sing, and the capital letters seemed to have become larger thus :

THE PRIEST'S HAT

It was certainly a dream, a delirium, a nightmare due to wine and the goose-pie.

In short, all this was only sensations.

He turned towards the girls and, laughing, said :

“ You stupid idiots ! ” He knew he was drunk by the very way he laughed. He felt it from the weight of his shoes, which seemed to be made of lead. He must take good care to be on the watch, not to betray himself. He went back to his reading.

The stupid paper mentioned him also, together with Don Antonio. What a dream ! What folly ! Just like one of Xavier Montepin's novels !

Here is what the *Piccolo* said :

“ All our readers will certainly remember Priest Cirillo, of whom we have spoken in connection with an extraordinary win on the lottery by a Naples hatter. We said on that occasion that the priest had left the town and nobody knew anything about him. People had begun to think he might have been the victim of foul play, and

here is a curious incident which confirms these ugly suspicions.

'What?' you will say, 'have they found his body?'

'No.'

'Has a plot against him been discovered?'

'No.'

'Have they arrested the murderer?'

'No. They have merely found his hat.'

'A hat? But what sort of talk is this?' It sounds like a story out of the Arabian Nights, yet it is nothing but the truth."

The paper, after relating the facts, taken (without acknowledgement) from *Popolo Cattolico*, concluded:

"We have sent one of our reporters to Santafusca to collect particulars, and we will keep our readers fully informed about this strange and complicated business."

Little by little the Baron had managed to make out the sense of these words and, even in his extreme intoxication, the thought of his danger appeared clearly in his mind. A force mightier than reason or chance was playing with him. He felt a rush of blood to his head, followed by a flow of bile which made his mouth bitter. All of a sudden rage overpowered him; he tore the paper to pieces, thrust some of it into his mouth, bit it, shook the windows till they broke, and ended by rolling under the table, roaring like a wild beast. A tremendous confusion ensued. The frightened girls rushed this way and that, shrieking like eagles, and the servants came running in at the noise and the cries for them, and helped to carry the Baron away, drunken and rigid like a man in an epileptic fit.

III

THEY HAVE ARRESTED HIM

WHEN the Baron awoke from the leaden stupor into which he had fallen, he could not make out where he was, and was puzzled to find himself in a room he did not know, near the sea, alone, lying dressed on the bed, with his head and one hand bandaged.

Once upon a time these adventures would have pleased him. But the time had gone by when the young and brilliant Santafusca, wounded almost mortally in a duel, awoke in a fairy's house.

The happy time of fairies was over long ago.

The sight of the sea, its azure flames dancing down below, seemed to recall a shadow, and behind the shadow was an idea . . . but a flaccid, confused idea, in which he felt that his priest somehow came in ; it was scarcely an idea, it was more a sort of pain in his heart, where he felt a sharp pang from time to time.

"Has Your Excellency any orders ?" asked a liveried servant, coming in suddenly through a velvet-curtained door.

"Where am I ?"

"At the *Favorita*, Excellency ; my master the Marchese of Spiano begged me to present his excuses as he has

been obliged to leave for Naples. He will return this evening——”

“ Ah ! this is the *Favorita*. . . . I remember now. But what has happened, my friend ? ”

“ Your Excellency was very ill yesterday.”

“ I remember. It was the fault of the champagne. The King of Saxony’s groom seems to have stolen a good wine ! Well ! such things happen to lively men, I suppose.”

The servant made a slight bow, and smiled slightly as if to say he could forgive these misfortunes. Thieves also make strange mistakes.

“ The Marchese begs you to order anything you may require.”

“ Let’s begin with a cup of coffee then ! But tell me, first, how long I have slept.”

“ From yesterday afternoon till now, and it is ten o’clock.”

“ By Jove ! there must be morphine in that wine. And you say the Marquis is coming back this evening ? ”

“ Yes, sir. He went to Naples to make some arrangements about the races to-morrow.”

“ Oh, yes, of course ; to-morrow is the day of the races. And those ladies who were here yesterday ? . . . ”

“ They went away directly.”

“ Tell me something more ; why are my hand and my head bandaged ? What is the matter ? What is this blood ? ”

“ Your Excellency fell against a great sheet of glass

on the balcony ; and cut himself here and there. 'The pavement is so slippery——'

"The morphine, I suppose ! Bring me that coffee."

The Baron sat up in bed and felt his head and his hand.

They were only scratched. He had had worse than that before now. In fact, it was not much of a misfortune to wake up in a pretty little house by the sea after eighteen hours good sleep. Since friend Spiano was so kind, Santafusca would take advantage of his kindness, and stay at the *Favorita* till he had time to send to Naples for some more decent clothes. The old libertine had come out of that orgy like a dog out of a church. Wine and blood everywhere !

"Wine and blood ! what a fine title for a newspaper serial."

The idea of the serial brought the newspaper to his mind, and that led him to think of the *Piccolo* and its famous story of a hat.

"Was that a real fact, or a drunken man's dream ?"

The servant brought in the coffee.

"There will be a great crush to-morrow ; we shall see some fine coaches. The Sebeto prize this year is three thousand francs, and the Ministerial prize two thousand five hundred. I hear that *Andreina* has many backers. The Marquis is lucky. Last year he won the Ottaiano eight thousand franc prize with *Rodomonte*. A fine horse, by Jove, that *Rodomonte* ! I forgot . . . have you yesterday's *Piccolo* ?"

"I will see. It should be here."

The servant poured out the coffee and went out.

Had it been a dream, or had the *Piccolo* really reported the story of a hat sent by Don Antonio to a Naples hatter? Once before he had had a wonderful dream. His imagination had not slept, and we know that dreams are made up of fragments of our ideas. The Baron fixed his eyes on the bottom of the cup, as if looking there for the solution of the riddle.

The servant came in with a torn piece of crumpled newspaper. It was all that remained of the *Piccolo*.

"Let's see . . . these races."

The Baron put the pieces together on the bed, and he found the big heading:

THE PRIEST'S HAT

So it was not a case of dreaming, or a trick played by the wine.

The coffee had dissipated the fumes in his head. Although the story was torn here and there, the Baron could read it and touch it with his hand. He was no longer drunk. He was awake. He was not delirious. Now he remembered quite well it was that infernal paper which had brought the blood and the wine to his head.

Wine and blood was not the title of a serial, but the real and horrible story of his life. And this story seemed to have no end. It was a terror, a punishment, an insupportable torment, to hear someone walking, coming

up close behind one's back, and not to be able to lay that spectre, not to be able to make out the reason of things.

How on earth the dead man's hat could rise from the bottom of the sea, and come by rail, in a sealed box, to the hands of the Public Prosecutor, was a mystery which he gave up trying to decipher. Is there perhaps above things and reasons, an operative force, more powerful than things or reason? Was it again the invisible arm which had reached far, far down into the ocean abyss, to fish up his crime?

"No, Santafusca, this is transcendentalism. Just consider; this has happened because you have made a mistake. Either you have put another hat away, or the Public Prosecutor has found a mare's nest."

"Let's reason, for Heaven's sake! That priest had not two hats any more than he had two heads. If justice has found a mare's nest, he will soon discover the mistake, and Priest Cirillo will sink into nothingness by the force of inertia. If I have made a mistake . . . I, well, let us see! what harm can come to me from that? Yes, a priest's hat has been found."

"Well, what of it?" (the Baron imagined a dispute between himself and the Prosecutor). "Let us see, sir, what follows?" "The hat has been found in the neighbourhood of Santafusca." "Yes! that is so. What then?" "The priest has disappeared." "Everyone knows that!" "They say he has been killed." "That's no fault of mine, my dear sir!" "It was found

in your Villa." "Which? the hat or the priest?" "The hat." "My Villa is everyone's property, and Salvatore's goats are masters there rather than I. Gently, gently! One does not so lightly start an accusation against a nobleman, against one of the oldest families in the kingdom. And who is this priest? I have never seen or known him. . . . There! . . . Moreover, I am highly astonished at not having been informed of this, and I protest against the abuse made of my name."

The Baron talked in this way, whilst he rearranged his dress as well as he could. Reciting his defence to himself, he was persuading himself to believe what he wished others to believe. He had nothing to fear; and when he had rid himself of the usual terrors of imagination, he felt that he would not be afraid, not even at the sight of the dead man.

He alone could accuse him; but though you can fish up a hat you cannot make a dead man speak.

On the other hand, it did not seem to him prudent to wait, with his hands in his pockets. He had behaved like a drunken fool, when he lost his head about the hat; but it was not advisable to let the newspapers get wind of the business and "tack on a fifth leg to the sheep."

Since Santafusca was implicated in the matter, it behoved him to come forward, to ask for information, to go to the Prosecutor himself, and ask what truth there was in this matter of the hat.

Too much silence about a thing in which his name

was directly or indirectly involved might cause people to wonder. He was bound to play some part in this case, if only as the landlord.

It was absolutely necessary he should go back to Naples; he washed his hands, arranged his clothes, called the servant and asked if he could have a closed carriage to take him into town.

"Yes, sir. You are asked to order anything you require."

"You will tell the Marchese . . . but I hope to see him myself in a couple of hours."

It would be better he should look at the morning papers and if necessary write to them to correct misstatement.

"Curse the newspapers," said the Baron, lying back in the corner of a landau which drove rapidly towards the town.

"A curse on this printed chatter! If I could I would drown every newspaper man."

The feudal feelings of the old Santafusca boiled in him, and his blood rebelled furiously against the so-called democratic system, which consists in collecting and printing all the chatter which the fishwives scatter at their doors. With an excuse of a "they say", things are printed which no one says, which no one wishes to say, or to hear said.

When he reached Naples he was still thinking of hanging a press-man. He tipped the coachman and hurried home to make himself decent and presentable.

Maddalena came to open the door, repeating the usual phrases, which her master from long habit no longer listened to.

Whilst dressing, he went over his self-defence, and decided he had nothing to fear from man, much less from God. Wishing to see the Marquis and make his excuses, he went out almost immediately and walked to the club, where Vico do Spiano usually lunched. It was also the easiest way to see all the morning papers.

As he entered the hall he heard the porter say to Raffaello :

“ They have arrested him.”

“ Who ? ” asked the Baron suddenly, as if the porter had addressed him.

“ The priest’s murderer, Your Excellency.”



IV

THE PRIEST'S MURDERER

THE Baron had hardly time to catch these words when :

“ There he is ! there he is ! ” called out many voices, and he saw Usilli do Spiano, and several others who were coming in behind him, who ran to meet, enquiring for news of his precious health.

“ Well, how do you feel ; what was the matter with you ? ”

“ Effects of the lobster ? ”

“ Effects of your abominable champagne, ” said the Baron, shaking hands with them in turn.

“ Don't you understand ? ” said Usilli, “ the lobster found himself swimming in an element which was new to him, and he created a revolution. ”

“ I am very sorry, my dear Marchese ; of course I will pay for the broken glass and the scandal. ”

“ I hope you have not hurt yourself. ”

“ A few scratches. You know we are pachiderms. ”

The Baron tried to laugh loudly, but he laughed with his teeth, rather than from his heart.

“ Count, ” said di Spiano, turning to one of those present, “ I beg to introduce to you the Baron Coriolano di Santafusca, my old friend and an old patriot, and to

you, my friend, I present Count Ignazi of Rome, who has brought with him his famous *Lazio*."

"Who won the Roman *Derby* this autumn?"

"Exactly."

"And this is Count Stagni of Urbino, who has been our guest for some days."

"Delighted! Charmed!"

"Very happy!"

The gentlemen shook each other by the hand, and complimented each other in turn, as is their way. Count Stagni thought that he recognized the Baron from having seen him some twenty days earlier at a small station near Naples.

"Very likely," said Santafusca coldly.

"I was coming back from a trip to Pompeii, and a gentleman who was running towards the station to catch his train attracted my attention. . . ."

"You are a good physiognomist," said the Baron, who, all through this conversation, kept repeating to himself the phrase he had heard in the hall: "They have arrested the priest's murderer!"

"You will lunch with us, Baron?"

"With pleasure; I will just glance at the papers first."

"All right; by the bye," called out Usilli, "Santafusca is going to be famous. They have found the priest's murderer."

"What murderer?" asked the Baron almost roughly.

"Read the papers! There is the whole and exact

explanation. I take great interest in *causes celebres*, and if I had not been born a count I should have been a police commissioner."

They all laughed at this pronouncement, whilst the Baron hurried to the reading-room where all the evening and morning papers were laid on the table. He looked through many of them, with trembling hands (fortunately he was alone), till he found one which bore the big heading :

" MORE ABOUT PRIEST CIRILLO "

" We are obliged," said the paper, " to return to this subject, because our secret information leads us to believe that the legend of Priest Cirillo will remain famous in the annals of justice.

Although so far justice cultivates a jealous and almost claustral reserve, it is well known that for a good reporter every door has its key !

We are therefore able to give some early information about the case, which is in the hands of that zealous and capable magistrate, Cav. Martellini, who adorns the Neapolitan bar, besides finding time for chess and society in the intervals of business.

We have already reported how the priest's hat was found in the neighbourhood of Santafusca, and sent to Naples in a box ; how the parish priest of that village was examined ; and how, in consequence of the reverend gentleman's deposition, justice has slipped the leash of its sleuth-hounds—the phrase is inevitable—on the trace of the criminals.

Hands were laid immediately on a certain Giorgio, a tavern-keeper who lives at Falda, at the sign of the *Vesuvio*, and who was found in possession of a hat which, however, turned out not to be Priest Cirillo's hat. . . .

This hat, in fact, was handed over, according to the innkeeper's deposition, to a mysterious sportsman (and here begins the puzzle), who came one day to claim it in the name of Don Antonio, parish priest of Santafusca.

The fact that a sportsman exists who is interested in this business is proved, not only by the innkeeper's deposition, but by that of various peasants and masons. But no one knows who the mysterious sportsman is, where he came from, or what has become of him.

Justice, however, has a long arm and with Cav. Martellini's zealous assistance, does not despair, and is already on the track of this sportsman, who, though he may run like a hare, will soon fall into the trap.

The curious part of the case is this: that whereas at first we had one hat, now we have two.

In short, one hat more and one priest less!

We need hardly say that the affair interests the good people of the Parthenopean city, and that the market women have begun to play three numbers: *priest, hat, sportsman* (see *Cabala* and the *Cumean Sybil*¹). It is possible therefore that the last of the necromancers, whether dead or alive, will again draw blood from the Treasurer's safe."

The paper was the old *Omnibus* and the article was signed Cecere, who seemed something of a witty writer.

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"We could arrange a sweepstake on *Andreina*, if Santafusca comes in."

"What for?" exclaimed the Baron, starting as people entered the room; and he tried to hide the newspaper amongst the others lying on the table.

"We are talking of backing *Andreina* against *Lazio*,

¹ Booklets compiled for the use of players at the Lottery.

Naples against Rome, the Sebeto against the Tiber, and you are too lucky, Santa, not to stake a few thousand lire."

"What for?" asked the Baron again, his hand on the newspaper, and his eyes staring.

"Usilli!" called di Spiano, from the other room.

The Baron was left with Count Ignazi, who began a polite conversation.

"You should come some time and try our fox-hunting in the Roman Campagna."

"Yes."

"Are you a sportsman, Baron?"

"I?"

"Is there much love of sport in this part of the world?"

"None at all."

"We Romans go in for it a lot. You know *noblesse oblige*."

Usilli, fortunately, now came in, vivacious as ever, and took them both into another room where di Spiano was persuading some of his friends to bet on *Andreina*.

They were all in a fervour of discussion. Everybody talked at once of the turf, the racecourse, fine weather, the weighing paddock, pedigrees, mares, pretty women, with all the ardour excited amongst gentlemen by idle questions.

They were mostly young, ambitious, and eager for glory and pleasure. Some sat on the table, some on the back of the sofa, some astride the chairs. Amongst

them were officers in handsome uniforms, and the strong scent of cigarettes made the air hot and choking.

The Baron, seated in the midst of them, and almost forgotten amongst so many brilliant young men, come from all parts of Italy to represent the luxurious aristocracy of the country, had a moment's repose and could give himself up for a minute to his thoughts.

He felt that he had now exhausted all his strength and that this struggle between a living man and a dead man was too unequal.

The priest was too strong for him.

Murdered, buried, crushed beneath a great stone and a heap of bricks and sand, the priest had thrown up his hat before him. In vain he had tried to drown the hat at the bottom of the sea ; the priest had a long arm.

By Jove ! It is not enough to kill a man with two tremendous blows on the head, if all the Mediterranean is not enough to cover a secret, if to kill signifies to make him live more than ever, if to hide him in a cistern means that he will make a whole city busy themselves about him, all the press, the magistrates, the telegraph, the barbers' shops, the lottery booths ; if all this happens in the world, by Jove ! it is a sign that reason is unreason, truth is not truth, but everything else is truth, especially what is impossible, or indeed absurd ; all is nothing, and nothing is everything. . . .

A roar of laughter followed these philosophical reflections of the Baron of Santafusca ; it seemed to him that his friends were laughing at his stupidity. He began

to hate these fastidious dandies ; but he was wrong.

Usilli was telling light stories with such happy wit that he would have made the stones laugh. Santa, annoyed at the coarse hilarity of his friends, got up with the air of an offended man, left the room and, without saying good-bye to anyone, went out of the Club, ran down the steps and hurried towards the Law Courts, with the idea of speaking to Cav. Martellini, whom he knew quite well, having met him several times at the chess club, where the good magistrate was an authority.

On the way he thought that the boys were selling more papers than usual. Many of the cabmen had a paper in their hands and were reading, no doubt, the story of the priest and the sportsman.

And while he too was thinking of this strange sportsman, he seemed to see him all of a sudden in the bright windows of a pastry-cook. He stopped as if an abyss had opened at his feet ; and stood a moment looking at his own image with terrified eyes.

Although he had changed his clothes, the famous sportsman's face must have been impressed on the minds of Giorgio of Falda and of the other peasants, especially his shining, lustrous eyes and his full, coal-black beard. Why ! even Count Stagni remembered it ! If Cav. Martellini were to confront him with the accused man he would most certainly be recognized. However much the Baron might defend himself by lies and oaths, it would never do, at the point things had now reached, to arouse a suspicion or even the shadow of one.

What was to be done? He could not take his eyes off that face in the windows. Chance, or instinct, led him to Granella's shop.

Once again chance favoured the designs of the noble sportsman. The fashion plates from England prescribed this year, as the *nec plus ultra* of elegance in matters of sport and races, a red jacket, tight at the waist, riding-boots, light coloured trousers, the beard cut *Derby* fashion, with two short whiskers, and the rest of the face clean-shaved.

Granella, always up to date, required no advice how to make the Baron of Santafusca the most English of Neapolitans.

"The Prince of Ottaiano has also sacrificed his fine *Palmerston* beard for to-morrow's races. It is in these things one recognizes the real sportsman. He who will not sacrifice something to elegance and fashion will sacrifice nothing to beauty and love. *Voilà monsieur!* . . . if the Baron of Santafusca triumphs to-morrow the merit will be in part that of his 'hairdresser'."

The Baron laughed at hearing Granella speak English. As he looked into the glass, he congratulated himself heartily on looking so young. The sportsman was dead, by the hands of the first "hairdresser" of the town! Giorgio of Falda would not recognize the curate of Santafusca's nephew in this elegant devotee of the Turf.

With nerves rather more tranquil, and with a view of consulting public opinion, as he had done before,

by making Granella talk, he asked carelessly, as he tied his cravat before the looking-glass :

“ Well ! about this priest ? ”

“ Which one ? ”

“ The one of the three numbers ; have they found him ? ”

“ It is a tangled skein, and I fancy that Madam Justice is on the wrong track this time.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because, while she thinks she has the criminal in her hands, she is giving the real criminal time to get away.”

“ You mean . . . ? ”

“ I do not wish to boast, Excellency ; but as I have the honour to serve Cav. Martellini, who has charge of the case, I am in a position to know things the newspapers do not know.”

“ Aha ! ” exclaimed the Baron, standing in front of the looking-glass and undoing the bow of his cravat a second time.

“ We talk about it sometimes, I and the Cavaliere, who is an acute and affable man . . . and I don't deny he knows his business, but sometimes he sees an ant on the top of a pole, and yet overlooks an elephant.”

“ Really ? well, go on.”

“ The priest, I don't mean the dead one, the live one, has deposed : first, that he has never sent any sportsman to Falda to collect a hat ; second, that he has no relations, and especially no nephews who are sportsmen ; thirdly,

that the hat he sent to Filippino was new, whereas his was an old worn-out hat, and that, consequently, the poor devil arrested and accused of having killed the priest had not even touched his hat. And meanwhile, partly owing to the lengthy formalities, and partly because of the newspaper chatter, the sportsman will clear out, and there's an end of the music."

"Do you really believe that . . . the sportsman is guilty?"

"I have no doubt of it, any more than I doubt that Your Excellency will be the most elegant man in Naples to-morrow. Too many witnesses have seen him. There is also a railway guard who says that he passed on such a day, at such an hour, that he took the train for Naples, that he had a knapsack on his back; and it is known, through other witnesses, that the priest's hat was in that knapsack. . . . This man therefore was deeply interested in causing the disappearance of the priest's hat; which a chance, namely the winning of the famous three numbers, had suddenly made celebrated throughout the world. The devil helps his children, but only up to a certain point. . . ."

"Well, we shall see," said the Baron, who began to find all this chatter oppressive. "I foresee that I shall have trouble too, on account of Santafusca; I should be sorry if I were called up to-morrow."

"Do you happen to know Cav. Martellini?"

"Yes, quite well. We meet sometimes at the Chess Club."

“ You might write him a note.”

“ That's a good idea ; you should have been a lawyer.”

“ I feel I should have succeeded. Will you have a light ? ”

Granella offered a lighted match, and held it for the Baron to light his cigar. Then he ran to hold aside the curtain, and cracking his napkin like a whip, exclaimed in his Neapolitan English :

“ Got bai ! ”

“ That is really a good idea,” said the Baron to himself, as he passed the shop windows in which he no longer saw the image of the sportsman. Hope revived again for the third time, and his sensations of fear began to give place to clear and positive considerations.

Once more he had been frightened by a shadow.

If the real criminal was the sportsman, what fear was there now for the Baron of Santafusca ? Granella's opinion was the general opinion, and probably that of the examining magistrate too. The witnesses agreed in throwing the responsibility on this poor sportsman who had no connection on earth with the most elegant man in Naples.

Finding this sound reasoning, and occasionally believing to rather an unnecessary extent in the myth of the sportsman, he went into a cafe and wrote as follows to Cav. Martellini, on his visiting card, duly adorned with his coronet :

"DEAR AND COURTEOUS CAVALIERE,

I have just read that Santafusca is involved in the Hat case. The communal Secretary has informed me that the sanctity of my domicile has been violated. I am preparing a strong protest, but I will freely forgive Cav. Martellini provided he does not call me as a witness on the day of the races. If he spares me the trouble altogether I would gladly take train for Paris. I am, however, always ready to obey—like Don Abbondio."

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Cav. Martellini, who knew the ways of Society, and who swam in the good graces of the nobility like a tench in clear water, at once replied as follows :

"EXCELLENCY !

If sacred ground has been violated, we will offer propitiatory sacrifices. As to calling your Excellency I hope it may not be necessary, since the case has no foundation and will probably end in an acquittal. At all events, I am too anxious to be present at the Races, to play myself the trick of sitting *pro tribunali*, and summoning you whilst *Andreina* beats that poor *Lazio* by a full length. Every good Neapolitan is bound to believe to-day in *Andreina*.

Yours ever !"

.

"That's all right !" said the Baron, not even troubling to read the evening papers. He was, indeed, surprised to feel so safe and relieved.

A great weight was transferred from his conscience to the conscience of another self, derived from himself, a pitiful shadow who interposed between the victim and

his murderer. It was necessary now to believe in this good sportsman, were it only out of gratitude.

And at times he really believed in him, as if his were a double personality, just as the little child believes in the real existence of the shadow which plays with him. He was inclined to speak of him readily, in the hope that speaking of him would help to give the shadow greater consistence.

He thought that by so doing he would help public opinion to wander further from the truth, and to concentrate on an impalpable being the whole responsibility for the wicked deed.

This was his chief preoccupation during the day preceding the races.

Wherever he happened to be, at the Club, at the café, or on the turf, wherever, in fact, he could bring the talk round to the famous case, he expressed his ideas with the utmost heat and clearness, with such boring insistence that Usilli ended by saying :

“ Look here ! you have almost given me a headache with that hat ! ”

As he held shares with Usilli di Spiano and many others in a sweepstake, about which there were many bets, he had to run about all that evening and all the next morning, on horseback, or driving, to the tailor who had not got his red jacket finished, to the riding school to some ladies of the aristocracy to make arrangements.

It was so enjoyable to be thus busy that he seemed as full of life and gaiety, of grace and elegance, as he

had been at thirty. Cav. Martellini would not have believed what good he had done to a soul in purgatory. Even the Princess of Palandes, who had avoided him of late years, found Santafusca a good ten years younger.

This famous princess, sprung from the union of two old Italo-Spanish families, was still a very beautiful woman. She had been left a widow early and still claimed to be thirty years old ; and her beauty flourished in the full development of her second youth, which in handsome women is often like a second edition, revised, expanded and improved. The Princess was quite willing to be courted (she had nothing else to do), and the motto *audaces fortuna juvat* was apt to find favour with her: The Baron, as we know, was not lacking in enterprise, and succeeded so well in his approaches, and said so many odd things in so few minutes, that the Princess chose him as her escort.

“ I will come to fetch you with the carriage, Princess.”

“ Why not on horseback ? ”

“ Certainly, if you prefer it,” said the Baron, clicking his spurs.

“ You shall be my terrible cavalier.”

“ And why terrible, Princess.”

“ Why ? because you have a brigand's face, and I like that.”

Then the Princess, laughing, added in her rich voice :

“ Is it true that one of your ancestors hung ? ”

“ Brigand yes, Princess ; *hung*, no. The Santafuscas don't let themselves be *hung*. Au revoir to-morrow.”

“ Mind you're in good time.”

The Baron took his leave, almost enamoured of the beautiful widow, and this new and pleasant thought wove itself, like a golden thread, into the torn and obscure tissue of his poor life.

Next day at noon, the Baron, wearing his fine coat of red cloth and with a long feather in his velvet cap, rode out to the racecourse, the beautiful amazon at his side.

V

AT THE RACES

THE day could not have been more splendid.

There was a great crush of carriages, four-in-hands, tilburys, coupés, breaks and beautiful women ; and the betting was heavy.

The bookmakers did good business, and more than two hundred thousand lire changed hands in the course of a few hours.

Andreina beat *Lazio*, the first favourite for the next *Derby*, by a length, thus giving the victory to the Neapolitan stables of which the Marchese Spiano was president.

The enthusiasm was indescribable ; and applause, caresses, kisses, greeted the pretty mare, the ladies even throwing their bouquets.

The crowd of outsiders were not so deeply moved by a triumph which had not much to do with them, but they shouted all the same ; and the sellers of fresh water and lemonade, oranges, melons and japanese fans, did a fine business.

When the homeward journey began, no pen could describe the movement, the life, the chatter, the show of colours, the hurrying and shouting and dazzling gaiety in that air full of sunlight and blue sky.

People called to each other, greeted each other from the carriages, horsemen and people on foot crossed each other, in a mixture of liveries, feathers, red and grey jackets, fans, scarlet parasols, trailing dresses, floating veils; in short, it was a sparkling scene of diamonds and fairy's eyes.

The Baron, invigorated and transformed, had been paying eager court to the Princess, who was inclined to indulge her caprice and take her revenge for a secret adorer's treason by accepting Santafusca's devotion.

Santafusca accepted the fair lady's smiles for what they were worth. It had always been his plan not to ask of women more than they were inclined to give; and he had never had reason to regret this system.

The open air, the light, the excitement of betting, the anxiety about the races, so many people, so many pretty women, had aroused all the vital force in this man, whose instinct was to enjoy life to its fullest extent without restraint and without repentance.

"Excellency! Excellency! . . . you see we have not disturbed you!"

It was the voice of Cav. Martellini, who, from the top of a swagger break, in the midst of a basketful of fine ladies, was doing his best to reconcile the rigid severity of a judge with the amiable courtesy of a man of the world. This may be compared to writing one's life partly in ink, and partly in cherry-brandy, and few men were greater masters of the art than the Cavaliere.

“ Thanks ! thanks ! ” the Baron called back, waving his hand.

“ Don't thank me too much, because I am quite capable of having you arrested . . . with your lovely accomplice,” shouted the Cavaliere, making a trumpet of his two hands.

“ Certainly ! I shall not oppose any resistance ! ”

Great laughter from the top of the break, which disappeared in a cloud of dust.

“ Why is he going to arrest you, Baron ? ” asked the handsome amazon riding at his side.

“ It's still the story of that trial.”

“ Is it really true that a priest was killed at Santafusca ? Count Villi was telling me about it last night. What an ugly story ! Have they found the murderer ? ”

“ They suspect someone . . . ” the Baron answered, looking up in the air.

“ Then it's not a case of *cherchez la femme*. . . . ”

“ No. It is rather *cherchez le chasseur*. . . . ”

“ Are you really convinced that the criminal is this mythical *Freischütz* ? ”

“ Yes ! Just as I am convinced that I love you.”

“ You have thought it over for three days before saying so.”

“ It is love, aggravated by premeditation.”

The lovely Italo-Spanish princess smiled adorably. The Baron spurred his horse ; and, getting clear of the crowd, they set off at a sharp trot, exchanging glances eloquent of love.

A strong infusion of new hope displaced those thoughts which had bid fair to turn him grey. The sun, a good horse, and love—these are the best gifts that life can give.

The life of a free man, who can boast riches and perfect health—what else is the paradise Adam lost? Of what value to him who possesses Eve, and this earthly paradise, is that other paradise built in the clouds? The Baron would willingly abandon that paradise above the roof-tops to the poor in spirit.

The full and vigorous perception of his strength made him feel ready to fight the last battle. He took the superb amazon home—who, as she said “*au revoir*”, pressed his hand warmly; and then rejoined di Spiano and Usilli at the stables.

“Well! that’s a great victory, Santa . . .” cried his friends.

“If it means money, let’s rake it in,” answered the Baron.

Luck continued to serve him. What with big bets and little, he had won another twenty or thirty thousand lire. This abundance of money seemed trifling now to a man who, for fifteen thousand lire, had been forced to murder a priest. The conviction possessed him that money would always be his from now on; he knew he could find it everywhere, by just scratching the earth. He won and spent without counting, as if the treasure locked up in his desk were bound to increase and multiply.

As he quitted the stables he fell into the arms of

Cecere, the fat impressionist chronicler of the *Omnibus*, a paper now more than fifty years old, which Cecere with his staccato style, his asterisks, and inverted commas, had lately rejuvenated.

“Baron,” cried Cecere, “you come in (forgive the comparison) like cheese on macaroni.”¹

“Oh! my dear Cecere, I was meaning to write to you one of these days.”

“And I was hoping to meet you, Excellency. One can't print a man's name twice without feeling somehow related to him. It's the consanguinity of ink!”

Cecere, whose face was smooth and flabby, like a shaved monk, laughed and showed two rows of large white teeth, like those of a ruminant.

“What's to prevent our dining together?”

“Which of the gods?” declaimed Cecere, by no means unwilling to lock arms with a man who had won at the races. “I want many particulars about this great day, and it is always a piece of luck for a journalist when he can say that he has got them from an ‘unexceptionable’ source. But what is of greater importance for me, Baron, is to get your leave to visit Santafusca.”

“Heaven forbid!” said the Baron involuntarily.

“To such a suitor nought can be denied,” quoted Cecere. “I must persist in this request, because my editor has twice already expressed his surprise that I have not yet visited the scene of the crime. If he wonders a third time, he will take care that I shall not give him

¹ An Italian expression for something welcome and appropriate.

cause for further wonder . . . and then where am I ? ”

“ But who tells you, my good sir, that there has been a crime ? ” exclaimed the Baron, as he and Cecere entered the dining-room of the Europa café.

“ As a general rule, a crime always exists for a journalist, especially when he perceives that it does not exist. This ‘ priest’s trial ’ has interested our readers so much that we daren’t disappoint them with an acquittal. We must galvanize our dead man, make him live to-day, in order to kill him to-morrow, bury him, dig him up, and so on, at any rate till the next political elections, that is till the next political murders. Why should we not do all this to a dead man, when we always do it to the living ones ? ”

Cecere laughed again and showed his beautiful ox-like teeth, whilst he tucked his napkin under his chin and began to rub up the plates and knives and forks the waiter put before him.

“ If you knew how often I have wished you to the devil with this trial of yours ! ”

“ The man who sends a journalist to the devil, sends him to his grandfather. The divine poet has said that the devil is the father of lies, and we are certainly the children of his daughter. . . . ”

“ Well ! let’s hear,” exclaimed the Baron, who felt himself in a talkative mood, “ what are the particulars you want ? ”

“ May I say at least that I have interviewed you ? ”

“ I am not Prince Bismarck.”

“ For a journalist you are something better, and you cannot imagine the pleasure I shall give my readers when I can write, for instance, these words ; ‘ We have yesterday spoken with His Excellency the Baron of Santafusca, one of the most agreeable young men of the day ’ . ”

“ Young ! alas ! ”

“ Is not one young, when one has the good fortune to escort the beautiful Princess Palandes ? ”

“ Would you print that too ! ”

“ Not at present. ”

“ You are brutes. ”

“ It’s not without a purpose when a man cuts off his beard, *Derby* fashion, and has his chin clean shaven. ”

“ What do you mean ? ” asked the Baron, in a hesitating tone.

“ That you are young, in love, and fortunate. Leave it to me. I will call the attention of our gentle lady readers to this circumstance. I will put you down as only thirty years old. But about this other matter—you have a villa at Santafusca. ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Style ? ”

“ Seventeenth century, half baroque. ”

“ Half baroque is good ; the background is more scenographic. The Villa is, of course, splendid. ”

“ On the contrary, it is a ruin . . . falling to pieces. ”

“ Stupendous ! that is romantic . . . and will make a fine effect. And the hat was found in the Villa ? ”

"I know nothing about that. It is you who have said so."

"That was proved at the trial. What is your opinion about this crime of the priest?"

"How do you mean?" asked the Baron, helping himself to wine.

"Do you believe that the priest was killed in the Villa?"

"I?"—the Baron raised and emptied his glass. "What should I know about it? It's you who have killed this priest." (At this point he did his best to laugh.) "I skimmed through your chatter because they told me my name was involved in it and, as I understand, it appears that some sportsman has found the priest's hat, and has been seen first at Santafusca, and then at Falda at the Vesuvio tavern; and he said he was the priest's nephew . . . do you suggest that we can improve on this story to-day? . . ."

"At all events, if you were asked to give your opinion in court, you would probably say that this version, which accuses the mysterious sportsman . . ."

"If there is a crime . . ."

"If there is a hare, there should be a sportsman, you say!"

The Baron tried to laugh again, but could only cough. He poured out some more wine, drank it hurriedly, and wishing to clinch an argument, which at worst would help to save him, went on:

"I don't say, mind you, that the sportsman killed the

priest, at Santafusca or elsewhere. Perhaps the criminals were many, perhaps they drowned him in the sea after robbing him, and then one of them, the sportsman or another, threw the famous hat over the wall of my garden, five, six, ten miles away from the scene of the crime, in order to confuse the trail, and so mislead justice."

"It may be so. . . . Is the garden wall high?"

The Baron did not answer. His eyes were fixed on the door, through which the cash-desk was visible.

"Is it high?"

"What?" asked the Baron, still watching the door.

Cecere turned and saw two carabinieri, who were showing a paper to the landlord, asking him for information on something.

The conversation was interrupted by the waiter.

"What may I bring you further?"

"It is His Excellency who rules these domains," said Cecere.

"I don't care . . . please order what you wish. My head feels heavy and stupid. The sun was too strong down there."

The Baron rubbed his head, as if he wanted to rub the wrinkles off his forehead.

"Since we have talked of sportsmen, suppose we have a sportsman's dish, broiled fowl," said Cecere.

The two carabinieri disappeared, and the landlord went back to his place.

Cecere, whose attention was largely taken up with eating his dinner at another's expense, believed quite

sincerely that the Baron had a touch of the sun, and said :

“ A short nap is a good remedy. . . . Anyhow, Excellency, you don't lose much by being off your feed. Did you ever see a more apocalyptic fowl than this ? I seem to have our priest's skeleton on my plate. . . . These people laugh at the press and at sport. I shall have to put that down as well in the *Omnibus*.”

Cecere jotted down a few words in his notebook ; hat . . . sportsman . . . high wall . . . meagre priest and pullet . . . and after a torrent of words which the Baron, with the excuse of his headache, did not listen to, went away well satisfied with his day's work.

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The Baron was left alone, his chin resting on his hand, and his eyes apparently fixed on the carcase that Cecere had left on his plate. He felt really ill. That stupid talk, Cecere's vulgar and fatuous mirth, the sight of those two gendarmes who seemed to have come in search of somebody, had stirred the bad blood in his veins ; and now he fell back more heavily than ever to the painful contemplation of his thoughts.

For the last twenty days he had been leading a wretched life of despair, full of shocks and fears, of hopes and herculean efforts to support the artificial edifice he had built on his crime.

He had lost many nights in play or in orgies ; and for as many days he had sought strength and forgetfulness

in noisy chatter, in the stables, in horses, in wine and spirits. Now, after a day in the blazing sun, he felt his head really splitting, and incapable of putting two ideas together. It was a dangerous condition for a man who had to reason very clearly, and then to induce others to reason as he did. His heart also, that infernal weak heart, was making itself felt more than usual.

He was not even hungry. If he drank, it was rather to stupefy himself, than for any pleasure it gave him. He had not yet given life that strong shock which was to make all the dead leaves fall ; and he felt that he would never escape from his thoughts till that accursed trial was over.

Fortunately all the witnesses agreed in proving the innocence of Giorgio of Falda. But if, by an error of justice, the punishment had fallen on an innocent man, would he have had the courage to add this crime to the other ?

Although a man's value was no more than a lizard's, he would have hated to make a living man suffer. One may not fear spectres, but there are thoughts which terrify one more than spectres.

To think ! therein lies the punishment !

He had hoped so much from science ; and it was science which was helping to create and sharpen his conscience.

Perhaps Doctor Panterre was a fool also. Only wild beasts devour without remorse ; never, never, would he find peace he felt, unless he gradually brutalized himself, with orgies and filth.

The beautiful Princess had said "au revoir" to him, but he would not go there. That gracious creature, wrapped in a cloud of oriental perfumes, with her soft, dreamy eyes, and her voice full of music, would only make him the more sensitive and increase his suffering. Even Marinella, thoughtless in her gaiety like a pretty little animal, was too good for him.

The Baron of Santafusca could never more reconcile his heart's load of fear with his reason and its principles. . . . That was the terrible battle which would outlast the small span of his life.

These thoughts passed shadow-like, one after the other, in procession, whilst with his head resting on his hand, and his eyes half shut, he felt the wine throb in his head, already baked by the sun.

It was a beastly life. . . .

Why should he not kill himself?

That was a question he had never so far put to himself. If one man is as good as another, why had he not begun by killing himself instead of braining the priest? Was he afraid of what lay hidden behind the scenes?

"Oh! what imbeciles we are!" he murmured under his breath, and he got up to go out.

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The next day the *Omnibus* published a brilliant article by Cecere, headed: *Three days at Santafusca*.

The writer described his journey through an enchanting country full of houses and olive yards. Then came the

description of a Villa, in the baroque style, and an historical sketch of the Santafusca family, which Cecere had copied from *Notable Families*.

“His Excellency the Baron Coriolano came to meet us with his usual amiability” (continued the storyteller), “and shook hands with us cordially. The Baron is a handsome man with a special predilection for journalists. He is one of the most elegant and daring of our noblemen, and if the ladies declare he is more than thirty years old, that is no reason for saying that he is forty.

“His Excellency (who, be it said, is much bored by the hubbub that is being made about him), showed us the place where the famous hat is said to have been found. He also is of our opinion that the priest may have been killed elsewhere and that, to confuse the issues of justice, the sportsman may have thrown the hat over the garden wall. We measured the wall; it is two metres and forty-seven centimetres high.”

After many other particulars, equally exact, which Cecere had fished out of his inkpot, the article ended with the motto: *Cherchez le chasseur*.

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Two days after these events, a gracious little note from Cav. Martellini invited His Excellency, the Baron of Santafusca, to a private interview in his office . . . but without the Princess.

“I am sorry,” he added, “to give you so much trouble about a business which will end in nothing, and

perhaps Priest Cirillo, issuing suddenly from his hiding-place, will spare Your Excellency this annoyance.

"But meanwhile, to exhaust the matter, as we say, I am bound to question the landlord also. Do not consider that you are coming to the judge, but to the friend. We shall be alone, and it will afford a good opportunity of lunching together afterwards! I hear talk of certain oysters *à la mayonnaise*, a speciality of the *Golden Dove*, which are said to be exquisite.

"The sitting is at ten o'clock."

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The Baron read and re-read this; and then listened to what his heart said. It seemed to him that he was quiet enough. The way in which the amiable Cavaliere wrote was sufficient to dispel any suspicion.

He had still a night before him in which to review quietly the details of the trial, all the facts of the examination, and to learn by heart the part he must play in this drama.

It was not difficult to formulate his position.

He knew nothing; he had never seen Priest Cirillo, He only knew that a hat had been found at the Villa . . . and since there was talk of a sportsman, he supposed that, if a crime had been committed, this . . . unknown . . . sportsman . . . might have had a share in it. Otherwise he knew nothing. This word *nothing* was his strong point.

After having gone over these fundamental ideas three

or four times, like a boy who does not want to pass an examination discreditably, he tried to think no more of it ; but all the same, he could not close his eyes all night.

Only towards morning, with his bones aching from his vigil, did he sleep, only to experience incongruous dreams, in which, like a burning coal placed on his heart, his hidden pain burnt constantly, insistent, tormenting. In his dreams he also saw a little brother of his, who died at ten months old, whom he had carried in his arms as a boy ; and it seemed to him that he still ran with the child on his shoulder, through a field full of poppies.

Oh ! if he could have blotted out twelve hours from his life.

He would have given twelve ounces of his blood, for those accursed twelve hours. Although fate cried to him : “ Don’t be afraid ! I will help you . . . ” he feared there might be something stronger than fate, against which no defence would avail. That accursed priest still moved in his cistern !

“ What life dead men carry with them ! ” said he once, sitting on his bed, his eyes staring into the darkness. The time which had first seemed too short, now passed all too slowly. Looking back, he seemed to have lived fifty years since the day Priest Cirillo had come to see him at the Villa. Yet only one month had passed since then.

VI

ANOTHER GREAT CRIMINAL

NOR was poor Don Antonio's heart quiet and relieved, on the day that he came back to Santafusca with Martino, after a sad journey to Naples and a sad day spent in the corridors of the Courts of Justice.

He had been called to the sitting by a written order, handed him by the sergeant of the carabinieri, and had gone down, with terror in his heart, to the presence of the judge, who had tortured him for an hour with a searching examination.

He could put up with the examination, and the sight of so many policeman and jailers, who passed along, rattling their bunches of keys, and the sight of so many iron doors and bars enclosing dark dungeons. He could bear all that . . . but what a nest of intrigues and lies, and betrayal, and murder. . . . And to think he had worn on his head, out of avarice, the proof of a crime! On the holy tonsure he had put the execrable sign of crime! . . .

This thought was enough to make him shiver, even beneath the bright sun of May, which warmed the slopes and ripened the harvest. Martino, who walked ahead on the stony road, from time to time stopped to wait for his priest, who with difficulty moved his legs—as if they were chained.

For forty years and more he had blessed those fields on the day of the Rogation Sunday.

Nearly all the population had passed through his hands, and the cemetery was full of people whom he had started on their way to heaven.

In his simplicity and poverty, the old pastor had accomplished his long journey serenely, the loving father of his children, the friend of the abandoned, the support of the weak, his soul pure of any evil deed, immaculate, clean from every stain.

Why had God allowed it that, near the close of his life, his little spot of earth should be laden with a horrible sacrilege, and his house soiled by a crime? He who had always kept his hands clean of any sin had, with hands consecrated to the divine mystery, touched the pledge of blood; and had been glad to possess it, and had slept in the horrid shade of a black spectre which still cried for justice and revenge.

Though the result of the trial was not yet clear, everything led to the belief that justice was really following the bloody traces of a crime. The depositions of Filippino, Don Ciccio, Gennariello, Giorgio, the peasants of Falda, all agreed in proving that an unknown man, dressed as a sportsman, had had a hand in this mysterious undertaking.

After three or four days of commotion, Priest Cirillo must have made some sign, if he were still alive. In a fisherman's boat, near some rocks, a sportsman's knapsack had been found, which Giorgio at once recognized

as the one into which he had put the priest's hat. But here the trail ended, and even Cav. Martellini was puzzled how to go on, since the ground failed him at every step.

On the other hand, many thought that Priest Cirillo had gone to the East.

"Pluck up your courage, Don Antonio, for even if the priest is dead, it is not we who have killed him."

So said Martino, hearing his master's deep sighs.

"I am satisfied it is all moonshine, and that the judges and the carabinieri are barking up the wrong tree about this priest. A hat is not a dead man, and if a gust of wind carried off my hat that would not prove I was dead."

"Would it might be as you say, Martino. But if you knew what a terrible suspicion has sprung up in my mind during the last few hours, on thinking of all these strange happenings! . . ."

"What do you mean now?"

"Look there. . . ."

"Where?"

Don Antonio pointed with his finger to the Santafusca Villa, which slept in deserted solitude in the shade of a great cloud.

"Well! what do you think?"

"I think . . . oh, nothing; let us go home. I feel feverish. I want to lie down."

"You don't think that Salvatore killed the priest?"

"He, poor fellow? He had not strength enough to kill a fly. Peace and eternal life to him who is dead! Salvatore only picked up the hat where he found it, and

carried it home, perhaps with the intention of speaking to me about it; but from that day he was not able to open his mouth."

"From what day?"

"I don't know, I don't know! don't make me say any more."

And the two sorrowing men walked on for some time in silence. Then, all of a sudden, Don Antonio, unable to escape his thoughts, broke out with this question:

"Do you remember the day we washed the faces of the saints on the altar?"

"Yes, I remember."

"When was it?"

"Wait a bit! It was before the Sunday *in albis*; and the very same day I found the candles gnawed by the rats. Not the vigil, not Friday. I know! it was surely the fourth of April, the first day that I rang for the festival."

"Exactly," said the priest, knitting his brows.

And he said no more.

But he remembered that, while he was in front of the vicarage, Salvatore had passed with a letter in his hand, and had said:

"The Baron has arrived!"

The small son of Menichella of the Torchio had said he had seen a priest go towards the Villa, by the plane-tree avenue. No one had seen the Baron before or afterwards, and no one thought of him, till the day when he came back arrogantly on horseback. The Baron was a lost soul, in dire need, an unbeliever, a materialist,

and there were many terrible stories about the Santafuscas.

With this suspicion lurking in his heart Don Antonio went home and was taken to his room, where he shut himself in to pray, and weep, and sigh.

Towards sunset a high fever seized him, and he was put to bed, repeating deliriously the strangest things possible.

Martino and some of the good peasants stayed in charge of him while someone went for the doctor and for medicine.

VII

THE ACQUITTAL

THAT worthy magistrate, Cav. Martellini, was at a loss how to find the clue of his trial. After numerous witnesses, corroborated by ascertained facts, had established the innocence of Giorgio of Falda, and the existence of a second hat, which put the first out of court, nothing remained but an elusive shadow ; that of the famous sportsman whom many had seen certainly, but who had disappeared into thin air like a spirit.

The industrious magistrate found he had to deal with a hypothetical case, a dead man whose death was not proved, and a "volatilized" murderer.

One day he said to Don Ciccio with a laugh :

" Dear Don Ciccio, I admire your zeal, but I hope that your accounts, and your clients' money, are less ideal than the cases you bring forward. I will continue my enquiries, but I cannot keep a poor devil in prison whose only crime is that he supplied drink to a sportsman."

" But this sportsman exists."

" If he exists, tell me where he is ; I shall be much obliged to you."

“ And what about Priest Cirillo, who has not come to life ? ”

“ That is not enough. We have to prove that he is dead.”

“ And the hat found at Santafusca, with dents and marks of lime and bricks ? ”

“ That is nothing. The hat was found by old Salvatore, was carried home, was taken by Don Antonio and then sent to the hatter. . . . You will observe that few lawyers' reasonings go as straight to the mark as this hat. . . . ”

“ What object had the sportsman in introducing himself as Don Antonio's nephew ? ”

“ There you are with your sportsman again. . . . He is the Arabian phoenix :

“ ‘ Everyone says that it exists,
But no one knows where it is.’ ”

“ My view is that we must first find the dead man, if he is dead, and then we will look for the live man, if that is necessary. As a last effort I will interrogate, to-morrow morning, His Excellency the Baron of Santafusca, to whom I have already spoken at the races, and who has promised me some explanations as to the locality and some information about Salvatore, his servant. But it is really by way of bringing things to a conclusion. And to-day I shall set the accused and the witnesses free.”

To Don Ciccio it seemed incredible that his great case, stupendously built on his summing up in Filippino's house, should vanish like a burst soap-bubble.

According to him, the matter had been very badly managed, on the usual crooked plan of our legal procedure, with too much intervention of journalists and too much chatter: giving time to the real criminal (and he felt that there was a criminal), to escape and elude the police investigations.

It was in the *Popolo Cattolico's* office that he poured out his bile: "Always the usual unwisdom! Don't they see that if the crime was probable when they had one hat to deal with, it is doubly probable now that they have two? And does not the knapsack cry to Heaven for vengeance? And have we not two peasants, three masons, a pointsman and an innkeeper who all say that on such a day, at such an hour, they saw a sportsman? No, forsooth! these are not eloquent signs! and because it is only a poor priest, they do not even think it worth while to see if he is alive or dead. . . . But if God grants me life and strength I'll write a book on the 'defects of our Procedure'. What's the good of talking of hereditary criminals, of irresistible force, of lipomania, of reasoning madness, of positive doctrine, and classic doctrine; it's all nonsense! we must take care that scoundrels are arrested, and that the terror of the delinquent shall be united to the safety of the innocent.

That is what is wanting to these fine liberals of the penal code, to whom Romagnosi, if he still lived, would seem a reasoning idiot."

This time Don Ciccio was even more ruffled than his white hat !

VIII

THE PUNISHMENT

It was only towards morning that the Baron closed his eyes for a time, and he awoke before seven o'clock. For a moment he did not remember the troublous night's thoughts, till that eternal pain in his heart forced him again to think of his illness, and he recollected.

By daylight his position still seemed a good one and free from danger. It would need a volcanic fancy to see, in Cav. Martellini's amiable summons, anything more than an invitation to try the oysters *à la mayonnaise*.

"That's a funny fellow!". . . said he, laughing as he again read over the Cavaliere's letter. "If I could send him the Princess in my stead I am sure I should make him lose his head. Meanwhile let's take care not to lose ours! . . ."

He felt that all his life was centred there, in his head. Thence had come the idea of killing the priest, and thence came the axiom that a man and a lizard are of the same value, and that the dead and the living all ferment in the same leaven.

Thence latterly had come prudent counsels, suggestions, inductions, stratagems and war-plans.

Thence therefore should come defence also.

His poor head already felt full and armed with arguments like a fortress, and when he carried his hand to it, it was as if he touched a burning furnace.

Poor head! For the last six weeks, that is from the day when the Canon of the Holy Fund for Female Orphans had sent to ask him for the fifteen thousand lire, he had never had an hour of truce and rest. Even the deep sleep into which he fell from time to time was only the consequence of an overwhelming brain-fatigue.

Well! this was the last day. Five hours hence he could go away without arousing suspicion in anyone. . . .

To leave Naples! What a delight it would be to know he was four hundred leagues beyond the sea! He would go to Spain. Why not? Spain is the land of the *toreros*, and of Andalusian women.

It was also in part the country of the beautiful Princess of Palandes.

And while he turned to these thoughts in order to give his head rest and change, he finished dressing. Rarely had the Baron of Santafusca appeared better dressed; white waistcoat, shining top-hat, light-coloured gloves, a high collar, an ebony stick with a platinum head, and a perfume of iris pervading all his person.

To pass the time, he wrote a sweet and perfumed letter to the Princess, to say that at six o'clock he would dine with her.

"I have a long discourse to make," he wrote, "on

which all my future life may depend." These words really meant nothing ; he merely wrote to pass the time and escape somehow from the strain of the present hour.

He thought he was very late and found, when he was on the way, that it was only half past eight. He had still an hour and a half to wait.

What should he do meanwhile ? He went into Compariello's for a moment, found the owner alone, and stopped with him talking about the races and idly rolling cigarettes.

" I thought you were in the country, Baron," said Compariello.

" Why ? "

" Because the *Omnibus* speaks of a visit which the writer made to Your Excellency, at your splendid Villa of Santafusca."

" Where is the *Omnibus* ? It's probably that fool Cecere. Ah, yes ! It is he, as I thought ! " he added, running his eyes over the paper. " That is how history is written ; he stole a dinner from me ! that's all ! "

" It helps him to sell his paper. People said that a great trial would arise from this hat, but now it seems likely to end in nothing."

" I too am summoned this morning. I don't know what I shall say, for I have never been very familiar with the priests. But Cav. Martellini wishes me to try some oysters. . . ."

" I have a Lipari wine, Excellency, in which oysters swim as if they were alive."

Although talk led to talk, the hands of the clock only said nine.

Good heavens ! an hour more ! Newspapers made him sick. He stood a minute with his face against the window looking at the people who came and went briskly about their business, indifferent, unconscious of his troubles.

He went out and strolled about, till chance took him to the church of the Ospedaletto, where Priest Cirillo had heard his last mass.

Here his attention was caught by a group of poor people, partly fishermen and partly workmen, who had brought a child to be baptized ; and as the Baron was only looking for an opportunity to pass the time and to let his mind rest on some external novelty, he was drawn into the church by the little crowd, which had attracted all the small boys who swarm in the lanes.

What joy shone in the eyes of these dirty people !

A young girl, the sister, or perhaps the maiden aunt, of the child held it in her arms and pressed it to her bosom, with a mother's love ; while the new-born infant's father—who looked like a huckster—went round and round one of the columns, turning his hat in his hands. It was his first son, and the father did not know how, otherwise, to manifest his shamefaced content.

Santafusca, for the second time, envied each one in that rabble of poor persons, who had found out how to be happy and had not the beginning of an idea in their heads.

At the high altar a monk said mass in a flaming red cope. An old priest, bent and prostrate in the pews, coughed loudly, his head in his hands.

The Baron had not seen a church for a long time and, as he turned his eyes around and above, he felt those holy walls might once have surrounded and defended him from the terrible social monster which fills the streets with noise. There were dark and secret passages, where he would have been content to hide all his life if only his head, his poor head, might rest at last from thought, reflection, argument.

Perhaps some ancient religious feelings of his early youth, buried yet not quite suffocated beneath the ruins of his libertine's life, were stirring in the depths; some images, struggling free from the deepest layers of sentiment, traversed his soul like a flight of white pigeons on the arid wastes of a desert.

Once in his life, as we have said before, he had thought of becoming a monk. At sixteen years old, when still pure in mind and body, he had followed a pious monk up to Montecassino, where he had stayed three days and three nights, contemplating the sky and the valley from the little window of a cell.

What peace, what precious repose could be found in that boundless solitude! . . . Could he have got there before evening, and asked for hospitality in God's name! Could he have hidden during the rest of his days in a subterranean cell, with only a streak of sky to look at . . . then he might rest for ever from this intolerable thinking.

In a niche under the altar of the Addolorate, piled on a confused heap of bones and broken humanity, some skulls looked out through a little iron grating, with deep black eye-sockets, in an attitude of excited curiosity.

One of these skulls had a priest's cap on it, dusty and gnawed by time; by that great Time the patient philosopher who, like infinite space, has a remedy for all things. It would be quite possible—the Baron thought—that chance should one day bring Priest Cirillo's broken skull to talk to his own hard sinner's skull in some niche on the ossary of Santafusca. The ossary is a little chapel, in baroque style, which stands at the junction of two field-paths, with its windows facing towards the west, that is towards the sea. The heads of many old peasants who died during the plague of 1630 have looked, for two hundred and fifty years, on the blue sea and on smoking Vesuvius. The rain from time to time washes those unwrinkled brows which are slowly dissolving into their elements, little else than phosphate of lime.

The thought of his own slow chemical dissolution seemed as sweet to the Baron as his thoughts when writing to the Princess an hour earlier, his dreams of a meeting free from all fear, a meeting of love.

A loud whispering and trampling roused the unfortunate man from a contemplation and reverie which had held him motionless, enchained as it were in its coils. The people were crowding towards the door, surrounding the baby, who had had the melancholy

idea of coming into the world, only to wish perhaps one day that he had died two hundred years ago, and was staring at the air and at nothing, through the bars of an ossary.

He heard a clock strike.

It was ten o'clock.

He looked at his watch.

He had still five minutes.

Should he really go to the judge, or should he run to the station, jump into the first train that was going and get clear away? If the cell could not, perhaps the forest might save him. Monk or brigand, it was all one to him if only they did not lay hands on him. . . .

He was still thinking like this, balancing the pros and cons, life or death, everything or nothing, when he came in sight of the Palace of Justice. There seemed to be two forces working in him, a rational one which worked in a vacuum, with no basis; the other, instinctive and suffering, which urged him forward. This is what we all feel as we go to the dentist to have a tooth pulled out which gives us the pains of hell; the will is afraid, but the pain would make us put our head on the scaffold.

At the moment of setting foot on the threshold of that tribunal, where during the past week everyone had been busy about his affairs, the Baron felt himself falling into a dark gulf. It was a fit of giddiness, against which he struggled, resting his stick against one of the columns near the porch and leaning his chest against it for a minute. If he had had eyes to see what passed around

him he would have noticed in the court and under the porches a group of persons who, on seeing him, moved and wavered, murmuring his name as he passed in front of them.

These were the people who had played a large or small part in the trial called the trial of the Hat, and who had come, perhaps, for the last time, to put themselves at the disposal of the examining magistrate.

There was Filippino, the hatter, dressed like a prince in a cloth jacket with large checks. There was Donna Chiarina, his wife, in a silk mantle with a lace border and a bright-coloured fan. Her hair was surmounted by a lofty tortoise-shell comb which had cost her husband two hundred and fifty lire.

There was also Don Ciccio Scuoto, the lost soul of the case, with his light-coloured trousers braced up short and flapping on the instep of his boots, with his inevitable white hat rough and bristling.

There was Don Nunziantè with the large and spongy nose, cited by Don Ciccio to give a legal opinion ; and Gennariello, the priest's nephew, a poor stick with long hair, pale from hunger owing to the long sittings of the tribunal, which prevented him from going about to satisfy his appetite with the help of his pretty ballads ; and with them, too, was Giorgio of Falda, twenty-four hours out of prison, whom Filippino had lodged in his house from a feeling we will not call gratitude (there is no merit in not killing), but from respect towards the priest his benefactor. Giorgio did not recognize, in the

elegant gentleman with his beard cut Derby fashion, the famous sportsman with the long black beard who had appeared one day up there at Falda, looking for the hat.

The most mortified of them all was Don Ciccio, the famous "priest's lawyer", who saw his great case melting like a snowball thrown into cauldron of boiling oil. The idiocy of the judges this time was, in his opinion, pyramidal, and he was just then repeating and declaiming, for the tenth time, his work on the "Defects, etc.", when the sight of the Baron, appearing in that sudden, unexpected way in the porch, for some reason or other made him jump.

Don Ciccio Scuoto, able and zealous lawyer as he was, was not a man superior to his time, or better than his fellows. He believed in fascination, in the evil eye, in impressions, more or less, according to circumstances, just as we all believe a little in dreams, and even in luck at the lottery. He only knew the Baron of Santafusca from having met him a couple of times, but some men have a medical and philosophic eye. I mean to say that, from the way in which the Baron reached the door, from the way in which he leant his stick against the column and then ran up the staircase, from the excessive elegance of his dress, from his short, hurried step; in short, from something indescribable, and perhaps also unreasonable, which irritated his nerves, the famous "priest's lawyer" was impelled to follow that man as one follows a gleam which shines out unexpectedly in a thick wood where one has been wandering for five or six hours alone and in despair.

It is not a case of believing blindly in secret instincts, and mysterious philological laws ; it is enough for us, in these circumstances, to admit the existence of a subtle sense of things and their condition in order to understand why Don Ciccio followed the Baron of Santafusca almost to the examining magistrate's door.

The Baron, with his swaggering and insolent air, startled the old porter who was snoozing in the anteroom.

'What can I do for you?' said he, getting up with stiff joints.

"Inform Cav. Martellini that the Baron of Santafusca is at his disposal." And, raising his stick, he showed the porter the way he should go.

He waited a few moments, pacing up and down with a military step, and this exercise also helped to steady his nerves. At that moment he thought of nothing. Like the scholar who, at the moment of going in to examination, feels that he has forgotten everything and that his head is full of tow, the Baron could no longer remember the principal formulas expressing his ideas ; but this did not frighten him. It would be enough to answer that vulgar horde of lawyers with one phrase only : "I know nothing." It is true that his ancestor Nicolo would have answered still more shortly, but . . . patience ! Fortunately Cav. Martellini knew still less about it than he.

"I wish I had three days' reign!" he growled. "These scribes and pharisees!"

"Your Excellency is as punctual as a king," exclaimed

he gracious Cavaliere, thrusting his shining bald head through the chink of the door.

Martellini was a fattish man, a bit round-shouldered, well fed, white skinned, with black whiskers and a good forehead, smooth as a billiard ball. His affable and confidential manners revealed the man accustomed to live in good society and especially amongst ladies, to whom he was wont to present little compliments in rhyme.

“How are you, Baron? Have you not brought your fair prisoner with you? It's true that you are her prisoner. . . . Ah! ah!” the judge was laughing loudly, “it must be a beautiful prison, I vow!”

“What do you mean?”

“The Princess. Well! you are paying a double game. You win at the races by running, and you win in love by arriving in good time.”

With the ease of a man accustomed to live in drawing-rooms, the Cavaliere linked arms with the witness and, stopping three or four times in five minutes as he led him through a dark passage, he said in an undertone, with the air of a man telling a delicate secret:

“*Inter nos*, I would have liked to spare you this nuisance, considering that this nonsense about the hat is a senseless business. But we poor judges are the victims of the public, and especially of the journalists. Then there is that poor Don Ciccio . . . do you know Don Ciccio?”

“No.”

“He is the most absurd man in the world, this ‘priest’s lawyer’, touchy, insistent, as tiresome as a gnat. It is he who is moving heaven and earth to make me find this priest. He has found a booby who spends money easily, so he taps the cask with law charges and bill stamps. Don Ciccio is determined that I shall find the priest for him at all costs, dead or alive, and preferably dead, for the advertisement of his shop, you understand. He insists, he even threatens to write pamphlets, and you have no idea what a pamphlet-writing lawyer is! I confess I am almost inclined to kill a priest to content him. . . . Ah! ah!”

The shrill laugh of the little judge resounded in the dark vaults of the passage.

“So that, my dear Baron, I am obliged, at least, to prove my good intentions and to interrogate, if necessary, even the goats and the dogs of Santafusca. The dog, ‘having been interrogated, did not answer’.”

“What dog?” exclaimed the Baron suddenly. He mixed up too many thoughts of his own with the judge’s gay words to be able to shoot a witticism on the wing.

“You can muzzle dogs, but you cannot muzzle journalists and lawyers.”

Talking in this way, they reached a large bare room where there were a few chairs, a table in the middle, and the king’s portrait as the only decoration.

Many doors around. On one was written: “Public

Prosecutor." On another: "Registry Office." On a third: "Prisons." Further on: "Royal Carabinieri."

A close smell of dust and dry ink increased the gloom of this ugly room, beyond which the Baron of Santafusca felt the armed force, the terror, the vengeance of Society lurking, loaded with chains and keys.

"Now, Excellency, be so good as to wait two minutes. Then I will have you called, and in a few words I shall have done with you. I have ordered the oysters for midday. . . . You will see!"

The Baron, feeling his legs wilting as a man does who has had high fever, sat down; he put his hat on the dusty table and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

In spite of having learnt not to believe in sensations, he could not help trembling a little now that he found himself face to face with human justice.

However, his plan was infallible. . . . "I know nothing." A man who holds his tongue cannot betray himself.

It was the last skirmish. Once his feet had carried him out of that dark little palace, he thought he would go for six months to some small place in Switzerland, very high up, in some romantic valley, there to spend long days stretched on the grass, and so recover his strength of mind and body. Then . . . he would do good. Once more he felt that one cannot oppose nature's old laws without pain and danger. But first he required to rest on the green grass. Then he would do good

yes. . . . Goodness is as necessary to life as oil to machinery.

He turned his eyes from a vision of green fields and fixed them on one of the doors before him.

The social monster was there, and he had to meet it with a smile on his lips, the same smile with which he used to meet the Princess ; he must conciliate it with some jest, laugh at its angry roars.

The door towards which the poor man directed these last thoughts of his opened with a harsh creak, and two broad-shouldered, strong-armed carabinieri came in with a beardless boy between them, one of those earth-coloured gutter-snipes who haunt the muddy lanes near the harbour ; he was handcuffed and dressed in a colourless jacket and a pair of torn trousers which he tried to hold up with his joined hands.

When the carabinieri had searched him thoroughly all over, to the skin, they pushed him towards the prisoners' door, opened it . . . and crack !—the door shut with a snap.

The Baron Coriolano of Santafusca thought it hard that a Christian should end like that, just for a stolen watch or maybe a hen. As for him, he would rather blow his brains out ten times over ?

A sudden terror showed him an abyss opening at his feet. Who had pushed him, little by little, to the threshold of prison ? He seemed still to feel on his shoulder the *invisible hand* pushing him quietly, and he turned quickly round.

He felt ashamed of his cowardice. Rapidly he went

over the summary of a thousand ideas he had collected in former years as to the infinity of space and time, and the blessed rest of death.

Was it not madness to suffer so much for such a trifling contingency ?

“ Your Excellency is requested to come in.”

These words were pronounced in a tone of humble reverence by an old usher, thin as a cod-fish, with scanty white hair and dressed in an old black gown.

The Baron stopped as if struck, looking at that man with the tiny head, dressed also like a priest.

“ This way, if you please, Excellency.”

Santafusca made another effort, and moved forward. The old usher, seeing he was about to go through a wrong door, put his hand gently on his shoulder and stammered :

“ Excuse me ! this way ! ”

.

He entered a large hall, well furnished and well lighted. Before a table covered with papers sat Cavaliere Martellini, sunk into his armchair, between two bell-ropes which met over his knees. His shining white skull was sharply defined against the blood-colour of the ample chair-back. At the two ends of the table sat two gentlemen, bent over their writing paper, whom the witness saw dimly in the shade.

The Baron felt, as by a sort of magnetic current, that the old usher, dressed like a priest, had stopped at the bottom of the hall near the door.

"Pray sit down, Excellency," said the amiable Cavaliere, in a somewhat stiffer tone; his lofty seat gave him a more serious and official appearance.

The Baron went at once to the armchair indicated, and sat down with some resentment and vexation.

"Since we are almost in private, let me introduce the Secretary Cav. Tinca, and Dr. Macelli, my colleague."

The two shadows sitting at each end of the table made a slight motion. The Baron endeavoured to do the same.

"Bring the things, Quaglia," said the Cavaliere.

The thin dry shadow detached itself from the wall and brought to the judge's table a basket covered with a green cloth.

"Our conversation will be very short, Baron, because I see that I have been forestalled."

"In what respect?" exclaimed the witness, very loud.

"A scamp can be sure to save himself from the judge's hands, but an honest man cannot escape those of the journalist. Excuse my indiscretion, Excellency. What truth is there in the conversation which the *Omnibus* printed in yesterday's issue? I have it here."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Baron, laughing, though his heart had jumped disagreeably at the judge's opening words. "The truth is: first that the journalist never was at Santafusca; secondly, that lies are sold cheap."

"You have, however, really had a conversation with this gentleman who signs himself Cecere?"

"Yes, a conversation . . . that is, some talk at the

café. He asked me my opinion, and I gave it him. But I know nothing about it.”

“ You think, therefore . . . or you are inclined to think, that a sportsman really exists ? ”

“ As I have said . . . I know nothing.”

“ Nothing, relatively, of course. But one is not owner of a Villa called Santafusca without taking some interest in questions relating to the property and to one’s own name. The hat was found in the Villa and, in fact, you have already protested against the violation of your domicile. . . . Did you know Priest Cirillo ? ”

“ No ! ”

Quaglia, though accustomed to doze through long examinations, had learnt instinctively to distinguish all the tones of truth and falsehood, and his trained hearing at once detected a false note in this sharp, rough “ No ” which the Baron of Santafusca flung, like a rag, into the judge’s face.

“ And what can you tell us of Salvatore ? ”

“ An old man, Salvatore, a good old man, Salvatore. Let us leave him in peace, for God’s sake ; in our wish to establish a crime, don’t let us be unjust to a poor dead man, in the name of Heaven.”

The Baron pronounced these words in one breath, and with a feeling of pitying tenderness.

Salvatore could not have wished for warmer praise from his master’s mouth ; these words were spoken sincerely from a warm and loving heart.

Salvatore and Maddalena, as we have said, had found

while there was yet time the soft spot in that heart so full of passion and imagination.

“How then do you explain, Excellency, that Salvatore was in possession of Priest Cirillo's hat?”

“I know nothing, my dear friend. . . .”

“You said to the journalist that the hat may have been thrown into the garden?”

“Yes.”

“Will you give us an idea of the house, and the garden? Is there a surrounding wall?”

“Yes.”

“A very high one?”

“About so high. . . .”

“But a witness says that the hat was not found in the garden.”

“Where was it found?” asked the Baron, taking courage.

“In the house.”

“Where?” insisted His Excellency, with an almost insolent tone.

“Have patience! I realize how tiresome this is, but it is only a matter of five minutes.”

The Baron had stopped at his “Where?” as if it had been a closed door. He was as curious as anybody to know how the priest had lost his hat.

A little pause followed, during which the Secretary and the other gentlemen with spectacles hunted amongst a heap of papers, murmuring to each other confused and cabalistic words.

“ You know nothing ! ” said a voice once more, proceeding from the deepest strata of his thoughts. It was a last warning to a man who perceived he was letting himself be too much deceived by sensations.

He lay back, settled himself in his armchair, and began to look straight before him, his eyes fixed on the bright light of the window, his legs crossed, and his shining top-hat in his hand. He dandled his stick, he looked at the points of his gloves. . . .

“ You know nothing ! ” said that prudent and secret voice again.

The judge spent some time in looking for a paper amongst the other papers ; then, with the uniform tone of a bell, he began :

“ Your name ? Excuse me ! these are just the usual formalities.”

“ Carlo Coriolano, Baron of Santafusca,” answered the Baron, with emphasis.

“ Son of ? ”

“ Son of Nicolo.”

“ Your age ? ”

“ Forty-five . . . I think . . . however. . . . ”

The Baron smiled a little.

The judge also smiled a little.

“ Living at ? . . . We know . . . that does not matter.”

The judge murmured a few words to his neighbour, who stood up, a great pair of spectacles on his nose.

The old usher began swaying like a pendulum behind the witness' back.

The Baron, who could see him out of the corner of his eye, could not resist turning his head to look once more at that thin codfish figure, dressed in black.

It was very mysterious. He thought he had destroyed the proof of the crime by sinking the hat to the bottom of the sea, and yet here it was now in the judge's hands.

Absorbed in this problem, he did not hear the judge's last question, and this produced a certain embarrassment all round.

"Do you think it may have been thrown into the sea?" asked the amiable Cavaliere Martellini casually, keeping his eye on the clock, as if to say to his illustrious friend: "Have patience. I have almost done."

"That is certainly my opinion. . . ."

"What was thrown into the sea?" asked the Secretary, who was writing down the answers in the official report of the examination.

"The hat."

"The priest."

These two answers were made simultaneously, the first by the Baron, who was coerced by the force of truth; the second by the judge, who was following the natural indications of the case.

The contrast of these two words was the first shock to the building which the Baron had raised for his defence.

He feared he had already contradicted himself, and hastened to say with great vivacity : " I say the hat ! . . . the hat ! "

" That is not possible," answered the judge, " because the hat is now in our hands. Indeed, if you wish to see it. . . . Quaglia, take off the cloth."

The usher approached the basket with his slow uncertain step, and uncovered it.

The Cav. Martellini got up and said :

" Pray step forward, Excellency."

The Baron, who was seated on a lower level, could not look into the basket from his chair. When the judge repeated his request he tried to move, but at first could not do so, from a sort of nervous paralysis.

" Excuse me, perhaps you will take the trouble to come here."

The Baron felt that he could not sit there like a block of wood, as if spell-bound. He was frightened at this physical incapacity, especially as he thought he saw signs of astonishment in the Cavaliere's face ; he pulled himself together and, with one of those final efforts of which he was still capable, went straight to the table and looked.

The priest's hat, in all its elegant newness, showed up well against the reddish lining of a sportsman's knapsack.

The Cavaliere continued : " Look at it, Excellency. The law knows with certainty that this hat was sold to Priest Cirillo on the morning of the 4th of April. Don

Antonio found it in Salvatore's room, where he had perhaps carried it from the garden. Owing to conscientious scruples it was sent in a box to Filippino Mantica; meanwhile Priest Cirillo disappeared and we know nothing more of his movements. The hat shows some slight dents here and there, some marks of lime, do you see?"

The Baron saw nothing but a great darkness. All his strength was concentrated in the effort to understand the judge's explanations and his questions. At his side he saw a black figure, which wavered and thrust its hands into the basket, as if on purpose to annoy him; and he began to stare at it with bloodshot and wicked eyes.

The old usher's worn black gown made the white of his small head, and of a linen tag stuck into his collar, stand out. Quaglia, who held the priest's hat in his hand, turned it round two or three times, pointing with his bony finger to the dents and the stains here and there, and opening wide a pair of mother-of-pearl coloured eyes.

The Baron could not take his eyes from those staring eyes, which looked at him almost ironically.

"As for the suggestion of a sportsman's guilt, it seems partly confirmed by the discovery of this knapsack."

"Ah!" said the Baron with a triumphant exclamation, as if he meant: "Was I not right in believing in this sportsman?"

“ This knapsack was found in a boat, near some rocks.”

“ Precisely ! ” said the guilty man, without perceiving that he was saying too much ; and thinking he would thus destroy the effect of a contradiction into which he had fallen before. But from this moment, in the disturbed state of his mind, and finding himself in conflict with the truth, with his conscience, and the judge, he did not always remember what it was policy to say, and what it would be better to conceal.

“ Excuse me, Baron, perhaps you are not feeling well ? ” stammered the kind magistrate, turning rather pale.

“ No, no ! I am perfectly well ; what do you mean ? ” answered the Baron, starting with a jump as if he were falling down a step he had missed in the dark. “ I only wished to observe,” he added, laughing, “ that my opinion was founded on a presumption, and that I was not wrong in saying *cherchez le chasseur*. I am not feeling unwell at all, on the contrary I am rather hungry.” He took out his watch and looked at it. “ That’s natural enough, it is almost midday. It seems that you gentlemen wished to make me contradict myself, but here is the speaking proof that a sportsman exists. Here is the sad wedlock of the murderer and his victim.”

The Baron of Santafusca’s voice had become so husky and deep, the way in which he was staring at the old usher was so full of ferociousness and terror, that Cava-

liere Martellini and the other persons present looked at each other in astonishment.

The good judge pretended to look for some papers, but his hands trembled as if he had tertian fever.

"Is Don Ciccio Scuoto outside?" he said to Quaglia.

"Yes, sir."

"Show him in."

The Baron, whose mind already wandered in a turbid and stormy sea, again fixed his white and crystalline eyes on the window.

"Excuse me, Excellency, pray sit down," continued the judge, with a more tranquil voice. "We also have never doubted the existence of the sportsman . . . pray sit down."

The Baron sat down on a stool which he carried himself into the middle of the room, and began making calculations and comparisons between his watch and the clock hanging on the wall. One would have thought that the case had nothing further to do with him.

"Now let us try to understand each other, my dear Baron, so as to come to a conclusion," the judge began, with his usual courtesy; then, taking point by point, with one of those inquisitorial artifices which rarely failed him, he entered into the witness' mind and tried to draw him out: "A sportsman, then, was seen at Falda at the Vesuvio tavern; he was seen later by a pointsman on the railway, and finally he appears to have rowed out in a fishing boat, which he found near some rocks. Is that right?"

“Exactly,” said Santafusca, with the simple and natural tone of a man who has seen and touched the things he mentions.

Cavaliere Martellini again moved some papers, to give his mind time to concentrate. The two other gentlemen, sitting at the ends of the table, cast a glance of fear at each other from behind their papers and registers.

The assurance, the readiness, the candour almost, with which the witness confirmed the particulars as disclosed by the evidence, struck the judges even more than his previous irritated manner and staring eyes.

Meanwhile Don Ciccio, to whom Quaglia had whispered a few words, came in. The sharp lawyer cast a glance at that troubled man who sat in the middle of the room, his elbows resting on his knees, and started suddenly. Had he found more than he looked for?

Fixed, ecstatic in his triumph, the priest's lawyer kept passing his sleeve over the fur of his white hat, which had never been so smooth.

After having settled himself comfortably in his arm-chair, Cav. Martellini continued, with his usual pleasant manner :

“One word more, Excellency, and I will then set you free. It is no longer the judge who interrogates, but the friend who discusses a curious question. We magistrates are often affected by legal short-sight, and the more we sharpen our eyes the less we see what we are looking for. A man of the world, on the other hand,

has an unprejudiced eye. As you have very rightly said, my dear Baron!" added the judge in a gracious and confidential tone, "we have before us the base wedlock of the murderer and his victim, but, in your view, what reason would the murderer have to kill the poor priest?"

"The priest was rich," said the Baron, shrugging his shoulders roughly.

"And do you believe, my dear Baron, that the sportsman acted on his own account, or on a commission given him by some powerful person?"

"On his own account, of course!"

"So that," continued the judge, in a more excited and vibrating tone, "this sportsman, or sham sportsman, had managed to entice the priest out of Naples. . . ."

The Baron got up with a tragic air, and accompanied his affirmation with a vigorous gesture, extending his arm and his forefinger towards a spot on the wall.

"Exactly, and he threw him into the sea."

"The priest?" cried the judge.

"The priest. . . ." answered the Baron, who was now only speaking by a sort of internal mechanism.

"The Secretary will write in the minutes that the witness thinks the priest has been thrown into the sea."

The gruff and authoritative tone with which the judge pronounced these words, and the blow of his hand on the paper before him which accompanied his order, gave a second terrible shock to the man who was speaking as if in his sleep. The Baron started and, repeating to

himself his last answer, was alarmed at having so soon fallen into a contradiction. First he had said that the sportsman had thrown the hat, not the priest, into the sea ; now he had said that the priest had been thrown into the sea. His mind was no longer able to estimate the importance, and the danger, of this contradiction ; much less was it able to reconcile the two answers ; but the guilty man felt confusedly that the edifice of his defence was crumbling in all directions, and that from this moment he had a terrible enemy in Cav. Martellini.

He tried to rectify his first deposition, but now his arguments, his voice, even time, failed him ; and the words were jumbled together in his mouth. He had no longer strength to differentiate the sportsman clearly from himself, or to avoid attributing to the first deeds and thoughts which belonged, alas ! only to the latter. He could no longer discern the fact emerging from the details, and in his eagerness to reconcile the priest and his hat, and to believe so confidently in the sportsman, he did not perceive that he was, by degrees, exposing and accusing himself. His head was like a furnace. The thousand spectres cast out, thrust back, constrained, flagellated by his science and his logic, were now hurrying out, all together, from the dark caverns of his conscience and invading his reason, and terror was taking possession of the man who, a month earlier, had launched a terrible defiance against nature and against God.

That poor mind which had resisted the shocks of remorse and despair, held together for a time by an

artificial enamel of scientific convictions, was now cracking in all directions owing to the bad quality of this varnish.

The mind no longer worked connectedly ; the logical formulas gave way, and madness, the avenging fury of proud reason, descended to crush the head of the Baron of Santafusca ; as he had crushed, with an iron bar, the little head of Priest Cirillo.

What followed, from this moment, was no longer a formal examination, but a last struggle of reason against remorse.

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The Baron, standing in the middle of the hall, gesticulating vehemently with his light stick in his hand, began to say :

“ I am astonished that I should still be accused of contradiction. The whole thing is quite clear. I beg you will not make me say things I do not think. What do I know about this business ? I say that the sportsman was deeply interested in concealing the traces of the priest, that is to say, his hat. One was as important as the other ; indeed, one was more important than the other, because you can put out a man just as you blow out a candle, but matter ” (and now he shouted, twisting the stick in his hands), “ matter is hard, resistant, indestructible ; has eternal, immortal filaments. Have you read, gentlemen, the *Treatise on Things* of the celebrated Doctor Panterre ? Must I quote to these

gentlemen Buchner, Moleschott, Hartmann, to prove the fundamental principle that nothing which exists can be destroyed? When you consider that a cannon-ball would take more than a million years to fall from the centre of the sun to the centre of the earth, and that the sun is no larger than the yolk of an egg in comparison with the nebular spaces and the asteroids and infinite space, I am convinced that you will laugh with me at these absurdities, just as the priest's skull lately laughed, with his teeth resting on the grating. Neither that priest, nor *the other* will sing psalms again. . . .”

The Baron gave a sinister smile and, taking three or four quick steps in the hall, he continued excitedly, breaking his handsome stick in two and throwing the pieces, at random, in the air :

“ That is why the sportsman tried to make the priest's hat disappear by throwing it into the sea. In order to get possession of it he had gone to Falda because he knew that Giorgio of Falda had fetched it, with other things, from Salvatore's room. That's why I said that the hat had been thrown into the sea ; and there is no contradiction, dear Cav. Martellini. If the priest had been thrown into the sea, how could he be buried at Santa-fusca ? Pray do not think that Salvatore killed him ! No, by my soul ! I must defend the memory of a man who once carried me in his arms ; and if it cost me my life, I will never allow the shadow of the smallest suspicion to desecrate his pure and lowly tomb. Cowardly is he who thinks it ! Cowardly he who says it ! Because you

have found the hat in his room, you hasten to calumniate a poor dead man who can no longer defend himself. And how do you know that the hat was not carried to Salvatore's room by his dog? 'the dog when interrogated, did not answer', as Cav. Martellini ironically observed; but if that dog could speak, gentlemen, he would tell you, as he told me, that the priest was not thrown into the sea, but was killed by the sportsman and buried in the Villa. . . ."

"By the sportsman?" said the judge, with a break in his voice. He was holding tight to the arms of his chair, as if to withstand the terror of this extraordinary scene.

The other officials, the usher and Don Ciccio, neither spoke nor moved and gave hardly any sign of life.

"By the sportsman! that antichrist!" shouted the Baron.

"Who . . . who enticed the priest to Santafusca . . . killed him, and buried him in the garden . . . eh? eh?" The judge seemed ready to climb on to the back of the great armchair.

"Not in the garden," exclaimed the Baron, laughing as though the cavaliere had made a joke, "at the end of the stables, under that heap . . ."

The Baron said no more. With his eyes fixed on the priest's hat, having told of the sportsman what he had, too often, repeated to himself during the last month, he lost himself in ecstatic contemplation of his crime, as if he had still that accursed heap of lime and bricks

before his eyes. It was indeed a tragic and solemn spectacle for those who were present ; this confession of a man who accused his own shadow.

“ Baron of Santafusca ! ” cried the judge at last, raising himself to the full height of his small stature which seemed to have become taller, “ you are my prisoner ! ”

At these words the Baron seemed to awaken from the sort of trance into which his thoughts had plunged him ; he made a half turn, looked about him with a wild scowl and seemed suddenly to realize the horror of his position. With a yell he raised his arms and, upsetting his chair, he tried to clear a way towards the door.

It was too late. Armed men were there, waiting.

“ No ! ” he cried, foaming at the mouth, “ you are mistaken. I can give other proofs. Don’t you see that I am ill ? It is my head. Feel my head ! By the holy Christ ! I am in a fever. I am innocent. Shall I lead you to the spot ? I will show you and convince you, Gentlemen, you have before you a Baron of Santafusca ; he cannot allow himself to be arrested like any gutter-snipe ! ”

So saying, he bent down and seized the chair with both hands, then, raising it with all the furious strength of his muscular arms, he tried again to clear the way towards freedom.

An indescribable scene followed.

The judges got up in alarm and fled to the furthest side of the hall, upsetting in their flight chairs, books

and papers. The old usher was nearly killed by the chair, which the murderer flung at his head ; fortunately he got out of the way in time.

Then followed a wild struggle between the fierce assassin and the two powerful soldiers, whose strong arms gripped him like a wild beast. The assassin rolled on the ground at the foot of the table, dragging with him one of the carabinieri, trying to bite his face. At last, with the help of several warders, he was mastered and bound . . . but human justice had in her hands only a poor madman.

The Baron had been betrayed and punished by his own conscience.

IX

A DEAD MAN, AND A MAN WHO CAME TO LIFE

It is a dull rainy day. The houses of Santafusca, enveloped in cloud, have a grey and mournful aspect.

Don Antonio is dying.

Since yesterday, the women, the old men, the children are collected there at his threshold, on the doorsteps, and with tears in their eyes pray for the peace of their old Father who is leaving them.

The priest from S. Fedele has come, and sits at his bedside to support him in his last moments.

In spite of his great age, no one would ever have thought that the good parish priest would have succumbed so suddenly, struck down by a malignant fever which the doctor cannot define. They had hoped to have him for many a Christmas yet, and the old man had promised to carry out various improvements in his garden . . . but God's will must be obeyed.

Martino went about saying that the priest's hat had killed him.

"You know," he said, "Don Antonio's scrupulous conscience and his holiness. The Old Testament does not contain a nobler patriarch, unless it be Abraham

who let his own son be taken to the mountain, and put on the pyre, through obedience to God. That hat of the devil came into the house, bringing first of all scruples of conscience, then punishment, then crime and blood . . . God grant, at least, to our holy pastor the transit of the just !”

“ God grant it !” repeated the women, and continued to pray for his peace.

Don Antonio, lying on his death-bed, groaned from time to time, turning his face as if to avoid seeing an ugly spectre ; now raising his hand, with a last effort, as if to protect his breast from a shadow which darkened the last visions of his consciousness.

They continued to lament for him, while the rain poured down and the houses of Santafusca were shrouded in heavy gloom.

Beneath this sky, during this agony of the dying, Cavaliere Martellini, accompanied by the Secretary, Don Ciccio, and some policemen, arrived at Santafusca to search for Priest Cirillo.

The Baron's confession could not have been more explicit, or more terrible. What he had not said at first, he said over and over again in his furious delirium ; whilst, bound like a bull led to the slaughter, he struggled in the convulsions of raving madness.

He spoke confusedly, laughing, whistling, yelling ; of philosophy, of Dr. Panterre, of races, of cards, of women, of Priest Cirillo ; he called him by name, mocked

him, warned him not to trust the sportsman who meant to kill him ; and when the scene of the little courtyard came back to him, the Baron became a terrible actor and declaimed the drama of his crime, with gesture and words which were dark evidence of the truth.

“ This is indeed a horrible day, a day well suited for a funeral,” said the Cavaliere, wrapping himself in a shawl, and protecting himself from the rain with his umbrella as best he could. “ And how that bell helps to form the atmosphere ! People talk so much of atmosphere nowadays ! ”

Don Ciccio, who was walking near him, answered ; “ People talk too much nowadays ; however, I said so.”

“ Said what, Don Ciccio ? That it was going to rain ? ”

“ I said I should find my dead man.”

Don Ciccio uttered these words with a half smile of triumph.

“ I suppose you are happy now ? ”

“ Not on account of Priest Cirillo, poor man ! But on account of your ‘ justice ’ which despises an old man’s spectacles. . . .”

“ We must return to old ways, you say. . . .”

“ I say that man will always be a wolf to his kind. *Homini lupus.*”

They reached the Villa. They called the communal Secretary and a smith ; the gate was opened for the

second time and, on this day of ill omen, it was at least lucky that the women, the children, and the more timid part of the population were collected to weep and pray at the doorway, and on the stair, of the poor dying man. Martino, tolling the bell, gave out its slow wailing strokes, drying his eyes with his sleeves from time to time, and alternating the strokes with some words of latin taken from the prayer-book. . . .

“Lead us to the stables,” said the judge to the communal Secretary.

“Please come this way.”

The grave procession went towards the stables.

They crossed a wood-store, entered the little courtyard, and stopped silently before the heap of bricks, sand and lime.

Everything was still in its place, even the iron bar stuck into the lime.

“Send for two men with shovels,” said the judge.

And whilst the Secretary went for the men, those present looked round the gloomy place in silence.

It was raining, and the water from the roof, falling into the courtyard, beat on a part of it which was paved. Don Ciccio and the judge, to avoid the rain, went towards the stables and were still citing Puffendorf when they heard a long whine which seemed to come from underground.

It was Salvatore's dog again, who brushed through

the straw and fled between Don Ciccio's legs, making him yell.

The Cavaliere tried to smile, but this time the muscles of his mouth stiffened.

However, not wishing to lose his reputation for wit, he murmured :

“ Man is a dog to his kind. *Homo homini canis !* ”

“ It's the same thing ! ” said Don Ciccio, to show himself above such fear ; and I think he meant to say that, dog or wolf, man is an ugly beast.

The men came with their shovels and began to move the rubbish. They removed the bricks, the lime, the sand ; and exposed the great stone which closed the cistern.

Martino continued ringing slowly and sadly.

The doctor, making his way through the women kneeling on the stairs and the landing said, with his cane under one arm and his handkerchief under the other :

“ Earth has one just man the less, and heaven one saint more. It was congestion of the brain.”

The women began to answer the prayers for the dead which a priest was saying in the room.

They wept no longer ; they had the moral certainty which is based on an accomplished fact, and the conviction that there is nothing now to hope for. The certainty that they had one more saint in heaven made those fervent prayers more confident. One could not distinguish whether they prayed for Don Antonio, or

whether they already invoked him as a protecting saint.

When they were allowed to do so, they entered his room in procession and, passing round the bed, kissed his hands and feet, touched his garments, and then dispersed all over the house, entering his little study, happy to think of him as still alive, seated in his great chair before his books, which they touched with the reverence with which you place your hand on a missal.

Then, taking advantage of a moment when the rain held off for a time and air cleared in sunlight, they went into the garden and each one plucked a rose in memory of him ; fastening it to her dress after kissing it as a relic.

When Martino went to another bell and rang for midday, the crowd poured out into the square and began to go down towards their homes for dinner ; no longer weeping, but almost consoled and happy because they had kissed the hands of a saint.

It looked like a May-day's festival, with so many roses in the pretty girls' bosoms.

They were all going down together, old men, girls and women, towards the centre of the village, when they saw the Secretary coming up, gasping, as pale as a ghost and calling out :

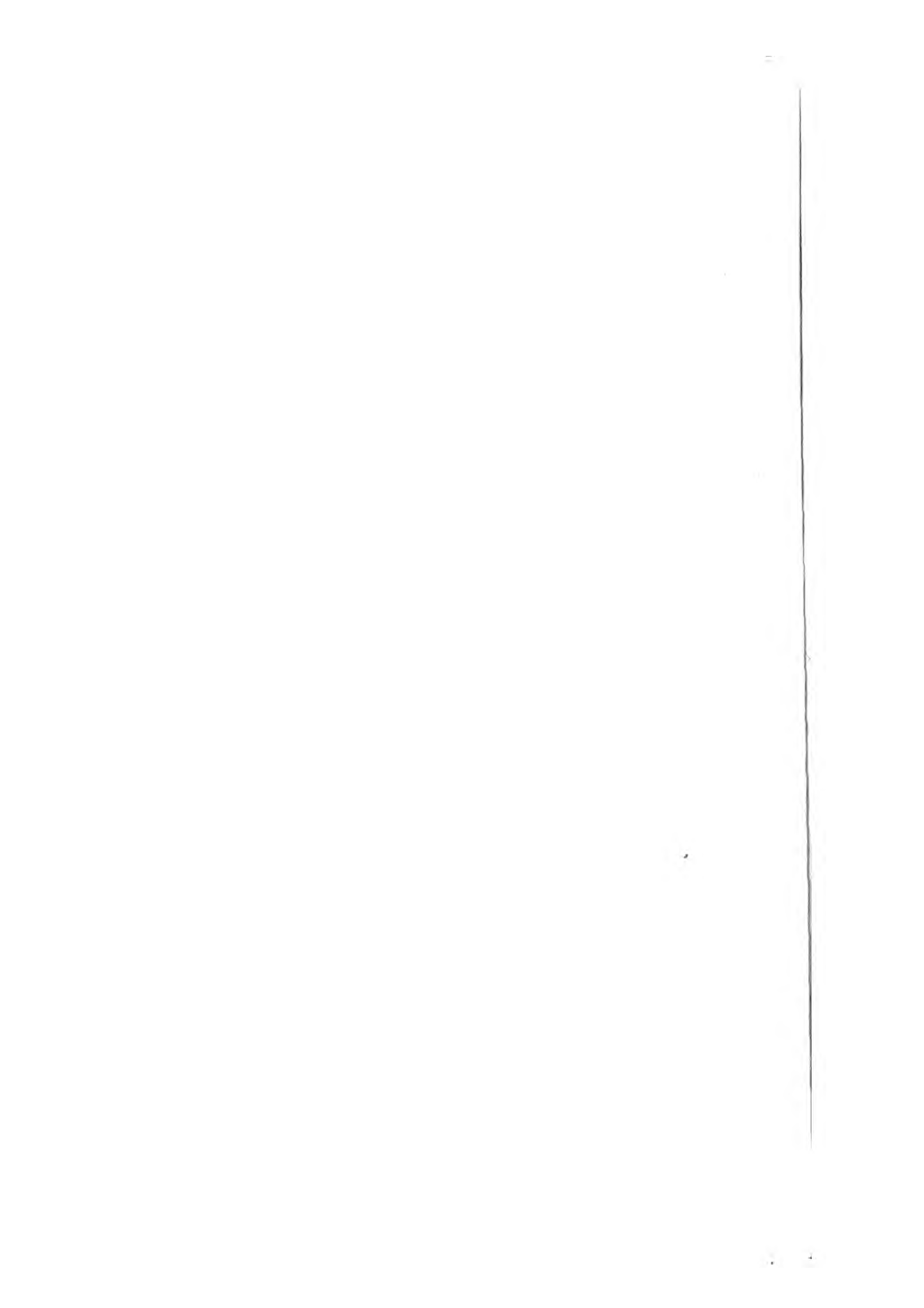
“ Stand back ! stand back ! Let them pass ! ”

Immediately afterwards the people saw a personage dressed in black go by wrapped in a shawl ; behind him

a little gentleman, with a ruffled white fur hat, and then some policemen, and then men bearing a litter.

They were carrying Priest Cirillo to be buried in holy ground.

THE END



NOTES

Note 1. Fra Diavolo : a wild adventurer, who flourished in Naples in Napoleon's time. His name was Michele Pezza ; he came from Calabria and was in turn a monk, a brigand, and a general in the Neapolitan army with the title of Duke of Cassano ; finally he was hung in 1806. He figures in a drama by Pietro Cossa, " I Napoletani del 1799 " ; and lent his name to Auber's well-known opera.

Note 2. The Royal lottery (Regio Lotto), of which we shall hear a good deal in this book, was a Government institution and yielded an important revenue to the Italian Treasury. The published figures for the financial year 1908-1909 show 46 million lire (say £1,840,000) profit to the Treasury, on 85 million lire (£3,400,000) received from the public. This is how the Government game was played : in eight principal towns of Italy (Rome, Naples, Turin, Milan, Venice, Florence, Bari and Palermo) every Saturday ninety numbers (1 to 90), were put into a wheel (ruota), which was duly turned so as to mix up the numbers. A small boy, usually an orphan, whose bare arm showed there was no trickery, drew five numbers at random from the wheel. This was done in public with due formality, so that every one might see that all was fair and above board.

In each town the player could stake on the numbers in various ways, e.g., if he staked on two numbers in Turin, and these two numbers formed part of the five numbers drawn there, he received 250 times his stake (less a considerable deduction in the shape of a special

Government tax); if he staked on three numbers and they all came up, he received 4250 times his stake (this was called a "terno", and was the favourite mode of play); on four successful numbers ("quaterno") he received 60,000 times his stake. The Government, however, limited its maximum loss on any one stake to 500,000 lire (£20,000).

A vivid description of the State Lotteries and the evils that attended them may be found in Matilde Serao's novel, *Il Paese di Cuccagna*, of which an English translation was published in 1901.

Note 3. Aristodemus. The allusion is to a fine play of this name by Vincenzo Monti (1754-1828). In this tragedy Aristodemo, King of Messenia, kills his daughter Dirce under atrocious circumstances and is consequently terribly tormented by remorse. Santafusca felt sure of himself; he was not weak and silly like Macbeth and Aristodemus.

Note 4. Gerolamo Cardano, of Pavia (1501-1576), an illustrious mathematician, author of Ars Magna, containing rules for the solution of equations, and many other works, published in 10 vols. as his Opera Omnia at Lyons in 1663.

Cardano had also a great reputation as a doctor, and as such was called to Scotland to attend the Primate of St. Andrews, whom he is said to have cured. His philosophical work is extravagant and incoherent.

G. B. Porta, of Naples (1540-1615), wrote on physical science; author of Magiae Naturalis (1589), translated into German and Italian; De furtifis literarum notis vulgo de ciferis, Ars reminiscendi, etc. He founded in Naples an Academy "dei Segreti", as we say now "for physical research", but it was closed by a Papal bull, under Pope Paul III. He persisted, however, in his investigations, and carried out many interesting

optical, and other, experiments. He is the inventor of the camera obscura.

Note 5. Giandomenico Romagnosi, of Salsomaggiore, an illustrious philosopher and jurist, whose works are still highly esteemed (1761-1835). It is recorded of him that he lived and died poor, which may possibly have been an additional reason for our author's admiring him (see "Emilio De Marchi" at the head of these notes).

Note 6. The dog did not answer. This alludes to a well-known story of a pedantic notary. He insisted on entering the depositions of all the parties to a suit, including a dead man, whom therefore he also interrogated; and as he did not answer, he noted that fact also in the deed.



