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LUNA AND PEROLLO.



AN HISTORIC TALE.

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THE
FEUDS
OF
LUNA AND PEROLLO;
OR, THE
FORTUNES
OF THE
HOUSE OF PANDOLFINA.
AN HISTORIC TALE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

Who set this ancient quarrel new abroad?
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began?
SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
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1821.



THE
FEUDS
OF
LUNA AND PEROLLO.

CHAPTER I.

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing, anxious being ere resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?

GREY.

EVERY care and attention which affection itself could dictate, was exerted by all the inmates of the Casa di Perollo, to relieve the sufferings of the chevalier Landolini, and the distress of his afflicted daughter. The shock he had received when first robbed of his child, had greatly

impaired his constitution. The joyful tidings of her return, and the incessant fatigue and anxiety of mind he suffered in his rapid journey from Trapani, had been more than his weakened health could bear, and a violent fever was the consequence. In a few hours he became delirious, and the physicians, who, from the first, had been far from sanguine, began decidedly to fear that the struggle must terminate in death.

Marguerita wept not; pale as a monumental statue, she sat beside his bed, watched every turn of his countenance, every fluctuation of his pulse, and administered every medicine herself.

Federico, Gaetano, and the baroness, were scarcely less assiduous in their attentions. During three days the disease was rapidly approaching to its crisis; on the fourth the delirium ceased; and when, in a scarcely-audible tone, Marguerita heard the words, "my child," and her father's eyes turned languidly towards her, she felt as if returning reason must be the symp-

tom of returning health; and falling on her knees beside the bed, she wept upon the burning hand which was extended to her, in a paroxysm of gratitude and hope; they were the first tears she had shed since he became ill, and relieved her from the oppression with which her heart was loaded. With intense anxiety, but without the alarm she had hitherto felt, she watched the countenance of the physician, who was sent for on this change in the state of his patient; with a sensation of cold and appalling horror, she saw the same expression of despondency on his features—"My father is—he must be better!" she exclaimed.

"I fear, lady, that no favourable symptoms have occurred; and," after a pause, he added, "it is my duty to say, I now despair of witnessing any."

"What?" said Marguerita, as if doubting whether she had heard aright. "My father cannot be in danger now!—cannot be beyond your hope!—No! Providence

has not restored me to his arms only to witness the extinction of my hopes for ever!—Heaven will not thus abandon me!”

Landolini, who was now conscious of all that passed, made an effort to speak; Marguerita bent down, and listened in agony.—“Be composed, my child,” he said; “I feel it is even so—I feel that I am dying.”

“Oh no, no, my dear father; you are weak and low, reduced by your illness, but better, much better, than you were a few hours back.”

“Do not deceive yourself, my child; in a few hours I shall be taken from you; let me see my kind friend, the baron Pandolfina.”

Don Giacomo was in a few moments in the apartment; but Landolini was too much exhausted to speak again for some time. Federico was kneeling by the bed, the baroness seated beside it, and Gaetano endeavouring to support his old friend, while the physician administered a restorative, Marguerita having been reduced al-

most to insensibility by the shock the fatal intelligence had given her. Don Giacomo appeared deeply affected at the scene; the baroness wept in silence; Landolini extended his hand to the baron as he approached the bed, who, taking it within his own, affectionately hoped all might yet be well. The sufferer shook his head, and looking at Marguerita, made a fruitless effort to articulate.

“ I understand you, my friend,” said Pandolfina : “ whatever may be the event of your illness, Marguerita is my adopted child ; in every respect hereafter shall she be considered as a daughter of Perollo’s house.”

“ In me,” said the baroness, “ she shall always find a mother ; I feel deeply interested in her ; and had all been well, should still have hoped to have supplied to her the parent she has lost.”

“ If a brother’s love to this adopted sister can be accepted, gladly shall I unite with my family in guarding this sacred charge,” added Federico.

“Heaven’s blessing on my child, and you her noble friends!” faintly articulated Landolini, and sunk senseless in the arms of Pignatelli.

“He is dead!” exclaimed Marguerita, clinging to him.

“Not yet,” replied the physician. “The lady had better be removed for a time. The chevalier is not dead, and may yet linger some hours longer.”

The baroness assisted in removing Marguerita, and the attendants exerted themselves in restoring her father, who soon recovered from his swoon.

His child could scarcely be convinced that he was still in existence, but requested instantly to be taken back to his bedside.

Landolini seemed very anxious to speak, and was supported by Federico and Gaetano, who appeared to emulate each other’s attentions to the sufferer.

Marguerita was brought back by the baroness, who entreated her to exert herself, for her father’s sake, to bear the cala-

mity with calmness, and not to shorten the few remaining hours of his existence here, or render them more painful by the sight of her anguish.

When she approached him again, he held out his arms, and tenderly embracing her, said, in a faint voice—"Let it be a comfort to you, my darling child, in this hour of affliction, that your virtues and excellence have been to your unhappy father a consolation greater than can be imagined, and far greater than he deserved; that my knowledge of your conduct and discretion mitigates even the agony of leaving you." Here the father's feelings overcame all restraint; his voice became inarticulate, and the tears coursing down his pale cheeks, fell on the head of his child. The scene was agonizing to all who witnessed it; and the physician, fearing the exertion was speeding the parting spirit of the sufferer from his worldly trials, attempted to lift Marguerita from his bosom; but Landolini's look of suppli-

cation, and pressing with all his remaining strength his arms round his child, forbade all opposition; and, after a minute or two, he spoke again.—“Do not grieve for me, my beloved Marguerita; I am going from a world, which has been to me, since my early youth, a scene of trial and distress; but remember always, that those sorrows, great as they were, I brought upon myself—remember that I owe my own sufferings, those of your angel mother, perhaps her death, and, above all, my most intolerable anguish, the leaving you thus early unprotected by a parent’s care, to yielding, in early life, to the indulgence of my own passions. Never, my child, indulge an affection at the expence of its object, or at that of any duty.”

The sympathy of the surrounding friends seemed too great to be repressed; and Landolini had exerted himself till his relaxing hold of all he wished to retain, and his closing eyes, proclaimed that he had again fainted. He remained longer

in a state of insensibility than he had done before, and seemed, if possible, still weaker than after his last recovery.

Don Giacomo took the opportunity of again assuring him, that his Marguerita should hereafter be the object of his tenderest care, and that her present asylum should be her future home.

The confessor, who was in attendance, now approached, to perform the sad duties of his office. Landolini acknowledged, by signs, that he was conscious of all that passed, and endeavoured in vain to speak.

Marguerita was borne insensible from the room; the looks of her father followed her to the door; and as it shut her from his sight, he sunk upon the bosom of Pignatelli, to rise no more. She was still reclining in the arms of the baroness, and Federico standing by, when don Giacomo came from the apartment of death. He stood for some moments regarding her with the tenderest compassion. Tears

rolled silently down his cheeks; and as Marguerita raised her eyes, she caught the expression of his countenance, and with a scream again threw herself on the bosom of the baroness.

Pandolfina began to speak, but was overpowered by his feelings, and hastily quitted the apartment.

Federico was aware of what had taken place, yet wishing he might still hope, rose, and was advancing towards the door of the room, where the remains of Landolini reposed, when Marguerita, raising herself, exclaimed—"I know it well—I am informed of my misery; take me with you, signor."

"Impossible, at present," said the baroness.

"Your affectionate kindness," said Federico, "will no longer be felt. Why add to your own distress needlessly?"

He took her hand with the kindest sympathy, and with the aid of his mother conducted her, in a state of passive and stupa-

fied misery, to an apartment further removed from the scene of death.

A cloud of gloom hung for some days over the Casa di Perollo. The obsequies of the cavalier Landolini were performed with the same attention as if he had been related to don Giacomo, and his remains deposited in the cemetery of the Perollo family, with every mark of respect which the baron Pandolfina could pay; every member of his family attended and mourned as for a kinsman. The grief of Marguerita continued with unabated violence. The kind and parental affection of her guardians, and the fraternal, considerate attentions of Federico and his friend, were unwearied, but generally produced a burst of grief, as if recalling the memory of him whose loss they were intended to supply.—The calm and cheerful devotion of the baroness, without any studied exhortations, first led her thoughts to the only source from which she could derive consolation; and in the employment of her religious duties, Marguerita found that resignation

and comfort, which, in the earlier days of her sorrow, she had thought never to taste again.

Don Giacomo had taken upon himself the arrangement of her father's affairs, and repeated to her the assurances he had beforemade, of considering himself henceforth as her parent and protector, replying to her grateful tears with the kindest expressions of the gratification he should feel in fulfilling the duties he had taken upon him.

The baroness, by every means in her power, demonstrated her affection, making no other distinction in her conduct to her adopted child and her own offspring, than the different ages of the parties rendered necessary.

Federico appeared to watch for every opportunity of shewing his entire concurrence in the kind intentions of his family, and his desire to relieve her from the weight of her past sorrows, or any anticipation of evils to come.

Gaetano, who had deeply felt the loss of

Landolini himself, could for some days scarcely look at Marguerita with composure; his attentions afterwards were not so apparent as those of his friend, but they were not less kind and delicate, never for a moment forgetting his regard for her father, or the situation of his orphaned child.

All intercourse with the Solanto family had, during these sad scenes, been interrupted. The baron had attended the funeral rites with the other friends of Perollo, and the baroness and Costanza sent their inquiries after Marguerita; but no meeting had taken place, all visitors being excluded from the castle, in the same manner as upon the death of a near connexion of the family.

Marguerita felt all the kindness of her friends, and exerted herself to conceal the poignancy of her grief with all her fortitude and resolution, by which she, in a great degree, recovered her self-command; and her sorrow, though unabated, was less frequently displayed in public.

The family of Solanto had taken up

their abode in a cassino, beautifully situated in the rocky valley where the hot springs rise, and at about the distance of half a league from Sciacca. It had been the choice of count Luna; and being the property of his relation Francesco Imbiagnia, every thing was instantly done which could make it convenient to the friends of don Sigismund. At some distance from the other habitations round the baths, it afforded at once every advantage of the springs, quiet, and retirement, which the baroness might require.

Don Sigismund every day spent a considerable portion of time with his mistress, and exerted himself to the utmost to ingratiate himself with all the family.

The countess had made one visit of form, and took occasion to urge the speedy fulfilment of the baron's engagement with her son, both to the father and mother of Costanza; the latter referred the matter solely to her husband; and the baron politely declined hurrying on the affair, till the parties so deeply interested

were better informed on the subject of their mutual dispositions.

The friends of don Sigismund had not been backward in shewing every attention to the family. A grand entertainment had been given at the Castel di Luna, in honour of the count's future relatives, at which they were introduced to all the friends and adherents of his house, with the exception of the barons, Adriano and Della Bardia; the former had not appeared publicly at the castle since his fracas with Solanto, and the latter was again absent from the neighbourhood of Sciacca.

The party assembled were none of them persons calculated to interest the Solantos in any way. They consisted chiefly of the nobles of the city, whose conversation was usually details of each other's affairs to all their acquaintance, and abuse of don Giacomo Perollo and his friends; as the latter subject, however, was understood to be the one on which the baron Solanto had expressed such vehement anger against Adriano, it was carefully avoided, except

by oblique hints, shrugs, and ejaculations of horror and antipathy at any allusion to the party's foe.

Some few of the visitors had been occasionally at Palermo, and attended the viceroyal court; they consequently considered themselves as men of the world, and deeply versed in the politics of every European state.

Amongst the company, don Ferrante Luchese was the principal person who attracted the notice of Solanto. He was distantly related to the countess, and warmly attached to the interest of Luna, but without any of the virulent antipathy to the house of Perollo, which generally marked all the friends of don Sigismund. He was introduced to the baron by Geronimo Ferrara, and they were soon mutually pleased with each other. Don Ferrante seemed to appreciate the polished manners of the baron, and his extensive information, derived from the active part he had so long taken in public affairs; while the frank good-nature, and intelligent and rational conversa-

tion, of Luchese, were a considerable relief to Solanto from the unmeaning prate of the barone del Nadore, and many others of the party.

The countess Caltabellotta, enveloped in the idea of her own consequence, as presiding over the splendours of Luna Castle, received the homage of such as chose to flatter her, and remained perfectly inattentive to all beside.

The count had attached himself to Costanza, of whom he daily became more enamoured, though he could scarcely hope he was making the slightest progress in gaining her affection.

The weak state of the baroness's health was an excuse for her retiring early; and after a dull and heavy day, the party broke up.

On the next morning the baron and his family returned to their cassino, having remained at the Castel di Luna for the night.

The constant attentions of don Sigismund, though they had made no impres-

sion on the affections of the signora di Solanto, yet had accustomed her to the thoughts of eventually becoming his wife, and to his daily increasing impatience she began to expect her father's resolution must yield ; but in addition to the warning of don Paolo Perollo, the baron himself felt so much difficulty in forming a decided opinion on the character of count Luna, that he was by no means inclined to expedite the affair.

Soon after the funeral of the cavalier Landolini, don Giacomo, his son, and signor Pignatelli, rode down to the cassino, and apologizing for the baroness Pandolina, who stayed at home with Marguerita, made a visit of some length.

The baron Solanto received them with every demonstration of welcome, and they mutually wished that the intercourse between their families might continue and increase ; their regard for each other seemed hourly to become greater ; all the party united in lamenting the unfortunate termination of Landolini's illness, and com-

miserating the affliction of his orphan child, the conversation afterwards turned upon the advantages of their situation for the convenience of the baths, and the short distance from Sciacca. Amongst the thickets, at the northern extremity of the valley, don Giacomo mentioned that there were a considerable number of wild boars, and offered, at the same time, as Solanto had a great taste for hunting, to attend him with his own dogs and huntsmen. The offer was immediately accepted, and an early day appointed for an expedition up the country. The party then took leave, and returned to the city.

On their way they met count Luna, whom they passed, without any notice whatever; and as the train of Pandolfina's attendants went by, they followed the example of their lord, and without salutation or regard held on their way.

Enraged at this neglect, Luna spurred his horse impetuously forward, and felt at the instant as if nothing but the sacrifice of all the house of Perollo could appease

the fury of his rage. In a few moments he began to collect his thoughts, and turning his horse's head from the cassino, rode nearly a league on the road to Liculiani. His attendants, and Pietro Infontanetta, who was with him, followed without comprehending his meaning. At length he halted, and observing to his companion that he had changed his original intention, again turned his course back towards Sciacca.—“The insolence of Giacomo Perollo,” he said, “calls for speedy punishment, and he shall have it to the full; his audacious disregard of me rendered me unfit to meet Solanto's keen inspection; I am now better prepared to play the dissembler; let us return to their abode.”

Pietro assented; and on their way they agreed to make no mention of the meeting with Perollo, but to place it to the long train of grievances they soon hoped to be in a situation to revenge.

Notwithstanding these resolutions, Sigismund was not in a state of mind to enjoy even the society of Costanza, or to

feel sufficiently on his guard to be at ease with her father, and his visit was shorter than any he had yet paid.

When he reached his own home, he vented his rage to his mother and Adriano, in imprecating vengeance and destruction on don Giacomo. His advisers, by promising him his full of both hereafter, soothed him into composure for the present. The next day, his devoirs at the cassino were paid without any alteration. Again he urged his suit with Costanza, and pressed her father on the subject, but with no more success than before.

“A few months, signor,” said Solanto, “is but a short probation, considering we have but so lately become personally acquainted; and I prize the happiness of my child too dearly to be precipitate in an affair of such importance to the whole of her future life. I have no hesitation in repeating what has before passed between us, that if, upon a sufficient knowledge of each other, there exists no dislike to the match in either party, I shall most

readily bestow my heiress on the son of my old friend count Luna. This is the engagement, and to this at present I must beg to confine myself.”

In vain count Luna used every argument and entreaty in his power, declared his unbounded and unalterable love, and promised a most unhesitating compliance to any preliminary the baron might require. Solanto, however, remained obdurate; and the count again departed without receiving a more favourable answer to his request.

The day previous to the hunting expedition, don Giacomo, being himself particularly engaged, sent Federico and Gaetano down to the cassino, to make the final arrangements with Solanto. The baroness, whose health was already considerably improved by the use of the baths, was sitting with her husband and daughter, and cheerfully entered into conversation with Federico respecting his mother and family. Solanto and Pignatelli were deeply engaged in discussing the merits of dogs, horses,

and hunting spears; and the former requesting Gaetano's opinion of some new purchase, they withdrew to inspect it, the baroness detaining Federico a voluntary prisoner with her.

Soon after the departure of the baron and Pignatelli, Beatrice, thinking the ladies alone, came in. Perollo would have retired, but the baroness said—"I shall be absent only a few minutes, and you had better remain with Costanza, as you might not be able to find the gentlemen."

Left alone with Costanza, Federico felt conscious of something like guilt; he attempted in vain to find some indifferent subject for conversation; the lady seemed equally deprived of all presence of mind; and after two or three attempts to break the distressing silence, they both gave it up in despair, the lady being employed at her embroidery, and the gentleman in looking at her.

At length a step was heard approaching; Perollo began to recover his senses, and Costanza to lose her fears, when the door

opened, and beneath the portal appeared count Luna.

Costanza blushed, she knew not why, and trembled with agitation at the idea of doing so. Federico rose from his seat, stammered some unintelligible nonsense, and looked as if taken in the perpetration of a crime. Sigismund started and turned to an ashy paleness, as he witnessed the evident confusion of those whom he had thus unexpectedly surprised. He had learned from the domestics what guests were at the cassino, but having alighted from his horse, he did not choose to remount, and he so evidently driven off by those he considered his enemies; he had therefore advanced to the saloon, expecting to find all the family assembled, but, to his infinite consternation and anger, beheld only Costanza, with Federico Perollo, engaged, as it appeared, in very interesting discourse.

The whole party were for some moments speechless. The lady was the first to recover her recollection, and she said

—“ My mother has this instant left the apartment, and will return in a moment ; she is only engaged with her servant.”

“ You, signora, seem to have been well satisfied with the opportunity she has afforded to this treacherous boy to employ his arts and flattery.”

“ For myself, count Luna,” answered Costanza, “ I consider your insinuations as no more than the natural effusions of your ill-bred violence, and unfortunate disposition ; how my father will approve the insults you may think proper to offer to his friends, I know not.”

“ Your father’s friends, madam, will doubtless find an eloquent and willing defender in yourself, but I must request some further explanation from this gentleman.”

“ At present, count Luna,” answered Federico, “ I have no further explanation to give, nor do I comprehend exactly what I am called on to explain ; if I consider myself insulted, I shall find some better opportunity to answer it.”

The baroness now entered, and gazed with wonder at the scene before her. Costanza's face was flushed with indignation, count Luna violently agitated, and Perollo alone seemed undisturbed. To him she turned an anxious look of inquiry.

"Some misunderstanding," he said, "has excited the count's displeasure."

"No, signora," exclaimed Luna, vehemently, "my doubts have been all cleared up—no misunderstanding exists! Signor Perollo has basely endeavoured to supplant me in the affections of my betrothed wife, and has too fatally, I fear, succeeded. My unexpected arrival has clearly proved his guilty love, and alarmed me with well-grounded fears, that it meets with an approval, which none of her family, I trust, will venture to excuse."

"Your assertions, count Luna," replied Costanza, "are equally false and grating to my feelings; such uncurbed fury, such malignant aspersions on my character, have broken every tie between us. I thank you for the lessons you have given me;

henceforth you must be the object of my aversion and contempt—Costanza di Solanto renounces and detests you!”

The baron entered during this violent speech of his daughter's. Federico's glowing cheeks had borne witness to the truth of the love he had been accused of. The baroness comprehended nothing but that some event had excited the jealousy of don Sigismund, and the indignation of Costanza. Gaetano alone had some comprehension of the truth. Sigismund attempted an apology to the lady, which was rejected with scorn.

“Address yourself from henceforth to my father, count Luna,” she said; “you have received your dismissal from me; I have been too deeply insulted by your unfounded charges to forget your conduct easily.”

“From whom am I to expect an explanation of this scene?” asked Solanto.

“Let signor Perollo,” said Sigismund, “explain the subject of the interesting

conference, which I so unfortunately interrupted, between himself and the lady Costanza.”

“ We had scarcely spoken,” answered Federico, “ during the momentary absence of the baroness Solanto.”

“ Do you mean to deny your dishonourable love towards the lady ?” asked Luna, fiercely.

Federico paused a moment.—“ Those who attempt to brand Perollo’s name by any title of dishonour,” he replied, “ should seek some other opportunity than such as now presents itself.”

“ Do you deny your love to the lady Costanza di Solanto ?” again thundered forth don Sigismund.

Again Perollo paused, and, with some hesitation, answered—“ Thus rudely questioned, signor, excuse me a reply.”

“ This discussion, count Luna,” said Solanto, “ from whatever it arose, should be conducted with more regard to the character of those to whom it is directed.”

“ My absence, signor,” said the baroness,

mildly, "could not have lasted many moments, when you arrived; believe me, you are acting under some false impression."

Don Sigismund was silent for a few moments.—"If I have been misled," he at length began, "the lady Costanza knows from whence my vehemence proceeded. To prize her favours too highly, is a crime which, I trust, she will not visit so severely as she has threatened."

Costanza did not deign to raise her eyes to the speaker.

"This affair may easily be explained," said the baroness, "when all parties are better disposed to listen. Your own impetuosity, Costanza, must make you more lenient to the same error in another. I think I may venture to undertake the adjustment of the matter; and first, signor Perollo, let me ask of you what had taken place during my absence?"

"The lady Costanza and myself," replied Federico, "had not exchanged any conversation when count Luna appeared. I was certainly surprised at his entrance,

and made some excuse for our apparently-private interview."

"The jealousy of don Sigismund seemed to have taken alarm, then, at the circumstance of your being alone with Costanza?"

"The evident confusion of the gentleman, and the blushes of the lady," said Luna, "gave me grounds for suspicion, which, if unjustly excited, demand an apology, which I now beg to offer."

At this effort of justice towards Perollo, the blood mounted to the cheeks of Luna, and it was not without great difficulty that he had prevailed on himself to make it.

"My feelings towards you, count Luna," replied Federico, "are only those of amity and concord, and I willingly accept your excuses for such conduct as appearances perhaps might justify."

Costanza still remained silent.—"Come, my love," said the baroness, "you, I am sure, will join in this reconciliation, and forget the circumstances which have occurred."

“ And afford count Luna another opportunity to insult me by his insolent and presumptuous suspicions : your excellenza must excuse me, but it is impossible for me so soon to pass over the indignation which such treatment has called forth.”

The baroness sighed.—“ This spirit, Costanza, is not that which I would have adorn a child of mine.”

“ Costanza will think more correctly and act more mildly upon reflection,” said Solanto ; “ and, in the meantime, we will let the subject subside.” Then turning to Federico, he gave him a message to his father, and an assurance of being ready to attend him at the appointed time.

The young men then took their leave of the family, and with a low bow to don Sigismund, withdrew.

Costanza soon after left the room, not being inclined either to remonstrate with her parents, or listen to the supplications of count Luna.

When she was gone, the baroness offered many excuses for her warmth of temper.

“ Do not, signora,” said Sigismund, “ so severely censure me, as you must do by condemning a disposition which, in every instance, must make my own appear to disadvantage by comparison ; besides which, the signora di Solanto is too dear to me, to make it tolerable to hear her blamed, even by you ; but lend me your influence both with her and her father, to overcome their perseverance in this cruel delay.”

Solanto only shook his head ; while the baroness smiled, and assured the count her best endeavours should not be wanting in his service.

After some further conversation, the count withdrew, not perfectly satisfied with the appearance he had observed, though he had seemed to overlook it, in order to sooth the irritation of Costanza.

When don Sigismund had departed, the baroness fulfilled her promise to him, and attempted to obtain Solanto’s consent to shorten the period of probation he had resolved on inflicting upon the impatient lover.

The baron was, however, fixed in his determination, and the lady soon after repaired to her daughter's apartment, to make some particular inquiries relative to what had passed during her absence. She found Costanza walking rapidly up and down her room, as if agitating her body would quiet her mind.

On her mother's entrance she blushed, and, as though endeavouring to turn her thoughts from the recent scene, began asking, with great earnestness, about the baron's hunting party.

The baroness answered all her inquiries with great patience and calmness, and then said—"Now, my love, reply to a few questions I have to ask you; I do not tell you to be candid—I know you will; explain to me the real cause of count Luna's anger this morning, for I must confess there seemed to me more understood than expressed by all parties."

"My dearest mother, how should I understand what excited such a temper as

count Luna's to violence? if he had been good-humoured and gentlemanlike, the cause of such a marvel might have been worth seeking."

"Costanza, I did not ask you for an opinion of don Sigismund's temper in general, but for the reason of the violent irritation in which you and he both were on my return."

"Mamma, signor Perollo and I—were—saying nothing—and count Luna came in—and signor Perollo—I mean myself—I looked surprised—I believe, and then he began that insolent accusation which you heard. That is all—except that if signor Federico Perollo had at all resembled in character this odious count Luna, the scene would have ended very differently to what it did."

"Costanza, my child, look at me; what had been the conversation between you and don Federico during my absence?"

"None, mamma," said Costanza, blushing still more; "I do not believe we talked at all."

“ And whence arose this miraculous silence ?”

“ I do not know, mamma—I could not recollect any thing to say.”

The baroness was silent for a minute or two, as if considering what she was to think of Costanza's altered and embarrassed manner. At last she said—“ Federico Perollo knew of your engagement from the first; surely he cannot have been so base as to endeavour to render the performance of it painful to you ?”

“ I do not think, mamma, that signor Perollo would do any thing base.”

“ If he has ever expressed for you any other sentiments than those of respect and friendship, I cannot call his conduct by any gentler name.”

“ He never professed any sentiments of any kind to me,” said Costanza, endeavouring to exert herself, but feeling a most violent inclination to weep, though she scarcely knew why, “ and indeed he has never said or done any thing that I know

of, which should lessen the good opinion you entertained of him."

"My dearest Costanza," said the baroness, "I have never attempted to deceive you into obedience; the indulgence I have ever shewn to your wishes, and the noble candour you have till now manifested, had made me hope I should never have to deplore your want of confidence in me. Your own heart must accuse the way you are replying to questions which can be dictated by nothing but anxiety for your happiness."

"What can I tell you?" said Costanza, much affected. "If I think that Federico Perollo would not be sorry if I were disengaged, I have only my own thoughts on the subject, for he is too generous to have expressed such a feeling; and if I cannot help comparing him with count Luna, and count Luna always loses by the comparison, what am I to do? I own I do feel under a great restraint with signor Perollo, which I cannot account for

any other way ; and when count Luna entered, I dare say I looked confused and uncomfortable ; but knowing that I had been using my utmost power over my own feelings, on the side of don Sigismund, I lost all patience at being accused by him, with so little ceremony, and before Perollo too, of encouraging addresses which were never made to me."

" Now, my love, you have answered me. You are in a dangerous situation, but as upright intentions are alone necessary to extricate you, I shall not long be uneasy on the subject. I will not prolong this conversation, or renew it unnecessarily ; such subjects do more mischief than they have credit for ; you are engaged to count Luna, whose affection for you cannot be doubted, and whose greatest fault is a spirit, to which your own is but too nearly allied ; it is therefore your duty to avoid all comparisons to his disadvantage. Signor Perollo departs very shortly for the Milanese, and while he stays, I will take care not to expose you too frequently to

his society, which I am sorry you find so agreeable—yourself must do the rest.”

Saying this, the baroness embraced her daughter, and returned to the baron, to whom she gave an account of what had passed, and expressed to him a degree of anxiety about her child, which she had not thought it prudent to shew to her.

Every fresh communication made the baron feel less inclined to commit the happiness of his darling Costanza to the risk of a marriage, to which he saw no existing temptation; still, to behave honourably to count Luna, he entirely concurred with the baroness, on the propriety of requesting that Federico would not at present visit them unaccompanied by his family, and this they determined to do, in a confidential communication to the baron and baroness Pandolfina.

CHAPTER II.
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There was a laughing devil in his sneer,
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope withering fled, and mercy sighed farewell.

BYRON.

AFTER his interview with the countess, Della Bardia set out for Santa Caterina, to claim his prize. The abbess knew too well the character of Accursi d'Amato, and the authority under which he acted, to resist the order, and the novice Francisca was summoned to the parlour of the convent, unconscious of the fate which awaited her.

With astonishment she beheld the terrific figure of Accursi, tall beyond the stature of ordinary men; his gigantic form was awkward and unprepossessing, and his countenance marked by the deep lines of dark and malignant passions; and render-

ed still more repellent by the cadaverous hue of his complexion, seemed, to the timid novice, one of the most appalling objects her fancy could conceive ; she was at first so overpowered at his appearance, and at being summoned on such an occasion, that she scarcely heeded the introduction of the abbess.

“ The unknown friends,” said the superior, “ by whom you were placed under my care, and to whom you are indebted for support, have changed their wishes with regard to your future destination, and I am now, my child, to deliver you into the hands of this gentleman, the barone della Bardia.”

Francisca looked, almost incredulous, first at the abbess, and then at Accursi ; horror and dismay seized all her faculties, and she sunk fainting on the floor.

Della Bardia assisted the superior in raising her, observing, that he was not to be imposed upon by any affected terrors or pious resolutions ; and, as soon as she began to recover, desired, that when her

surprise had in some degree subsided, she might be directed to prepare for her departure within two hours.

“ A longer delay might be granted by your policy, signor,” said the abbess; “ I expect it not from your humanity; Francisca is timid, and of a delicate constitution—violence and barbarity may rob you of your prey. I shall not give her up till I see her perfectly restored.”

“ You will do well, madam, to resist my authority, and that of the natural guardians of this girl,” said Accursi, with a sneer.

“ I do not mean to resist, signor; but I shall act with some attention to the feelings of humanity, which I lament to see are so totally unknown to you.”

Della Bardia withdrew, and left the abbess to recover the fainting novice, who, on her return to sensation, eagerly inquired if she had not been suffering under the effects of a frightful dream?

“ You have unnecessarily alarmed yourself, my child,” said the superior; “ the

friends and relatives you have so frequently wished to see, will now be made known to you ; why should you feel such terrors upon the occasion ?”

“ But to go with that dreadful stranger !” said Francisca, clinging to the abbess, with horror at the remembrance of Della Bardia ; “ oh, hide me from him, and let me wait some other conductor !”

The superior protested that it was impossible to detain her, or to disobey the orders she had received from the lady from whom she had been sent in infancy, and whose plans for her being now changed, it was resolved that she should be introduced to the world, from which she had so long been secluded.

Francisca had been educated with no other idea than that of a monastic life, and with a full belief that in the wicked scenes beyond the walls of her convent, she had no one from whom she had a right to expect either love or protection, and she had long looked forward to the expiration of her noviciate with satisfaction.

To the circumstances of her birth she was a stranger, and had never been able to learn more than that some lady, interested in her fate, had placed her where she was, and in so doing had conferred upon her a favour, which her utmost gratitude could never hope to repay.

The strict rules of Santa Caterina made it no desirable residence for any but such devotees as hoped, by leading miserable lives on earth, to be happy in heaven, and a few profligate females, who trusted, by severe penance and fasting, to wash away the stains of earlier life. Few parents, who condemned their children to a religious seclusion, were so bigoted or so unfeeling as to send them to Santa Caterina.

Francisca therefore seldom had met with a companion of her own age, or with any lighter spirit, who might have inspired her with a wish to join in the pleasures of the world, or the amusements of society. She was surrounded on all sides by gloom and bigotry; beyond the walls she was taught that every place was filled with vi-

olence and crime, and that a conventual life was the only means of peace and happiness, either in heaven or on earth. Her talents had received little or no cultivation, and had not her intellects been naturally strong, she must have sunk into a state of childish fatuity; but her mind was pure from every thought of evil, and her patience and fortitude had been severely tried in this school of fanatic bigotry. The lives and martyrdom of all the saints and virgins in the calendar, were the only examples ever held up to her imitation; yet from them she learned resolution and perseverance in her career of religion and virtue, unamiable as they might appear in the characters by whom she was surrounded.

The superior of the convent had generally treated her with all the kindness the rules of the sisterhood permitted, and habit had fixed the affection of the novice upon her, and two or three of the other nuns; having no other object to call forth, or rather to receive the natural effusions

of youthful feelings, they had been placed upon such of her associates as seemed best inclined to foster them. But the nuns of Santa Caterina had few of them any worldly affections remaining; superstition and fanaticism reigned without one rival feeling within them; and cool indifference had often repaid the warmth of Francisca's love.

Notwithstanding the inmates of her convent were thus repulsive and unprepossessing, still the thoughts of being torn from the only home she had ever seen, from the only friends she had ever known, from the abode of her youth, and the boundary of her wishes, was a shock so violent and unexpected, that she knew not how to think or act under it. Sorrow would have predominated, had not a more powerful sensation of alarm possessed her mind, arising from her dread at the thoughts of being entrusted to such a person as the barone.

It was in vain that the abbess strove to compose her, by assuring her that she

would receive every attention where she was going, and that she would still be under the protection of the lady, whose care had attended her through her early years, and, in all probability, would soon meet with other friends, and perhaps relatives, from whom she would receive the greatest kindness.

In spite of the representations of the superior, Francisca sat weeping and lamenting her destiny, and protesting that no power should divert her from her intention of taking the veil, and returning to her convent, from whence she considered it as sacrilege to take her.

By command of the abbess, her slender wardrobe was soon in readiness, the novice herself being unable to attend to anything. Her conductor at length reappeared, and terror stopped the lamentations of Francisca; speechless, pale, and trembling, she received the adieus of the sisterhood, and, with a convulsive shudder, was supported to a litter at the convent gate, in which she was placed by Della

Bardia, who did not appear to perceive her agitation, or, if he perceived it, did not deign to notice it.

In the evening they halted at a small village near Santa Margarita, where the barone was more attentive to the wants and wishes of his companion than he had been during the journey.

Francisca had in some degree recovered her composure, and resolved within herself the conduct she intended to pursue. She expected soon to see the lady who had always been considered as her guardian and protectress, and hoped, by declaring her fixed determination to persist in taking the veil, that she should be permitted to return to her convent.

Her fellow-traveller exerted himself to amuse her. He congratulated her upon her release from the convent, and the prospect of being introduced to the world, from which she had been so long secluded.

This produced a vehement declaration of her abhorrence of the pleasures of soci-

ety, and her resolution to live and die within the walls of Santa Caterina.

A little more knowledge on the subject, and the experience of a few days, Accursi observed, would soon dissipate these spiritual notions.—“The wishes of your friends, lady,” he said, “will find a powerful support from the temptations around you, and the gaieties of the world obliterate the visions conjured up by the superstition and hypocrisy of the old nuns of Santa Caterina.”

This was the first time Francisca had ever heard an idea that the society she had quitted were not the most perfect and most fortunate of human beings. She looked in wonder at the dark countenance of Accursi d'Amato, and fancied that the foul fiend himself must have been permitted to take possession of his person, and crossed herself with devotion at his profane remark.

“At San Bartolomeo, whither we are going,” he continued, “you will find but

little society; I hope, however, soon to take you to Sciacca, where you will be introduced to the friends and connexions of both our families."

"You know then, signor, to whom I owe my origin?" exclaimed Francisca, with joyful satisfaction. "Shall I indeed see my parents and relations?"

"This," he replied, "is no place for explanations; when we arrive at Santo Bartolomeo, you shall be informed of all you wish to know; but we must begin our travels early; you had therefore better retire to your couch, signora; and be assured that all your anxiety shall be fully quieted in a short time, and your curiosity satisfied, when we shall hear no more, I trust, of returning to Santa Caterina."

The novice began again to eulogize the happiness of her old abode, in the same strains she had so frequently heard it extolled.

Accursi listened with impatience for a short time, and in the midst of the ha-

rangue wished her good-night, and retired, sending in a female attendant to assist the lady in preparing for the short interval allowed for her repose.

In vain Francisca attempted to compose herself to sleep. The present and future prospects which had dawned upon her during the last few hours, so entirely occupied her thoughts, that it was impossible to exclude them, and daybreak found her still waking and restless. She was soon summoned to rise and set forward; and during a long and fatiguing day, she was shut up in her litter, except for a short time at noon, when they halted at Sambuca to rest themselves and their horses.

Towards evening they began to ascend the dreary heights of Santo Bartolomeo, in the deepest recesses of which stood the castle belonging to the barone della Bardia; a few miserable hovels in a valley beneath the castle were the only traces of human habitation, and these resembled the huts of a wandering tribe, rather than the abodes of civilization.

Francisca had been always accustomed to the gloom and melancholy of Santa Caterina; therefore, perhaps the scene made less impression upon her than it would have done on any other person; yet as she passed under the dark and ruined archway into the courtyard, which was covered in places with fragments of the tottering building, the air of desolation struck even her; and the few persons who appeared had the same fierce and military aspect which characterized her travelling companion. The whole looked more like a robber's den than the establishment of a feudal baron.

As Accursi lifted Francisca from her litter, he observed to her, that he hoped the exterior appearance of her future home would soon be more prepossessing; and conducting her through a dark hall, they passed two or three desolate apartments; and finally entered one, which, though somewhat better, was cheerless and gloomy in the extreme.

After some apparent difficulty in finding her, an old woman entered the room, and received Della Bardia's orders to attend entirely upon the lady, until he could procure for her some more suitable waiting-woman—"Mine has hitherto," he said, "been a bachelor's establishment, and you will find the castle in some disorder; but we shall soon make it more habitable, signora, and, for the present, you will excuse its want of accommodation. I have affairs of importance, which require my attention this evening, but you will give whatever orders you think necessary, and they shall be obeyed to the extent of our ability." He then took his leave of the astonished girl, who, wearied by her journey, terrified at her novel situation, and ignorant of every thing around her, was incapable of answering; and seating herself on the nearest chair, gave free course to her tears for some time.

The old woman, standing by, in nearly equal surprise, but her volubility soon getting the better of her reserve, she prated

most loquaciously to the almost-unheeding Francisca.—“ I never did expect such doings as this,” she began, “ that ever I should live to see a real lady mistress of the old Castle of Santo Bartolomeo ; but they do say, that your excellenza has gold and jewels enough to build up the battered walls again, as fine as any thing in Sciacca. To be sure, I did think it was all a story, invented by that fellow Giuseppe, to make me guess and wonder, when he told me that his excellenza was going to marry an angel, as rich as the madonna di Trapani, who was, for aught he knew, a daughter of the emperor, or the viceroy ; but when I was told to put the best furniture into this room, and the great bed in the next was dusted and cleaned, I thought there might be something in it, and perhaps the barone was about to bring home another smart lady from Palermo, such as he has once or twice before ; but, bless me ! your excellenza is quite another thing ; and when I heard just now that there really was a priest in the castle, I could not tell

which way to turn me; and so I sat still in the room over the gateway to watch your arrival—not that I expected to see you; and though they searched all over the castle, they would never have found me, only I thought I might as well come and look at my lord's new bride."

"You are mistaken then," said Francisca, still weeping. "I am not, nor do I mean to be, any one's bride; I am a novice, belonging to Santa Caterina. Why I am brought here, I know not; but when I see my friends, I presume I shall be informed."

"But your excellenza has untold sums of gold, and mines of wealth?" asked the old woman.

"I neither know of, nor wish to possess the treasures of the world," said Francisca; "only let me return to Santa Caterina, and I shall be happy."

The old woman stared as if doubting the sanity of the young lady, who expressed a wish to retire to rest, hoping thereby to escape from her attendant.

“Your excellenza will take some food first; I will go and see what can be found,” she said, and withdrew.

During her absence, the new inmate of Santo Bartolomeo looked round her apartment, into which, she had just been told, the best furniture in the castle had been removed. The tapestry hangings consisted of various fragments of various stories, put up by the taste of old Beatrice, wherever the original covering had fallen from the walls. Warriors upon their chargers, with their legs in the air, were grouped with tattered apostles, and moth-eaten scenes of farms and vineyards. The few chairs were those which had been selected as most fit for service, from various sets; and a table, which would stand without much trouble, completed the sumptuous display.

The air of abandoned and desolate misery struck even the novice from Santa Caterina. In her convent she had been accustomed to every deprivation of the comforts, as well as the luxuries of life, yet

still there was order, and some idea of neatness, in the humble pallet and slender furniture of their cells; and the parlour, and apartments of the abbess, were decently, though simply arranged.

The old woman arrived at length with a most enormous dish of oglio, which appeared to have been prepared for all the ruffian-like domestics in the courts below, and a bottle of execrable wine. Francisca had not been accustomed to dainty fare; she therefore thankfully partook of the viands offered her, and was conducted by Beatrice into the adjoining room, where the state bed had been dusted out for her reception. The appearance of this room was much in the same style as the one she had quitted.

“His excellenza,” said the old woman, “never resided much at Santo Bartolomeo till of late; he used formerly to spend his time in Sciacca; and my husband and I kept the castle in order; but now we have the barone himself, and his friend count Giorgio, and all their attendants, or sol-

diers, as they call themselves. It was a fine surprise to me, as your *eccellenza* may suppose, when they came clattering up to the castle in the dead of night; and then there was so much consulting and debating with my husband, and such searching for keys, and exploring all the old holds, that I could never make out what they meant, or where they put the poor man who was brought with them, so muffled up, that I never got a glimpse at his face, though I peeped at every opportunity."

Francisca could not avoid hearing all this gossip, though it made but little impression on her; and having performed her evening services, and secured the door after the departure of old Beatrice, she retired to rest. She did not see the barone till late the next day, which she spent almost entirely alone, and much in the same way as she would have done at Santa Caterina, in devotional exercises. It appeared to her singular that her friends should have taken her from her convent to im-

mure her in a ruinous castle, with only a man like Della Bardia; but she had been exercised in patience, and now found the benefit of that which she had acquired.

When Accursi entered, he excused himself slightly for his absence, which business, he said, had rendered necessary.

“When may I expect to see the friends to whom I am related?” asked Francisca.

“It will not be long before you will be introduced to them,” he replied; “and in the meantime, I hope you will not find this so uncomfortable a residence as it at first appeared.”

“You promised me, signor, an explanation of several circumstances, to which I am at present a stranger.”

“And it is my intention to fulfil it,” said Accursi; “but you, lady, must first obey the injunction of your unknown mother.”

“In all things I am prepared to honour and be obedient to her,” answered Francisca.

“I am happy,” said Accursi, “to find

the abbess has not failed in her duty here; your professions, signora, are now to be proved; you must accompany me to the altar, and instantly become the wife of Della Bardia."

The novice was for a few minutes silent; she had rallied all her presence of mind, all her composure, to hear the expected intelligence of her family and origin, to meet the terrific barone, and to learn the intentions of her friends. She had spent the greater part of the day in prayer, and felt, when she began the conversation, as if capable of bowing in humble resignation to the event, whatever it might be; but when she heard the price she was expected to pay for the introduction to her friends, the suddenness of the shock for a moment overpowered her. Her mind, however, was firm and decided; she considered herself devoted to the altar, and resolutely determined to resist, like the numberless virgins with whose histories she was so well acquainted, even to martyrdom, any matrimonial connection.

This resolution she announced, in firm yet gentle terms, to Della Bardia, who replied, with a shout of derision—"Most pious lady, we have, it is true, neither racks nor executioners to try your fortitude, but the power of Accursi d'Amato is not to be resisted by a child. My friends are waiting in the chapel below, the priest is in readiness, and you must instantly attend me thither."

Francisca knelt, but not to Della Bardia, in humble supplication; she bent to Heaven for aid and support in this hour of trial.

"Now for a miracle, holy Santa Caterina!" exclaimed Accursi, "to save your credit, and your votary's virgin fame."

"No miracle," replied Francisca, meekly, "is requisite to support a resolution which defies your tyranny, signor, and is fixed on Heaven alone."

As she spoke, a hasty footstep was heard advancing to the door; the novice's heart fluttered with hope; the countenance of Accursi fell; an armed attendant appear-

ed at the entrance.—“ A courier from Bivonia requires your excellenza’s immediate attention.”

“ He must wait,” exclaimed the barone, furiously ; “ neither earth nor Heaven shall stop my purpose now !”

The man retired.

“ Your saint,” continued Della Bardia, with a sneer of derision, “ must find some other means to save you, lady ; this but accelerates your doom.”

He took her hand with a grasp, which she found it vain to resist, and led her from the apartment.

As they advanced through the desolate chambers, the novice looked round for aid, but saw only a few ferocious-looking men, and they arrived at the chapel, where a priest was waiting their approach. With him was a tall man in armour, and two or three persons, who appeared to be subaltern officers.

“ The lady Francisca di Luna,” said Accursi, leading her up to the principal person.

“ My friend, count Giorgio, lady, who honours our nuptials by his presence. Proceed,” he continued to the priest; “ I have a summons to attend to, the instant that this ceremony is concluded; therefore, good father, make no delay in the duties of your office.”

“ Hear me, father,” said Francisca.

“ Silence, lady !” said Accursi, with a frown.

“ No, signor, I will not be silenced.— Father,” she continued, “ I here protest, before the blessed Virgin, that I am the consecrated spouse of God. I have been forced from my convent, by whose authority I know not, and am now dragged hither by one who has neither natural nor acquired right over me. I demand your assistance to restore me to my convent; and I protest, in the name of all the blessed saints above, against the further proceeding of the ceremony.”

The party stood for a moment in silent astonishment.

"These objections," at length said the priest, "are most powerful."

"And thus I answer them," exclaimed Accursi, vehemently drawing his sword, and seizing the monk. "Either proceed without delay, or meet your fate. This is only the prate of a wayward girl. At your peril, father, delay the solemnization of the nuptials! You know under whose sanction we act."

The priest opened the book, and in a tremulous voice began.

Another difficulty now arose: Francisca throughout refused her approbation and consent at every response she was required to make. The monk hesitated.

"You are to attend to me alone," said the barone, and again his sword gleamed before the eyes of the terrified father.

When this mockery had ceased, Della Bardia called on the priest to draw up an attestation of the act, which was signed by count Giorgio and the attendant witnesses, in spite of all the protestations and appeals of the lady.

The barone received the document, and carefully looked it over, then folded it up; and turning to the ruffians behind him, said—"Bear this most scrupulous good man to the deepest dungeon of the castle, and secure him in fetters; we have no further occasion for his services, and his babbling tongue may be inconvenient hereafter."

The men advanced, and seized the trembling priest, who gave one shriek as they threw a cloak over him, and forcibly bore him away.

"Allow me, baroness della Bardia, to conduct you from the chapel," said count Giorgio.

Without heeding him, Francisca again threw herself upon her knees before the crucifix, and remained some minutes undisturbed.

Accursi spoke a few words apart to the count, and left him to conduct the lady to the other part of the castle.

"We have important business, signora," he said, "which requires the immediate

attention of your lord and myself; I am sorry to interrupt your thanksgivings, but you must permit me to conduct you from hence."

The novice rose without further delay; she threw back the veil with which she had been covered; and looking steadily at the count, said—"I am unacquainted with the world, signor, but in my retirement have always heard that noblemen and soldiers were honourable, brave, and generous; from the conduct of yourself, and of the person who forced me hither, I must suppose that I have fallen into the hands of brigands and banditti, and have cause indeed to be thankful to the Power which has afforded me strength to resist the tyrannous attempt to make me the wife of your friend. The same Power will, I doubt not, deliver me from his hands. I am ready to attend you."

He then led her to the apartment she had quitted when forced away by Accursi, and Beatrice attended her. The count instantly withdrew in search of Della Bar-

dia, and Francisca seated herself, in silent meditation at the scene she had gone through, and anxious deliberation on her future proceedings. Last night she had wept bitterly at the bare idea of being removed from Santa Caterina; she had now shed no tear during all the violence to which she had been exposed, but, on the contrary, felt her spirits supported by a strength hitherto unknown to her; and hopeless as her situation seemed, she suffered neither despondency nor fear to the degree she might have expected; her firm reliance on Providence was unabated by danger and difficulty, and she calmly awaited succeeding events.

About an hour she continued undisturbed, when the clatter of horses in the courts below drew the attention of the old woman—"Bless me!" she exclaimed, "what a bustle there is! Why all the men are armed, and seem as if preparing for some grand expedition."

The barone entered the apartment as she was speaking—"Your brother," he

said, "signora, count Sigismund di Luna, requires my immediate attendance at Bivonia; he is my near kinsman, and the head of our illustrious house. Exclusive of our new connexion, I am bound to him by the strongest ties, and am now about to hasten to his aid with all my vassals and adherents. My return is uncertain, but shall not be unnecessarily delayed; you will, in the mean time, remain mistress here. One thing only I have to caution you against; all hopes of escape are now fruitless; you are my lawful wife, and any attempt of the sort which you may engage in, will be visited by my heaviest displeasure. Adieu! I have no moments for delay."

Francisca was about to speak, but he hastily left the apartment; the notes of a bugle, which sounded in the court, appeared to be the signal for departure. The clattering of horses on the pavement increased; she heard them thunder over the drawbridge, and all was again silence round her.

Thankful for her present release from persecution, by the departure of the baron, Francisca gratefully offered up her prayers to Heaven, and commended her future destiny to the same protecting Power which had hitherto defended her. The parting words of Della Bardia had informed her of her origin, and the name of her family; but she was an utter stranger to all the world, excepting the inmates of Santa Caterina; and don Sigismund di Luna was to her almost as remote a person as the emperor Charles; he was, however, some connexion on whom she had a claim, and eagerly and anxiously did she question Beatrice as to her knowledge of him and his family. To her great satisfaction, it was a subject on which the old woman could give her information. From two or three visits to Sciacca, and from the circumstance of his being the chieftain of Della Bardia's family, he was an object of interest to all the vassals; and with much embellishment, and no small additions, the attendant manu-

factured a complete detail of all the affairs of the house of Luna.

The novice learned, that at least she had a mother, and many powerful relations; and fully confided in their future compliance with her wishes to reassume at her convent the life from which she had been torn. Her time during the eventful day, and several which succeeded, was uniform and undisturbed; the only person she saw was Beatrice, and her principal conversation was respecting the newly-found relatives, whose names only excited so much interest.

To return to the affairs of Sciacca. On the day after the encounter of Federico and Sigismund, don Giacomo and his party accompanied the baron Solanto on his hunting expedition; and, after a fatiguing but successful day, returned to the cassino.

Don Sigismund had been there during their absence, and endeavoured, by every means in his power, to appease the anger of Costanza, but her mother's authority

could alone make her listen to him ; and she would only engage to overlook his late conduct, upon such a continuance of better temper as might manifest an improvement in his powers of self-command. He had retired before the return of the hunters, and the baroness took the earliest opportunity, unperceived by the rest of the party, to speak to Federico upon the subject of Costanza, and the jealousy of count Luna.

Perollo blushed deeply when she first mentioned the subject ; the baroness appeared not to regard it, and gave him every possible credit for his honourable intentions, and for having innocently caused the disagreeable scene which had taken place.

Federico attempted an apology, but could not produce an intelligible sentence.

The baroness perceived his agitation, and proceeded in the conversation—“ Under the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed in regard to both families, bound by the strongest ties of gratitude to your

father and yourself, and connected by our engagements with count Luna, it is an imperious duty, signor Perollo, which calls upon the baron Solanto to act with honour and confidence to all parties, neither to provoke the irritable feelings of count Luna, by giving him unnecessary pain, nor in any way to fail in shewing every testimony of friendship towards the house of Perollo. Much also is due to the feelings and the character of our daughter; and I shall not, I hope, be thought acting either with harshness, ingratitude, or suspicion, if I request you to avoid, as much as possible, the society of my child." Perollo started, and shewed violent signs of agitation. The lady continued—"It is neither from a want of confidence in your honour or generosity, signor, that I am tempted to urge the necessity of your withholding from all particular attention, either in public or private, but from a regard to the peace of all parties—to count Luna, to yourself, and to Costanza."

Federico had bowed assent to all that

the baroness had said, but without trusting himself to answer her. She now paused for a reply, but all he could say was a disjointed sentence, in which he acknowledged the justice of her opinions, and promised obedience to her wishes.

The truth was now but too evident to the mother of Costanza, and she trembled for the event.—“Remember, signor Perollo,” she said, “I rely confidently upon your honour and discretion.”

Don Giacomo requested to have his attendants summoned, as he was impatient to return. His son gladly took advantage of the circumstance, and in a short time the party left the cassino.

Costanza quitted the room when she saw the effect her mother’s conversation had upon Federico, whose countenance she had watched when she could do so unperceived. He had thus escaped the necessity of taking leave of her; and during his ride home, endeavoured to recover his spirits; but fearing to excite the inquiries of his mother, as soon as he arrived there,

he pleaded fatigue from the exertions of the day, and retired to his own apartment.

The baroness Pandolfina had, however, learned from Gaetano the events of the preceding day, and had considered them with deep and painful interest. Some days after the hunting, she succeeded in persuading Marguerita to accompany her for the first time to the casino.

Costanza, who sympathized sincerely in the sorrow of Landolini's orphan, exerted every power she possessed to amuse and relieve her thoughts, which gave the baroness Solanto the means of a long conversation with her friend, in which the two ladies discussed the subject of Federico's unfortunate attachment, and his mother engaged to exert her influence to prevent his visiting at the casino, or having any intercourse with Costanza, except such as their meeting in public rendered unavoidable and unsuspecting.

Soon after the departure of the ladies, don Giacomo, don Paolo Perollo, and

signor Pignatelli, arrived at the cassino. Solanto, who had been out for an hour or two, was returned, and the party were engaged in general conversation, when count Luna entered the saloon. A silence immediately ensued.

The count slightly saluted Solanto and the ladies, and turning fiercely towards don Paolo, said—"I am happy, signor, in this public opportunity of demanding satisfaction at your hands, for the injury which I have been informed you in private sought to render me, by insidiously seeking to discover the secret transactions of my family, and exposing them where they might most materially injure me, and forward the interest of your friend and kinsman with this lady," pointing to Costanza.

"Less intemperate language, count Luna," answered don Paolo, calmly, "might have suited both yourself and me more properly than that which you have now thought fit to use. I should not think it necessary to reply to your attack, but that

I consider myself as bound in duty to the baron Solanto to explain my conduct towards him. I did, signor," he continued, addressing Solanto, "a short time ago, request you not to precipitate your engagement with count Luna; my motive for so doing I did not state at the time, nor did I allege any cause, or produce any accusation against the count himself, or any one connected with him; I am now most willing to account for this conduct, and to give my reasons for acting in the manner I have done."

"I require no explanation, signor," said Solanto; "the character of don Paolo Perollo stands too high in reputation to make me doubt his honour or his judgment."

"But I am not thus to be evaded!" exclaimed the count, with vehemence, "and again demand an explanation!"

"For my own sake, I beg I may explain the motives which urged me to address you on the subject, baron Solanto," said don Paolo. "I had received infor-

mation from a friend, that a lady nearly connected with the count was in existence, the production of whom would materially affect the interest of your daughter and yourself; and I was at the time requested to state thus much to your excellenza. The proofs upon the subject were probable, but not decisive, and I was unwilling, until further information could be laid before you, to pledge myself to any thing which could imply dishonourable secrecy in the family of count Luna, or hereafter be altogether refuted. I therefore contented myself with requesting that some delay might be made, which would afford time for other knowledge to be obtained upon this most mysterious subject; but I neither sought for the intelligence which was given me, or received it through a dishonourable channel."

"And who is this unknown lady, who has risen from the grave to interrupt my negotiations with the baron Solanto?" replied Luna, with insolent contempt.

"That, signor," replied don Paolo, "can

only be answered by those members of your family who are acquainted with the secrets of the affair."

"From whom did the information come, and who but a madman would have believed so improbable a tale?"

Federico was about to interfere, but don Paolo prevented him; and his father took up the contest.

"If my kinsman can stand by and hear your impertinence with patience, Sigismund di Luna, it is more than I can do!" said don Giacomo, losing his temper.

The baroness tried to intercede, and Solanto requested count Luna to restrain his impetuosity.

"I long have borne Perollo's insolence!" said Sigismund, furiously; "it was but lately he passed me unsaluted in the city gate, and all his dissolute followers did the same, imitating the disrespect their ruffian chief dared to offer to my superior rank."

"Myself and my attendants," answered don Giacomo, "shewed all the respect which we considered due to the illustrious

don Sigismund ; but, for superior rank, it is a point on which I am disposed to yield to none in Sciacca; no, not to count Caltabellotta, Bivonia, Selafani, and Caltaventura, who, with all his high pretences, I must confess I hold in slight esteem."

"Don Giacomo Perollo shall soon be taught another lesson, and repent this insolence," said Luna.

"It must be some other than a maniac, who shall teach me humility and submission."

Solanto exhorted Perollo, and commanded his antagonist to hear him; the baroness added her entreaties, and Costanza, alarmed at the increasing violence of the parties, endeavoured to exert her influence over don Sigismund, whilst Paolo Perollo strove to moderate the anger of his kinsman.

"Is it thus, count Luna," asked Costanza, "that your promises are kept? Is this the regard you profess to shew in all things to my feelings and my wishes? and is such violence intended to disprove the

story your friends have sent abroad respecting this unknown female?"

"Torture me not by your reproaches, lady Costanza!" said Sigismund; "can I calmly listen to the aspersions these malignant enemies would cast upon my character? can I endure this insulting abuse? and would you persuade me to humble myself before these hereditary foes? but, above all, am I, without resenting it, to suffer their interference to delay my happiness, or, perhaps, eventually to deprive me of that which I value above all things, your affection and regard? No, Perollo," he continued, turning to don Giacomo, "the vengeance of Luna and Peralta has slept too long; you have at length awakened it, and the extermination of one or both our parties can alone extinguish the deadly feud between us."

"Your most heroic resolutions, signor," said Giacomo, more coolly, "are doubtless formed with infinite wisdom, and will be executed with equal valour and judgment. But we will no longer disturb these ladies

by our broils ; when next we meet, illustrious count Luna, you shall not find Perollo wanting in respectful salutations. Forgive me, my friends," he added, addressing himself to Solanto and his family, " for the intemperance into which this encounter has betrayed me. I have some affairs to arrange, a league from hence, and must be in Sciacca by a certain hour."

He then took his leave, and, attended by his friends, pursued his journey along the road, towards Caltabellotta, to a country-seat belonging to Vicentio Cubrici, where he had appointed to meet some members of his family, and his adherents, Matteo Benfari, Giovanni di Reggio, Giacomo di Palermo, and Di Visco, a Spanish relative of the baroness Pandolfina.

Don Sigismund remained at the cassino a short time after the departure of Perollo, and entered into a long and vehement justification of himself. Costanza had withdrawn, but the baroness remained, and endeavoured to remove the displeasure of Solanto, and sooth the irritation of Sigis-

mund against the family of don Giacomo.

“ However disposed I might be, signor,” observed the baron, “ to forgive your indignation at the report to which don Paolo alluded, yet there was nothing in his conduct to justify your violence towards him, or your threats of vengeance against my friend don Giacomo; and although I fully exculpate you from the suspicion of any dishonourable transaction, yet the history of this unknown female must be another objection against any conclusive engagements with you, even were the great obstacle of temper removed, of which, I must say, I now see no hopes.”

The prospect of losing Costanza increased the tumult in the breast of Luna; he vowed to sacrifice to his fury the author of such an unfounded falsehood, be he whom he might; and, after the most urgent supplications to Solanto and the baroness, to judge his conduct more leniently, and to intercede with their daughter, he hastily took his leave, and mounting

his horse, returned, with all speed, to Luna Castle, to endeavour instantly to unfold the history of this secret female, and to prove its total want of foundation.

Impatiently he sought the apartment of his mother, with whom he found her kinsman, Marco Luchese, and, without preface or hesitation, declared that the information he had received, respecting the private inquiries made by Paolo Perollo, was true—that he confessed to have listened to some secret spy—that he had reported his opinion to Solanto—delayed the completion of his engagement with Costanza—and, finally, attempted to justify himself, by alleging in excuse that he had heard of the existence of some lady, nearly connected with the house of Luna, whose life or death would materially affect the interest of the future countess.

An exclamation of horror and surprise from his mother arrested the voice of Luna.—“Is it thus the villain Della Bardia seeks his revenge?” she exclaimed, and endeavoured to escape from the room.

Luna caught her arm, and forcibly detaining her, demanded, in a voice scarcely audible from agitation—"Has Lucretia risen from her grave?"

With a look of guilty terror the countess inquired his meaning.

"To whom should the report allude, but to her?" replied Luna.

His mother perceived the direction of his thoughts, and instantly recovered her self-possession—"It is all an invention of the Perollo, to destroy the confidence of Solanto, to break his engagement with you, and to secure his daughter to the son of Giacomo."

The sudden change in the manner of his mother struck Sigismund with suspicion.—"There must have been some ground for the tale," he said; "I would not credit the oaths of all the rest of their united party; but the word of don Paolo, and his general character, though he bears the name of Perollo, persuade me that we have some traitor in our confidence, who has given rise to the report, though from what

motive or foundation appears inexplicable. Your excellenza mentioned the name of Della Bardia, as if suspicious of his faith."

The countess seemed again thrown off her guard for an instant, and said—"I have no trust in Accursi d'Amato, when his interest or his malignity may tempt him to betray his friends."

"The baron della Bardia," answered Sigismund, "has ever been a firm and zealous partisan, sincerely attached to our cause; what should induce him to invent this fable?"

"I did not mean," replied the countess, hesitating, "to accuse him, or any of our friends, of that which has its origin only in Perollo; I was alluding to other events, between myself and Della Bardia, with which no one else has any concern. I doubt not but this report may soon be traced, and proved to have originated in Paolo himself, though you seem so well-disposed to exonerate him from the charge, and fix it on your friends. The deepest injury these deadly foes can do, will be to

sow suspicion in you, my son, against our nearest kinsmen and connexions; I would advise you instantly to follow Adriano, who cannot be far upon the road; bring him back to Sciacca, and be guided by his advice."

"Has Adriano departed?" asked Sigismund.

"Almost an hour ago," said Luchese, and offered to attend the count, if he wished to overtake him.

The countess, anxious to get rid of the discussion, and to have some time for reflection on her own best method of proceeding, urged her son to seek Peralta instantly.

Attended by Luchese and two domestics, he immediately rode from the castle, leaving the city by the Porta degli Bagni. When near the convent of San Francisco, without the walls, they encountered the returning party of Perollo.

CHAPTER III.

Oh, wise was the founder, and well said he,
Where there are women, mischief must be.

Queen's Wake.

RECOGNISING instantly the party of Perollo, Luna spurred his horse to its utmost speed, endeavouring to ride violently through the crowd around don Giacomo, who exclaimed loudly to his attendants—
“ Here is this illustrious personage again ; let us watch his motions, and salute him as he desires, and his great worth demands :” and immediately turning his horse, he rode back with all his band.

At the distance of a bowshot he halted on the little plain behind the church of St. Barnabas, and ordered such of his men as had fire-arms with them to discharge them in the air ; and as Luchese and the servants of don Sigismund passed, the ad-

herents of don Giacomo pursued them by the most insulting shouts and cries.

Luna, furious at this outrage, halted an instant, and, with a tremendous oath, vowed, in the destruction of all Perollo's name, to raise an eternal monument to his revenge, and then took the road to Bivonia, without addressing a word to his companions, and apparently forgetful of the original intention with which he had set out.

"I hope we have now saluted the most noble count with all the distinction he desires," said the baron, as, with his party, he retook the road to Sciacca. "Paolo, you look grave; was it not right to pay the deference that sweet youth demands to his pre-eminent greatness?"

"I cannot help wishing," said don Paolo, "that your excellenza treated that unhappy temper of count Luna with the compassion it deserves, or, at least, that you had not given it the consequence of such notice as that which has just passed."

"Why, Paolo, would you have me submit to be braved and defied by a Luna—

by the hereditary foe of my family? and besides, there was something so delightfully absurd in a man, in a transport of jealous rage about his mistress, going out of his way to quarrel with me about a salutation last week in the city gate; surely it was right to indulge the young gentleman in his love of such ceremonies."

"That he is a Luna, and that the Lunas and Perollos were foes, is just what I wish you would forget," said don Paolo; "it appears to me the most unreasonable thing in the world, that because our great-grandfathers quarrelled, we should be condemned to perpetual enmity to a person of don Sigismund's disposition; my interference (which has doubtless been represented to him under every false and aggravating form) could hardly fail to be irritating; but, as I do believe him generous and sincere, when he had discovered the truth (of which I believe him now completely ignorant), it is most likely he would himself have repented his intemperance."

“Perhaps he might,” said Pandolfina; “but I confess it appears to me full as likely that he would not, and, in the mean time, I cannot say I have any inclination to be subject to his insolence; he is just the most disagreeable fellow I ever met with, and certainly I should feel no objection to the task of correcting him; his temper is very unfortunate perhaps, and the sooner he gets a new one the better; I have no patience with such violent hot-headed fools, who, precisely because they cannot keep their own tempers, or do not think it worth while to try, suppose every one else must submit to their humours.”

“I fear your desire of attempting his correction will not long be denied you,” answered don Paolo, “for certainly this quarrel will not end here, and if it involved only ourselves, as it would perhaps give us the satisfaction of ridding the city of Adriano, Della Bardia, and a few more of the party, I am not sure I should regret it. But it will involve much distress to many

who have only to obey, and can derive but little advantage from our contest."

"Those you mention, who have only to obey, are the very people who are most fond of the amusement of fighting," said don Giacomo; "but do tell me, Pignatelli, what you think of it?"

"Why I am afraid," answered Gaetano, "that don Paolo is right in his argument; but I should certainly have acted like your excellenza."

"Oh, Paolo always ends *par avoir raison*," said the baron; "and if he could persuade us all to be as rational and as good as himself, I should not despair of seeing that old demon the countess, in Spanish costume, bearing to the font some infant heir of a Perollo, or honouring me with private conferences, as she does Della Bardia; but since that will not be easily accomplished, we must prepare, I fear, for a few broken heads."

"I should hardly have thought it possible," said Paolo, "to have wished your temper other than it is, my kinsman; but

indeed you are more wrong than will be seen at present; the best advantage to be drawn from good temper is not to be ruffled by the bad; if you were like count Luna, you could but be provoked to hostility by his folly; why will you not treat such childish violence as it deserves, and leave it to its own insignificance?"

"Let me but teach him a little civility, and I will then leave him to your moderation."

"Would you then commence open war against this misguided young man?"

"No, Paolo, he will, I believe, save me the trouble; why, if you were not known for the bravest of the brave, I should suspect you loved not danger, so warmly do you plead for peace."

"I had almost rather be branded for a coward, than involve Sciacca in a new feud of Luna and Perollo," said Paolo, as they entered the gates of the Casa di Perollo.

Count Sigismund preserved the strictest silence during the whole of his journey to Bivonia, as if brooding over the vengeance

he had threatened, and unwilling to allow any cause whatever to divert his mind from the one great end he had in view, the destruction of Perollo.

On arriving at his castle, he heeded not the attentions of those about him, refused all refreshment, and, offering a slight excuse to Marco Luchese, retired to a private apartment, where he passed the whole night in writing to all the connexions of his house, to his own personal friends, and to every one over whom he possessed either influence or power, requiring them to join him instantly at Bivonia, for the purpose of consulting upon business of the utmost importance, and to bring with them all their vassals and retainers; and by daybreak messengers were sent off in all directions with his letters.

Within the castle all was bustle and preparation for the reception of the expected guests, and Sigismund, in the hurry and tumult of external objects, and the full employment of his time and thoughts, endeavoured to find some respite from the

conflicting passions which agitated his mind.

In the first burst of fury at the insult he had received, every other idea had been overpowered; Costanza even had been forgotten; and when the remembrance of his love returned, it came mingled with the recollection of the various incidents in which his enemies had crossed him.

The affair of Serican had given a bias to the mind of Solanto in favour of Perollo. The services of Federico had previously made an impression on the mind of Costanza, which had been improved by circumstances; whilst untoward accidents had shewn forth his own temper in its most unprepossessing form. The intimacy of the baroness Pandolfina with the mother of his intended bride, and the interference of Paolo Perollo, all tended to confirm his jealousy, and to impel him forwards in seeking the destruction of his foes.

Anxiously he awaited the arrival of his friends, more particularly that of Adriano, on whom he depended to devise some

plan by which his marriage with Costanza might be secured.

The summons of their chieftain was obeyed with alacrity by all the adherents of his house. In the course of a few days, a numerous band of nobles and their retainers were assembled at Bivonia; amongst whom were Pietro Gilberto, a Palermitan cavalier, and Michele Pugiades, a newly-declared enemy of Perollo.

All the men of Bivonia, and the surrounding country, and from every part of the domains of count Luna, were collected with the greatest expedition. Accursi d'Amato obeyed the call, and brought with him the Greek count Giorgio, who was immediately engaged as a stipendiary with many of his countrymen and followers, men of evil life, and despisers of every danger. Of these Greeks there were at that time considerable numbers scattered over the island, and distinguished for acts of cruelty and revenge.

Having assembled nearly four hundred men, don Sigismund communicated to the

chiefs the purpose he had in hand ; and, finding them all zealous in his cause, selected those on whose judgment he could best rely to advise with on the conduct of his designs.

To them count Luna painted his grievances, with all the aggravation which long-cherished hatred, jealousy, and a sense of recent injury and insult, could give ; and pleaded, with all the animation these incitements must necessarily inspire, and at the same time pleaded to an audience instigated by similar feelings, and whose swords were always ready to start from their scabbards at the command of their chieftains. One heart and one mind appeared to animate the whole body, and with enthusiasm they entered into his measures.

The dark visage of Accursi d'Amato was rendered more terrific by his smile of anticipated vengeance ; and perhaps, for the first time, the countenance of Adriano exhibited the real feelings of his heart, as, with a look of triumphant malignity, he

surveyed the powers assembled to crush the objects of his bitterest hatred and detestation.

To decide upon the surest method of attaining their end, was a work of time, and called forth all their energies. Powerful as they were in numbers, Adriano pointed out the hopeless chance of open warfare, which don Sigismund impetuously demanded, in a city populous as Sciacca, with the multitude in favour of their enemy, many of the principal inhabitants not to be depended upon, and others decidedly friendly to Perollo.

“It would,” urged Adriano, “be an act of madness to attack the castle of don Giacomo,” the wall and towers of which had been so lately strengthened and repaired; they had the command of no artillery, whilst Perollo had seven pieces of considerable weight, his walls were well manned, his armoury well furnished, and he himself, with all his crimes and tyranny, had ever borne the reputation of a wise and brave commander. Nor were the strength and talents of his kinsmen and

adherents to be forgotten and despised. By advancing openly, and with banners displayed, it would appear as if they were risen in declared rebellion against the emperor himself, and thus excite the country in general against them, and place their lives and property in jeopardy hereafter.

“And what then are the temporizing plans of Geronimo Peralta?” asked Della Bardia, with a look of contempt; “by what crooked paths of policy does he intend to lead us on to victory and vengeance? Is a force of four hundred gallant men to be wasted in devising schemes of individual assassination? Count Luna, you have now the united powers of your friends and family obedient to your command; with one heart they have vowed to redress your wrongs—with one voice they call for the total extermination of our mutual enemies; and if but one individual of Perollo’s accursed race shall escape, this tyranny will hereafter be again revived, and our posterity will crouch beneath the

yoke from which we may deliver them. Let us draw our toils around their den, nor let one thought of mercy be permitted to any soul connected with Perollo."

"No one," said Calogero Calandrino, "can, I think, accuse me of supporting plans of needless caution, or of charity towards the party of Perollo; but I must think, with the baron Adriano, that our forces are too weak to cope with the undivided power of don Giacomo; if he can himself be surprised and slain, the residue would fall an easy conquest. Let then a number of our men be selected for his destruction—let them be received and secretly kept in Sciacca, till an occasion offers when they may rush out and crush the insolent oppressor, surround his walls, admit into the city the remainder of our troops, and finally complete our glorious triumph of revenge and justice."

The opinion of Calandrino met with almost universal approbation. Sigismund and Della Bardia at length acceded to it, and the assembly proceeded to deliberate

on the surest way of putting their designs in practice. Finally it was determined to select an hundred of their boldest men, who were to be conveyed into the city during the night, and await an opportunity when Perollo should leave his castle; and, by a sudden assault, they then hoped to compass his destruction, after which they might proceed as circumstances should dictate. The first difficulty to be surmounted was the conveying so large a body of persons into the town unnoticed. The gates being regularly closed at night, made this more difficult; but it was at length proposed that they should enter by means of a lower window in the house of Pietro Infontanetta, which, as adjoining the exterior wall of the city, in a situation little exposed to public notice, could afford the surest and most private ingress to any number of men, and at any hour of the night.

The impatience of don Sigismund urged the immediate execution of their enter-

prise; but Adriano, Pugiades, and one or two of the more cautious leaders, demanded a few hours preparation and reflection, that every thing might be better arranged and considered, and no oversight destroy their hopes at the time of action. The delay was not obtained without much debate and opposition from the more impetuous members of the confederacy, and only upon an assurance that the scheme should be put in practice on the second night.

As the party separated, Sigismund took an opportunity to desire Adriano privately to follow him to his own apartment, as soon as he could escape from general observation.

A long interview took place between the count and his confidential friend, which continued during great part of the night; and at daybreak Adriano left the castle, attended by ten of his followers; and to all inquiries after him the next day, Sigismund replied, that the baron, having some affairs of importance to transact, had de-

parted for a few hours, but would probably return to partake in the expedition on the ensuing night.

During the morning after this secret journey of Peralta, Sigismund encountered Della Bardia on the ramparts of the castle; and entering into conversation with him on the subject of their approaching enterprise, observed, that it did not appear that many of their party concurred with him in considering it of consequence to destroy other of their enemies besides Pandolfina himself—"Yet," added Luna, "I feel as deeply injured by the treachery of the son, in endeavouring to alienate the affections of my betrothed wife, as by the insults of the father, or the impertinent interference and unfounded accusation of their kinsman don Paolo, who pretends to have had information of the existence of some female connexion of mine, which may be an obstacle to my intended alliance."

"Indeed!" said Della Bardia, looking surprised. "To whom could he allude?"

Sigismund fixed his eyes steadily on Accursi—"Can it be possible that my suspicions are well founded," he said, "and that my mother's mysterious allusion had any foundation?"

"If your excellenza derived any knowledge from the countess Caltabellotta, it is probably correct," coldly replied Della Bardia.

"My mother hinted at some transaction in which you yourself were concerned, signor."

"Speak out, count Sigismund di Luna; I am prepared to meet your questions, nor shall I refuse to answer them."

"Your vehemence, Della Bardia, has rendered you forgetful where you are. If you have any information to communicate, let us retire to a more private spot; we are here exposed to all the vassals who crowd the courts below."

"It matters not," answered Accursi; "it will not long be a secret that Francisca di Luna is restored again, and claims her natural rights."

“I know not,” said Sigismund, “who this same lady is; but be she who she may, we need not subject her history or her claims to the discussion of our vassals; nor can I easily forgive those who pretend to be my friends, and have exposed me to the suspicions of the baron Solanto, the insinuations of Paolo Perollo, and to the appearance of having acted with dishonour and duplicity. Let us retire, and in a more convenient place inform me of the particulars of this mysterious affair.”

“There is no occasion for retirement, don Sigismund; the bride of Della Bardia, and the sister of count Luna, has been too long concealed from the knowledge of the world.”

Sigismund stood in mute amazement — “You must have been imposed upon, barone della Bardia; my father had no child but me, save one who died in infancy.”

“Your excellenza has been misinformed. The baroness della Bardia was report-

ed dead, and since that time resided with the nuns of Santa Caterina."

"My mother's evidence will soon confute this foolish history," observed don Sigismund.

"The countess dares not, cannot, does not, disown her daughter, the lady Francisca di Luna," said Accursi.

Again don Sigismund paused.—"Should this improbable tale," he said at last, "be true, who has dared to give a daughter of our house in marriage without the consent of her high relatives?"

"The countess Caltabellotta has found no unfit husband for her child, I trust, in her kinsman Accursi d'Amato; and be she finally acknowledged or not by her nearer connexions, we have evidence sufficient to compel them not to withhold her rights."

"Do you threaten me with this imposture, signor? Have you yet to learn that Luna is not to be acted upon by insolence or terror?"

"Neither has arrogance, or affected in-

credulity, yet influenced Della Bardia. I have no desire, don Sigismund, to expose your mother's deeds of unnatural cruelty towards her helpless child, nor to be at variance with yourself; it was not my intention to have made this disclosure until after your nuptials with Solanto's daughter; your own curiosity has drawn it from me, and with yourself it remains to make it public, or still to conceal it till that event has taken place; until when, I am willing to allow our claims to continue dormant."

"I wish, signor d'Amato, to take no undue advantage of the baron Solanto, and to shew the world, that Sigismund di Luna is clear from the imputation cast upon him; but whilst the present important affair is pending, it will be impossible for me to attend to any other. As soon as leisure is afforded me, I shall be happy to investigate the lady's claims; and if substantiated, gladly receive her as my sister. Had this information come in any other manner, or through any other chan-

nel than a Perollo, I should have welcomed it more cheerfully ; but I cannot now deny the justice of their accusation, and may find it difficult to clear myself from the suspicion of being accessory to the concealment."

"Your excellenza can arrange that as best pleases you," said Accursi ; "it will be a matter of little import when you have secured the lady and her dower."

Don Sigismund was going to reply, not in the gentlest manner, to this cavalier mode of treating his character ; but Della Bardia interrupted him, by requesting permission to bring a prisoner to Bivonia, whose life and safety, he said, were of material consequence to him ; and as during the approaching hostilities he should be absent from his own castle, his captive would be more secure at Bivonia, where a garrison was always kept, than elsewhere. The count gave the permission, without troubling himself to make any inquiries, and left his companion to himself.

A few days after the scene of alterca-

tion between don Sigismund and Perollo at the cassino, the family of Solanto were thrown into astonishment by the arrival of the countess Caltabellotta, attired in a state dress, which she had worn fifty years before at Palermo, attended by her awkward domestics, and endeavouring to imitate the elegance and splendour of the baroness Pandolfina. Her arrival was announced some minutes before she made her entrance, and she appeared to be studying the means of making her dignity most conspicuous. She was received with easy and respectful attention by the baroness, and with reserve by Costanza.

“Count Luna,” the lady began, “has commissioned me to offer his excuses to the signora di Solanto for his involuntary absence. Unexpected business has called him over to Bivonia, which may detain him there for several days.”

Costanza bowed, but expressed no regret at his absence; her mother however endeavoured, by every means in her power, to conciliate her guest, but apparently in

vain : the coolness with which the younger lady received herself and her intelligence, produced a cloud of ill-humour, which nothing seemed likely to dissipate. With the delivery of her embassy, the conversation of the countess was exhausted ; but she considered it as a matter of etiquette to make her visit of a certain length. After some time she again addressed Costanza — “ Upon the return of don Sigismund to Sciacca,” she said, “ some time will, I suppose, be fixed for the fulfilment of your engagement, signora ?”

“ My destiny, madam,” replied Costanza, “ is, in this instance, in my father’s hands ; count Luna’s violence is little likely to make me anxious for any such period.”

“ There are few young females, signora, in Sicily,” said the elder lady, “ who would not appreciate the merits of my son, and the honour of his alliance, at a sufficiently-high rate to overlook any little effusions of vehemence which his warm and generous temper sometimes involves him in.”

“ The Sicilian damsels, and particularly

those in Sciacca, possess, I doubt not, all the meekness and patience of their mothers," said Costanza; "but I am unfortunately not gifted with the gentle spirit of the baroness Solanto."

The countess shewed symptoms of anger and impatience; but repressing them, answered—"Sigismund's love, signora, is ardent and impetuous; but your influence over him, in every instance, will shew itself, when all causes for jealousy and fear are at an end."

"Your excellenza is arguing," replied Costanza, "as if every impediment to this union were obviated; whereas the conduct of count Luna, during the last interview with which he honoured our family, was such as would have made me refuse him even at the altar; and I beg once again to state, that I consider myself as under no obligation to fulfil the treaty which was begun before our arrival here; and that I should expect my future days to pass more peaceably in any way, than as

united with the head of a faction, so violent as that with which count Luna is connected."

"It is well the baron Solanto possesses an authority over this high spirit, lady."

"In that I perfectly agree with your excellenza," answered Costanza; "and so gently does he use it, that I should be unwilling to exchange it, were the dispositions of my future connexions more inviting, and had no other lady claims upon don Sigismund."

"I am ignorant of your allusion, signora," said the countess, looking pale.

The baroness prevented her daughter's reply, by mentioning that she had heard some mysterious history, which, she doubted not, count Luna would easily explain when next they met.

"Some malignant invention of Perollo, I presume."

"Don Paolo Perollo," interrupted Costanza, "has never been accused, by envy itself, of falsehood or malignity."

“The detested race are all alike,” said the lady, furiously, as the countess Sambuea entered the room.

Without perceiving all the party present, with a silent salutation to the baroness, she rushed up to Costanza, and embraced her, with every symptom of the most violent affection—“My dear creature!” said she, “allow me to congratulate you on your delightful escape! I have been enchanted ever since I heard this exquisite story; it is, to be sure, very dreadful; but you must be most happy at its termination.”

“Allow me to introduce you to the countess Caltabellotta,” replied Costanza.

The lady looked round surprised; and seeing the countess, was silent for a few moments. The mother of Sigismund, however, affected not to perceive the intruder, who resumed her conversation in an under-tone.

“I was in hopes, my dear friend,” she said, “of not finding any of your old lover’s family at the casino, and of hear-

ing more of this divine history. I wish I durst speak to that old wretch, and ask her a few questions. She looks dreadfully grim; but I cannot restrain my curiosity;" and, in rather a faltering tone, the countess Sambuca began—"You really must excuse me, my dear madam, but I am so interested in the affair, that I cannot help applying to you for information.—Will you tell me some of the dreadful particulars?"

The countess Caltabellotta, between anger and surprise, was perfectly mute; and the inquirer, taking her silence as permission to proceed, continued—"It certainly must be a very unpleasant circumstance to your family, signora; but as it is now so generally known, and all the facts so clearly established, there can be no longer any use in secrecy. When Laura Benfari first told me that the lady Lucretia was alive again, I assure you I said directly—'Madama di Trapani!' What a horror for the poor countess Caltabellotta! But really, when I heard that she had lived privately

all this time with that fright the barone della Bardia, I was so shocked at her conduct, that I even pitied her husband. I do abhor scandal, and think it the most dreadful thing in the world; but when one hears of such interesting events, one cannot help listening. I dare say don Sigismund wont be able to get a divorce, for the pope will not like to expose his niece; so my dear superior-minded Costanza will be free, and marry my cousin Federico, as I told signor Pignatelli when we first met."

The baroness had been so astonished at the beginning of this harangue, that she had lost her presence of mind, and had not attempted to interrupt it; but both Costanza and herself becoming alarmed at the consequences, exerted themselves by protesting against the absurdity of her information; Costanza blushed deeply at the mention of Federico, and the allusion to the conversation at the Casa di Perollo,

"Pray, ladies," said the countess Calta-

bellotta, pale with rage, "let this candid and most amusing personage proceed; she may elucidate several mysteries with which we are unacquainted. Probably," she continued, "the signora di Sambuca is an emissary from this honourable lover; let me be no interruption to your proceedings, madame; I am about to depart; but first, you must let me express my thanks for your avowal of the connexion between this lady and Perollo."

"I declare I had no idea she was so agreeable," said the countess Sambuca; "I had always been told she was the most——"

"I must request, signora," said Costanza, "that you will, for my sake, explain the subject which the countess Caltabellotta appears to misunderstand."

"Really, my dear creature, I cannot explain it," she answered. "You know it has been reported that the lady Lucretia was spirited away," with a significant nod at the countess.

"Silence, fool!" exclaimed the lady, shaking with emotion.

The countess Sambuca screamed at the vehemence of her tone and gesture.

“ I must desire,” said Costanza, gravely, and with firmness, “ that the signora be allowed to explain her insinuation about signor Perollo.”

Poor madame Sambuca was, however, terrified into silence, and seemed only anxious how to escape from the presence of the enraged countess Caltabellotta.

“ Nothing more is necessary on the subject,” said the latter; “ every one will now be convinced of the treachery with which don Sigismund has been treated.”

The baroness Solanto pointed out the justice of hearing her daughter’s explanation.

“ The first time,” said Costanza, “ I met this lady at the Casa di Perollo, she certainly expressed a wish that my engagement with count Luna could be transferred to her kinsman ; but it was said, I then considered, in the same unthinking way in which she has now repeated it. This, signora di Sambuca, is, I believe,

the true history of all your conversation on the subject."

"Really, my dear creature, I dare say it is; but pray take me away from that dreadful person; I am so terrified, I shall not be able to speak for a month."

"Your account, signora di Solanto," said the countess Caltabellotta, "has unfortunately so many circumstances to contradict it, that it can scarcely be believed."

"When I condescended to explain the thoughtless expressions of this lady," said Costanza, with calm dignity, "it was done to vindicate my own conduct, and to inform my mother of their meaning. I weigh too lightly the opinion of your excellenza, to have entered into any explanation on your account."

"What a delightful spirit!" whispered the countess Sambuca to the baroness; "I would not speak again to the cross old creature for the universe."

"I must request, signora, that you will have the goodness to confirm or contradict the statement of Costanza."

“ My dear madam,” she replied, still in an under-tone, “ I never contradict any body but my husband ; I would not, I am sure, oppose that lady, though what donna Costanza says is perfectly true.”

“ Be so good, countess Caltabellotta, “ as to hear this lady’s acknowledgment,” said the baroness.

“ Addio,” said the signora di Sambuca, making to the door.

The commands and entreaties of Costanza and her mother were in vain ; she hastily withdrew, and the mother of count Luna looked with a sarcastic smile to the parties remaining.

“ My assertions want not further proof with you, my mother, I trust,” said Costanza.

“ No, my child ; nor will they with any who knows and can appreciate you as you deserve.”

“ Your friend, signora,” said the countess, “ seemed unwilling to confirm the statement you vouchsafed to give ; don

Sigismund will have no small right to demand a more explicit satisfaction."

"Don Sigismund can have no right over my conduct, madame. The accusation under which he himself now lies, is such as demands the fullest explanation. If my father has been insulted by the offer of an engagement, to which any secret impediment existed, he may indeed complain of treachery and dishonourable usage. But I wish not to recriminate, and again repeat, that I consider my engagement to your son, count Luna, as null and void."

"That you may fulfil your contract with Perollo," said the countess; "but beware, young lady; you may raise a storm which shall crush your house, as well as theirs. The friends of Luna are numerous and brave; force may revenge his injuries, but not redress them."

"The threats and promises of don Sigismund, his friends, and family, I equally disregard," said Costanza.

Solanto now entered the apartment, and good-humouredly saluted the countess.

“ You heard, I hope, the last reply of donna Costanza,” she said; “ though without perhaps fully understanding the impulse under which she acts, her engagements with Perollo are now exposed beyond a doubt.”

“ Engagements with Perollo!” repeated Solanto; “ to whose engagements does your excellenza allude ?”

“ To those of your daughter, signor, the betrothed bride of Sigismund count Luna. We shall now see how far you have been infected by their schemes.”

“ If we have any arrangements with the baron Pandolfina,” replied Solanto, “ there would be some treachery perhaps in breaking them; but what treaty can Costanza have entered into, to excite such vehemence in your excellenza ?”

“ It appears hardly possible,” said the countess, “ that you, baron Solanto, should be ignorant of the love entertained by Federico Perollo for your daughter, though she may have denied the return she has

dared to make to his presumptuous passion."

"And who has now discovered this most important secret?" asked the gentleman.

"Her friend the countess Sambuca."

"Costanza has been most imprudent in her choice of a *confidante*," said Solanto, smiling.

"And you intend, signor, to justify her falsehood?"

"By no means, signora; I only intend to doubt the authenticity of your information."

"And dare you doubt the word of the countess Caltabellotta?" asked the lady, in no gentle tone.

"I may be allowed, I hope, to doubt the authority on which your excellenza's opinion is formed.

The composure of the baron provoked the lady beyond endurance—"Once for all, baron Solanto," she said, "as the mother of count Luna, I demand to know

your determination—whether you intend to fulfil your contract with my son, or, in defiance of honour and justice, give your daughter to Perollo?”

“Probably neither,” said Solanto, with indifference. “I should be sorry to displease you, lady, or treat count Luna improperly; but I see too much against the intended union at present to allow it to proceed, though this denial by no means involves a future contract with Perollo, or a final rejection of count Luna’s suit.”

“This then, sir, is your decision?”

“For the present, signora, this is my resolution.”

“Then, baron Solanto, on your own head be the fatal consequences,” replied the lady, and rose to depart.

The baroness received a slight parting salutation; but Costanza was regarded only with a look of indignation.

“Allow me to see your excellenza to your litter,” said Solanto, as the lady was quitting the room.

“My attendants are in waiting,” answered the countess; and refusing his offered hand, departed.

CHAPTER IV.
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So that, from point to point, now have you heard  
The fundamental reasons of this war,  
Whose great decision hath much blood let forth,  
And more thirsts after.     *All's Well that Ends Well.*

THE hot springs of Sciacca are situated in a deep and rocky valley, at the distance of about half a league from the city, and have been the resort of invalids from time immemorial. The waters are powerfully impregnated with sulphur, and rise at a very high temperature, and of the colour of milk; so great is the quantity of the mineral contained in them, that the pipes through which they flow into the baths become choked up from the deposit; and by evaporating, the fluid, after it has passed through the places designed for the bathers, a vast quantity of sulphur is obtained.

The springs rise at no great distance from each other, are many in number, and various in their appearance and quality.

Beside the principal one above described, is one which is called the *Acqua Santa*. The waters here rise clear and pellucid, about the temperature of new milk, and possessing a pleasant soft taste. Three other springs near the spot are black and brackish; and a fourth, though perfectly clear, has only a slightly sulphuric flavour.

At the distance of a league from hence, eastward of the city, rise a chain of lofty hills, on whose summits are wells of a similar nature, which are much frequented at certain seasons.

The scenery in this valley of the baths is wild and picturesque. On the eminence which bounds it to the west, are the white towers of the city, interspersed with the various trees which adorn the gardens attached to the convents and palaces. Eastward the hills rise successively one behind another, till the prospect is terminated by the lofty mountains between

Sciacca and Girgenti, from which descends the Fiume Platani, one of the principal rivers in the island. The lower part of the valley affords occasional views of the sea, whilst northward it is closed in by hills covered with thickets, and abounding in game, in pursuit of which, and in wandering amongst these lonely scenes, the baron Solanto spent a considerable portion of his time, frequently unattended by any of his domestics.

The baroness Solanto, always nervous and delicate, had been so distressed at the scene of altercation which took place during the last visit of the countess Caltabellotta, that she had in consequence been for some days far from well, which the baroness Pandolfina hearing, came down to the cassino with Marguerita ; and whilst the two elder ladies were engaged in conversation, the baroness requested Costanza would take the benefit of air and exercise in the olive-grove adjoining the house, fearing her confinement with her mother might be injurious to her health, and Marguerita



offered to accompany her. The latter, though in low spirits, was calm and composed; and her young friend sought every means of beguiling her sorrows in detailing the event which had so unfortunately affected her mother.

Costanza said, she could easily have forgiven the attack upon herself, after the irritation of the moment was over, for the sake of the effect which the fury of the countess had produced upon her father's mind, it having almost determined him to give up all thoughts of a union for her with don Sigismund, to whom she now felt so decided a dislike, as to make her rejoice in any event which broke their engagement, without involving her in disobedience to her parents; "for the sagacity of my unfortunate friend, the countess Sambuca," she continued, "her absurd terror of the old lady, and provoking repetition of her own ridiculous conversation, they would have afforded me so much amusement in the recollection, that I should have felt obliged to her for the

scene, had it not involved my mother's present illness. The arrival of the baroness Pandolfina will, I hope, revive her; and my father has all along endeavoured to place the intemperate violence of the countess in as absurd a light as possible."

The ladies wandered for some time beneath the olive and almond trees around the house, and at length seated themselves on a fragment of rock, at some distance from it, sheltered on all sides from the beams of the sun, and embosomed amongst the shrubs, which grew luxuriantly above. Marguerita was unable to support the conversation; and Costanza, fearful of fatiguing her, was silent also. The hum of the insects fluttering in the air was the only sound which disturbed the repose of the scene; and the ladies had sat for several minutes, when a loud yawn, as if from a person awaking from sleep, startled them to attention.

"A pretty watch you keep!" said a hoarse gruff voice on the other side of the rock on which they were resting.

“ Watch !” replied some other person, “ after riding all night ; not for count Luna himself, much less for this good friend of his.”

Costanza looked at her companion in speechless amazement, and Marguerita appeared equally terrified.

The first speaker began again—“ We shall have a troublesome job, I expect, and our chieftain seems to think so too, for he keeps himself pretty well out of the way.”

“ This carrying off,” said the second voice, “ is poor work, and gives a deal of useless trouble—a stiletto would do the business in half the time. Our leader has commanded us to be tender over them, but I am inclined to think he was not much in earnest, and would have little objection to our making short work of it, and giving his prisoner over into the keeping of a good deep grave.”

A dark ruffian-like face appeared amidst the bushes, and the terrified females fled with the utmost speed towards the house, where they arrived breathless from alarm.

Costanza had the presence of mind to prevent her companion from disturbing her mother or the baroness Pandolfina, and eagerly inquired for her father. The baron, she was told, had left the house soon after the young ladies, and was not yet returned. The amusement she had derived from the society of her friend was of considerable service to the baroness Solanto, who entreated her to repeat her kindness soon.

After their departure, Costanza impatiently awaited the return of her father, that she might detail to him the conversation she had heard in the grove; but she looked for him in vain; and as evening approached, her terrors rapidly increased. She inquired if the baron had gone to visit don Giacomo? The baron Pandolfina, her mother said, was so occupied with business of importance, as to be prevented from leaving his castle, even for an hour. After which information, communicated by the baroness, it was not probable that Solanto had gone thither.

The distress of Costanza became every moment more insupportable; and her mother also began to be impatient for the return of her husband, when a noise of horsemen was heard, and soon after count Luna was announced. Costanza, who at any other time would have met him with repulsive coolness, now welcomed his arrival, as a possible means of being relieved from her uneasiness, and from the idea of having some one to whom she could communicate her fears.

“I am come over from Bivonia only for an hour,” he said, “but would not lose the opportunity of paying my respects here, and of inquiring after the health of the baroness Solanto and yourself, lady Costanza.”

“My mother is, I trust, improving,” she replied, “but unable to bear the fatigue of much conversation; and my father is at present absent from the cassino; but I hope and expect each moment to see him return.”

Encouraged by his favourable reception,



don Sigismund attempted to converse on indifferent subjects, but his manner was constrained, and he seemed ill at ease.

Under the pretence of not disturbing her mother, Costanza attracted the count to a distant window, and requested a few minutes private conversation with him. Luna appeared confounded at the request, and as if he knew not how to proceed.—“Take leave,” said Costanza, “and withdraw, and I will join you immediately in another apartment.”

Her anxiety appeared excessive, and Sigismund could not but obey. He excused the shortness of his visit on account of the necessity of his return to Bivonia; and taking leave of the baroness and Costanza, begged his respectful salutations to the baron, and retired.

In a few minutes the signora di Solanto found some excuse to follow him.

In relating the conversation she had heard in the grove, and the subsequent absence of her father, Costanza was so overpowered by agitation and distress, that it



was some time before she observed the extraordinary conduct of don Sigismund; but having related all she knew, and detailed her fears that some misfortune had befallen her parent, she requested the advice and assistance of Luna, and waited his reply. As she looked earnestly in his face through her tears, don Sigismund averted his eyes with precipitation, and stammered forth an unintelligible attempt to console and support her spirits, without any comment on what he had heard, or proposing any immediate plan of proceeding.

“It is not consolation,” said Costanza, “that I am now in need of, but advice and active exertion. The ruffian I overheard in the grove mentioned your name, count Luna, and some friend of yours.” Sigismund trembled beneath her look, blushed, and was about to defend himself. “I am not going to accuse you, count Luna, of any connexion with those persons, neither am I aware that my father can have excited any enmity amongst the

people of the country, but, by what I heard, I am assured that they are known to some of your friends ; and if any dreadful design has been perpetrated against my father, to you I look for redress."

Luna assured her of every exertion in his power being made to discover the cause of the baron's mysterious absence—" But it is now early evening," he said, " and your alarms are perhaps visionary."

" Oh no, no," replied Costanza ; " every moment confirms the dreadful suspicions which the scene to-day gave rise to ; I foresee the certain death of my mother in the shock this horrible event will give her, if any accident has befallen my father." She shuddered at her thoughts.

Luna again attempted some commonplace topic of consolation, but proposed no remedy for her distressing anxiety. Costanza again looked steadily in his face. He appeared anxious to avoid her inquiring gaze, and to be confused and uneasy at it. She started, and suddenly left the

apartment. Luna waited for her, and she came not, and he was impatiently pacing the room, when he heard a horse pass rapidly under the window. He summoned a domestic, and requested that the lady Costanza might be informed that he awaited her further commands.

“The signora desired me to say,” answered the man, “should your excellenza inquire for her, that she has no further wish to detain you.”

“Is the baron Solanto returned?” asked Luna.

“No, signor.”

“What horseman just left the cassino?”

“Perhaps one of your excellenza’s train.”

Sigismund stood some time in silent deliberation with himself; the servant waited as if to conduct him out.—“I must see the lady Costanza again.”

“It is impossible, signor; she is now with the baroness, and desired me peremptorily to tell your excellenza she had no further commands.”

With hesitating step, Luna departed, and inquired impatiently if any of his suite had left the cassino during his stay.

“Your excellenza gave no such orders,” said one of the men. “A horseman passed us some time since, but whence he came I know not.”

The count, in the hearing of Solanto’s attendants, now ordered his party to Bivonia.

The extraordinary discomposure of count Luna, and his conduct altogether, had excited in Costanza a suspicion of some foul deed with which he was at least acquainted; and instantly quitting him, she dispatched a trusty messenger to don Giacomo Perollo, stating her fears that some conspiracy was on foot against her father and his family, and entreating his immediate presence and protection, she desired the messenger to use his utmost speed, and that no one might inform count Luna of her proceedings.

After this she returned to her mother, who was getting anxious and uneasy to a

most painful degree. Costanza felt unable to excite hopes to which she herself was a stranger, yet to disclose the whole of her fears she dared not. At length she informed her, that she had dispatched a message to Perollo Castle, to inform the baron Pandolfina of her father's absence, and to request his presence and advice. This step met with the decided approbation of the baroness, but as it shewed the strength of Costanza's fears, contributed to increase her own. She however thought it too early in the evening to excite any great alarm.

Every passing sound caught the attention of the mother and daughter. Costanza had closed the lattice, lest the night air should inconvenience the invalid ; but she herself wandered every minute to the anteroom, to listen from the balcony. She had dismissed servants with torches, in various directions, to search the thickets ; but one by one they returned as the time wore away, without any tidings of their lord. She had counted the time also which it might take to bring Perollo, and thought



he also was delayed beyond all expectation. At length a distant sound caught her ears; she again hurried to the balcony, and listened with breathless anxiety. A loud trampling of horses sounded from the craggy road to Sciacca—"It is only don Giacomo," she said, and a fearful weight pressed heavily on her heart. The party approached with rapidity, and seemed more numerous than she had expected. A few minutes brought them to the cassino. Costanza ran to meet them, and, with something like disappointment, saw don Paolo Perollo, attended by Gaetano—"My father!" she exclaimed, in a hurried tone. The countenances of the gentlemen exhibited no cheering signs of intelligence.

"I regret most sincerely, lady," said don Paolo, "this distressing event. For the ultimate safety of the baron Solanto, I trust you need feel no alarm; but I fear the machinations of our enemies and his have succeeded in securing his person. I have directed a body of our men to search every road and passage in the neighbour-



hood, and to use every means to discover tidings of your father. In the meantime the safety of your mother and yourself can only be ensured by your immediate removal to the Casa di Perollo; imperious circumstances detained my kinsman, don Giacomo, from hastening to your assistance; but he has sent signor Pignatelli and myself to conduct you thither. A litter will arrive instantly, and it will be right to lose no time in apprising the baroness of the necessity of putting the plan in execution instantly."

Costanza stood for some time speechless with horror and astonishment; thus to have her fears confirmed, no hopes given, and dangers still unknown, which made all these precautions necessary, was more than her mind could comprehend at first. The idea of her father's ultimate safety, which don Paolo frequently repeated, and the necessity of supporting her mother, obliged her to rally her spirits, and with some composure she conducted the gentlemen to her.

Perollo endeavoured to make the affair as light as possible to the baroness—"Pandolfina and his friends," he said, "signora, have no doubt of the source from whence your distress arises. Some petty malice of the countess Caltabellotta, Adriano, or some of the partisans of Luna, who are busily engaged, we learn, in planning some offensive operations against don Giacomo, has induced them to decoy the baron Solanto into their society, to endeavour to make him espouse their party; they will soon find their weakness and error, and release him. But to counteract their schemes, we all think it necessary that your excellenza and the lady Costanza should be conveyed in safety to the Casa di Perollo. I have assured the signora di Solanto, and here repeat, that I do not apprehend any personal danger to the baron; but during his detention, which may be prolonged a few days, you will be more secure from insult in my kinsman's castle than here. Our suppositions may still be wrong, and I have dispatched men in

every direction to search for your lord. Should they be so fortunate as to recover him, they have orders to escort him to Sciacca; and Pandolfina has sent a litter for yourself and daughter, to be conveyed to his protection, should you so please."

"Count Sigismund himself was here this evening," said Costanza. "I did not wish to distress you, my mother, by my fears, but in a private interview with him after he quitted you, I saw such signs of confusion in his conduct, as excited my suspicions; other circumstances, I suppose, don Paolo, you have heard," she added, alluding to the conversation which Marguerita had been witness to, but which she so trembled to reflect upon, that she would not alarm her mother by the detail.

Perollo understood her, and replied, that he had collected other information, which strongly proved that no fears were to be entertained for the safety of the baron, but that they could gain nothing at present to direct their search.

The baroness was so shocked by the intelligence, even softened as it was by the care of her friends, that she remained, during this conversation, gazing in silent terror on those around her, and at last fainted on the bosom of her daughter. Their exertions restored her in a short time to animation, but it was only by her looks she could assent to the wishes of the party for her removal.

The ladies and their female attendants were immediately conducted by Perollo from the cassino, and escorted by a numerous body of well-armed men, whom don Giacomo had sent.

The party set out for the Casa di Perollo, leaving the male domestics in the house, with strict orders to forward any information which could be gained, without loss of time, to the baron Pandolfina.

They arrived at the castle gate without the walls, which was immediately opened, and both don Giacomo and the baroness were waiting to receive their unhappy

guests, with every attention which circumstances would allow.

The wife of Solanto was, however, nearly in a state of insensibility, and appeared scarcely to perceive the kindness of her friends. She was immediately carried to a private apartment, and her hostess then begged Costanza to leave her mother for a short time to her care, whilst she informed don Giacomo of every particular she had been able to make out relative to this unfortunate affair. The conversation she had heard in the grove, the circumstances of her interview with don Sigismund, and the vague threats of the countess Caltabellotta, were the only grounds for suspicion she could furnish; but Pandolfina appeared to have other corroborating circumstances, which weighed upon his mind, to fix the absence of her father on some of the Luna party—"I am, however," he added, "decidedly of don Paolo's opinion, that there is no danger of their offering any violence to their pri-



soner; and I have no doubt but a very few days at furthest will enable me to discover more, and to effect the release of the baron, for which purpose I will exert every means that can be devised; and should there be any particular line of proceeding which will relieve the anxiety of your mother and yourself, more than the course I intend to pursue, I will, with readiness and pleasure, adopt it."

An appeal to the feelings of count Luna Costanza felt would be in vain, and to call for the aid of the viceroy would take too much time; yet still she wished that both these measures should be resorted to directly.

"I will instantly dispatch a courier to Palermo," replied Pandolfina; "but by expressing our decided suspicion of Luna, we shall put him on his guard against our more private inquiries: still it shall be as you wish, signora."

Costanza left the whole affair in the hands of her friends, assuring them that she relied most confidently on their zeal and



wisdom in the cause, and then returned to her mother, who was in a slight degree recovered, the judicious conversation of her friend having revived her hopes, and somewhat cheered her spirits.

Tediously the hours of night wore away, and morning brought no intelligence of the baron.

During the scene of distress which the preceding evening had witnessed, Federico Perollo had not been an uninterested spectator; he had earnestly entreated to be one of the party to the cassino, or at least to be permitted to go in search of Solanto, and it was only the representations of his mother which restrained him. She anxiously pointed out the impropriety of his interfering, after the jealousy of don Sigismund had been so publicly shewn towards him — “The assertions of the countess had attempted to accuse Costanza and himself of dishonourable proceedings, and the baroness Solanto had remonstrated against any particular attentions. For the sake of the signora di Solanto you ought

not to take any part in the proceedings, my son ; all that can be done will be effected by your father, don Paolo, and Pignatelli ; and as your exertions could not be of signal benefit, the characters, both of the lady and yourself, require you to avoid any public display of the interest you take in her and her family."

Unwillingly Federico consented ; and though he deplored the sufferings of the mother and daughter, yet he could not avoid contemplating, with no little satisfaction, the circumstance of their being inmates in his father's house, and the certainty of Costanza's engagements with count Luna being, from henceforth, entirely at an end.

During the whole of the day on which the destined expedition was to leave Bivonia, the castle of don Sigismund was a scene of bustle and confusion ; the count himself, with all the principal leaders, were to be of the party to Sciacca, and had selected an hundred of their most daring fol-

lowers. Adriano was not returned, but was expected to join them soon after their arrival in the city. It was arranged that Sigismund should go over early in the evening, and that Accursi d'Amato should remain to superintend the conveyance of the troops.

The count departed in the afternoon, with only the small train of his usual domestics, and after a short interview with his mother, on arriving at Luna Castle, rode down to the Solanto cassino, giving it out as his intention to return to Bivonia for some time longer. After his dismissal, therefore, by Costanza, he had given directions to his followers to take the road thither; but as soon as he had got a short distance, he turned his horse, and rode back to the city with his party.

Three hours after sunset the enemies of Perollo started on their murderous expedition, in small companies of four or six each, and at short intervals of time, being strictly enjoined to avoid the principal road as much as possible, and to proceed with

all the silence and secrecy they could. Pietro Infontanetta himself went with the first party, to guide them to the window in his house by which they were to effect their unobserved entrance into the city.

The night was dark, and veiled their purpose to the utmost of their wishes; the first party, without meeting with any incident or interruption, reached the walls of Sciacca, and skirted the city at some short distance, till they arrived opposite the Casa d'Infontanetta, as any thing like preparation might have excited suspicion. The party were obliged to break away the bars of the window, and remove some of the stone-work, before they could effect their entrance. This, however, was done without creating any alarm, and they gained the interior unperceived by any but the members of the conspiracy, and immediately proceeded to Luna Castle, to await the coming of their companions. Party after party continued to arrive during the greater part of the night.

One of the companies, under Calogero Calandrino, in proceeding along the walls of the city, perceived at some distance rather a numerous band of persons with torches surrounding a litter; and immediately ordering his companions to conceal themselves, he approached the travellers, as nearly as he could, without being perceived, and watched them till he saw them enter the private gate of the Casa di Perollo. With this intelligence he hastened on to the place of his destination, to inform his chieftain of the circumstance to which he had been witness.

The succeeding parties were longer in arriving, having been obliged to conceal themselves, for some time, from the search of a band of horsemen, who had scoured the road to Caltabellotta and Bivonia, being some of those sent by don Paolo in search of Solanto.

“They are evidently spies of the Perollo, and will doubtless fall in with some of our companions,” said Marco Luchese to Infontanetta, on his arrival.



“No matter,” replied don Pietro, “they can have no cause to suspect unarmed men proceeding in such small companies. Many of our troops are already come, and some will doubtless pass unseen, in the darkness of night, as you have done.”

With some of the succeeding bands, the scouts in search of the baron met; but having questioned them on the persons who had passed them on the road, and hearing no tidings of Solanto, they had not proceeded, but diverged into more unfrequented paths, in other directions, by which the greater number of the partisans of Luna gained the city unperceived.

The information of Calandrino seemed to have great effect upon Luna; he inquired anxiously and repeatedly if he could tell him who was in the litter, or from whence it came.

“It appeared to have come from the baths,” said Calogero, “and might perhaps be Giacomo’s wife returning from a visit to the Solanto family.”

The conduct of Costanza, during his interview with her, in the evening, had astonished and perplexed the count; and the detail of Calandrino awakened his fears, lest she should, by an immediate application to Perollo, shew her independence of himself and his friends.

The horsemen sent out by don Paolo proved that Pandolfina had been apprised of the absence of the baron, and was exerting himself to recover him.

It was late before Accursi d'Amato arrived, and Adriano did not make his appearance till the succeeding day. It had been determined by the party in Luna Castle to conceal, as carefully as possible, the circumstance of their being inmates of the city, and to be in ambush till the moment of executing their project of revenge against don Giacomo. The count was therefore prevented from making inquiries in person at the cassino, relative to the proceedings of Solanto's family; but a domestic was dispatched, early in the morning,

in the name of the countess Caltabellotta, to inquire if the baron was returned, and to learn how the ladies were employed.

The answer his messenger brought back confirmed the worst fears the count had entertained. He was thunderstricken at the intelligence that the ladies had taken up their abode at the Casa di Perollo, without any mention of returning during the mysterious absence of the baron.

Della Bardia was summoned to a private interview, as Sigismund did not wish immediately to publish the affair amongst his friends, and to expose his chagrin and disappointment.

Accursi found the count in a state of fury bordering on desperation.—“ These fiends have at length succeeded,” he cried, “ in robbing me of the treasure I had hoped was now my own! the wife and daughter of Solanto are inmates of Perollo Castle, and that insidious young traitor, the son of Giacomo, will now espouse the plighted bride of Luna, and laugh at his folly and delusion in letting the prize escape him.”

“ Probably, signor,” said D’Amato.

“ And this then is to be the end of all our stratagems! all my exertions are to come at length to this! Curse on the folly that made me listen to Adriano and his schemes! myself to be the cause of all this mischief—to be defeated by the perverseness of a girl, and made the tool of Pandolfina!”

“ Adriano,” said Della Bardia, coolly, “ was the adviser, and ought to bear the blame of a defeat, which his mighty wisdom surely could have foreseen, and ought to have guarded against.”

“ I sent not for you, signor,” said Luna, “ to discover where the blame of our failure should fall, but to find a remedy.”

“ Patience!” said Accursi, with a shrug.

“ My blood is too hot to bear these taunts, signor; nor did I expect my feelings to be thus outraged by your indifference.”

“ I am called on,” answered Della Bardia, “ to remedy an evil brought on by the folly of another, when nothing but pa-

tience remains ; had I been consulted earlier in this affair, the present dilemma would not have occurred.”

“ Indeed !” interrupted Sigismund ; “ and how could it have been prevented ?”

“ When Accursi d’Amato, signor, has the game within his toils, he is not wont to let it thus escape him. You had Solanto and his family within your walls, surrounded by your friends and partisans ; force should have completed their engagements ; and when again these females were deprived of their natural guardian, why did you not forestall Perollo, and send the unprotected ladies hither ?”

“ I want not to be informed as to what might have been done,” said Luna, impatiently, and unwilling to accuse himself in the affair, “ but what there now remains to do, to prevent the probable effect of these ladies seeking an asylum with Perollo.”

“ Had we all our forces here, it might be possible to surprise the castle, and effect



a rescue by force; but the small number of our men makes this impracticable."

Adriano entered the apartment as Della Bardia was speaking.—“Congratulate me, signor,” he said, “on the full success of any undertaking; may the same fortune crown all the enterprises of the house of Luna!”

“Santa Maria prevent your prayers, Peralta!” said Accursi.

While Luna frowned in anger, the baron looked to both in wonder for an explanation.

“The lady Costanza and her mother are fled to Perollo for protection,” said D’Amato, with a sneer; “and if you exert your wonted sagacity, signor, you may perhaps be employed to draw up the marriage articles of Federico and Costanza.”

Adriano looked to Sigismund in dismay and confusion.—“It is even so, baron Adriano; a proper subject for congratulation, think you, this termination of your manœuvring? no doubt you will easily

devise a remedy to counteract the mischief which is done."

"A little more caution," said Accursi, "may perhaps be necessary, to avoid expediting the nuptials, for which this flight of the ladies will be so fair a pretext."

"Barone della Bardia," replied Adriano, "if I have failed, it has not been through want of devotion to my kinsman's cause; nor shall my future exertions be wanting to repair any errors I may have committed; but I do not see the present motives for condemning the plan I advised count Sigismund to follow."

"Peralta will, without a question, make his own cause good, signor," said Accursi; "and having now so able and so fortunate a counsellor, my services, I trust, may be dispensed with."

"I should rather," answered Adriano, "avail myself of any assistance your advice can give, signor, though perhaps it may not be delivered with all the consideration towards my feelings which I could wish; yet I am not so lukewarm in the

service of count Luna, as to risk the injury of his interest from any personal feelings, and shall act with more confidence, if you will give your opinion on the proceedings I may think proper to advise at the present juncture."

"In professions or devices," replied Accursi, "the baron Adriano will never be found wanting; but the wisdom of his schemes may require some deliberation."

"Which is just what I require you, signor, to bestow upon them. I have no doubt," he continued, "that your anxiety, count Luna, at the conduct of the wife and daughter of Solanto, will be needless."

"I should be happy to find it so," said Luna; "but, with the full conviction of the love this son of Pandolfina entertains for the signora di Solanto, the opportunities their present intercourse will give him to press his suit, the arguments he may draw, and the suspicions he may excite, respecting my conduct, I must confess that no little sophistry is wanting to make me regard the present situation of affairs

with composure, or any hope of future benefit from our exertions.”

“ During the absence of her father, and under such circumstances, it is not probable that the lady Costanza will contract an engagement of so important a nature, as that of betrothing herself to the son of Perollo, or even that she will accept his offers of affection. Her anxiety and grief will fully occupy her for a time, and give us an opportunity to perfect our schemes. By the success of our great design against her present protector, we may hope to cut off at least one object of alarm. And why may not this dreaded Federico be one of our earliest victims? if our swords are charged with the fate of Pandolfina and his house, a few days will probably deliver you from all these jealous fears. Deprived of don Giacomo, his party will not dare to make head against the power of your excellenza, and the just claims your engagement with Solanto furnish will be irresistible to a dispirited faction; or, should our intended vengeance, by any unfore-

seen event, be delayed or counteracted, the ladies may be decoyed by stratagem from their asylum, or terrified by threats from unknown quarters, which, in their present state of doubt and anxiety, must weigh upon the minds of weak and timid females."

"Your advice is specious, as it generally is, signor," said Della Bardia; "but remember that you have Perollo to deal with, as well as these weak females, who have shewn no want of resolution in the decided step they have thus promptly taken: if we succeed in fulfilling our revenge upon Perollo, still, unless all the race can be exterminated, these ladies will find advisers and defenders to protect them from your violence or deceit, and will probably apply to the reigning powers, with whom we know, by fatal experience, the influence of Perollo; and this Solanto also was too highly in favour at the imperial court, to suffer his disappearance to pass unquestioned, or his wife and child to be left defenceless. I am still for open force;



had we all our troops within the city, they might be cantoned amongst our friends, and the castle be surprised."

"Let us first follow up our plans against don Giacomo," said Adriano, "and then your scheme, signor, will be feasible enough; at present, there can be no cause for alarm with regard to the lady Costanza; and, before she can have recovered from the shock of her recent loss, we shall be enabled to follow up our blow, and to deprive her of her present protector—all shall yet be well, count Luna paramount in Sciaeca, and Costanza di Solanto, his affianced bride, restored in triumph to his arms."

Sigismund listened to his advisers with some complacency, and was soon persuaded into something like composure, and to give up his thoughts to the conduct of their main design. The armed band were kept with the utmost privacy within the castle, and spies placed in every possible direction, to watch the motions of Perollo and the inmates of his castle.

CHAPTER V.  

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'Twill vex thy soul to hear what I shall speak ;

For I must talk of murders,

Acts of black night, abominable deeds,

Complots of mischief, treason, villainies,

Ruthful to hear.

*Titus Andronicus.*

THE proceedings of count Luna and his friends had not been so secret as to escape the knowledge of Pandolfina, who had been apprised of their assemblage and expedition to Sciacca ; and not wishing to disturb the public peace by any broils or tumult, he determined to remain a voluntary prisoner within the walls of his castle, and to keep his party also from any encounter with the opposite faction.

The inquiries after Solanto had been pursued by his emissaries with unabated zeal, and a courier had been dispatched to the viceroy with the information of the

baron's sudden disappearance. But no clue had yet been discovered which might explain the affair, or tranquillize the agonized feelings of the family. The baroness still continued in a state of hopeless despondency, and Costanza was herself too deeply distressed to be able to offer much comfort to her mother.

Don Giacomo had sent a messenger in their name to Bivonia, to inform count Luna of the dangerous state into which the baroness had been thrown, and exhorting him, by every tie of friendship and compassion, to assist them.

After some delay, a reply was sent, requesting the ladies to return to their casino, and assuring them, that every exertion would then be made by the house of Luna, and that they should not despair of being successful; intimating, that while they remained in their present abode, count Luna could not communicate with them, and that his exertions therefore would be of no avail.

The conduct of Federico Perollo during

this time was guarded in the extreme; it is true, he seldom saw the lady Costanza, whose hours were principally passed with her mother and the baroness Pandolfina (their kind hostess quitting her unhappy friend as rarely as possible); yet, when they did meet, he kept the strictest watch over every word and action, that nothing might escape him offensive to the delicate situation in which she was placed, or which might be construed into any thing like taking advantage of the melancholy event which had driven her for refuge beneath his father's roof.

For some days all the Perollo party confined themselves to the castle, and even the dependants of the family were allowed to be as little as possible within the city; but the signora di Solanto, wishing to have some of their property removed from the cassino, don Giacomo was induced to send twelve men, under the direction of two of his favourite officers, Antonio Margieri and Francisco Scanzarella, to convey it to the castle.

Count Luna and his partisans impatiently awaited the time when Perollo should issue from his castle; but, day after day, they were disappointed in their wishes. The gates of the Casa di Perollo were closed, and all was quiet within the walls. Don Sigismund was among the most anxious of his party; he could learn no tidings of donna Costanza, and all the arguments of Adriano, to tranquillize his mind on the subject of Federico Perollo, were fruitless. His jealous fancy had pictured them as already married, and laughing at his ill-conducted plans, which had hastened the event, and congratulating themselves on the excuses they might derive from his ill-governed temper, and the untoward events it had occasioned. At times he was nearly tempted to listen to the furious suggestions of Della Bardia, to summon the remainder of his forces from Bivonia, and to assault in open warfare the towers of his enemies; the entreaties of Adriano, and the determined resistance of many of the more prudent of his party, alone pre-



vented him from giving way to his violence and impetuosity, and risking all on the hazard of this hopeless scheme.—“ It was impossible,” they said, “ that Perollo should long continue in his present state of seclusion, but that he must soon afford them the opportunity they wished for;” and several refused to join in any attempt which must end in defeat, as such an open attack was sure to do.

During the time they thus remained inactive, the count had made inquiries of his mother, as to the truth of the statement which Accursi d'Amato had given him of the existence of his sister.

The countess had expected the conversation, and prepared herself to meet the questions of her son upon the subject. Whatever were the faults of count Sigismund, and they were manifold and grievous, want of respect and affection to his sole remaining parent was not one of them; the defects in his own temper made him look with indulgence on his mother's violence and ill-humour; and her

ardent affection for him, which she had shewn on all occasions, and at all hazards and sacrifices, would easily have obliterated the remembrance of weightier sins than any he suspected her of committing.

With feelings, therefore, of reluctance, he prepared for the unpleasant task of searching into this secret and equivocal affair. He opened the subject with every possible expression of delicacy towards her, and of his perfect confidence in the rectitude of her intentions, thus giving her time to collect her thoughts to meet the investigation; and having briefly stated the circumstances of Della Bardia's information, he requested her to confirm or deny it.

“However injuriously I may have been treated by Accursi,” she said, “it never was my intention to have kept you much longer in ignorance, my son, of the existence of your sister, for such is Francisca di Luna; he has betrayed the secret sooner than I intended it should be known, and related the circumstances in a way,

perhaps, to make you judge unfavourably of my conduct in this affair; but I trust I can explain the whole to your satisfaction, and vindicate myself in your eyes, at least, from any aspersions he may have cast upon me."

Sigismund professed his perfect reliance upon her, but assured her that Accursi had given no detail of events, which he confessed he felt deeply interested to be informed upon.

"You must well remember, my son," she said, "the period of Francisca's birth—an event prematurely brought on by the death of your father, from which her infancy was rendered so weak and sickly, that she appeared, from the first, as if devoted to the grave. In this extremity I (rashly perhaps) vowed, should her life be spared, to dedicate her to the shrine of Santa Caterina, and from that moment her strength and health rapidly improved. Fearful lest my purpose should be frustrated by the opposition of my family, I instantly conveyed my child to the con-

vent, and, by the aid of a domestic, caused her death to be generally believed. In the meantime, Francisca gradually improved under the care of the superior, one of my earliest friends, with whom she has been, until the present act of Della Bardia removed her from her convent. The will of Manfredi Peralta, which divided his immense wealth in equal shares between your father's heirs, induced me to conceal, with the greatest strictness, the existence of any claimant except yourself, not wishing to enrich the convent with the spoils of my child's inheritance, or to diminish the grandeur of the house of Luna, by diverting its property into other channels. By what means Accursi made himself master of the secret, I know not; but having done so, he never ceased from importuning me upon the subject, threatening to disclose the purport of Peralta's will, and to rend the portion of Francisca from her family. The strong dislike I felt to meet the odium which this disclosure must have brought upon our house, tempted me to

listen to his proposals, to break my resolution, and to change the destination of my child; but Della Bardia has hurried on beyond the limits I had conceded; and without waiting for the approbation of any member of her family, has possessed himself of the hand of Francisca. It is now too late to remedy this evil, and will be useless to expose the private transactions of our house; therefore, as Accursi has given me his word to keep the secret till Solanto's daughter is secured, we must compromise the matter with him."

This detail was far from satisfactory, even to count Luna, who observed, that it was something unlike the usual spirit of his mother thus to yield to the insolence of Della Bardia.

"The fear," she said, "of throwing any impediment in the way of her son's success with the daughter of Solanto, and an unwillingness to expose the name of Luna to the censure which might have fallen upon it, from any false statement of the affair, induced her to temporize, when the



audacity of Accursi led him to the step he had taken ; but as resentment on their part would now be of no avail, the countess earnestly implored her son to overlook the past, and when his own nuptials were completed, to acknowledge and receive his sister ; nor to weaken the power and influence of his family by dissensions among themselves, particularly at a juncture like the present, when so much was at stake.

Don Sigismund had never before seen his mother acting under any other influence than that of her own ungoverned temper. She was now attempting to gloss over the unjustifiable act to which ambition, and the desire of aggrandizing her son, had excited her ; and suffering under the fear of confessing enough to condemn her in the eyes of the count, or of concealing so much as might draw forth the anger of Accursi, it was with difficulty she restrained her rage against the latter from bursting out ; but the terrors of his vengeance were more than she

dared venture to provoke. Unaccustomed to contradict his mother, or to question the propriety of her conduct, count Luna did not, in the present instance, doubt the truth of her statement; and however he might wonder at her actions, it did not enter his imagination to discredit or condemn them; and when he parted from her, after the explanation she had chosen to give, she congratulated herself, with no little justice, on the good effects her management had produced.

The excursion of the party from the Casa di Perollo was soon made known to count Luna and his friends, who, impatient of their long confinement, eagerly caught at an opportunity of sacrificing some of their enemies, and resolved no longer to wait for don Giacomo alone, but to assail any of his friends either by force or stratagem.

The conduct of those who were now to be sent out against the adherents of Perollo, was given to Accursi d'Amato, Ferrante Luchese, and Pietro Infontanetta,

who selecting twenty of the boldest and stoutest of their followers, prepared, with joyful alacrity, for the encounter.

Every thing had been so long in readiness, that no time was lost; but as soon as it was decided to whom the enterprise was to be confided, they mounted their horses, and rode furiously towards the Porta degli Bagni, whither Antonio Margieri and his band had directed their course.

Fearing lest any accident should prevent his sanguinary purpose, Della Bardia exhorted his companions to lose no time in the pursuit; nor when within musket-shot, to wait for parley, or to give their enemies time for preparation, but to level their carbines, and let none escape them.

They then hurried on, with all the speed the rugged pathway would admit; and on reaching the brow of the descent towards the baths, saw their enemies at no great distance before them.—“Now for Luna and Peralta!” exclaimed Della Bardia; and such was their impatience, that

their first volley, which had they reserved their fire till a nearer approach, might have been fatal to half the companions of Margieri, wounded but two of them. His brother fell from his horse, and Scanzarella received a ball through his shoulder.

The retainers of Perollo halted; surprised, but not dismayed, they faced their enemy. Antonio exhorted them to make a gallant defence—"Our only hope," he said, "must be in cutting our way through this troop of assassins." Some of the men attempted to raise the fallen body of his brother, but life was totally extinct.

"To revenge his fall is all we now can do," said Margieri. "Attend to Scanzarella."

The latter seemed incapable of sitting his horse; but his companions placed themselves around him, and gallantly advanced against the adherents of Luna. Though the numbers were so fearfully unequal, an arduous struggle ensued; the valour of the assailants was met with as determined resolution. Scanzarella was totally incapable

of defence, and the generosity of his companions would not allow them to neglect his safety ; but they attempted in vain to force their way through their opponents.

The fight was long and obstinate ; three of the partisans of Luna had fallen, and Infontanetta was wounded. Margieri and his friends had also suffered severely ; and Scanzarella, during the conflict, fell from his horse, and, in spite of the exertions of his party, was trampled to death beneath their chargers. The adherents of Perollo began to give way — Accursi d'Amato pressed on with sanguinary fury ; he had received a wound from the sword of Margieri, and infuriated at the sight of his flowing blood, redoubled his blows.

“ Let us retreat to the lower road,” said one of Antonio’s men, “ and we may gain the advantage of the ground, and succeed in reaching the castle gate, or obtain succours to match the number of our enemies.”

Della Bardia pressed violently forward, endeavouring to prevent their retreat,



when his horse fell, and he received at the same time a violent blow from the hand of Margieri, which rolled him in the dust; but the sword had only lighted on his helmet, and sheared the plume from his crest. Don Ferrante threw himself from his horse, and extended his shield over his fallen friend. The party were thrown into some confusion, and Antonio again strove to force his way through; but they still closed up the road against him; and Della Bardia was beginning to recover, when the objects of his vengeance wheeled round, took advantage of the exertions their enemies were making to remount the fallen baron, and finally succeeded in gaining the lower road. Soon however they were pursued by Luchese, and several of his men, who once more discharged their carbines, and wounded Margieri, and two of his followers. They again encountered on the brow of a hill, nearly within view of Perollo Castle. Antonio, though suffering severely from his wounds, roused the courage of his men—"One more suc-

cessful struggle," he said, "and we shall teach these ruffians to stoop to the valour of Perollo."

"Hew them down for Luna and Peralta!" exclaimed Della Bardia, forcing his horse impetuously up the hill towards the scene of action; "vengeance for the insult I received," he continued, aiming a blow at Margieri, "shall soon overtake Perollo and his slaves."

His antagonist warded the stroke; and exerting all his remaining strength and skill, he deprived the furious baron of his sword, who, catching a dagger he wore by his side, made a second blow, which, falling short of Antonio, wounded his horse, which springing forward from the pain, flew up the rocky way, but not till the sword of his gallant rider had inflicted a deep wound in the side of Accursi. Lucchese once more rushed forward to defend him, but the party of Margieri seeing their leader borne away by his ungovernable steed, rode after him, and left the followers of Della Bardia to attend to him, and re-

store the sword of which he had been deprived. Regardless of the blood which flowed from his wound, he urged his comrades to the pursuit; but their opponents had gained the summit of the hill, and were too near their friends in the castle to afford any hopes of completing their murderous intentions; the party therefore rode back in search of those who had fallen in the affray.

Near the bottom of the hill lay the corpse of the younger Margieri, who had been the first victim of Della Bardia and his crew. A bullet had struck him through the head, and he had fallen instantly lifeless. His friends had removed him from the roadway; but when they found all their attentions to him were in vain, they abandoned him, in the hope of saving the wounded Scanzarella.

When the murderers arrived where the body laid, they halted, to enjoy the sight of their bloody act—"It is Margieri's brother," said one of the party, looking at the dead man. In an instant Accursi had

thrown himself from his horse, and, in spite of faintness, he seized the lifeless body with a look of savage fury, which appalled even the hearts of his companions, and dashing it upon the rock, stamped violently upon it, hewing it with his sword, and imprecating curses on all the adherents of Perollo, and more particularly the race of Margieri. Luchese remonstrated against this useless barbarity; but Della Bardia still continued to vent his rage upon the corpse, till the exertion brought a second stream of blood from his side, and he sunk lifeless beside the object of his sanguinary vengeance.

The body of Scanzarella had been trodden in the dust beneath the horses feet; but Luchese ordered both that and the mutilated remains of Margieri, to be conveyed to the neighbouring convent of San Francisco. Of their own party, two were dead, a third desperately wounded, Accursi senseless from loss of blood, and Infontanetta scarcely able to sit his horse.

They were however greeted on their return with rapturous joy, though their work had been so imperfectly performed; yet to have made their first assault on the party of Perollo, seemed to be the beginning of the series of triumphs which they confidently anticipated.

Don Sigismund appeared unable to express the pleasure he took in the service his friends had performed. As soon as Accursi was a little recovered, he overwhelmed him with thanks, presented him with a valuable diamond, and declared himself eternally obliged to him. To Luchese he presented a valuable charger, and gave Infontanetta a jewel of great price; whilst to all the vassals engaged in the expedition he ordered a considerable largess to be given. The gates of the castle were thrown open, and the whole troop issuing out, paraded the streets in complete armour, as if in triumph at their victory, and in defiance of the vengeance of the baron Pandolfina.

On their return to the castle, the count



ordered a banquet to be spread in the great hall, and all the retainers to be feasted. Such of the nobles of the city as had hitherto remained secret enemies of Perollo, now flocked to the castle of his adversary. Amongst others, came Del Nadore, and one of his colleagues in office, Giovanni Maurici—"But here comes one," said count Luna, "whom I hardly hoped to see amongst us—Geronimo Ferrara!"

"No good purpose brings him here," said Adriano, in a low voice. "Under the mask of friendship and candour, he is the spy of don Giacomo, and now will strive to fathom all our future plans. Under pretence of healing the strife which is begun, he comes to wrest our weapons from our hands, and give us up, defenceless and unarmed, as victims to the rage of Pandolfina."

"We have never found him false," said Sigismund.

"From whom but some such neutral friend can Perollo have had such infor-

mation as he always boasts of all our private actions? This too is the friend, who, I suspect, carried the poison to Solanto's ears, which blighted all your hopes from thence."

The near approach of the person of whom he spoke checked Peralta. The contrast of the tall and venerable figure of Ferrara, with the surrounding groups, struck Luna forcibly. Totally unarmed, clad only in the robes of peace, he advanced slowly through the crowd of armed warriors who filled the hall; his white locks hung from his uncovered head, and an air of sad and silent commiseration marked his countenance, as he received the embrace of don Sigismund. Like an evil genius, Adriano stood by the side of his kinsman, ready to misinterpret every word and action of Ferrara.

"Welcome, don Geronimo, amongst my friends," said Luna, kindly; "I had scarcely hoped to see you with us; and the high value I have always felt for your

opinion, adds weight indeed to the kindness and countenance this visit gives to our proceedings."

Don Geronimo sighed heavily.

"Accomplished hypocrite!" whispered Adriano; "he was just seen to come from the Casa di Perollo, and has probably been urging the suit of his young friend, Federico, with the same weapons he brings to conquer us—his sighs and groans."

"I have known your excellenza," said Ferrara, "from infancy to manhood; I have watched with interest and affection the growth of your many virtues, and lamented the foibles I have seen arise amongst them. I had hoped to see honour and renown accumulated on the house of Luna by count Sigismund, and cannot but regret the dangerous precipice to which you are now hastening. Hear me, count Luna! these deadly foes to the house of Perollo would seize the serpent by any other hands than their own; for the love of Heaven, and all its saints, listen not to their seductions! in seeking the ruin of

Pandolfina's race, you seek, at the same time, the downfall of your own. By every tie of humanity, by every bond of Christian charity, I implore you to attend to me! I willingly offer myself as a mediator between the chieftain of Perollo and yourself; I pledge my life and honour to redress your wrongs with full and ample satisfaction—with oblivion for the past, and for the future the friendship of the baron Pandolfina, which shall more avail to your happiness and glory, than all the power of such false friends as those, who, for their own interest, and their own revenge, are urging you on to certain destruction."

Count Luna turned away in silent anger.

"This well-delivered speech, signor Gerónimo," said Adriano, "comes a little too late and out of season."

An insulting laugh from Del Nadore applauded the reply; but the frowns of many of the party shewed that they felt the reproaches of Ferrara deeper.

He saw the fruitless nature of his visit, and with a respectful salutation, which was unheeded by Luna, retired from the hall.

“ Insolent and malignant spy !” said Talyavia ; “ has don Giacomo no better methods of defence than to send such emissaries here, to sow dissensions in our party ?”

“ Unless don Sigismund intends to countenance the aspersions this insidious foe has cast upon us all,” said Adriano, “ he will give his orders that punishment shall speedily overtake him.”

“ His blood alone can wash away the indignity !” cried Calandrino.

Luna still was silent.

“ A glorious opportunity is now offered,” continued Adriano, “ to shew the confidence you feel in your friends ; to prove to the Perollo, that endeavours to alienate your affection from us, will meet with exemplary chastisement. And it will be a lesson,” he added, in a lower tone, “ to all who may henceforth aid



and abet the treacheries of Federico with Costanza di Solanto."

"Be it as you will," said Sigismund.

"Follow the traitor, and dispatch him instantly!" cried Adriano, loudly.

Several of the vassals, at the lower part of the hall, half intoxicated with wine, and the ardour of the time, rushed furiously into the streets towards the abode of Ferrara, who was proceeding up the flight of steps to his residence; but seeing the approach of some of the partisans of Luna, bearing the badges of their faction, and brandishing their naked weapons, he stopped to watch their proceedings; they advanced rapidly towards him, but he felt neither fear nor suspicion, when two of the ruffians, running up the steps, buried their poniards in his side, and he fell a lifeless corpse from the top of the steps to the bottom.

The murderers having completed their act of butchery, they returned, waving their bloody weapons, and crying—"Viva Lu-

na è Peralta ! death to Perollo and his spies !”

Their return was greeted with shouts of exultation by their companions; but count Luna looked not as if he partook in the immoderate joy of his friends.

The return of Margieri and his wounded associates had excited a general indignation throughout the Casa di Perollo. The impatient vassals and soldiers of don Giacomo urged him with vehemence to allow them to revenge the outrage by an attack on the Castel di Luna.

The baron, however, firmly resisted their entreaties, resolved to stand on the defensive, and call on the viceroy to punish, by a legal process, the atrocious offenders. He well knew that an act of violence on his part would be a plea with his enemies to justify any future crimes they might commit; and, as a strenuous defender of the laws of his country, he did not choose now to violate them, by taking the redress of his partisans into his own hands.

To the entreaties of his followers he replied, by pointing out how much beneath their characters as soldiers it would be, to take upon them an office which would soon be performed by the public executioner; and how derogatory to them, as citizens and adherents to him, who in every instance had maintained the cause of civil justice, to give themselves up to their passions, and be parties in exciting a popular commotion from motives of private feeling.

The murder of don Geronimo Ferrara was soon after known, and excited deeper feelings of horror and detestation, plunging all the family of Pandolfina in sorrow and affliction. The baron invited all connected with him, by any tie whatever, to take refuge within the walls of his castle, until the violent faction of their enemies could be brought to legal punishment.

Every member of the family repaired to the castle, with all their retainers, except Francisco Perollo, who had been placed by don Giacomo, with Del Nadore, among

the five giurati of the city, and who excused himself from his official capacity, but afterwards escaped from Sciacca, terrified at the danger of the name he bore.

Count Sambuca, his lady, and her brother the baron Celano, who were in the city at the time, availed themselves of the protection offered by their kinsman; and before evening, all Perollo's connexions in Sciacca had secured themselves within his towers. The drawbridge was up, the walls well manned; and, without any act of hostility, Pandolfina manifested his resolution and ability to protect to the utmost his family and friends from the outrages of their infuriated enemies.

The passing events were easily concealed from the unhappy baroness Solanto, who appeared gradually sinking under her sorrows; but her kind hostess, though anxious and alarmed at the threatening evil, still bore herself with the composure and dignity of her general character.

Marguerita exerted herself more than she had done since the melancholy death

of her father, to cheer the spirits of Costanza, and assist in the care of the baroness, and the exertion appeared to be of infinite use to her.

The signora di Solanto spent her time almost entirely with her mother, and struggled with her own feelings of despondency to cheer the baroness. Vague tidings had been heard of some persons who were seen in the mountains at no great distance from Sambuca; but this tale could give no clue to the mysterious disappearance of Solanto. The environs of the cassino had carefully been searched, and as no trace of blood, nor the marks of any violence, had been discovered, Pandolfina and his friends were still sanguine in their belief, that the baron was only held in confinement by the policy of the Luna faction, until don Sigismund had secured the hand of Costanza.

During these events, Federico had remained a silent, but deeply-interested spectator; whenever Costanza appeared, he had, by every delicate attention, attempt-



ed to cheer her spirits, and to inspire her with hopes for the safety of her father, and the ultimate recovery of her mother, and declared his readiness to undertake any plan she might devise to discover intelligence of her lost parent.

His conduct failed not to make the impression it deserved—Costanza felt and appreciated his delicacy. From the moment she had considered her engagement with count Luna at an end, she had ceased to prevent her thoughts from dwelling on Federico Perollo; and although during her present distress she had few moments in which her mind was unoccupied by the doubtful state of both her parents, yet there were intervals at which she did think, and think favourably, of Federico.

The count Sambuca offered to make his way to his castle, and raising his own retainers, and the friends of Perollo, the marquis Geraci and the baron Partanna, to reinforce the garrison within the castle; but their strength was considered fully adequate to the defence, and his offer was

declined. To don Paolo the second place in the command was given, and all appeared fully to rely upon his conduct, valour, and moderation.

These arrangements being made, the baron Pandolfina prepared his dispatches for the viceroy, which he sent off by the gate of the castle which opened beyond the city walls, as soon as the shades of evening promised to conceal the departure of the couriers. The baron took the precaution of sending both to Palermo and to Messina, to prevent any delay, in case the viceroy should have left the capital for the port, from which he expected to embark with his army.

Don Giacomo referred the necessary measures which must be taken entirely to the wisdom of his highness, and the council of state; and having informed them of what had occurred, requested immediate directions how to proceed, and begged that some person of weight and authority might be sent over to investigate the affair, to impose legal punishments upon the

guilty, and to secure the peace of Sciacca from such outrages in future. At the same time he stated to the viceroy the continued absence of the baron Solanto, and the intense anxiety under which his wife and daughter suffered; and giving it as his opinion that he was detained by the machinations of the parties who had been guilty of the other crimes complained of, in order to further the intended marriage of count Luna with the heiress of the absent baron; and, finally, he concluded by mentioning the resolution which had been adopted by himself and his friends, of preserving a pacific conduct until they received instructions from the court, which he hoped would be forwarded with all the expedition possible, as the peace and safety of so important a place was now at the mercy of these insurgents.

After the messengers had departed, guards were stationed for the night on the towers and battlements, to prevent any surprise, and the same precautions taken as if the castle had been in a state of

The watchfulness of the man  
and the Paolo saw everything placed in  
order and the night passed without  
any attempt from the agents of Lu-  
ca to disturb the peace of the Casa di Pe-

CHAPTER VI.  
.....

“ Go, bid the timid lover choose,  
And I'll resign my charter,  
If he for ten kind how-d'y'dos,  
One kind good-bye would barter.”

THE viceroy received, at Messina, the information forwarded to him by Perollo, respecting the affairs of Sciacca, and instantly summoned the council of state, to communicate to them the contents of the dispatches he had received.

Count Sigismund di Luna, his highness informed the assembly, having placed himself at the head of a factious multitude, and being joined by many nobles in Sciacca and its vicinity, had made himself master of the city : there being no power sufficient to curb their deeds of lawless violence and outrage, the insurgents had at-



tacked a party of the adherents of the baron Pandolfina, some of whom they had slain, and others desperately wounded; and afterwards most inhumanly murdered don Geronimo Ferrara, a cavalier of rank, whose virtues had endeared him to all his fellow-citizens. And, further, he stated, that the rebels who had thus outraged the majesty of the empire, and the laws of civil society, still sought the destruction of the gallant don Giacomo Perollo; and that, unless their crimes were visited with promptness and celerity, these atrocious transactions would affix an eternal stain upon the present government of the island.

The council were unanimous in expressing their abhorrence at the conduct of the insurgents, and in advising the most decided measures to be instantly taken for bringing them to punishment.

It was resolved, that don Geronimo Starella, barone del Mundino, a noble Catanese officer, should be sent with a sufficient military force to quell the disturbance; and, that his proceedings might not

want the solemnity of legal authority, a number of counsellors and lawyers were to attend him, for the purposes of examining into the affair, and of inflicting punishment upon the guilty.

To don Geronimo, the commander, his highness particularly commended his friend, the baron Pandolfina, desiring that every provision might be made to ensure his safety, and that his wishes should be attended to in all matters of consequence ; to which he added his earnest request, that all the expedition which justice would permit should be made in dispatching the affair, in order that the troops should not be taken from their destination, but, if possible, return in time to embark with the rest of the army for Italy.

The messenger who had brought the intelligence from Sciacca was sent back without delay, with an account of the determination of the viceroy, and the preparations which were making in consequence ; he was also the bearer of private

dispatches from his highness, which contained orders for the immediate return of Federico and Gaetano to head-quarters, the Imperial mandate being expected for the embarkation of the troops, and as, at all events, the viceroy wished to remove the young men from the scene of tumult and contest.

In four days the courier arrived in Sciacca, delivered his dispatches, and announced the coming aid. The letters which he brought all gave unmixed pleasure and satisfaction to Perollo, save that which contained the order for the departure of his son and Pignatelli.

To Federico this summons was a sentence which condemned him to despair and misery; he had of late indulged in such flattering hopes, that the blow, though no other than he had every reason to expect, overwhelmed him with the deepest sorrow. From the exertions of the government he had confidently expected the release of Solanto, whose connexion with count Luna would undoubtedly be at an

end, and himself therefore at liberty to offer his hand to the lady Costanza; and, just at this important crisis, to be called away, was a trial of fortitude not likely to be borne with equanimity by the ardent spirit of a youthful lover.

He received from his father the orders and the information contained in the dispatches, and concealing, as much as possible, the distress he felt, said, he would find Gaetano, and communicate to him the intelligence; and left the apartment, intending to go to his own, and there endeavour to recover his composure, when, hurrying along the corridor, he was met by Costanza.

The agitation of his countenance terrified her, and scarcely able to support herself, she clasped her hands, as in supplication to Heaven, and exclaimed—"Oh, Perollo! for what new misery am I to prepare?"

"None, none, to you, I trust, lady Costanza; do not alarm yourself; sit down here," he said, opening the door of the nearest room.

“ There must be something, signor,” she said, “ or you could not look so changed since you left us just now.”

“ Dearest lady Costanza, I was distressed by an order from the viceroy for my instant departure.”

Costanza felt ill, and looked very pale.

Federico sat down by her, and took her unreluctant hand.—“ If,” he said, much embarrassed, “ I could only hope that my going or my return could be of interest to you, I should quit even you more cheerfully.”

Costanza trembled with emotion, but was silent.

“ Tell me, dearest Costanza, may I hope?”

She tried to speak, but burst into tears.

Federico drew her towards him, with the arm which had supported her to her seat, and she wept upon his shoulder in uncontrollable agitation.

For some minutes the feelings of both were at too high a pitch for words; and



Federico was just beginning to pour forth his gratitude and joy, when the opening door shewed the baroness Pandolfina.

Costanza started up, and threw herself into her arms.

“ My child, how is this ? Federico, have you forgotten for a moment the situation of lady Costanza ? ”

“ My dear mother, I met the lady Costanza, when I could think of nothing but the agony of leaving her. ”

“ Leaving her, my son ! ”

“ Do not you be distressed, my beloved mother ; we have been all along uncertain how soon this order might arrive. ”

“ And has it come, my darling child ? Good Heavens, to be taken from me at such a time ! yet, how often have I thought that you were safer any where than in Sciacca during these scenes of tumult and horror. ”

In the quickly-succeeding idea of parting from her son, the baroness had forgotten Costanza for a moment, but immediately recollecting herself, she embraced her

affectionately, and said—"I cannot chide you now, my children, though there are two who will have great right to do so. Federico, though you might perhaps reckon on your own father's happiness at receiving the lady Costanza into his family, still you could not answer for the baron Solanto."

Costanza hid her blushes on the bosom of the baroness, as she whispered that her father was not less indulgent, and that her engagement with count Luna he himself had broken.

"It would be to me," said the baroness, "a happiness only inferior to your own, my children, to witness the completion of your wishes; but, for the present, circumstanced as we all are, let the subject be carried no farther."

Federico was just beginning to remonstrate, when the baroness interrupted him with a smile, and added—"So much appears to have been effected by this sudden event, and the explanations it has produced, that surely, Federico, you may de-

part with confidence; and without urging our Costanza to repent the happiness she has conferred upon you; remember her situation at present, and the delicacy which is required from every member of our family."

Perollo, who was silent, and gazing on the blushing half-averted face of Costanza, heeded not his mother's inquiry respecting the tidings which had arrived with his orders. When she again repeated her question, he endeavoured to collect his thoughts, and to reply.

The signora di Solanto, with an affectionate embrace to the baroness, made her escape from the apartment, and Federico then seemed to recover the use of his faculties.—“Troops,” he said, “are now marching hither, under the command of don Geronimo Statella, barone Mundino, with a sufficient number of legal advisers to search into and punish the atrocious crimes of these lawless ruffians; their arrival may be expected in two or three

days, and immediately after their coming we must obey our orders, and join his highness at head-quarters."

"At any other time I should more deeply have regretted our separation," replied the baroness; "but it will now be a consolation to me to know that you are safely removed from this scene of vindictive hatred, far from the machinations of the Luna party; and in the uncertainty under which the family of the baron Solanto suffer from his absence, it is better for the lady Costanza that you should be removed for a while, till, under better auspices, your mutual wishes may receive the sanction of both your families; and I trust, my child, that you will not seek, by any engagement, made without the consent of her parents, to bind the lady Costanza. It might be considered as taking an undue advantage of the circumstances which have driven her here for protection, and not only be a stain upon the name and family of Perollo, but displease the baron Solanto,

and eventually be a bar to the completion of your hopes."

Federico acknowledged the justice of his mother's sentiments, and with feelings very different from those which had occupied his bosom a few minutes before, he resumed his search for Gaetano.

He found his friend upon the ramparts with don Paolo.—“By your appearance, Federico,” said Pignatelli, “the messenger from my uncle has brought pleasant intelligence.”

“Orders are come for our immediate appearance at Messina,” answered Federico.

“And is that the cause of your exuberant happiness?” asked Gaetano, in amazement.

Don Paolo also looked astonished, but said nothing.

“The barone del Mundino will be here in a day or two, with forces sufficient to quell the insurgents,” said Perollo.

“And what beside? some still better news remains behind.”



“Nothing,” answered Federico.

“Nay,” said Gaetano, “I am not to be told that the self-gratulation and pleasure in your countenance proceed either from the anticipation of our campaign in Italy, or that of don Geronimo Statella and the hangman in Sciacca; something more has given you these smiles—has any intelligence been received of the baron Solanto?”

“No,” said Federico, looking gravely.

“And am I to receive no further elucidation on the subject?” asked Pignatelli.

“I have seen the lady Costanza,” said Perollo, and hesitated.

“Really!” said his friend: “why I should have thought you might have done the same yesterday, or any day for this fortnight. I suppose she is equally enchanted at the prospect of our departure.”

“The lady’s sentiments upon the subject,” replied Federico, “are all that I would have them; and, for the acknowledgment she has just made of them, I now ask the congratulations of don Paolo and yourself.”

“ You have done nothing clandestine, my dear Federico ?” asked the former.

“ My mother,” he answered, “ has not refused her approbation.”

“ What the baroness does not condemn,” said don Paolo, with a smile, “ I shall not long disapprove;” and embracing his young kinsman, he assured him of the interest he should ever take in his happiness, and that no event could give him equal satisfaction with that of seeing him united hereafter with the signora di Solanto.

“ All I am at present sure of,” replied Federico, “ is the lady’s consent. The baron Solanto will soon, I hope, be restored to us, and not prove more inexorable to our wishes. At present they remain unknown, except to you, my friends, and to my mother.”

“ But the particulars ?” said Gaetano : “ as far as I may be indulged, do, my dear friend, let me hear more on this subject.”

“ You have caught your mania from our fair friend Sambuca, I fear,” said Perollo ; “ and this is no place for explanations.”

“Not being so deeply interested in details of lovers conferences, and having other affairs upon my hands,” said don Paolo, “I shall retire, wishing you all the happiness which an union with donna Costanza promies; and to signor Pignatelli, all the patience a confidant stands in need of.”

The young men withdrew to the apartment of Gaetano, where Federico detailed all his newly-encouraged hopes, which his friend no longer sought to discourage; and the interview with Costanza seemed to have so entirely dissipated the cares of Perollo, that he had never appeared in such spirits since his arrival at his father's house, as now on the eve of quitting it.

The approach of the expected succours from Messina gave general satisfaction throughout the castle; preparations were busily carried on, as don Giacomo intended to offer the hospitalities of the Casa di Perollo to all the party. On the third day, the arrival of Statella was announced by a courier, dispatched to the giurati of

of the city, and bearing to the baron Pandolfina further dispatches from the viceroy.

The baron excused himself from joining the party, who awaited at the city gates the representatives of the viceregal authority, as he wished not, by his presence, to excite any symptoms of discord, but requested the general and his troops would honour him by occupying the Casa di Perollo during their stay in Sciacca.

Upon his entrance into the city, Starella proceeded immediately to the residence of the baron Pandolfina, to thank him for his offer, which, however, he declined accepting, as not wishing to give so public a demonstration of partiality; and declared his intention of taking up his abode, during his stay, in the house of Stefano di Lauro, near the church of St. Cataldo (which in later times was the property of don Fabricio del Carretto, barone della Fabica, to whom it descended from his ancestors of the house of Luchese): but at the same time that the general declined

accepting the castle of don Giacomo as a permanent abode, he did not refuse to partake of a banquet, which had been prepared in honour of his arrival; and declared with how much pleasure he should return to avail himself of the kindness of the chief of Perollo, as soon as he had made arrangements for the accommodation of his followers.

The house of don Stefano was large and commodious, and easily accommodated Statella, his officers, and the legal advisers who attended him, whilst the troops were quartered in the neighbourhood. The whole affair was quickly arranged, when the general, and his principal companions, returned to fulfil their appointment with don Giacomo. A long consultation took place between the chiefs, Statella professing his intention to be guided in all things by the advice of Pandolfina; but requesting that as little open display as possible might be made of their private connexion, he informed Perollo of the wishes of the viceroy, that the affair should be dis-



patched with all possible expedition, in order that the troops might not be detained from their destined service.

“With the number of our friends,” replied Perollo, “it appears to me unnecessary to retain all the force the viceroy has sent us. The partisans of Luna, seeing the determined resolution with which his highness is prepared to assert the cause of justice, will hardly think of opposition; and your excellenza may shew your zeal for the Imperial cause, and your confidence in the loyalty of our citizens, by dismissing part of your men with my son and signor Pignatelli, who return to headquarters the day after to-morrow.”

To this proposition the general seemed much inclined to accede; but don Paolo urged, with great anxiety, that no such step ought to be ventured upon—“It is at present unknown to any of us,” he said, “what force the count now has at Bivonia, or what addition he may be able to make to it. The present power of your excellenza

will give you so decided a superiority over any number of men which they can have the means of bringing forward, as to make all opposition hopeless; but having once reduced your strength, they will gain confidence, and exert every nerve to avoid punishment, by adding to their crimes, and we may yet find ourselves too weak to resist their overwhelming force."

"Your caution, my dear Paolo," said don Giacomo, "is always prudent; but in the present instance it is, I think, rather carried beyond necessity; and the Imperial cause may suffer even from the slight reduction of the force which is now in Sciacca, besides the trouble and inconvenience it will hereafter be to convey them to the main body of the army, if they are delayed here till after the expedition has set sail."

Statella seemed more inclined to listen to the baron than to don Paolo; but nothing was decided at the time, and the general inquired if any particulars had yet

transpired respecting the fate of Solanto. To this Perollo answered in the negative; he related the circumstances of the event, and his reasons for supposing don Sigismund to have been the principal contriver of the act; and concluded by lamenting the melancholy effect it had produced upon the declining health of the baroness. Stabella requested that the ladies might be informed of the assurances of the deep interest which his highness the viceroy felt for the baron's restoration, and which he had been commissioned to deliver. Federico immediately carried the message to the lady Costanza (who would not leave her mother to appear at the banquet), and brought back her most grateful acknowledgments for the kindness of his highness, and those whom he had deputed to act for him. The signora di Solanto endeavoured, but in vain, to restore her mother to hope and cheerfulness; she had received a shock from which there appeared but little chance of her ever recovering, even

though Solanto himself should be instantly restored.

The proceedings at Luna Castle, after the murder of Ferrara, had been much baffled by the precautions taken by don Giacomo. The Luna party had hoped he would have been instigated to some act of hostility, which would have exposed him to their arms; but so well was the castle watched and guarded, and so strictly were its inmates confined within its limits, that no occasion offered to gratify their increasing desire for slaughter. The severe wound of Accursi d'Amato also confined him so closely, that for some days he was no more able to excite others to action, than to unite with them in it. Another circumstance, which considerably deranged their plans, was the prompt and decided steps which the viceroy appeared about to adopt. Till the arrival of Statella in Sciacca, they had fondly hoped that the Imperial mandate would have compelled the duca to quit the island with all his forces,

and that the orders of those who were to march to punish their offences must be countermanded ; and that when once the army had quitted Messina, they would be able to act free from the fear of an overwhelming force. The irritation of don Sigismund was continually kept up by the artifices of his friend Adriano, and the vehemence of the countess, who seemed to have entered into the conspiracy with all the energy she possessed. Her pride was gratified in contemplating the strength and resources of the house of Luna, and her hatred and revenge fully satisfied in the anticipated downfall of Perollo. To the interference of her cousin, pope Clement, she confidently looked for the Imperial pardon ; and as affairs between the pontiff and Charles wore a more amicable aspect, she felt no fears for the conclusion of all things according to her wishes. The subject of Francisca was no longer one of such anxiety as it had been ; she had succeeded in overcoming any ill impression



it might leave upon the mind of Sigismund; and upon the full acknowledgment of her daughter's rights, Della Bardia repeatedly declared his intention of restoring the pledges which he held, and which she was so anxious to regain.

The feelings of the party, in regard to the unhappy family of Solanto, were various, and yet, openly, all appeared to continue most anxious for the completion of the count's engagement with the lady Costanza. Don Sigismund felt his passion increase with the obstacles to its gratification; he would almost have resigned his hopes of vengeance for the immediate possession of the object of his love; and her present protection in the Casa di Perollo appeared amongst the heaviest crimes of Pandolfina. The affliction under which they laboured from the absence of the baron, was a subject on which he thought as little as possible; and when it did occur, he called to his recollection that his offered services had been refused, and those of his

enemy accepted; and this excuse was generally the antidote by which he quieted his conscience on that head.

The countess, though anxious to secure the wealth of Solanto to her son, had yet had so severe a proof of the spirit she should have to encounter in Costanza, that she had lost much of her real anxiety on the subject; yet, in order not to displease her son, she still kept up the appearance of being most sincere in the cause, and did not even hint at the pleasure with which she should receive as wealthy a bride, with a temper more obsequious and yielding.

The baron Adriano, the great mover of all the actions, and many of the thoughts, of Sigismund di Luna, in this, as in every thing else, consulted entirely his own advantage and gratification. The fury he had conceived against the baron for the exposure of his conduct, and the slight consideration in which the lady Costanza had always held him, had steeled him against any suffering they might meet with; and as he no longer counted on the

power and support of the baron in their great design against Perollo, he had no motive to wish for the marriage; whilst, like the countess, he would willingly have transferred the count's affections to some female in whom he had not to fear a counteracting influence over his mind; yet he knew the passion of Luna to be too violent to bear opposition, and he found his jealousy of Federico Perollo at all times a useful weapon in his hands, wherewith to raise the slumbering fury, or to stifle the rising feelings of moderation, in the bosom of his friend.

The arrival of Statella in Sciacca threw all the party into consternation, and their debates upon the subject were long and anxious. To avoid the punishment they had provoked, or openly to defy it, was the alternative to which they appeared reduced, and various were the opinions which were given on the different methods to be pursued. Adriano was inclined to temporise—to disperse their assembly for a time—to conceal the principal delinquents, and,

by every species of delay, to endeavour to thwart the legal proceedings, until the patience of the viceroy should be worn out, and the troops ordered to their final destination; and when clear of these adversaries, he said, they might again assemble with what celerity they chose, and sate their anger against Pandolfina and his party.

To this Della Bardia, Calandrino, and several of the more vehement partisans, urged the difficulty, and almost impossibility, of concealing so large a number of persons as would undoubtedly be involved in the proscription dictated by the vengeance of Perollo. By separation also they would give their enemies the means of taking them singly; and without a hope of deriving any advantage from resistance, their force would then be exterminated, and the purpose of their foe effectually secured through their weakness and irresolution. Upon count Luna himself, left thus unsupported and undefended, the heaviest wrath of don Giacomo would assuredly

be poured, and not only would they be thus subjected to present punishment and degradation, but every future hope of compassing their ends would be annihilated.

The advocates for yielding to the storm, and withdrawing from its influence, declared the impracticability of resisting, with any hopes of success, the powers of the viceroy, united, as they would be, with the strength of Perollo and his friends, and if necessary, by aid drawn from the neighbouring towns; many also of those in Sciacca, who had stood as neutrals during the contest of the rival families, would consider themselves as obliged to take part with the representative of the Imperial power, and professed supporters of law and justice.

Don Sigismund, though unwilling to give up his plan, and disband his men, though conscious of the heavy accusations which, in all probability, would be brought against himself, yet could not but confess the fruitless prospect offered by open resistance. With respect to the deaths of



the younger Margieri and Scanzarella, he considered them as the chances of a hostile skirmish, for which no disgrace could attach to his party; but the murder of Ferrara, even in his eyes, appeared an act of intemperate barbarity. It was not, however, now a question as to what had been done, but what course they must for the future pursue, to ensure their safety, and provide for their ultimate success in the contest.

A medium between the two opinions which had divided the party, was proposed by Pugiades, and met with approbation from all but Della Bardia, Ferrante Luchese, and Calogero Calandrino. His advice was, that the principal actors in the late scenes should return to Bivonia, where the great body of their forces still remained; that the rest of the party in Sciacca should continue where they were, without shewing themselves openly, or making any display of opposition; not refusing the jurisdiction of the viceregal messen-

gers, but keeping entirely out of their way, and by every device creating difficulty and delay; and should circumstances allow of resistance, or the safety of their chieftain, count Luna, be endangered, he would still have force enough about him to defend his castle for some time, until, by treaty, some terms might be procured.

“Which,” added Adriano, “we may keep or break, as we may hereafter find most to our advantage.”

“No, signor barone,” said Pugiades, “warm as I am in the cause, and devoted to count Luna, I should consider it no act of friendship towards him, to bring dishonour on his name and party, by compromising our good faith even with don Giacomo Perollo.”

“Such sentiments,” said Peralta, with some slight appearance of shame at the reproof, “are proper to be held out in public, but we shall find them useless incumbrances in our present conflict with a power so superior to our own.”

Don Sigismund interrupted the conver-

sation, and gave his most decided approbation to the counsel of don Michele, in which he was followed by a large majority; and it was determined immediately to remove from Sciacca Accursi d'Amato, Ferrante Luchese, Pietro Infontanetta, and those men who had been concerned in the attack on Margieri, and secretly to retain the rest of their forces.

The day before Federico and Gaetano were to leave Sciacca, the latter entered the apartment where the baroness usually passed the morning with her younger children, with whom the good temper and perpetual cheerfulness of Pignatelli made him a very great favourite; and in a moment the boy had found employment for him, in shewing the best way to new-feather his arrows, and to new-string the bow with which he intended to perform marvels against the Luna party; for all the moderation of the baroness could not prevent those who attended her children from teaching them that the house of Luna were foes.

“ I promise you,” said Gaetano, “ that when I return, I will bring you the best bows and arrows in Sicily, if you will not insist on my repairing these just now, for I came to beg your mamma would indulge me in half an hour’s conversation.”

“ Willingly,” said the baroness; and giving permission to the boy to seek his brother in the armoury, and to the girls to go to Marguerita, she remained alone with Gaetano, who now seemed hesitating what to say; at last smiling, and sitting down by the baroness, he said—“ I am not clear that you will not think me very absurd, or perhaps very vain, but I can think of no way so likely to be right, as one which will involve your excellenza a little in my actions.”

“ My young friend, what ails you ?”

“ Nothing, I believe, except that I begin to think that I have caught the complaint of Federico, and fallen in love. I confess, indeed, I do not feel in any danger of dying immediately of my passion, and that I have still some very ungallant

doubts of such things ever taking place; but I think that I should live very much happier, and perhaps a little longer, if I could pass my future years with the signora Landolini. I am afraid I shall explain myself badly, but what I mean to say is, that I am conscious of a degree of attention to Marguerita, which, merely as her father's friend, I should not have been justified in shewing. I know not if it has been agreeable to her or otherwise, or if she has thought enough about me, unconnected with her father, to have observed it; for under so recent an affliction, to have sought such knowledge, would have been to insult her feelings; and going, as I am now, with the chances of war against my return, I would not seek to involve her in any engagement, even if I were sure I could persuade her to it. But, my dear madame, I do not think it generous or honourable in a man, after particular attentions, to leave any doubt of his sentiments with the lady; the world does excuse such things, but I could not; and what I would request of



you is, to assure her, whenever you think she will hear it most favourably, of my unalterable respect and affection for her, my earnest desire to devote my life to the happiness of hers; and to say further, that though she is perfectly free, my greatest indulgence will be thinking myself bound to her till she forbids me to do so."

"Excellent young man!" said the baroness, whilst her countenance shewed how she estimated such uncommon delicacy and generosity of feeling.

"Do not praise me," said Gaetano, "for endeavouring to appropriate the well-tryed worth of Marguerita: and I have yet another commission to trouble you with. This packet, if I return in safety, you will restore to me; if otherwise, it is for Marguerita, and will give her the only thing which would, I believe, add to her comfort now—I mean the power of shewing that independence of the unequalled bounty of yourself and the baron would not abate her respect or affection towards you."

"My dear young friend, Federico ever

spoke of your worth with so much enthusiasm, that I ought not to be surprised at what you now do; but I must be heartless indeed if I received such proofs of them unmoved. I trust and hope my lovely *protégée* will receive, in your safe return, the most precious gift Heaven can bestow upon her. But let me ask you one question. Should you not consult your uncle, ere you dispose either of your fortune or your hand?"

"No, my dear madame, not in this instance; I am more than of age to act for myself, and my fortune is in my own power; though not large, it is sufficient to support our rank. If I am so happy as to be accepted by the signora Landolini, I shall bring into my family one whose name is fully equal to my own; and if my uncle objected, he would be unjust, and therefore unworthy of attention; and though I have all due respect for a natural guardian, still I should not choose to be always in leading-strings; and if I suffered

any ideas of my uncle's future wealth to make me trifle with the feelings of an amiable woman, I should deserve to be left in the world alone, without one tie of friendship or affection to delight my youth, or to cheer my age. But I have taken up your time unmercifully with my egotism; allow me to thank you for your indulgence."

"From the character of his highness," said the baroness, "there is little danger of his disapprobation; and upon one condition I will freely and willingly accept the office you have thought proper to confer upon me; and this condition is, that you inform the duca de Monteleone, immediately upon your arrival in Messina, of the steps which you have now taken."

"Most readily," replied Gaetano; "it is far from my wish or intention that there should be any thing clandestine in an engagement upon which I shall always look with pride and satisfaction."

"These love-tales of yourself and Federico," said the baroness, with a smile,

“ come to light under strange auspices— in the midst of discord and preparation for war.”

“ All will end at length in peace and amity,” said Pignatelli.

“ Heaven make you a true prophet, my young friend! I cannot but feel the anxiety which the present time produces; the events of both your declarations have given me a deep and lasting satisfaction.”

They conversed for some time on the subject of Marguerita, with whose character her kind protectress had every day additional cause to be captivated.

Gaetano listened with no little delight to so grateful a subject, and had never thought the baroness herself half so charming. From the discussion of his affairs, they wandered to those of Federico and Costanza.

“ I am most anxious,” said his mother, “ for the event of the proceedings which will be instituted by the barone Mundino, in regard to the recovery of our lost friend. The restoration of the baron Solanto would,

I hope, confirm our happiness ; but should no information be procured relative to his mysterious absence, I tremble for the consequences. The baroness cannot long be supported in her present state of weakness and exhaustion ; and, in case of her death, the natural guardians of the lady Costanza may place obstacles in the way of their union, which may be insurmountable.”

“ A more proper connexion than with the heir of Pandolfina cannot, I should think, be found,” replied Pignatelli ; “ and as the inclination of the parties is so powerful a plea, I doubt not but the influence of don Giacomo could procure an Imperial mandate, which would set all debate upon the subject entirely at rest.”

“ Federico could scarcely be more sanguine, or more ready in devising expedients to remove all the difficulties in his way, than you are, signor.”

The conversation was interrupted, and the remainder of the day was passed in rather melancholy anticipation of the parting on



the morrow. The baron and Statella had held a long deliberation on the question of dismissing the troops. The flight of Accursi d'Amato and his companions from Sciacca was soon known, as his friends wished not to conceal it, and seemed to declare the intentions of his party to submit without a struggle to legal authority.

A summons which was sent to count Luna to appear before the tribunal, was received without any sign of hostility or resistance, and no preparation seemed making by the party, which carried any show of their intention to resort to acts of violence, either to defend themselves, or oppose their judges.

Upon these grounds, and from the consideration of the advantage it would be to the Imperial arms to set the troops at liberty, and shew that no internal discord made the retaining garrisons in the island necessary to keep the public peace, the baron Pandolfina was desirous to expedite their return.

Statella also was anxious to shew his for-

wardness and activity in the cause of his Imperial master, and to anticipate the wishes of the viceroy.

Don Paolo Perollo alone resisted the opinion of the others; and such was the weight he possessed, that the delay of a day or two was granted, in order to ascertain what effect the commencement of the legal proceedings would have upon count Luna and his partisans.

Sentence of banishment and outlawry was passed against Della Bardia, Luchese, and Infontanetta, as principals in the murders of the younger Margieri and Scanzarella, against which accusation they had neglected to appear to vindicate themselves. Giorgio Erasta, a vassal of the baron Adriano, who had been one of the murderers of don Geronimo Ferrara, and who was taken as he endeavoured to escape from the city, was sentenced to death, and executed on the day following. Yet no symptoms appeared of any commotion, or of any intention of resistance on the part of don Sigismund; it was true that

he had neglected to appear before the tribunal, but had excused himself for so doing; and although the reasons stated for this neglect were trivial and groundless, yet the offering them shewed a disposition to yield to the power of the law; and don Paolo, though he did not approve, could no longer oppose the departure of the troops, which was accordingly decided upon without delay.

Federico had, in this interval, obtained another interview with Costanza, in which she had confessed the pleasure she should feel at his return; and, should it meet the wishes of her family, in complying with his entreaties to unite her fate with his.

The gratitude of Perollo was boundless, and he anticipated, with little doubt, the speedy release of Solanto from the captivity in which he was held, though little information had yet been obtained upon the subject.

The young men were admitted, at their particular request, to take leave of the baroness, who, notwithstanding her own

grief, partook in the sorrow of the family at this separation. She thanked them both for the kind attention they had shewn her since their first meeting, and with melancholy anticipation foretold that they should meet no more. Both endeavoured to cheer her spirits, by the assurance that her anxiety would be removed by the exertions which the baron Mundino was making, and by the confessions which would be extorted from the adherents of Laina; and that, when once her mind was restored to composure, she would feel her strength return, and that they should soon hope to receive intelligence of her rapid recovery.

The baroness shook her head, and with fervent prayers for their health and happiness, bade them a final adieu.

Don Giacomo was occupied, during the principal part of the evening, with business of importance; the baroness Pandolina, though anxious and sad, yet, from the quiet dignity of her usual manner, showed her feelings but little; whilst the

countess Sambuca's lamentations were loud and unceasing.

Neither Federico nor Gaetano had been particularly assiduous in cultivating her acquaintance; but she had chosen to conceive a violent friendship for the latter, and to profess a sisterly regard for the former. From the time that the orders for their departure had arrived, she had, at convenient times, when the count was not in the way, chosen to suffer the most violent hysterics at the mention of their parting, and now bewailed, in all the terms of despair she could find, the sad loss she should experience.

The baroness Pandolfina paid as little attention as politeness would allow to the tiresome details and incessant questions of the lady, and generally permitted her to engross all the conversation, which made the countess differ from many of her female friends, in thinking the wife of don Giacomo vastly agreeable; and when the lady of Cosmo Luchese, or of Geronimo Perollo, complained that the pride of the



baroness made her reserved and unsocial, and only permitted her to bow her head when they entered the room, and to do the same when they quitted it, the countess vehemently defended the elegant and courtly politeness with which her beloved baroness listened to her conversation—"An example," she generally remarked with a significant look, "which it would be well if the other ladies in Sciacca were to follow."

On the present occasion, the volubility of the countess was not likely to be checked; the baroness was more than commonly silent, Costanza was with her mother, and Marguerita felt all her sorrows return at the idea of losing her two friends.

Federico had, by his kindness and fraternal tenderness, excited in her heart the affection of a sister towards him; but when she thought on the departure of Gaetano, it was with still deeper feelings of regret; these she attributed to the light in which she had always considered him, as the friend of her father, a tie which grief

had consecrated in her eyes ; nor did she examine her sentiments towards Pignatelli with the scrutiny she might have done, had she suspected that any more tender feeling lurked in the bosom of either. She now sat beside the baroness, weeping in silence at the thoughts of the approaching separation, and unheeding the incessant detail of the miseries which afflicted madame Sambuca.

“ And after you are gone,” said the latter to Gaetano, “ the baron del Mundino will depart, and his officers and lawyers, and we shall return to our usual stupid state, without another murder, or any thing to do till the feast.”

“ ’Tis a pity your excellenza cannot contrive another encounter with the countess Caltabellotta, to pass your time in a more enlivening manner,” replied Gaetano.

“ Pray, signor Pignatelli, don’t mention that dreadful person ; it is getting quite late in the evening, and I never like to think of her when it is dark.”

“ It really would not astonish me,” he

said, "if the present bad aspect of her family affairs were to induce her to enter into a compact with the evil spirit; and possessed of supernatural powers, she would indeed be a dreadful antagonist."

"I only wonder," said the countess, "how I ever survived the fury she was in at the casino, and all for nothing. I only just hinted at the reports about the lady Lucretia, whom she most certainly did murder, and said something to Costanza about Federico, when she had the rudeness to call me horrible names, and to storm and rave as if I had offended her, or caused the restoration of the lady: but do tell me something to put her horrible image out of my thoughts, or I shall not dare to go to bed to-night."

"Will not our final departure do that?" asked the gentleman; "we start at an early hour, and shall not meet to-morrow."

"How inhuman," she replied, in a doleful voice, "to remind me with such indifference of the event which I have been all day deploring!"

“ If we were not the two most modest men in the island,” replied Federico, “ your flattery, my kind cousin, would raise our vanity to an insufferable height.”

“ Pray, Federico, don't make yourself agreeable now, or it will be still more dreadful to lose you.”

“ You return to Sambuca,” he continued, “ as I understand from the count, in a few days—our absence, therefore, will be a less misfortune.”

The lady now began to weep.

“ The country around your castle is beautiful, I am told, signora.”

“ Horrible ! dreadful !” said the lady. “ Hills and valleys, mountains, corn-fields, and vineyards, are all we see ; the most tiresome things in life ! I, who doat upon a long straight street, a house with plenty of windows, and people always passing before them, to go to a vile dismal castle, with nothing to look at but groves and vineyards, or the castle walls ; and to be immured with only my monkey and my husband. *Santissima Madre !* where is there

so miserable a woman as Theresa di Sambuca?"

"And have you no castles in your neighbourhood, in which there are resident families, that you are driven to so small a domestic circle as one man and a monkey?" asked Gaetano.

"Oh yes," replied the lady, "there are, to be sure, some people at no great distance; but there is something dreadful attached to them all. Our nearest neighbour, the baroness San Filippo, was very agreeable, till she was pointed out by Sambuca as a person who ought to be an example to me; and being told that she was a charming woman, on several disagreeable occasions, I have never been able to bear her since, and am resolved not to enter her castle gates again."

Don Paolo and the baron Pandolfina now entered; the latter had some final communications, which he wished Gaetano to convey to his uncle; and the countess was compelled to give up her auditor, without a hope of finding another.



The party remained together till a late hour, as if each was unwilling, by retiring, to give the signal for separation. At last don Paolo rose to say "Good night," adding—"we have been indulging our own feelings, at the expence of the rest our young friends will need, who are to start so early."

Kindly embracing them both, he wished them all that was good for them, and that they might return to the same assembled friends, when the feuds of party had ceased in Sciacca.

Gaetano took an affectionate leave of all before Marguerita, and when he kissed her cheek, and bade farewell, she burst into tears, and fled from the apartment.

The baron and baroness remained with Federico long after the rest had dispersed, and put violence on their own inclinations in desiring him to lie down for a few hours.

They were with him again, at his short repast, before setting out; and as the baron embraced him at parting, he said—"I

wished you to go, my son; yet I now feel worse than a woman at losing you. Heaven send you safely back again, to gladden your paternal home! Farewell!"

CHAPTER VII.  
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Hark! Peace!

It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,
Which gives the stern'st good night—he is about it.

SHAKESPEARE.

IT had required all the art and plausibility of the baron Adriano, to keep the spirit of don Sigismund from bursting into open violence during the days of Statella's inquiries. To the summons which was delivered to himself, he would have returned an open defiance, but the self-possession of his friend overcame the impetuosity of Luna, and he succeeded in keeping him quiet.

The sentence of outlawry and banishment pronounced against Della Bardia, Luchese, and Infontanetta, had been treated by Adriano with ridicule and contempt.

The execution of Erasta had required more skill to palliate ; the blood of Luna mounted indignantly at the thought of abandoning even one of his inferior followers to a shameful death ; but with cold-hearted policy Adriano argued on the expediency of leaving him to his fate : such an act of forbearance, he pleaded, would do more towards lulling the suspicions of their enemies, than all the protestations their whole party could make, and would do more to facilitate their purposes than the additional power of an hundred men.

Giorgio Erasta was one of his own immediate followers, and it suited the purpose of Adriano at the time to make him out a worthless character ; although his crime had been obedience to his chieftain in an hour of drunken enthusiasm, though during his life he had been extolled as one of his most trustworthy adherents, he now discovered in him every crime which could disgrace human nature, joined with a tendency to treachery and deceit, which would

make his death, even from themselves, an act of justice and prudence.

Sigismund did not attempt to defend a character of which he knew so little; yet still he argued with obstinacy and pertinacity on the want of spirit it would manifest in himself to submit to such an insult.

Finally, however, Adriano's perseverance succeeded; don Sigismund gave up the point, and Giorgio Erasta died by the hands of the common executioner—a fate he justly merited, for the slaughter of the gentle and generous Ferrara; but the ignominy thrown upon his character by Peralta was an injustice his very crime rendered more iniquitous.

The first tidings which were brought to Luna Castle, of the intended return of the troops immediately, were scarcely credited by any of the party; but when their doubts were changed into certainty, the exultation of Adriano was unbounded, and the most tumultuous satisfaction was expressed by all the adherents of count Luna.

All the leaders who were concealed in Sciacca were summoned to a midnight council in the Castel di Luna, where congratulation and unanimity prevailed. The slight check which had, for a while, impeded their career, seemed to have added tenfold strength to their fury, and the most decisive measures were instantly agreed upon. Every individual was to collect his utmost number of adherents, and Adriano was to repair as secretly as possible to Bivonia, to prepare Della Bardia and his companions to accompany the forces which still remained in readiness to march to Sciacca.

The wounds which Accursi had received were so severe, that it was with some difficulty he was conveyed to Bivonia, and for a day or two after his arrival there, he suffered exceedingly from his journey, and was strictly ordered by his medical attendants to remain perfectly quiet. His desire of getting over to San Bartolomeo was extreme; but for some time he felt the utter impossibility of doing it; however he had

determined on making the attempt, though in direct opposition to the opinion of his surgeon, when Adriano arrived with the important intelligence of the project which was on foot, in consequence of the imprudence of Statella and Perollo.

It now required no great powers of persuasion to induce him to remain two or three days longer quiet, that he might not be incapacitated from joining in the ensuing actions ; and, at the end of that time, he was judged sufficiently recovered to proceed to Sciacca.

He set out late in the evening, and made his way into the city through the Casa di Infontanetta. His first object was to seek the countess, to whom he was generally a most unwelcome visitor, but one to whom she dared not at any time refuse admission.

“ I am come, signora,” he said, “ for the purpose of making some final arrangement with you respecting the property of the baroness della Bardia. I wish not to enter into any unpleasant discussion with

don Sigismund ; but, in the uncertain state of our affairs, it is right and proper that some precautions should be taken, to secure her property, beyond the power of any accident which may happen to her brother or myself. In case of the fall of the count, it is requisite to have her claims duly acknowledged ; and the only means of their being clearly determined, is by a declaration of her birth from yourself and count Luna, upon the assembly of our family connexions."

The countess was uncertain what reply to make ; at length she said—" Don Sigismund has consented to receive his sister— why press the matter at a time like this, and before the event which was fixed on as a period to concealment has taken place ?"

" Your excellenza would be happy to defer my rights till this marriage of the count's has been completed : its ever taking place now appears so doubtful, that I am not disposed to wait for it ; events have not succeeded to your expectations,

and I am too much the master of your actions not to make whatever terms I please."

"And do you expect me to live a slave to your insulting tyranny?"

"That is a matter which is at the choice of your excellenza; the influence you possess over count Luna is unbounded, and it is my intention to avail myself of it. You may, as you think proper, obey my commands, or provoke my vengeance by resisting them. Your imperious spirit I have known before crouch beneath the dread of the discoveries I can make: need I recount the particulars of our first private conference, when——"

"No!" exclaimed the lady, with vehemence: "were there no other punishment for my offence than that which I have suffered from your insolence, that deed were deeply avenged."

"Your excellenza," pursued Accursi, "has perhaps forgotten the first effusions of your frenzy at the proofs I held—the ebullitions of passion, which subsided into

tame and meek compliance—the numberless soothing promises with which you masked your intention of ridding yourself of such a torment as D'Amato. The change from imperious anger to sullen fury, and then again to fawning hypocrisy, gave me at the time an insight into the various powers of your capricious soul, which are not easily forgotten.”

“ And to what do these taunting insults tend ?” asked the lady, with smothered indignation.

“ Merely to point out the impotence of your resistance.”

“ And what are your present demands ?”

“ The immediate possession of the property left by Peralta to my wife, the baroness della Bardia, the daughter of Giovanni di Luna, and a full acknowledgment of all her claims on the failure of her brother's issue.”

“ And you mean to bring her over, and present her to her family immediately ?”

“ Probably not,” said Accursi ; “ there

can be no reason for involving her in the present scene of confusion and discord."

"Her presence may probably be necessary in the arrangement of the affairs, which are intricate and complex, and had better be determined after the bustle in which all our friends and family are now engaged is at an end."

"It is my will to have the matter publicly and openly arranged without further delay."

"Then," replied the countess, "Francisca must herself appear."

"Impossible!" said Della Bardia, without consideration: "it would be useless," he added, "and is not part of my present arrangements."

The countess had urged the production of her daughter only as a pretext to gain time; but there was something in the manner of Della Bardia which excited a suspicion in her mind, that he had some secret motive for the refusal; it was not probable that any regard to her feelings or

comfort induced him to prevent her coming to Sciacca, yet that he had some motive was evident.—“ Sigismund has expressed a wish to see his sister,” she said, “ and where can she be so well, or so properly placed, as with her mother? or what means can be so eligible of announcing her existence, and confirming her identity to the world, as by a personal introduction to her family?”

“ My own health and engagements will not at present allow of this,” said Accursi; “ but this debate is foreign to the subject. I am now come to procure the immediate payment of the portion due to my bride, as the co-heiress of Peralta; and an open declaration of her future claims, in the general assembly of the house of Luna.”

“ And in what way is my influence to be exerted?” asked the countess.

“ By stating my wishes to count Luna, and using your power over him, to procure the attainment of them. As one of the trustees also for the Peralta property, you may, by your evidence and authority,

command the payment of the sum demanded."

"And when am I to be freed from this state of thralldom, and the pledges which you now hold restored?"

"I have found them so useful, that I must beg for your permission to retain them still," said Accursi, with a smile.

Her unwillingness to deprive her son of the portion of wealth, to purchase which she had sacrificed so much, induced the countess to venture to the last extremity she dared proceed with Della Bardia. His present reluctance to produce the person of Francisca, gave birth to a hope that there was some motive which induced him to hurry on the affair, and of which she might avail herself. The next morning she sent to request don Sigismund's attendance in her private apartments.

"I sent for you," she said, on his entrance, "in consequence of an interview I had last night with Della Bardia relating to Francisca; he desires to have her portion of Peralta's wealth delivered into his

hands, and her connexion with us immediately proclaimed to our friends on their assembling in Sciacca."

"When I had learned from you, my mother," said Luna, "the truth of my relationship to this unknown sister, I was fully aware of the claim which she possessed, and which Heaven forbid I should even wish to deprive her of. The demands of Della Bardia could not have come at a more inconvenient time; yet, as far as they can, they shall be complied with. But why should he insist on this public recognition now under such circumstances?"

"His conduct," replied the countess, "is, as usual, mysterious; and it behoves us to act with caution. The introduction of Francisca herself should, I think, precede any other arrangements; this would prevent the necessity of much unpleasant detail, and enable the guardians, under the will of Peralta, to act with more satisfaction to themselves."

"The whole affair," answered Luna, "is

inexplicable; but I think with you that the presence of Francisca is necessary to the re-establishment of her rights."

"It is only necessary," answered the countess, "that you make this the preliminary step to the adjustment of the affair; but let it not appear to be at my instigation. I am in some degree pledged to support the wishes of Della Bardia, though contrary to my real sentiments upon the subject; yet, as the happiness of Francisca is perhaps at stake, I am willing to sacrifice much, that by compliance with him I may acquire an influence capable of promoting her future welfare."

The intention of the countess, in thus urging the production of her daughter, was not perhaps from an idea of deriving any ultimate benefit from such a measure; but the conduct of Della Bardia proved his unwillingness to do it, and for that unwillingness she supposed some motive might exist, which would at least give her time for deliberation; and, notwithstanding every probability was in favour of her

being compelled to surrender the wealth, and make every concession her tyrant chose to insist on, yet every delay was a respite to her, and the pleasure of opposing him, great as was the hazard, she could not resist.

Intelligence soon arrived of the exertions of the friends of Luna; they had collected more than three hundred horse and four hundred foot soldiers, exclusive of fifty brave Agrigentines, and fifty lancers from Salerni, brought by don Michele Pugliese and his two brothers. The force, consisting of more than eight hundred men, awaited the orders of their chieftain, who instantly set out for Bivonia to join them.

Before his departure, he had a short interview with Accursi, and informed him of the information which had arrived, and the conversation he had held with his mother; declaring, at the same time, his readiness to renounce the inheritance of his sister, and publicly to recognise her, but expressed his intention of being first intro-

duced to her, and his desire that she should be brought to Sciacca as soon as possible.

Della Bardia knew well the disposition of count Luna, and from whence he derived his opinions, in his intention to be introduced to his sister, before any steps were taken in the adjustment of her affairs ; he clearly saw the influence of the countess, and was aware of the momentary forgetfulness into which he had been betrayed during his interview with her on the preceding night, and the impolitic anxiety he had shewn to resist the production of Francisca's person, which he feared to do, until by his presence he had habituated her to consider herself as his wife. He dreaded lest she should declare the violence which had been offered, and the illegality of her marriage; that don Sigmund should espouse her cause; and that all his power over the countess would be exerted in vain to bend the spirit of her daughter, or to overcome the repugnance of her son to force the inclinations

of Francisca, and to overlook the means he had used to possess himself of her person; and he was consequently enraged beyond measure at the manœuvre of the lady, who, not daring openly to resist his will, had thus endeavoured secretly to counteract his intentions, and instigated Sigismund to require the presence of his sister in Sciacca.

The countess Caltabellotta was absent during great part of the day from the Castel di Luna, engaged, it was said, in devotion at the convent of Lucia; Della Bardia had therefore no opportunity, for some hours, of venting his displeasure against her.

Information respecting the steps which the Luna party had taken on the departure of the troops, was soon given to the baron Pandolfina; and he learned also the increasing number of their partisans. To remedy the evil his want of caution had brought on, was now the only thing to be done, and he repaired to Statella, to confer with him upon the subject; and don Pa-

olo attended him, who, without boasting of his own wisdom in foretelling what had taken place, endeavoured to devise some possible means of preventing the increase of the danger, and to avoid its coming to the termination which he dreaded.

They found Statella surrounded by lawyers and counsellors, busily employed in taking informations and examining witnesses as to the late disturbances.

Don Giacomo requested a private audience, which was instantly granted, and the commander withdrew with the two cavaliers.

“ My cousin, don Paolo,” said Pandolfina, “ was right in the advice he gave ; and we have been too precipitate in the dismissal of the forces your excellenza brought with you.”

“ How so, signor ?” asked Statella.

“ The Luna party are making head at Bivonia, and have collected upwards of eight hundred men, under their determined and sanguinary chiefs.”

“ Let the city gates be closed against

them," said Statella; "we will yet find means to make examples of these rebels, and to shew them the power which law and justice can exert, when called on to suppress such insolent presumption."

"So many are their friends in Sciacca, and so various the private means they possess of entering the city, that it would be useless to close the gates; and besides, an open attack is not what we immediately fear; and all may yet be well," said don Giacomo, "if your excellenza would retire within the Casa di Perollo; our united strength might then defy open assaults and private machinations."

"Grateful as I feel for your attention, baron Pandolfina," said Statella, "I am sorry to decline it, but consider myself obliged to do so—we have yet much information to obtain, and many circumstances to investigate, and it would savour too much of partiality, were our proceedings carried on beneath your roof, and apparently under your influence and direction."

“The conduct of don Sigismund,” said Paolo Perollo, “will justify your acceptance of Pandolfina’s offer, signor. I would not urge you to an act which might look like partiality, did not the present aspect of affairs threaten the worst and most fatal consequences. You may even suspend your measures for a time, until we see what steps our opponents are prepared to take.”

“Representing the person of his Imperial majesty,” replied Statella, “it is not probable that the infatuation of the insurgents would venture to offer any violence to me; and by holding myself independent of your kindness, don Giacomo, I may prevent any farther outrages from being committed against your friends and family.”

“I wish not,” said don Paolo, “to excite any prejudice in the mind of your excellenza against the house of Luna; but from our knowledge of the dispositions of its various members, and from what we are able to learn of their present intentions;

it is clear that no trust is to be given to any show of moderation they may make. The disaffection of several of the chiefs to the present government, and the inveterate hatred they all bear towards our house, are become excitements too powerful to be conquered, even by the fear of utter destruction to all their party."

"The atrocious murder of Geronimo Ferrara shews," said Pandolfina, "how little regard they manifest to the mutual friends of Luna and myself; and did they not propose some undertaking of importance, would they have gathered together so great a number of men? Again let me urge you to take up your immediate residence with me."

"No," replied Statella, obstinately persevering in his original opinion; "it is impossible for men to be so void of reason, so transported by passion, as to venture such an insult against the majesty of the empire, or to attack the representative of sovereign power, with the certainty of bringing ruin on themselves. They might

expect, in the hurry of preparing for a foreign expedition, that the viceroy would overlook a trifling broil, or even an individual murder; but so daring an act as an assault upon a public minister of justice, sent with full powers from government, they could not hope would be passed over without the severest punishment."

"To any other set of men," replied don Paolo, "the arguments of your excellenza might perhaps apply; but the house of Luna have for years been approaching to this crisis, and given all their thoughts to the destruction of our race; the hour of contest is arrived, and the best method of counteracting their designs appears to be that which don Giacomo proposes. If your excellenza would retire within the walls of his castle, the authority you can there command may be exerted to call forth the loyalty of the people, who may otherwise not choose to take a part with either of our factions; but in dividing our force, we must all eventually fall, before we can either obtain the aid of our distant

friends, or the still more remote assistance of the viceroy."

The purpose of Statella remained, however, fixed ; no arrangement could induce him to change his resolution, and his friends gave up the point, after a long and strenuous endeavour to persuade him to listen to prudence and reason. As don Giacomo considered himself in some degree the cause of the dismissal of the troops, he felt responsible for Statella's future safety, and requested permission to send Margieri with a small band of men to protect him from the first effects of the storm, as they might perhaps secure a retreat to the Castel di Perollo, should such a measure be necessary.

This offer Statella did not refuse, though convinced there was but little chance of needing them.

An air of unusual gloom hung over the hospitable mansion of Perollo. Don Giacomo was anxious and uneasy, and continually reproached himself for the precipitancy with which he had dismissed the

aid the viceroy sent. Don Paolo, who had at the time resisted their departure to the utmost, now found every excuse for the conduct of his kinsman; his activity and exertions gave fresh spirits to the whole party, and his cheerfulness, in some degree, succeeded in removing the depression of Pandolfina. Hitherto he had been the unceasing advocate for peace, had softened every irritating event which had occurred between the rival houses, and, until the late outrages, been a never-failing advocate for count Luna. A different spirit now seemed to have taken possession of his bosom; and he appeared to regard the approaching contest rather with satisfaction than alarm. At all times a favourite with every member of his family, he now appeared their guardian-angel; his presence carried with it security and encouragement; the men regarded him with affectionate devotion, and the officers with confidence and respect.

The baroness had been apprised of the danger of a tumult, and the probability of

an attack upon the castle ; she had received the information with calm and unaltered serenity, and obeyed the directions of don Giacomo in removing, with her children and the other ladies, into the tower which stood within the interior court, without any evident symptoms of alarm.

The baroness Solanto was removed to a chamber as remote as possible from any part of the castle liable to attack, and every precaution taken to save her from unnecessary agitation and distress.

The countess Sambuca had, upon the first tidings of danger, been seized with a fit of enthusiastic devotion ; she had vowed pilgrimage to every shrine from St. Jago in Spain to the holy sepulchre itself ; had procured from the confessor of the castle absolution for all her sins ; and seemed expecting, though not with much impatience, a crown of martyrdom. She had borrowed an immense folio history of Santa Radagunda, and, with a large rosary on her arm, was seated in one corner of the

apartment to which the ladies had retired, sometimes reciting her ejaculations to her patron saint with astonishing rapidity, at others joining in conversation with whoever came near her.—“ Dear Concetta,” she said to the wife of Geronimo Perollo, “ how can you be wasting your time about your husband and children, when the assassins are at hand? I have made my peace with Heaven; and, blessed be Santa Radagunda! my jewels and wardrobe are at Sambuca, safe from these plunderers. I hope you have saved your pearls. Santissima Madre! that I was at Palermo—any where but in this horrible place!”

She then resorted to her book again, and, without comprehending a word, muttered over, in a half-audible tone of whining devotion, two or three pages respecting the foundation of a monastery by the saint whose legend was before her.

“ A curious employment, signora,” said madame Luchese, “ at a time like this, to be reading the dimensions of refectories, dormitories, and cloisters.”

“Don't disturb me,” said the countess; “it is a good book. I am sure I asked father Giuseppe to lend me a good book, and he brought me the history of this saint, who was martyred by the Saracens, as we shall be.”

She then resumed her employment, till another opportunity offered of disturbing her friends by her individual sorrows and lamentations; and at every pause, when her terrors returned, she resorted to the volume before her, and read with rapidity, as if she imagined that the quantity of the said good book would be an antidote against the approaching evils.

At the Castel di Luna the day passed in busy expectation. The count returned in the evening with a numerous attendance, and appeared in the highest spirits, as if the hour of his triumph was already come.

“You have considered my request, I hope, don Sigismund,” said Della Bardia, who met him soon after his arrival, “and are prepared to fulfil my wishes?”

“At present,” said count Luna, “I did

not think that any of our party would have pressed his private interests on my thoughts, when every moment should be given to our public measures ; much less did I suppose that such would have been the conduct of Della Bardia."

" I have too much at stake, signor, at this eventful time, to forget that which is due to others as well as myself."

" If possible," said Sigismund, " I will meet you in my mother's apartment, when all our arrangements are completed."

His forces arrived about two hours after sunset, near the walls of Sciacca, where they halted, and dismissed a messenger to the count with the tidings ; upon which he proceeded, with a considerable number, as secretly as possible, to the Porta di Palermo, which they succeeded in securing ; and after seizing the persons appointed to keep it, admitted as many of their party as they thought proper.

It had been determined to divide their forces into two squadrons, one of which was

placed under the command of don Michele Pugiades; and the other, in which were all the noblemen and cavaliers, was headed by count Luna in person. Pugiades and his band remained without the city walls, being stationed in the valley Dell' Abadia, under the Casa di Perollo, to prevent all egress from the gate which opened from thence into the country.

No sooner had the count admitted his friends than they began, without loss of time, to barricado the streets, so as to prevent all intercourse between don Giacomo and Statella, that neither might afford succour to the other. They possessed themselves also of the Porta di Santa Caterina, and the house of don Geronimo Perollo, which faced the greater gate of Pandolfina's castle, in which they found no resistance; don Geronimo having, with all the other friends of his family, removed within his kinsman's walls. Here they planted themselves, intending to make it their principal point of attack; and, for their better defence, threw up a breastwork, composed

of sacks filled with earth, to afford some shelter against the artillery which don Giacomo had planted on his battlements.

Francisco Perollo, the principal magistrate of the city, who lived near Santa Marguerita, at the other part of the town, informed of these proceedings, could no longer doubt the danger to which he had exposed himself, by neglecting the warning of Pandolfina. To attempt now to reach the castle, or to afford any assistance to don Giacomo, he considered hopeless; and mounting his horse, fled from the city with all the speed in his power, taking the road to Partanna, to raise the vassals of Perollo in aid of their chief.

Having seen his men to their allotted posts, placed vigilant officers over them, and enjoined the strictest silence till the signal should be given, don Sigismund returned for an hour or two to his castle. The chiefs whose services were required, were all upon their stations, and every thing awaited the morning light.

* Count Sigismund sought the apartment

of his mother, and was speedily followed thither by Della Bardia, who had resolved not to resign his demands, even at the last minute; the countess changed colour as he entered the room, and expressed her surprise at seeing him.

“It was by my appointment,” said the count. “The barone pressed me on my return this evening on the same subject—the acknowledgment of Francisca, and the resignation of her property. I could not attend to him at the time, nor can I now do more than repeat my former promises upon the matter—that as soon as we have fulfilled our meditated revenge against Pandolfina, Francisca shall be publicly presented to her family, and her claims of relationship confirmed by you, my mother, and by myself; without her personal introduction, I see not how the affair can be arranged.”

“And is this the opinion of your excellenza?” asked Accursi, turning to the countess with a look she perfectly understood.

“My wish,” she replied, “is to contribute to the happiness of both my children: I am willing to resign Francisca’s dower; but the consent of the other guardians of the Peralta property must also be obtained.”

“I have been trifled with,” said Della Bardia, again looking at the countess, who trembled violently.

Don Sigismund, astonished at her agitation, inquired the cause; uncertain of the length to which the malice of Della Bardia might provoke him, she feared the hour was come in which he would reveal to her son the secrets he possessed. How to appease and conciliate him she knew not; and conscious of having betrayed his cause, she was aware of the plea he might advance for no longer keeping terms with her.—“I am most willing,” she said at length, “to make any concession you demand, signor.”

“And instantly?” asked Accursi.

“Yes,” she faltered out, evidently under the impression of extreme terror.

The astonishment of count Luna increased.—“ There appears to be some undue influence exerted over your mind, my mother,” he said. “ The conduct of the barone requires explanation ; it has been throughout a tissue of mystery, which time will not allow me now to investigate ; but, until I am satisfied with respect to his motives, I forbid you to proceed in the business a step beyond where it has now gone. I deprecate all concessions and engagements entered into in your present state of mind, and insist upon all discussion being deferred till we are more at leisure to attend. For you, Della Bardia,” he continued, “ you have availed yourself of circumstances to form an alliance with our house, unauthorized by those to whom it was your first duty to apply. I do not wish or intend to publish the dissatisfaction such an act must necessarily have caused ; but excuse me if, in the present instance, I think that more attention is due from you towards the feelings of those

whom you have offended by such a precipitate and unwarrantable measure."

The barone had not expected to rouse these sentiments of opposition in don Sigismund, nor did he wish to provoke him. — "The countess," he replied, "can best explain the motives from which she acts; for myself, I confess that my anxiety to establish the rights of the baroness my wife, in case the present contest should terminate unfortunately to myself or your excellenza, has induced me to press the conclusion of the affair. But I will now leave it entirely to the discretion of the countess, who knows my wishes upon the subject, and with whose character I am so well acquainted."

With this compliance don Sigismund appeared somewhat appeased; the fears of the countess were relieved, and she protested her wish to make an immediate transfer of the property, and to put the parties in possession of all their legal rights.

A summons from Adriano called the count from his mother's chamber, and he desired Della Bardia to follow him. The night was wearing fast away, and the party in anxious expectation of the dawn which was to light them to vengeance and slaughter.

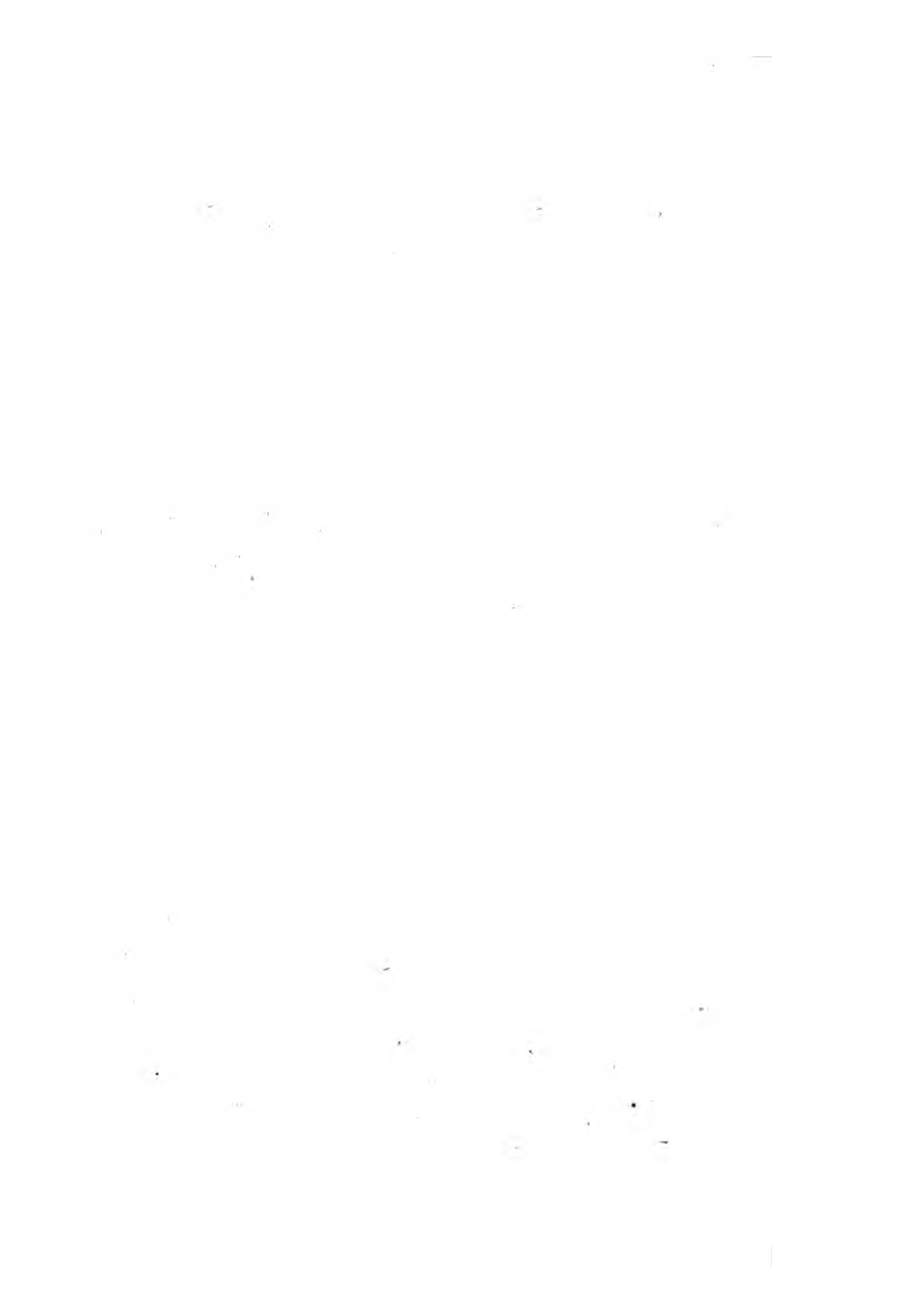
END OF VOL. III.

LUNA AND PEROLLO.



AN HISTORIC TALE.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall-Street, London.



THE
FEUDS
OF
LUNA AND PEROLLO;
OR, THE
FORTUNES
OF THE
HOUSE OF PANDOLFINA.

AN HISTORIC TALE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

Who set this ancient quarrel new abroad?
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began?
SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. IV.

LONDON:
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1821.

THE
FEUDS
OF
LUNA AND PEROLLO.

CHAPTER I.

And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim hors'd
Upon the silent couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. *Macbeth.*

WITH the first gleams of the morning the portal of the castle was thrown open, and the banners of Luna and Peralta borne out, followed by the whole of the party who had remained with don Sigismund. About an hundred men had been left with Pugiades, and others had been stationed

to protect the barricado, and to keep possession of the posts they had seized on during the night. Don Sigismund himself, in complete armour, followed his banner, and was surrounded by a numerous band of his principal friends, among whom were Adriano, Della Bardia, Ferrante Luchese, Nicola lo Vasco, Cesare Imbiagnia, Geronimo and Calogero Calandrino, Erasmo Loria, and many others of the first rank in Sciacca. The drums and trumpets sounded as the chief appeared, and a shout arose from the multitude, which echoed through the silent and deserted streets.

With wild and discordant cries, clattering their arms, and sounding their warlike instruments, the whole body proceeded towards the residence of Statella, against whom the rancour of the insurgents was excited, with scarcely less bitterness than against don Giacomo Perollo, the ancient object of their most inveterate hatred and detestation.

Startled from their slumbers by the sud-

den and unexpected tumult, many of the citizens escaped from their houses in horror and dismay ; others, in immoveable terror, awaited the approach of their expected foes without the power of exertion, either for escape or for defence ; but it was only against Pandolfina and Statella that the rage of Luna and his partisans was directed. The latter was destined to be the first object of attack, as likely to fall the easiest victim to their frenzy, his residence being destitute of defence, and himself surrounded by few followers in comparison with the numerous retainers of the family of Perollo.

Towards his abode then they proceeded with threats of vengeance for the death of Erasta, and the proceedings which had been instituted against their other associates. A storm of musquetry passed through the windows, and a flight of arrows which followed it announced to the inmates of the palazzo the fate which awaited them. Ladders were immediately ap-

plied to the walls, and an infinite number of the merciless assailants poured in at every aperture.

Some slight resistance was offered by Statella and his military companions; their valour was however vain against the overpowering strength of their foes, and they retired to a tower which formed part of the building; nor was even this retreat effected without the fall of one of the bravest of the devoted band. Antonio Margieri had thrown himself before the doorway through which Statella had retired, and alone and unsupported for some minutes, resisted the united force of the assailants.

Wearied out and oppressed by numbers, his strength was beginning to fail; his opponents gave a shout of triumph, and he retreated beneath the archway. Here he was in less danger of being surrounded, and in some degree relieved from the numbers which opposed him. But in vain had he laid three of his adversaries dead at his feet, and desperately wounded several

others; his own blood streamed profusely, and he felt his weakness rapidly increasing.

“This is my victim!” exclaimed a voice from the crowd, and Accursi forcibly made his way to the portal, beneath which the combat was continued.

Margieri recognized the murderer of his brother, and the ruffian who had once before sought his life. He rallied his spirits for a while, and returned the first blows of Della Bardia, with a strength renovated by the hope of avenging the fall of Pietro and of himself; he saw again the blood of his enemy follow the stroke of his weapon, but was now too much exhausted to keep up the combat. He retreated to a turn of the passage—his foes shouted again, and rushed upon him. He now feebly opposed his battered shield, which afforded little resistance to the might of Della Bardia, when a shrill scream of a female voice caused him to turn his head for an instant, and the sword of his antagonist was buried deep in his side. He staggered and fell at Della Bardia's feet, who trampled him

down, shouting—"Viva Luna e Peralta!" and was rushing forward when arrested by the female form from whence the cry proceeded.

A lady, hastily attired, having just risen from her bed, stood looking wildly around her—"Murderer!" she exclaimed, "you have slain my husband!"

The ruthless monster levelled a blow at her defenceless form, and she fell beside the slaughtered Antonio.

The crowd for an instant halted, as if appalled at the crime; but the rushing on of those behind impelled them forwards, and the bodies of Margieri and his hapless wife were trodden in the dust by the swarming multitude. The palazzo was soon filled in every part except the tower, to which Statella and some of his friends had retreated. The counsellors who had attended the general from Messina, the lawyers, alguazils, and domestics, were butchered in every apartment, and either hurled half dead from the windows into the street below, or trampled under the feet

of the murderers, like the gallant Margieri.

Every thing which could invite the hand of rapine and plunder soon disappeared. The informations which had been taken by Statella in his legal capacity were heaped together in the court, and soon reduced to ashes, whilst the greater part of the insurgents, with their principal leaders, were directing their attention to the retreat in which the first object of their vengeance had secured himself.

Most of the inhabitants of the palazzo, at the time of the attack, had been buried in sleep, and awakened by the tumult without; few of them had time to arm themselves, Margieri and two or three of his companions being the only persons who had not retired to rest.

Armed only with his sword, Statella had cut his way through the party who had first succeeded in entering, and was followed by such of his officers and men as had joined him in the moment of alarm. From one of the windows of the tower he had demanded the aid of all the loyal citi-

zens of Sciacca to defend his person, as the representative of their sovereign. He was answered only by a volley of musquetry and a flight of arrows, which struck down one of his companions beside him. The screams and cries of the murdered victims, which rose from every part of the palazzo, mingled with the shouts of the insurgents, announced to those who had retired the work of slaughter which was performing, and the fate which awaited themselves.

They resolved, at all events, to sell their lives as dearly as possible. Three or four of the men sent by Perollo, with one of the officers of Statella, who was tolerably accoutred for service, stationed themselves at the lower door of the tower, and for a considerable time resisted the united force of their enemies. One by one they fell beneath the musket balls of their assailants, and were cut in pieces on the spot where they fell. Every step of the ascent was manfully contested by the party within, and as perseveringly assaulted by the adherents of Luna. The Greek count

Georgio fought beside his friend Accursi, and with Luchese and Calogero Calandrino, was one of the principal leaders of the attack upon the tower, the interior of which they gained after a long and arduous conflict, and burst into the room in which was the object of their search, with the small remnant of his ill-fated friends.

As they rushed in, the sword of Statella cleft the helmet of one of the foremost, a kinsman of Della Bardia, of the race of D'Amato; he fell a lifeless corpse at the feet of the general, whose sword was shivered with the blow, and count Georgio, springing forward, laid Statella himself beside the victim of his short-lived triumph, having buried his sword deep in the bosom of the gallant and unarmed Catanese. He fell, and expired without a groan.

The swords of the other assassins soon completed their work of slaughter, and of all the inhabitants of the palazzo who were two hours before fearlessly sleeping, not one survived this exterminating massacre.

The bodies of the dead were stripped by the inferior vassals, and cast with ignominy from the tower.

Having searched the building to ascertain that no living soul had escaped their fury, the desperate band left the bloody scene, and advanced with tumultuous shouts of victory and vengeance towards the Casa di Perollo, the inhabitants of which soon guessed that their rejoicing was caused by the destruction of the unhappy Statella and his companions.

Their first act of hostility was to batter down one of the gates leading to the castle, called la Porta del Catogno; from thence they proceeded to another gate, which was attached to the church of St. Pietro belonging to the castle, and enclosed the whole south side of it. Count Luna then divided his troops into two bodies. Accursi, D'Amato, and Ferrante Luchese, were left with a large detachment to prosecute the enterprise against this gate of San Pietro, and exerted themselves with useless bravery, every assault being re-

pulsed with considerable loss to the partisans of Luna, of whom numbers fell, and more were wounded.

With the remainder of his force don Sigismund advanced against the principal entrance; but on the tower which surmounted it was stationed don Paolo Perollo, who, by the skilful management of the artillery, and the support of a few men armed with arquebusses, made the assailants pay dear for their temerity.

During these assaults on the north and western sides of the castle, Pugiades remained in the valley beneath the eastern wall. This chieftain had joined himself to the party of don Sigismund in a sudden fit of dislike to Pandolfina, with whom he was nearly connected by the marriage of his sister with don Federico Perollo, a deceased brother of don Giacomo, and upon whose death some dispute had arisen respecting the restitution of the dowry which Lucretia Pugiades had carried with her; the cause, however, for the quarrel was

but trifling, till it was blown into a flame by the artifices of Adriano.

Don Michele would gladly perhaps have seen the influence of Pandolfina reduced, and his pride humbled; but when he saw the extremity to which the violence of the party he had joined was likely to transport them, he would, had he not considered it too late, have retired with his auxiliaries from all further connexion with count Luna. The idea that his retreat during the heat of the contest might look like cowardice or a violation of his promises restrained him; but he remained an inactive spectator, and prevented the troops under his command from offering any hostilities to Perollo, who, knowing the banner of Pugiades, and perceiving his pacific intentions, permitted no sign of annoyance to be shewn towards them, though some of his artillery commanded the position which don Michele and his followers occupied, and the conduct of the two parties on this side appeared more like that of allies than of enemies.

ness and composure, and he contemplated the struggle with apparent satisfaction, and without any doubt as to its successful termination. His manners were cheerful, and even gay, and the reports he gave to the ladies of the impotent attacks of their enemies, could not fail to quiet the alarms even of the countess Sambuca, who chattered with her usual volubility, which was only occasionally interrupted by the thunders of the castle artillery, or the entrance of her husband.

The spirit of Pandolfina pervaded every part of the fortress; wherever the assailants appeared to threaten, he was seen animating his men to action; every point which seemed weaker than another, was defended with skill, and escaped not his instant observation.

At length the evening closed in, and the trumpets of count Luna sounded a retreat. He retired, little satisfied with the event of the struggles, though earlier in the day he had fully expected that his overpowering force would have given him

a speedy victory, and that ere night his enemy would have been a prisoner in his hands; but when he reflected upon the resolution and skill which had been shewn by Perollo in the defence, he could not but acknowledge that his prospect of triumph seemed doubtful, and with far other feelings he retired from the scene of action, than those with which he had first advanced to the attack.

On the retreat of his enemies, the baron Pandolfina instantly began to repair the mischief they had done. Stones, mattresses, and sacks of wool, were placed in various parts of the walls, to arrest the shot and arrows of the besiegers, and all the reservoirs filled with water, to resist any other attempt to fire the building; whilst to shew that all were vigilant within, and to prevent any attack under cover of the darkness, watch-fires were kindled in the towers and turrets of the castle, which threw far and wide a terrific glare over the city and its environs, and enabled those upon the walls to take aim at any of the

centinels posted by their enemy, who might advance within the range of their guns, and who on their parts were not inactive; but at intervals during the night was heard the pealing of their muskets and the whistling of their arrows.

Before he retired for the night, Perollo addressed his men with thanks for their brave exertions during the day; promises of noble rewards, and every argument most likely to encourage them in maintaining a gallant defence till the arrival of succours, for the sake of themselves, their wives and children. His kind and affectionate manner gave additional weight to his words, and all his auditors united in protesting their determination to fall beneath the ruins of the castle, rather than yield it to their sanguinary foes, or submit to the slightest degradation.

During the trying scene of the day, the baroness Pandolfina had shewn few symptoms of alarm; the paleness of her cheek had passed unnoticed by most of the party; don Giacomo and Marguerita only observ-

ed it attentively. The former, by an air of gaiety, had endeavoured to dissipate her anxiety, and to inspire her with the cheerfulness he felt himself; the latter had mustered all her resolution to banish her past sorrows and quiet her present fears, feeling justly that it was only by exerting herself in such a season as this that she could prove, beyond a doubt, the sincere and fervent gratitude she felt towards her kind friends; and by her attentions, and appearing herself to feel no apprehensions, she succeeded in supporting the spirits of her benefactress. It was no easy task to suppress her own feelings; but the affectionate gratitude of the signora Landolini was more than equal to it, though the perverse loquacity of the countess Sambuca frequently made the trial more severe by recurring to past events, which Marguerita could not remember without the deepest affliction.

When the castle artillery had thundered on the assailants, and her first alarms had subsided, she exclaimed—"Oh, dearest

Marguerita ! for mercy's sake tell us ! Is it like the dreadful scene on board the corsair, when you were first carried off ?”

“ I had no gallant defenders—no one on whom to rely but Heaven,” she replied.

“ You certainly had all the terror to yourself,” continued the countess, “ which, I suppose, made the affair so particularly interesting, for I have heard my dear departed friend,” here she gave a deep sigh, “ signor Gaetano, express his admiration of your fortitude and resignation, and I have seen him listen with attention to the detail of the whole affair, which he must have heard several times, though, I assure you, I could scarcely get from him one attempt at condolence, when I related the whole of my dreadful misfortune at the time the letiga was overturned, and I bruised my arm about five years back ; besides which, one morning, during mass, at San Pietro, I told him the whole history of the frightful rat I saw at Sambuca, when I first went there after my marriage, and the count was so inhuman as to insist

upon my remaining. Do you know, my dear creature, he positively refused to leave the castle, though I assured him I should inevitably expire, and really had several fits upon the occasion. Well, my dear friend, I related the whole of this shocking incident in the church, and when I had done, he made some stupid remark about the music. Could any thing be so afflicting? I hope now, when we have half of us been butchered, that I shall have something to relate, which may be as entertaining as your story of the pirates."

To escape from her persecutor, Marguerita retired for a while to the chamber of the baroness Solanto, who was much disturbed and terrified by the discharge of the artillery, and the evident confusion which it was impossible to conceal from her entirely.

Don Giacomo, fearful of the effect it might have upon her, repaired to her as soon as he could, and made light of the disturbance—"Dissatisfied with the strict proceedings instituted against them for

their violent conduct, count Luna and his partisans," he said, "are endeavouring to terrify the civil authorities into submission to his will, and is disposed to try his skill against our walls. It is a pity too that his misguided folly should involve him in the ruin which is sure to overtake his rebellion. I have been obliged to order my men to keep off his turbulent associates by the noise of my artillery, which I regret from the disturbance it may occasion to your excellenza."

"Your kindness, signor," replied the invalid, "has indeed been unremitting; to me it will soon cease to be necessary; but for my poor Costanza I trust it will still be exerted, either till the restoration of her lost father, or till her family can receive her. The eternal gratitude of all our connexions cannot repay the debt we owe to you, for your constant and active friendship to us all. My sufferings in this world, I feel, must soon cease, and were it not for the distressing condition in which I leave my beloved child, I could

hail the approach of death with satisfaction."

"My dear mother, talk not thus," said Costanza; "you are low and terrified, but indeed not so much worse as you fear."

"My child, do not deceive yourself; let me take this, perhaps last, opportunity of speaking to my noble friend."

"Dear donna Costanza," said the baron, "I trust her *eccellenza* is much better than she thinks herself; but do not let us agitate her by any opposition; and be assured, madam," he said, addressing the baroness, "that till the restoration of the baron, which I hope will be very soon, his daughter shall be as much my care as if she were my own; and if there is anything in my power, now or hereafter, which will contribute to your comfort, I beseech you to command me: but these storms will soon blow over, and the offenders punished. We shall all live to tell them to our children's children, as tales of other times; and for any services I am able to render, some of my family may per-

haps be desirous to tax your gratitude at a very high price."

"I can think of none which it would not be happiness to pay," said the baroness, "and your confidence in the event of this struggle with our ruthless persecutor gives me great comfort for you and those I leave behind me. I know you will exert every effort to restore my husband to liberty, if he is still in this world, and your assurances of care of my poor child give me the only consolation I am now capable of feeling."

The baron then returned to the baroness and her companions, and shortly after don Paolo entered. The baroness did not trust herself to speak; but she looked at him with intense anxiety, and he answered to her looks—"All has gone on through the day, even as your excellenza could wish."

"Do you tell me so?" she said, with a faint smile. "I feared Pandolfina had assumed cheerfulness to calm our fears."

"Don Giacomo could not have express-

ed more confidence than is felt by every individual within the walls. Our loss to-day has been almost nothing—the enemy's very great, and every thing is in such perfect order for to-morrow, that all but the centinels may rest as quietly as if count Luna and his party were not in existence."

"After toiling all day," said Pandolfina to the baroness, "think what a refreshment and comfort it must be to me and Paolo also to find you serene and tranquil, and able to attend to our repose and accommodation, instead of our having to quiet fears, which, as they are as often as not directed to subjects in which no rational causes of alarm exist, reason has very little chance of alleviating."

"I am sure," said the countess Sambuca, "the wretches have broken all the windows in the state apartments, for I heard the most dreadful riot in that direction, and it would be so shocking to have the new hangings spoiled."

"It would indeed," said the baron, smiling; "but your excellenza's known taste

and industry would give me hopes of some from your hands, and those of our other fair cousins, which would far outvalue those destroyed."

"Santa Maria!" said the countess, "what a horrible idea! It is well the count is not here: if such a fancy once got possession of him, he would insist on my working tapestry, or doing some shocking useful thing for every room at Sambuca."

"Here is the count himself coming, I think," said don Paolo.

"Is he indeed? Then I am sure I must go and visit the dear interesting baroness Solanto, and the sweet humble-minded Costanza. I have not been near them all day."

"No, for Heaven's sake, don't!" said Marguerita, running to prevent her; "your excellenza had better defer your visit till to-morrow morning."

"My dear creature, by to-morrow we may all be killed, and then, you know, I can never go at all."

“Do not be under any alarm,” said the count, who just entered, “for our foes must be too much in want of rest to disturb us to-night, and to-morrow we will find them too good employment to give them time to annoy you.”

Before her husband had ceased speaking, the countess had retired to her legend and her corner, with one of Perollo's children, whom she detained an unwilling auditor of a miserable detail of what might happen from those terrible people the Lunas, until the child began to weep audibly from terror, and was rescued from the general tormentor.

CHAPTER II.
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De mon fiel abreuvé à mes fureurs en proie  
Combattre avec audace, et mourir avec joie.

*Henriade.*

AT the dawn of morning, Ferrante Lucchese was sent with a detachment of the forces to continue the attack upon the side of St. Pietro, which church was entirely destroyed during the conflict. With another party don Pietro Gilberto, a Palermitan cavalier, attached to count Luna, took his way through the Porta di Santa Caterina, and sounding their drums and trumpets, shouting "Viva Luna and Peralta!" they mounted the roof of a palazzo which faced the great gateway. From this post they commenced a discharge of guns and cross-bows against don Paolo,



who was stationed on the tower. Being now more nearly on a level with the besieged, their shot took more effect, and many of the companions of don Paolo were wounded, but he himself escaped, though wherever the conflict was the hottest, there was seen the gleaming of his white armour and the waving of his plume; nor did the assailants purchase this advantage without feeling the vengeance of the gallant defenders; torrents of blood poured from the roof of the palazzo, and many of Gilberto's men fell lifeless from the summit of the building; but the enthusiasm of both parties seemed to increase with the increasing danger.

Amongst those who distinguished themselves in this conflict was don Antonio di Noto, a cavalier justly celebrated for his military talents and bravery; he had mounted amongst those who had taken possession of the palazzo, and had done considerable damage to the adherents of Perollo. The count Sambuca had been the chief victim of his unerring aim, and was borne

from the scene of action senseless and bleeding.

The countess, when informed of the accident, rent the air with screams, notwithstanding she was assured that her husband's wound, though severe, did not appear to be dangerous.

“ Let us render him all the service we can,” said the baroness Pandolfina. “ Come, my dear madam, you must be impatient to be with him.”

“ Jesu Maria, baroness !” again screamed the countess, “ I cannot endure the sight of blood. Oh ! my dear, dear Sambuca ! pray let him have a priest and a doctor,” and again her grief was vented in cries and lamentations.

The baroness, seeing that nothing like rational assistance was to be obtained from the lady, left the room to render all the aid in her power to the wounded man.

Don Paolo saw the fall of the count, and resolving to avenge him, singled out one of his opponents who appeared to be of consequence ; he levelled his harque-

buss, but a vassal of Gilberto passing at the instant, received the fatal blow. Again Perollo loaded his piece, and watched his opportunity; the ball struck with impetuous force the buckler of don Antonio, and smote it with such violence against his breast, that he fell from the parapet near which he stood, and was shattered to atoms in his descent.

Don Paolo and his companions raised a shout of triumph at their success, which was answered by cries of defiance and a volley from the friends of don Antonio, who seemed determined to revenge his loss.

Accursi d'Amato had been dispatched with a considerable detachment to the Porta delli Bagni, a gate adjoining the house of Cosmo Luchese, from which was an internal communication with the Casa di Perollo. The noble owner of this mansion was a member of a distinct branch of the house of Luchese, from which the countess Caltabellotta descended. Both don Cosmo and his father had married relatives

of Perollo, to whom they were firmly attached.

Hoping to effect an entrance into the castle on this side, Della Bardia was sent to make the attempt; the care of don Giacomo, however, had anticipated the danger, and the house was strongly barricaded. The assailants reared scaling-ladders against the south wall, and poured in at the windows such a continued discharge of balls and arrows, that no one could for some time approach them. At length, amidst a shower of hostile weapons, three of the gallant defenders endeavoured to return the fire of their enemies, and advancing to the windows, laid two of their adversaries on the ground by their shafts, and slightly wounded Della Bardia; but their valour was fatal to themselves, and they sunk under the numberless missiles which were aimed at them the instant they appeared.

At this time the castle was surrounded on three sides, and the battle continued obstinate and bloody during great part of

the morning; machines were brought to endeavour to batter down the walls, but with little or no success, except where Accursi had succeeded in making a breach in the house of Luchese; here, however, don Giacomo had brought two pieces of artillery to bear upon the assailants, and made a tremendous slaughter of the partisans of Luna.

Amidst the combatants, the gigantic figure of Accursi was eminently conspicuous; his dark plumes waved high over the heads of the surrounding multitude, and he appeared rejoicing in the scene of blood and desolation. By his side was Francisco Sacchetta, captain of the Lances, who had joined don Sigismund from Salemi, and who distinguished himself during the day by his intrepid courage: a shaft from a cross-bow at length pierced his eye, and at the same time a shot carried off his right arm. He fell weltering in his blood; a cry of vengeance burst from his associates, and Della Bardia, ex-



horting them to avenge the fall of Sacchetta, planted a ladder against the breach, and rushed through it sword in hand.

An exclamation from the besieged in the tower above caught the watchful attention of Pandolfina—"Follow me," he cried, to those nearest his person, and with the swiftness of lightning flew to the passage which led into the house of Luchese. The figure of Accursi darkened the entrance; the harquebuss of Pandolfina was levelled in an instant, and Della Bardia lay prostrate at the threshold.

"Forward!" cried Perollo to his followers, as he rushed towards the body.

Count Giorgio raised the fallen chieftain with inconceivable quickness, and aided by his men, conveyed him down the ladder, whilst a violent contest took place at the portal. Perollo was at length victorious; the partisans of Luna fled before him, and retreating with his friends again into his castle, the passage was immedi-

ately closed against all future danger, by battering down part of the mansion from above.

The body of Accursi was conveyed into the air, and his helmet taken off. The ball had lodged in his head; but he still lived, though speechless, and after a few moments appeared to revive. His valour had excited in his followers the highest respect, and they now crowded round him bewailing his misfortune; he was sensible of their conduct, and seemed perfectly aware of his own situation, intimating by signs a wish to be removed from the scene, and waving his hand to his soldiers, pointed to the towers of the castle, as if exciting them to revenge his death by the destruction of Perollo. He was then carried to the house of his kinsman Imbiagnia, as being nearest to the spot, and information of the unfortunate event dispatched to don Sigismund.

The character of Della Bardia was not such as to have conciliated the affection of his family; but their knowledge of his

firmness and resolution, and their esteem for his bravery, made them deeply lament the fatal catastrophe, and Luna, in particular, well knew the worth of his long-tried services and attachment, which, from whatever cause it proceeded, made him, under present circumstances, one of the greatest losses he could have sustained. He commanded that every care should be taken of his wounded friend, and the countess Caltabellotta informed of the accident.

Pietro Gilberto and his party, from the roof of the palazzo, still continued to maintain their conflict with those upon the tower, with some loss on both sides, but chiefly on the part of the besiegers. Despairing of driving his enemies from their station, and confiding in the bravery of his followers, don Pietro at length descended from his post, and with more than an hundred men advanced furiously to the castle gate, to endeavour once more to fire it. This movement was observed by don Paolo, and instantly provided against: he

commanded a large mortar to be filled with chains, nails, stones, and whatever means of offence was at hand, and discharged it at the advancing column, who were swept down in multitudes, and nearly the whole party killed or wounded by the blow.

The adherents of Luna stood aghast at this new method of destruction. Don Paolo perceived their consternation, and his artillery was opened upon them with fresh fury. The space before the castle was covered with the slaughtered followers of Gilberto, the remnant of whom began to give way, and fled in all directions; the friends of Perollo shouted in triumph; the gates were thrown open, and don Paolo, at the head of only twelve men, rushed out upon their routed foes.

Don Pietro had halted, transfixed with wonder and dismay, and was nearly abandoned by his men, when a bolt from the cross-bow of Perollo pierced his side. He turned and joined his flying host. At the entrance of the street of Santa Caterina, he met don Sigismund and Adriano, and

staggering towards the count, fell at his feet, and instantly expired.

The alarm spread by the fugitives, and the fall of Gilberto, reached the ears of Ferrante Luchese, who hastened with a considerable reinforcement to their aid, upon which don Paolo retired, and safely reconducted his brave companions within the walls. All the exhortations of Ferrante, and the force of his example, could not, after this, bring his people to a fresh assault; they had received too severe a lesson from the hands of don Paolo to venture again within reach of his fire, or to expose themselves to the danger of another sally; and gladly did the partisans of Luna hear the signal for retreat, which sounded as sunset closed the bloody and disastrous day which had seen the fall of their boldest leaders, and the flower of their troops, without giving them any advantage to boast against their impregnable enemy.

Having placed guards for the night, count Luna retired to his castle, much



dispirited at the events which had deprived him of his brave friends Della Bardia and Gilberto, and at the fruitless sacrifice of so many other faithful and devoted adherents: during the night the chief commanders assembled to deliberate on the unpromising state of their affairs.

Pugiades and Bartolomeo Tagliavia were almost the only advocates for peace; the former urged that they had now given their enemy a lesson of their courage and resolution in redressing their wrongs, and though they had not effected an entrance into the castle, still they had cut off many of their adversaries; and that rather than prosecute the affair, there could be no doubt but that don Giacomo would make some sacrifice and submission, of no less value than the destruction of a greater portion of his vassals; his men would soon be recruited, but his pride, once brought down to submit, could not easily rise to the height to which it had hitherto soared.

Don Michele pointed out the sacrifice

at which they had maintained the contest, and the little chance they had of being more successful on the morrow—"The walls of the castle," he said, "were uninjured; the spirits of the besieged undaunted, whilst their own troops were dispirited and disheartened. If with eight hundred men," he continued, "we have failed in storming their fortress, can we hope to be more fortunate with our forces weakened and reduced? Their friends are likely to increase; succours will arrive from every quarter, and from what resources can we multiply our numbers? Every man we can command has been brought into action, and if we waste our forces by a continuation of these useless attacks, what prospect can we have of compelling our enemies to terms hereafter, upon which our eventual safety must depend? My advice is, that terms be offered to Perollo—a due submission extorted from him, and some secure guarantee required against a renewal of the oppression to which we have been subject."

Bartolomeo Tagliavia agreed as to the policy of treating with Perollo—"The populace," he said, "were vehemently attached to his party, and had only been kept from rising tumultuously in his defence by their terror of the armed adherents of the count; the bad success of the last two days would encourage them to make a movement in favour of don Giacomo, and count Luna would be surrounded on all sides, even before the distant friends of Perollo could arrive. Our own troops," he added, "are much disheartened, and the catastrophe of Gilberto and his detachment has struck them with such a panic, that they could not again be rallied. During the night their ardour will continue to abate; they will learn the various misfortunes which occurred in other points of attack, and by to-morrow we shall find them more anxious to seek protection within the walls of Luna Castle, than to encounter the valour of don Paolo, and the terrors of his irresistible artillery."

Adriano thought it would be easy to

lure don Giacomo from his walls by proposing an amnesty, and that his insolence would undoubtedly give occasion to their followers to avenge it; their impetuosity could not be restrained; and if Perollo thus fell a victim to his own imprudence, he only would be to blame. The chiefs of the party would avoid the danger they might incur by continuing their acts of violence, and might, as they found most politic, punish or connive at the murder which the impatience of their followers, and the provocation of their enemy, would cause.

A silence of some length succeeded this proposal; the chiefs appeared not fully to comprehend the meaning of Peralta, and Ferrante Luchese requested an explanation.

“Our cause,” answered Adriano, “is that of justice; we are assembled to deliver ourselves from intolerable oppression, and to punish a long course of injuries against ourselves and fellow-citizens. We have used all the means we have of open

war, and since these have failed, stratagem and private revenge must have their way. In every nation, and in every age, when tyrants have fallen, by whatever means their end was compassed, succeeding generations have approved and justified the hand which struck the blow. By one great act of slaughter, our island was delivered from its French oppressors, and the name of Giovanni di Procida will for ever be consecrated in the memory of every true Sicilian. Let us do for Sciaeca what the Sicilian Vespers did for our forefathers; let us, as they did, lull our foes into a state of fancied security, and having persuaded them to lay aside their arms, let us resume our own, and fulfil our purposed vengeance. The disposition of Giacomo is bold and confident; he may be tempted to trust our faith, and made to feel our resolution. Pandolfina thus cut off, the rest will fall an easy conquest."

When Adriano had concluded, silence again prevailed till Ferrante once more addressed him—"I believe, signor barone,



I shall speak the sentiments of all our friends, at least of all whom I should wish to see amongst the number, in requesting that we may be no more insulted by your dastardly advice. I am no orator; I cannot recount all the successful murders in which the offenders have escaped the hands of the hangman: to yourself I leave such studies, and you will, I doubt not, one day, find them serviceable. We are, signor Peralta, a band of soldiers and of gentlemen, met to avenge our wrongs in open warfare. Had he required the hand of an assassin, count Luna would not have summoned together his family to seek for one: but I will not waste the time of these brave cavaliers in combating an opinion which meets with the same feelings of abhorrence from us all. It appears to me that the only want from which we at present suffer is that of artillery. Could we once succeed in making a breach in the wall, there would be little danger but that our brave followers would force their way into the interior; and had we but an op-

portunity of meeting upon equal terms, our superior numbers and our equal bravery must be victorious. It is not probable, as no impression has been made upon his outworks, that we shall find Perollo more inclined to submission than before the contest began; he will argue from our offers that we feel our weakness, and consequently reject the treaty, which will tend only to spread alarm through our already-dispirited troops."

As Luchese paused for a moment, Adriano again began—"I did not expect from signor Ferrante the very temperate reproof I have received; but I am not desirous of railing in return, or I might ask how his high and mighty spirit could be amongst the foremost in the unexpected attack upon the vassals of Perollo, or in the slaughter of the insolent Statella? It would surely have been more accordant with his lofty and romantic notions, to have sent his heralds and pursuivants, to announce his honourable intention to cut the throats of the party in their beds, ac-

According to the strictest rules of chivalry ; but signor Luchese has pointed out the wants under which we labour, and discovered the errors of others ; may I venture to request he will discover a remedy, and by his prodigious ingenuity furnish us with the artillery we stand in need of."

Luchese listened without heeding the taunts of Adriano, and replied with temper to his question—" I have been informed that Francisco Perollo, the captain of the city, has fled from his post. We have the honour to see amongst our friends the barone del Nadore and the brave Maurici, who, being the only two of the Giorati capable of acting, what prevents them from commanding the city artillery to be delivered to our use, and to what better purpose can these guns be put than to secure the freedom and welfare of the citizens?"

The proposal of Ferrante was warmly approved, and the Giorati called on for their consent.

Del Nadore highly extolled the wisdom

of Luchese and the plan he proposed, but declined giving the order himself, and wished to put the whole upon Maurici.

Don Sigismund however declared that he did not wish to involve either of the gentlemen in future trouble, and ordered Luchese to remove the guns as soon as morning dawned.

Pugiades made one more fruitless effort for peace, which had but little chance of being attended to, and concluded by thanking Luchese for the declaration of his sentiments on Adriano's proposed scheme of treacherous assassination, in reprobating which he said every honourable man amongst them must have united.

Stung by his censure, Adriano impatiently observed that don Michele Pugiades, the advocate and the relation of Perollo, might well attempt to excite discord between the friends of count Luna, though the fate of that impertinent spy Ferrara might have been a lesson to all who joined in their councils only to weaken and betray them.

“Count Luna,” said Pugiades, “has this nefarious and abusive partisan your countenance, in thus threatening and calumniating your friends and allies?”

“The vehemence of Peralta, and his attachment to our cause, have betrayed him into a warmth,” answered Luna, “for which he will, I know, hereafter apologize.”

“Count Luna,” replied Pugiades, “this is not sufficient; you must disown his insolence. I had hoped that the rebuke he met with from the gallant Luchese would have proceeded from yourself; your conscience may find some plea to exculpate your silence, but for the aspersions he has dared to cast on me, and the threats he has presumed to hold forth, I require from you a disavowal.”

Luna was about to reply in wrath, but was interrupted by Luchese, who protested against prolonging any cause for discord amongst themselves.

Sigismund recollected himself, and declared his disapprobation of the conduct of



Peralta; though not very graciously made, the concession was received by don Michele, and the party separated.

The mind of the countess Caltabellotta during the scenes which had passed was involved in a conflict of passions which at times had been nearly insupportable. To obtain full and ample vengeance against the house of Perollo was the first wish of her heart, and to obtain it through the valour and conduct of don Sigismund, the summit of her ambition; yet now that all her long-cherished hopes were on the eve of fulfilment, she trembled for the event. That victory must be the final reward of their exertions, was what she never thought of doubting; but the price at which it might be purchased she dreaded to consider. It was possible that Sigismund might fall. The anxiety of Della Bardia to arrange the claims of Francisca, in case of such an event, had pressed the subject upon her mind, and when once the scene of blood began—when she heard the clang of arms, the thunder of the hostile artil-

lery, and witnessed the hurry and preparation for the acts of carnage around her, she could not but remember that the heir of Luna and Peralta was vulnerable and mortal as the meanest of his followers; and when she reflected on the dreaded Accursi, she trembled at the idea either of his life or death: from the scene of action she had messengers incessantly; her time was principally spent in her private oratory, and her vows for the safety of her son most fervent and unceasing; if there was one feeling in the breast of the countess Luna which resembled virtue, it was maternal love. In Sigismund was centered all her pride, all her ambition; and to exalt his name and honour was the study of her life. He was the idol to which she had sacrificed every feeling but hatred and revenge.

With impatient anxiety she watched the countenance of every one who brought her tidings, to anticipate, if possible, their details. At length came one whose face

spoke him the bearer of ill. The countess held her breath for an instant, as she looked at the man—"Is he dead?" she exclaimed.

"Not yet," replied the man; "but it is impossible that he can long survive."

The countess stamped in an agony of grief, and was rushing to the door—"Where is he?" she exclaimed—"where is my murdered son?"

The man looked astonished.

"Did you not say count Luna was dying?" she asked, in a voice hoarse from emotion.

"Eccellenza, no!" replied the man, staring as if to ascertain whether her intellects were sound.

"Fool! idiot!" she cried, her grief changed into passion, "why did you answer me in the affirmative?"

"May it please your excellenza," said the man, "I told the truth. I saw the barone della Bardia borne away after his wound, and was dispatched hither by don Marco Luchese to inform you of the event."

When the messenger mentioned the name of Della Bardia, the countess started, and throwing herself into a chair, remained silent for several minutes.

The man proceeded to detail all he knew of the affair, but the lady was too much engrossed by her own reflections to heed him.

“He is not dead,” at length she said.

“No,” replied the man; “but it is impossible he can recover. He is conveyed to the house of Pietro Imbiagnia, and I dare say one of the monks from San Francisco will soon be with him, to take his confession, and speed his soul to paradise, which may San Pietro soon admit, together with that of your excellenza and myself!” he added, devoutly crossing himself.

The countess again sat some minutes in silent reflection. At length she said, turning to her women—“Order what servants can be found to attend me instantly to the house of Imbiagnia.”

“Your excellenza,” said one of them,

“will not expose yourself to the confusion of the streets at present?”

“Obey me without loss of time,” was the only reply; and with what few men could be found she took her way to the house whither Della Bardia had been conveyed from the scene of his fall.

Her agony at the idea of any confession he might make, or from any steps which might be taken after his death by those to whom his secret transactions were known, as he had threatened her, in case she attempted to remove him by assassination, now overpowered every other feeling, and what line of conduct to pursue she was undecided. If she could extort from him the knowledge of the place in which Pietro, her tool and confidant, was confined, she thought she should not so much dread the events of a deathbed confession, when his understanding might be represented as deranged.

On arriving at the house, she impatiently demanded to be conducted to the barone della Bardia. The family of Im-



biagnia had all removed from their residence, in consequence of the tumults, and taken up their abode in a cassino at some distance from the city. Don Pietro was with the troops at the siege, and only two or three domestics left in the house. By them the countess was conducted to the chamber of the wounded baron. He was placed upon a couch, and attended only by one of his own followers and a surgeon; the latter had just examined his wound, and declared his skill of no avail. The patient, he said, might linger for some few hours, or even days; but the ball was so lodged as to render it impossible to extract it, and his services being of no use, he was preparing to retire, for the purpose of rendering assistance to others who stood in need of it, and who were in a less-hopeless condition than Accursi, when, as he was about to quit the room, the countess Caltabellotta entered; she advanced rapidly to the couch, and gazed for some moments on the prostrate form of him whom most she feared and hated upon earth, yet whose

death was an event she contemplated with infinite alarm—"Accursi," she said, "I heard of your misfortune with the deepest sorrow, and am come to render you any aid or consolation in my power."

The wounded man slowly unclosed his eyes; their large dark orbs, now deprived of their fierceness, glared upon her with a glossy lustre, which made her shudder as she beheld him. He appeared to make an effort to speak; the breath rattled in his throat; with a groan the most appalling he again closed his eyes; the blood welled from his wound; he grasped the side of the couch with convulsive strength, and struggled violently for an instant.

"The baron seems incapable of speech," said the surgeon, "and suffers terribly from every attempt: it is cruel to torture him."

"Is there no means of restoring him for an instant to the power of articulation," asked the countess, "at any hazard?"

"None," replied the man, "that I know of. He may possibly recover his

speech in time, but no artificial means can aid it."

"I will remain with my dear kinsman," said the lady to the attendant of Della Bardia; "my women shall wait in the anti-room, and render any assistance I may want."

The man was about to depart, when Accursi endeavoured again to articulate, but in vain; a second struggle and convulsion took place, after which he remained quiet; and the surgeon withdrew, followed by the vassal who had been watching by the wounded man when the countess arrived. The lady closed the door, and ordered her women to allow no one to enter unexpectedly, as it might alarm the sufferer.

She seated herself beside the bed, and watched the dying baron in silence. He lay for some minutes still and motionless; his eyes closed, his respiration difficult, and his body at times convulsed by internal agony. Could she but ascertain one thing, the countess thought she should feel at peace for ever; yet the present

state of the sufferer made her hopeless of attaining this end. - It was true, there was now no fear of any confession being made by him which might betray her secret ; but he had always informed her that there was some other depository beside his own breast, which the event of his death would throw open to the world, and with this anticipation she was now tortured almost to distraction.

At length the eyes of Della Bardia again unclosed. The countess watched with intense anxiety every motion of his features ; he looked towards her, and fixed his regards steadily upon her—" Do you know me, Della Bardia ?" she asked.

He appeared to attend to the sound of her voice. She sank on her knees beside the couch—" Accursi," she said, " your fate in this world is decided. As you need mercy for your manifold offences, have compassion upon me ; restore the pledges you possess ; give me some intimation where they may be found, and where the wretched Pietro is now confined."

A slight convulsion crossed the features of the wounded man, but he gave no sign of compliance with her prayer.

“*Accursi*,” she continued, “if you have a wish on earth—if you have a command to be fulfilled, by all the saints in Heaven, it shall be complied with, so you but relieve my anxious suspense! Concealment can no longer be of use to you. The exposure of my errors to the world would but disgrace count Luna and our family, bring dishonour on our house, and advance no purpose of your own. Hear me, *Della Bardia*—you are going to your long account; the crimes you have been guilty of in this life are numerous and heavy; release me from my suspense, and all the spiritual treasures and indulgences of the church shall be purchased to release you from the flames of purgatory.”

A fresh convulsion shook the frame of the sufferer; he groaned heavily, writhed his body in torture, and relapsed into insensibility.



For some hours he continued with occasional symptoms of returning sense, and appeared to struggle hard with the agonies of death, which did not however release him from his sufferings. The countess remained with him, at every interval tormenting him by her importunities, making every promise she could think most probable to tempt him to remove her fears, yet ignorant whether her prayers were comprehended, and, worse than all, without having her anxieties lessened or relieved.

Don Sigismund and several of the chieftains of the party visited the house of Imbiagnia; but Della Bardia paid little attention either to their entrance or departure, except once, when he apparently made a faint attempt to detain count Giorgio with him. This movement, however, was only observed by the countess, whose purpose it did not suit to notice it; but it fixed a suspicion at once upon her mind, that this bosom friend of Accursi was

the repository of his secret, and she resolved to watch him accordingly.

In the Casa di Perollo the events of the day had been a subject of considerable satisfaction; they had indeed lost several men, but the destruction of their enemies had been as ten to one; and the principal chiefs of the party, with the exception of the count Sambuca, had escaped from the danger without a wound. The valour and exploits of don Paolo were the theme of every tongue, and the castle resounded with his praises.

The baroness now began to look with more confidence to the final issue of the contest, and every day she thought that the succours of their friends must be at hand—a subject which was seldom absent from her mind. The strength of the fortress had been sufficiently tried to give well-grounded assurance that it could for many days resist, as it had done, the assaults of the besiegers, who must be considerably weakened and disheartened by every fruitless effort.

The baroness Solanto suffered severely from the constant tumult and alarm, and her friends even feared that if the siege lasted but a few days longer, she must sink under her weakness.—The count Sambuca, though severely wounded, was not considered as at all in a dangerous state, and received every assistance which the kindness and care of his hostess could give. His own lady, from the first moment of the accident, persisted in declaring that his wounds were mortal, and it was long before she could be persuaded to visit him, and not until his desire to see her had been repeatedly announced. The baroness and Marguerita at length persuaded her to obey his wishes, and she was conducted to the couch of her wounded husband.

“ You have alarmed yourself very needlessly, dear Theresa,” said the count: “ my accident, though a painful one, yet will be of no worse consequence than that of rendering me a useless burthen to my friends, and of preventing me from return-

ing the favour of don Sigismund till he is quieted by some other hand."

"Oh! don't deceive yourself and me, Sambuca!" said the lady; "you must die—indeed, indeed you must—you don't look like a living man. Bless me! you are as pale as a spectre! Oh, Santa Radagunda! he is going! Maria delli Giumari, defend me!"

"The loss of blood I have suffered," said the count, "has perhaps taken the colour from my cheeks; but assure yourself I shall speedily be better, and that I do not feel at all like a dying man."

"Loss of blood!" exclaimed the lady, "and what kills people but loss of blood? However, I am always wrong: I never can judge of what will happen. Depend upon it, you will be dead before to-morrow, and I a wretched widow!"

Here she burst into a violent hysteric of grief.

"You would not wish to be right this time, I hope, Theresa," he replied; "but do not thus distress me by your lamenta-

tions; they are perfectly groundless, and prevent you from being the comfort to me I had hoped to find; but you seem to want consolation, instead of being able to give it."

"Consolation!" sobbed the countess; "don't be so barbarous as to talk to me of consolation. I have been two hours to-day with my confessor, and all to no purpose. Let me send for him, dear Sambuca, for I can never listen to your last wishes. I would not see you expire for the world, and already feel that I shall not long survive you."

"Well," said the count, "it is useless to argue with you; therefore remain quietly where you now are, and you will soon see how little danger there is of your prognostication being fulfilled, for I feel inclined to sleep, and shall awake, I think, considerably restored."

"Oh, Santa Virgine!" she cried, "he grows lethargic! he is falling into the same state as the baroness Solanto! they will both die before morning, and be



buried in the same grave, for we never can carry the body to Sambuca during the siege."

"Silence, Theresa!" said the count, in a tone which the lady had heard before, and which she was generally wont to obey. She therefore cast up her eyes to heaven, and producing her rosary, began to meditate upon the dissolution of her lord, and the difficulty she should find in procuring mourning whilst the tumults lasted.

Seeing the count compose himself to sleep, the baroness Pandolfina was about to retire, when the countess, forgetting her beads, stole up, and implored not to be left with a dying man.

"There is not the slightest danger of your receiving any alarm; but Marguerita will, I know, readily come and sit with you, signora, during the slumbers of the count," replied the baroness.

Her request was complied with, and the lady found considerable relief from her sorrows, in descanting upon the extreme perverseness and obstinacy of her husband,

who, she was sure, would only live for the express purpose of contradicting her opinions—a rule he had followed without any deviation since the first fortnight after their marriage.

CHAPTER III.  
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Chi la pace non vuol, la guerra l'abbia ;
Che penuria giammai non fu di risse. TASSO.

EARLY on the morning of the ensuing day, Ferrante Luchese was dispatched to the ramparts of the city, to remove the artillery to such situations as were best adapted to the bombardment. The populace, without a leader, and without arms, could only express their affection for Pandolfina by secret prayers for his deliverance, and smothered curses against his enemies.

The partisans of Luna were in fact absolute masters of the city, and seized, without opposition, whatever arms they wanted. The cavalry were dismounted, and by means of their horses, eight of

the largest pieces of ordnance were conveyed to their appointed stations, part of them being placed near the Porta di San Nicholas, where bastions were thrown up, and the pieces levelled at the northern tower and principal gateway, the post so gloriously defended by don Paolo. The remainder of the cannon were placed against the Porta del Catogno, and their fire directed against the western tower, and the walls which encircled the inner court.

This new device of the enemy was seen by don Giacomo with some consternation, and though he manifested no dismay, yet he could not but feel the peril of his situation.

“It is their last resource,” said don Paolo, “and will fail, as all the rest have done.”

At length, however, the perseverance of don Ferrante in the one point, and of count Luna in the other, overcame all difficulties, and their batteries were opened with a tremendous fire towards the castle. The loss on both sides was great, more exten-

sive perhaps on the side of Luna than of Pandolfina ; but the latter had not, during the whole siege, suffered so severely, and his numbers were so far inferior, that every diminution of them threw fearful odds into the scale against him.

At length the tower on the western side began to yield, and the besiegers renewed their efforts with redoubled fury, till it fell with a tremendous crash, carrying with it in its fall a large portion of the adjoining wall, laying open to the fire of the enemy part of the interior court, and burying in its ruins nearly a third part of its gallant defenders. Pandolfina had been called away a few moments before its destruction, and thus escaped the fate of many of his valiant followers.

The only person of note who fell in this desolation was the baron Celano, the brother of the countess Sambuca. The attention of don Giacomo was immediately called to this point of danger : fortunately the ruins had so fallen that the breach was not practicable ; his care was exerted to

save such of his wounded soldiers as could be recovered from the fallen fragments; they were conveyed to a remote part of the building, but the numbers increased so rapidly, that it was almost impossible to assist them all.

The noise made by the fall of so large a mass of building thundered through the city, and shook the ground with its violence. The shock within the castle was far more appalling; the baroness, pale with terror, threw her arms round her children; the countess Sambuca screamed, and was joined by most of the ladies.

Marguerita was silent for a moment—
“God will not abandon us, my beloved mother!” at length she exclaimed, taking the hand of her benefactress.

“My husband!” said the baroness; “oh! who will relieve this agonizing suspense?”

“I will endeavour,” replied the orphan of Landolini.

“Oh no! not you, my child: do not leave me.”

As she spoke Cosmo Luchese entered,

and as soon as curiosity had quieted the screams of the other females, informed them of what had happened.

“ And Pandolfina ? ” said the baroness.

“ Is employed, signora, in removing the wounded from the ruins ; but the poor fellows must many of them perish for want of assistance.”

“ Permit me to render what aid I can,” said Marguerita.

“ It is the duty of us all to do our utmost for our brave defenders,” said the baroness ; “ but I fear this dreadful misfortune has reduced us to the mercy of our enemies.”

“ By no means,” replied don Cosmo ; “ we may yet hold out for some hours ; but this range of building is now rendered insecure for you.”

At this moment a tremendous discharge of artillery shook the walls of the tower. Don Giacomo now appeared, and notwithstanding the lightness with which he spoke of the accident, there was an anxiety in his manner which could not escape

the eyes of the baroness. She feared to ask if no succours had yet arrived, having felt the distress she inflicted in asking often for a consolation which he who most wished it could not give her—"Tell me the worst, Pandolfina," she said at length.

"Why," he replied, "we have lost many brave fellows, and I fear Celano is amongst them."

"My brother!" screamed the countess.

"I fear is amongst the slain."

Her grief now seemed sincere and piteous.

"I have ordered Sambuca to be removed to the eastern side of the castle," continued don Giacomo; "and thither, ladies, I would wish you to follow him; these apartments are no longer secure."

"The baroness Solanto must not be left," observed madame Pandolfina.

"As soon as we have extricated all our wounded men from the ruins," replied don Giacomo, "she shall be attended to, and for the present she is perfectly safe:

let me instantly remove you from this place. I rely securely on Pugiades, and will inform him of your having taken refuge on the side of the castle where he is stationed; you will then meet with no further disturbance."

"Can no accommodation with count Luna be made through him?" asked the baroness.

"We are not in a condition to make it necessary," replied Perollo. "It is a last resource, and when requisite, we will use it."

The ladies were now escorted by don Giacomo and Luchese to a place of greater security, where the wounded men were also conveyed; on their way they saw several whom their comrades were removing.

"My services may be of use here, signor," said Marguerita; "will you allow me to exert them?"

"Gratefully, my child," said don Giacomo.

"Marguerita has forestalled me in her

offer," said the baroness, "which the alarm of the moment prevented me from making."

"The number of those who stand in need of assistance," said Perollo, "I am sorry to say is very great; but you may be of infinite service to many of them."

Several ladies, incited by the example of Marguerita and her benefactress, requested to accompany them; and Perollo led the way to the place where the unfortunate men were, and the scene which presented itself here was dreadful. The mangled and bleeding forms of some scarcely presented the appearance of humanity, so crushed and lacerated were they by the fall of the tower, and their attempts to disengage themselves from the ruins; that life remained in some could only be known by the deep and hollow groans which issued from their tortured bodies; whilst those who had suffered less still exhibited a variety of misery appalling even to Perollo.

Several of the females lost their courage

and resolution at the sight, and were obliged to be taken from the spot. The baroness was for some time incapable of any exertion, so great was her horror and distress. Marguerita still preserved her presence of mind and self-possession; pale as a spectre, and trembling from the excess of her feelings, she was compelled to struggle violently with herself to overcome the weakness of her nature; but remembering that every moment she remained inactive she might be prolonging the anguish of those around her, she was soon enabled to render material benefit. By the directions of the surgeon and the priest who resided in the castle, she was ere long actively employed in binding up wounds for some, or forming bandages for the broken limbs of others; and the baroness in a short time rendered assistance also.

The presence of don Giacomo was required elsewhere, and bestowing his blessing on their humanity, he withdrew, to

watch the progress of the besiegers. A fatal discovery was at length made; the ammunition of the castle began to fail; as long as it was possible, Pandolfina concealed the fact, lest it should damp the hearts of his little band; but at length it could no longer remain unknown.

“Strip the lead from the buildings,” cried don Paolo, “and while one stone remains upon another, let us stand by our walls, and we must be victorious at last; or if we fall, let us fall like men and soldiers, and sell our lives at a price which will make our foes rue their costly purchase.”

The roofs of the buildings were soon stripped, and a supply of ball provided by the ingenuity of Perollo, with which the contest was carried on with little diminution of vigour. Luchese had destroyed some of the buildings which were exposed by the fall of the tower and wall, but without deriving much benefit by his exertions. Don Giacomo however found the weakness of his party increasing, and resolved at length to try the effects of treaty.

A white flag was hoisted over the eastern battlements, and a parley demanded with don Michele Pugiades, who instantly attended the summons.

Don Giacomo expressed his obligations to him for his conduct during the outrages against him, and requested his good offices in procuring terms with don Sigismund.—“Our friends,” he observed, “must soon arrive from Geraci and Partanna, but I do not wish to involve so useless an effusion of blood as must ensue, and am willing to comply with any requisitions which are reasonable and honourable.”

Pugiades expressed his willingness to undertake the embassy, and lamented the scenes which had occurred. After friendly salutation, the two cavaliers parted; Perollo returning to inform the baroness of his proceedings, and Pugiades to endeavour to persuade count Luna to listen to terms.

Sigismund was at the time deliberating with Ferrante Luchese on the propriety of continuing their efforts on the western

side. Don Ferrante had represented the inutility of the labour he had been all day employed in.—“If,” he added, “we reduce the whole of this side to a mass of ruins, it will still be impracticable to enter, and we cannot do don Giacomo a greater service than to waste our time and ammunition on such devices.”

“My errand,” said don Michele, when he joined the party, “will, I hope, make all further debate upon the subject useless. Perollo has empowered me to demand from count Luna what he requires from him; he is willing to stop the further effusion of blood, and to accommodate matters in any way don Sigismund may wish, provided they militate not against his reputation and honour. A more frank and open submission cannot be required; and I trust, signor, your generosity will not ask any thing injurious from an enemy, who must have purchased your respect by his gallantry and conduct.”

“For Pandolfina,” interrupted Luchese,

“ I have little to say ; he has acted like a man and a cavalier ; but the display of heroic valour I yesterday witnessed in don Paolo, when scores of our dastards fled before him, has made me impatient to embrace him as a friend ; and whatever be the event of your treaty, don Michele, I shall ever hold him in the highest estimation, and would venture my life in his defence at any time.”

“ He murdered Gilberto,” said Luna, frowning.

“ He killed him like a soldier,” replied Luchese ; “ when I fall, may Heaven grant it be by the sword of a gentleman, and not by the hand of such a cowardly assassin as the baron Adriano !”

“ This recurrence to the conduct of Peralta,” answered don Sigismund, “ is not pleasant to me, signor Luchese ; I beg it may not be repeated.”

“ I am sorry, count Luna, that my observations are so grating to your feelings ; I would that the conduct of your kinsman had been equally so.”

“Count Luna,” said Pugiades, “you will not object to listen to such terms as may meet the approbation of your friends.”

Don Sigismund was silent.

“To be sure,” replied Luchese, “the count will now act with honour and liberality, worthy of himself and his cause.”

“Hostilities may cease for the present,” said Luna, “and we will deliberate on our future conduct towards Perollo; attend me two hours hence at Luna Castle.”

Pugiades, without further delay, rode to the north side of the Casa di Perollo, and ordered the bombardment to cease, which was obeyed, and Pandolfina knew that his embassy had been received.

Luchese was ordered to see the guards posted, and the artillery properly defended; and Sigismund returned to Luna Castle, where he was almost immediately joined by Adriano.

“The firing has ceased,” said the latter; “I was seeking you to ascertain the cause.”

“It was by my command,” replied

Luna ; “ Perollo has tendered his submission.”

“Submission!” ejaculated Adriano; “can the mighty Pandolfina descend so low as to submission? your excellenza will, I hope, accept no peace-offering but his head.”

“Surely there may be some intermediate course determined on; I have summoned my friends, and will take their counsel on the subject.”

“Then, count Luna,” answered Peralta, “your cause is ruined; your murdered friends have died unavenged; those who remain are delivered up as victims to the wrath of Pandolfina; your reputation is sullied, and the house of Luna will have fallen from its high and palmy state of honour and grandeur, and may make what speed it can, to secure its future existence beneath the shelter and shade of the aspiring Perollo.”

“You are too vehement,” replied don Sigismund; “you last night betrayed yourself to the censures of Pugiades, and

it was but a few minutes back that Lucchese cast in my teeth the sacrifice I made to your feelings by my silence; you must be aware, Peralta, that I have frequently deprecated the idea of private assassination, and that my heart acceded to all the indignation expressed by don Ferrante; but I preferred being implicated in your cause, to adding the public weight of my dissatisfaction to the reproaches you met with from our other friends. You will meet us here speedily in council."

"Some means must be devised," said Adriano, "of offering such terms as cannot fail to be rejected; this may sooth our doubtful friends, will ensure us for the night should the allies of Pandolfina arrive, and may give us an opportunity to discover the secret strength or weakness of our enemies. Your excellenza will not in sincerity, I hope, listen to any terms of accommodation with Perollo, for by what ties can he be bound? what oaths, what bonds, what vows, what protestations, now made, can shield us from fu-

ture danger, backed with the viceregal power, as he is? what force shall we possess to compel him to fulfil them? His loyalty forsooth will then enforce his most unwilling sentence to condemn the foes of peace and justice, or he will ostensibly yield up the sword of punishment to Monteleone's myrmidons, and rest contented with directing where its blow shall light. Or, say we now obtain a full and ample act of amnesty, of peace, of submission, and oblivion. The amnesty and peace will be for Giacomo; he will submit indeed to circumstances, and bury in oblivion every remembrance of his present vows and promises. Every occasion will be sought to find offences in those who have wished the downfall of his tyranny, and without the means of resistance, we shall one by one fall victims to the enemy our folly and weakness spared."

When the chiefs of the Luna party assembled, Pugiades stated the substance of the parley he had held with Perollo,

and urged the cause of peace; proposing that guarantees should be given for the future good conduct of Pandolfina; that himself and all his friends should be bound by every tie of honour to aid the adherents of count Luna in obtaining pardon from the emperor, and that they should publicly acknowledge the lenity of the party in withdrawing their arms.

Talyavia, Luchese, Infontanetta, and several more, were urgent to have these proposals accepted.

“Let me also,” said Adriano, “speak, and lend my voice to the cause of reconciliation. I agree entirely with don Michele, in considering it proper to accept the offer of Perollo, and think the terms he has proposed are easy, safe, and honourable: but one thing yet remains undecided—the fate of donna Costanza di Solanto; count Luna cannot in honour still leave his affianced bride a prisoner with Perollo. She has been entrapped into a residence with the enemy of her betrothed husband; she has been exposed

to the solicitations and attentions of Pandolfina's son, who doubtless profited by his fine figure and specious manners. On her account don Sigismund has been calumniated, insulted, and disgraced. Let some consideration of what he has suffered in this way be taken into the account. Let count Luna remember his visit to the casino, the treatment he there met with, and then declare what apology he will consider necessary, for this and all the other hostile acts of the party of Perollo. I am willing to shew them lenity, to treat them with generosity; but I think in this instance some slight acknowledgment of the wrong is necessary."

The countenance of Luna, during this speech of Adriano, was dyed with the deepest crimson at the recollection of the events which it had called up; every pacific feeling was swept away by the violence of passion; and in a voice hoarse from agitation, he swore, that, unless Perollo would kneel before him for pardon, and kiss his feet in token of submission,

no power or entreaties should stop him in his course of vengeance.

“And is this then your answer, signor?” asked Pugiades.

“It is,” replied Sigismund; “and I shall not hold that man my friend who strives to alter my resolves.”

Don Michele unbuckled his sword, and cast it before the feet of Luna.—“Don Sigismund,” he said, “I entered into your party to reduce by open force the power and insolence of don Giacomo Perollo, and have been betrayed into the society of assassins and rebels. The murder of Geronimo Ferrara was accomplished before aid could be afforded. Remonstrances would have been useless, and I remained a silent auditor of the disgraceful act. The butchery of an Imperial envoy I was removed from aiding and abetting. Since this I have been invited by your friend and confidant to join in a scheme of treachery and murder, and am now outraged by a reply equally disgraceful to you, and those who would deliver

it. I stand here unarmed; you may dispatch me to join the slaughtered Ferrara; but henceforth I renounce your alliance, and will shun your society, as a disgrace to a nobleman and a cavalier; but I will not join the standard of your foes."

"Cut him down!" cried Luna, stamping with passion, and drawing his sword.

Luchese threw himself before don Michele; Talyavia and some of his friends interfered, and calmed in some slight degree the fury of Sigismund.

"I shall finish my declaration," continued Pugiades, "and withdraw; for the present, I will be indebted to these gallant men who honour Sigismund di Luna by their friendship for protection from his violence. I have joined in an alliance with him, and though I here renounce and abandon it, I will not league me with his enemies, although I consider their cause as that of justice, loyalty, and virtue. I shall now seek my followers, and retire."

As Pugiades withdrew, Luna called

furiously to detain him; but he passed on uninterrupted by the assembled party, and unheeding the violence of the count, whose fury appeared to be diverted from Perollo to don Michele; he reproached his friends for having restrained him from avenging the insult he had received, and accused himself for his folly, in having admitted into his party one who was connected with his adversary.

Of all the assembly, Luchese was the only one who ventured to defend Pugiades, or to remonstrate against the ungenerous answer which don Sigismund still persisted in returning to the request of don Giacomo. This drew upon him the severest indignation and anger of the infuriated count. He answered quietly to all the abuse which Sigismund lavished upon him, and seemed to pity his weakness, rather than to dread his passion; but begged to decline having any thing to do with the delivery of this message; "which," he added, "if don Giacomo receives without hoisting the bearer's head

upon his flag-staff, he must have more command of temper than some of his enemies."

"The baron Adriano and don Bartolomeo Talyavia," said Luna, sullenly, "will be the bearers of my reply to the request of Pandolfina."

Neither of these gentlemen wishing to provoke the anger of the count, they acquiesced in his decision; and he again repeated his demand, that Pandolfina should kneel before him, and beg forgiveness for his past offences, and at the same time kiss his feet in token of submission and defeat.—"Let this reply be instantly conveyed," continued Sigismund, "that we may know how to proceed when morning dawns—whether to renew our final acts of warfare, and beat down the poor remaining shelter of our foes, or to prepare for the reception of the conquered."

The two emissaries repaired, without loss of time, to the castle of don Giacomo, declared the purpose of their coming, and were admitted within the portal. Perollo

came to meet them, and inquired who count Luna had sent?

“The baron Adriano and don Bartolomeo Talyavia.”

“I shall treat only with those whom I consider as men of honour,” said Pandolfina, as he approached. “The baron Adriano may withdraw. Perollo is not yet fallen so low as to hold converse with the instigator of Ferrara’s murder. Allow me, signor Talyavia, to conduct you to a place more worthy your rank and office.”

He then took the hand of don Bartolomeo, and led him from the portal, leaving Peralta surrounded by the guards, that he might not take advantage of his embassy to pry into the weakness of the interior. Don Paolo, at the command of his kinsman, attended to hear the result of the negotiation.

Left with the soldiers, Adriano lamented, in terms of great compassion, the useless sacrifice which would be made of their lives by the pride of Pandolfina.—“We bring him,” he said, “the most noble and

generous terms; all that count Luna requires, is, that he will make some slight acknowledgments for past insults, and give his promise to injure us no farther."

"The baron," replied one of the men, "will not reject such terms as these."

"Then never trust my word," said Adriano, "he will consider it beneath his dignity to yield, and will rather sacrifice the lives of all his faithful and brave defenders, than make a single promise to abstain from offering injuries to the peaceful inhabitants of Sciacca. Count Luna, my brave fellows, has seen and admired your gallant conduct. He would gladly open his ranks to let you pass whenever you chose, and by accepting these his offers, you would save your commanders lives, and avert the destruction of your wives and children. Perollo must then submit, and will be received to the same honourable capitulation we now offer." Seeing some of the men listen with attention, Adriano renewed his plausible arguments. He pointed out the injury they

were doing even to don Giacomo himself, by supporting him in any farther contest—the useless waste of their own blood—the danger to which they would expose their wives and children, should the castle be taken by assault, and given up to plunder. To this he added the most tempting offer of rewards from Luna; extolled the magnanimity with which they would act by sacrificing their private feelings to the public good; and finally succeeded in persuading them to promise, that if the baron rejected the present proposals, they would on the morrow march out, and leave their posts to be defended by those whom he could persuade to uphold his obstinacy and perverseness. These arrangements were scarcely made, and the seeds of disaffection sown, when Talyavia returned, and merely stating that his offers had been rejected, quitted the castle with Peralta.

Don Giacomo had conducted him into a private apartment, where don Paolo, don Geronimo, and don Giovanni Perollo, were assembled. Talyavia declared his

own wish for peace, and lamented the reply he was compelled to deliver.

“Be it for peace or war,” replied Pandolfina, “you find me equally prepared; no motive prompted me to seek this amnesty, but a desire to spare the effusion of more Sicilian blood, and to relieve the anxiety of the females who have taken refuge within our walls.”

Talyavia repeated the insulting message of count Luna.

Don Giacomo laid his hand upon his sword—half drew it from its scabbard; but after a moment’s silence and suspense, returned it.

“Sorry should I be in any thing to resemble Sigismund di Luna, or on the spot I had avenged the insult you have dared to offer me. The passion, the ignorance, the malignity of Luna, might prompt him to refuse accommodation, upon any terms of honour, liberality, or justice; but I hardly thought the man could have been found, who would have ventured to repeat the audacious offer to Perollo. Nei-

ther Luna nor yourself deserve a reply, nor shall I deign to make one. Our walls may be reduced to a mass of ruins by your artillery—the friends and followers of my house may, and I doubt not will, fall around me, and Perollo himself be exposed defenceless to the vengeance of his enemies—his spirit will still defy their menaces, and take its flight as unconquered as if it mounted from a field of victory. But to-morrow may bring a more fatal doom to Luna than to Pandolfina. Geraci and Partanna may arrive. But I will hold no farther parley.—My friends, conduct this insolent (whose forfeit head might well have paid the penalty his tongue deserved) beyond our outward gate.”

The orders of Pandolfina were obeyed, and the partisans of Luna returned to recount the success of their ill-omened embassy.

CHAPTER IV.
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Then died lamented, in the strength of life,  
A valued mother and a faithful wife ;  
Call'd not away, when time had loos'd each hold  
On the fond heart, and each desire grew cold ;  
But when to all that knit us to our kind,  
She felt fast bound as charity can bind.      CRABBE.

THE alarm excited in the mind of the baroness Solanto by the falling of the tower, and incessant bombardment of the part of the castle in which she lay, had produced a violent effect upon her weakened frame ; repeated fainting fits had reduced her so low, that all around her began to entertain the greatest fear for the final issue of her sufferings, which seemed to be drawing near their close. It was with difficulty she had been removed to the eastern side, and though every precaution was taken by the care of her

friends, it was impossible to conceal from her the increasing danger by which she was surrounded ; towards night, after the firing had ceased, she obtained a little rest, but awoke from it in such a state as convinced her that it would be the last sleep from which she should awake to the cares of life ; as her body became more and more enfeebled, her mind seemed to become more calm, and her resolution stronger. She requested the medical attendant to be sent for, and as soon as he appeared, insisted upon Costanza and the baroness Pandolfina leaving her.

When they had departed, she, with great calmness, desired the surgeon to feel her pulse, and to tell her how long she should survive. Seeing that he hesitated in replying, she said—“ Do not fear, signor, to shock me, by telling me that my release is at hand ; I know it must be near, but I wish to be informed how near, that I may endeavour to prepare those who are to remain some time longer in this scene of terror ; and besides, sir, recollect that no ten-

derness to my feelings here, can excuse you for suffering me to be too late in preparing for hereafter. Now tell me how soon this feeble flame may cease to burn."

"I fear, signora, to-morrow—or, I cannot speak with certainty, perhaps a few hours; but you must be very quiet."

"I thank you, signor; I will detain you no longer from the many who, I fear, require your friendly aid; the calmness and composure I now feel are lent me to do my duty."

The moment the surgeon left the apartment, Costanza returned, and seeing the serenity of the baroness's countenance, said—"I trust me, dear mother, signor Bartelemi has given a favourable opinion."

"Yes, my child, for me." The tone in which she spoke told all that poor Costanza dreaded to hear; she staggered to the couch, and hid her agonized countenance in the clothes; the baroness was deeply affected as she said—"My child! my beloved child! you would not make my parting pangs more bitter? Consider

it is for you only that I grieve, and then I know you will support yourself, and live to console your father. I feel a firm reliance that he will be restored to you, and the thought comforts me now. Wise and wonderful are the decrees of Providence, my child; but for the capture and consequent detention of your father, which we so lamented, you might have been irrevocably united to count Luna, ere we had discovered his character, and the baneful influence which surrounds him; whatever you may have to bear in future, remember that escape with gratitude."

Listening to her mother had in some degree restored the calmness of Costanza. She knelt beside her, watching every breath she drew with intense anxiety, and fearing that every word might be the last.

Those who have knelt over the form of an expiring and dearly-beloved parent, may in some measure feel for the daughter of Solanto; but not entirely can they judge of the accumulated horrors by which

she was surrounded ; the terrific and deafening noises of the previous day made the stillness of the night more awful ; the glare from the watchfires threw a frightful red light through the chamber ; and she knew, though her mother did not, that the morrow might destroy the hospitable roof that sheltered her, and reduce her noble protector to court death as a refuge from his ruthless foes ; added to all this was the uncertainty about her father's fate ; and who can wonder that, as she pressed her hands upon her throbbing temples, she felt as if life or reason must yield to the scene around her ? Yet she bore her misery in silence, and strove to feel the resignation and reliance which her mother taught.

After a short pause the baroness said—  
“ Thinking of your escape from count Luna, my child, has brought to my memory something the baron Pandolfina said two nights since. It appeared to me like a hint, that he knew his son's attachment



to you; if such is the case, and your own heart replies to it, you have my entire concurrence, and I could wish you were allowed to remain under the care of the baroness Pandolfina; but do not, as you value your duty—do not, I conjure you, dispose of your hand, till either you have your father's consent, or have lost all hopes of his return; and when you see him, tell him, all that affection the most fervent, confidence the most devoted, and respect the most unshaken, could inspire, I have felt during my life, and shall to my last hour, for him—tell him, I entreat his pardon for my faults, and bequeath him my most ardent gratitude, for a portion of happiness I think unequalled, and which I owe to him.”

The corporeal weakness of the baroness here overcame her mental energy, and she seemed to be expiring; Costanza tried to support her, and in the agony of knowing not whether to leave her and seek help, or stay and perhaps see her die for want of it, she uttered a piercing shriek, which,

in the stillness of the hour, rang through the neighbouring apartments, and speedily brought the baroness and Marguerita to her assistance.

The cordials they administered to the baroness Solanto revived her a little, and in a few minutes she asked for the father Angelini. He was instantly summoned, and the baroness and Marguerita withdrew into the next room with the almost-distracted Costanza, who, as soon as she was away from the danger of disturbing her mother, gave unrestrained loose to her misery and despair. The baroness embraced her with affectionate tenderness, imploring her to have pity upon them all, and endeavour to support herself with calmness; she confessed that her own distresses were at the moment greater than she knew how to bear—"Heaven alone can foresee," she said, "what to-morrow may produce, whether relief or an end to every hope of comfort to me on this side the grave. Do not, my Costanza, add to

the misery of my devoted family ; preserve something to my Federico for the much that he may lose ; you too, at the last, may perhaps have power over the heart of this merciless Luna, who would quench his hatred in the blood of the Perollo race. Recover your composure, dear child, for your own, your mother's, for all our sakes."

Poor Marguerita, whose distresses had begun to yield to kindness in those around her, and pious resignation in herself, felt all her woes renewed by the sight of similar suffering in Costanza, and in the sorrow of her adopted parents ; she paced the room, trying to restrain the gushing tears which would force themselves from her eyes. From time to time she would approach Costanza, embrace her, attempt to say something to comfort her, and then, at the sight of her grief, be overpowered by sympathy, and again quit her to recover herself.

Father Angelini did not remain long with the baroness Solanto before he begged

her daughter and friends to return to her, and went to request the attendance of don Giacomo, who had retired to rest for an hour or two; they found the baroness much weaker, but still perfectly sensible; she affectionately embraced her friend and Marguerita, said a few words of farewell to each, and recommended, with a mother's tenderness, her child to the care of the former. You will be a mother to her when I am gone—will you not, Victoria?"

"I will, I will, if I am spared to my own offspring."

She looked shocked at the appearance of the baron: since she had seen him, three days spent in toil, and the greater part of the nights in watching and directing, added to the feelings which in silence swelled his bosom, for his wife, his children, his friends, and faithful followers, who had fallen around him, his hourly increasing anxiety for the result, which had now almost become despair, could not

fail to shew itself on his face, though no syllable but of hope and encouragement had escaped him; he raised the hand of the sufferer to his lips, and promised, whilst he had life, to protect her child. She held out her arms, as if once more to embrace her daughter, who was kneeling by her. Costanza rose to meet her circling arms. A slight convulsion seemed to agitate her; she looked to the confessor, who held up the crucifix before her, and pronounced the awful sentence—"Resign your soul to him who gave it."—Once she looked from her child to Pandolfina—tried to articulate—could not—looked to heaven—and expired.

What, in the catalogue of human misery, is equal to the frightful silence which follows the departed spirit of those we love, when for a moment we fear to breathe, lest we dissipate the life which still seems hovering round us; and dare not own to ourselves that hope has fled, and left us with the blank reality of death? Such



silence, such deathlike stillness, reigned around the couch of what was the baroness Solanto.

Costanza still remained in the attitude of receiving her last embrace; she uttered no sound; she seemed turned to stone. At length she slowly raised herself upright; the pale and stiffened features of her mother looked not more assailing than did her fixed countenance; no one could speak for a few moments; but at last the confessor took her hand, and said—"My child, he who gave may take away; in his name be comforted."

"Talk not to me of comfort, father! bring hither the tigers of Luna, and shew them what they have done; shew them their glorious achievements. Such a sight would comfort them, perhaps; mine is gone for ever. Sweet saint! what had you done to these destroyers, that they first took away him on whom you leaned for happiness, and then sought to tear down the home which sheltered you? Your angel charity and meekness have often

found excuses for them, when no one else could. No! such sweetness was not fit for earth: tell them that she is gone: would that I were too, for then there would be peace."

Costanza paused, and the baroness folded her arms around her, and tried to lead her away, but the action seemed immediately to restore her recollection, and she said—"No, no! I cannot leave her yet—I know I must, but not yet—I will be very mild in future and dutiful—she bade me; but do not take me from her—do not weep so much—I make every one unhappy—pray forgive me."

She then went and knelt down by the couch, and holding the lifeless hand of her mother, buried her face in the clothes. Marguerita begged to be left with her and father Angelini; and the baron, whose silent sympathy for those around him forced tears down his manly cheek, supported the baroness from the scene of death.

Perollo was soon after summoned to

receive the emissaries of count Luna, when his fruitless and insulting proposals met with so proper a reception from the gallant chief, whose bosom swelled with feelings too indignant to admit for some time of any thoughts of the future consequence of the rejection; but when he again returned to his family, after taking such precautions as the dilapidated state of the castle made necessary, the distress and anxiety which was so deeply marked on the features of the baroness, recalled him to a full sense of the dangers by which he was surrounded; still he exerted himself to communicate to others the assurance which he himself could not feel, that their security was a matter of no doubt or anxiety.

“The attempt to treat with don Sigismund has failed,” said the baroness, with a sigh of despondency.

“I never had much inclination to receive the insulting dictates of a conqueror,” replied Perollo, “and am spared this disgrace at present; to think of which, I was

only tempted by a hope to save the effusion of blood on the part of Luna as well as of myself; they must abide by the consequences of their reply to my offers."

"Can no mediating friend be found," asked the lady, "who possesses influence enough over count Luna to bring him to more reasonable terms?"

"He has cut off all possibility of a compromise," replied don Giacomo; "and I would scarcely expose any of my friends to meet the fate of poor Ferrara."

"There is one alternative which yet might save us all," said the baroness. Perollo replied by a look of inquiry. His wife waited as if for encouragement to proceed, and continued—"In your safety, Pandolfina, is centered the preservation of your friends and family; were you with Geraci or Partanna, or even with the viceroy, don Sigismund would no longer waste his men in fruitless attempts to batter down your walls; you would collect an overpowering force, and the dread of your approach must be to us a stronger

shield, a surer stay, than even your own heroic arm can give us now. We should not dread the further annoyance of our enemies, whilst you were securely armed to avenge any insults to which we might be subject; and under the protection of don Paolo, I could cheerfully await your return, without the distressing anxiety which now tortures me."

The baroness was silent, and don Giacomo looked at her with an aspect something like reproach. She burst into tears—"Forgive me, Victoria," he said; "I did not think to have been instigated by you to a disgraceful flight; but the sad scenes by which we are surrounded weaken all our firmer feelings. Let me hear no more of this," he added, affectionately; "all will yet be well, without my fleeing before this insolent aggressor."

"I should not have ventured," replied the baroness, still weeping, "to have preferred my request, had I not deeply weighed the subject in my thoughts, and fully determined that no disgrace could attach



itself to the name and honour of Perollo, by your retiring for a time before the storm, to collect in person your friends and partisans, and to save the remnant of your followers and family assembled here."

Don Paolo entered as she was speaking.

"This faithful friend," she continued, "shall judge my cause, and will, I know, decide with honour and with prudence."

"It can require no deliberation," answered don Giacomo, "to ascertain that flight must always be disgraceful."

"There are instances," said don Paolo, "in which the timely retreat of one may prove the means of safety to those who remain; and if the force be overpowering to which the retiring party yields, flight then becomes a duty—though unpleasant and distressing, still the duty of a chieftain."

"Bless you for this reply!" ejaculated the baroness.

Pandolfina smiled.—"Paolo," he said, "is doubtless well provided with cases in

point, but none, I think, which will excuse a chieftain who deserts his family and friends, who leaves his faithful soldiers to defend his towers, and to shed their blood in the cause he has himself abandoned."

"Abandoned!" interrupted the baroness—"the cause he seeks to aid, by raising the support from which it must eventually triumph; but don Paolo does not understand my argument."

"I had forbidden you to mention it, but he must now have a pretty clear idea of the subject of our conversation," observed Perollo; "you may proceed."

"I was urging to Pandolfina," she began, "the expediency of his seeking a refuge with Geraci or Partanna, raising what succours he can procure, without the delay with which they seem to proceed, and leaving myself and family beneath the protection of yourself and our other gallant friends. It is against my husband's person the fury of the assailants is directed; and were he once away, their de-

sire to purchase the ruins of our mansion would not be sufficiently strong to urge them on at the hazard of their lives to gain it: with a full conviction that Perollo would speedily return, armed with resistless power for victory and vengeance, I urge him to no disgraceful act, by inciting him to seek our safety and his own; the lingering conduct of Geraci, and the weakness of Francisco Perollo, make it necessary that more energetic measures should be used to collect their forces. Geraci may be with the viceroy, and in whom can we look for the promptness and alacrity with which Perollo himself will act? He leaves us here neither defenceless nor unprotected. His single arm, though strong and powerful, cannot alone support a sinking cause, and our friends have shewn how heroically they can acquit themselves. I am aware that this conduct might be a dangerous example to the men; but when they learn that their chieftain commits the dearest pledges of his love into their hands, to stand or fall together;

when they are assured that he goes but to return with additional support, they will feel encouraged, rather than depressed, by his departure."

"I would not," observed don Paolo, "be hasty in adopting or rejecting the plan you propose, signora. I am well aware that the violence of our enemies is principally directed against my kinsman as an individual; but how far his absence would mitigate their thirst for vengeance and destruction, and divert the storm, or suspend its fury, it is impossible to decide: at all events, I do not consider the present posture of affairs as making such an attempt either feasible or politic; the castle is nearly surrounded by guards and centinels, through whom it would be difficult, if not impossible, to pass; and a failure in the attempt would involve undoubted ruin to Pandolfina, and probably to all our party: should events grow desperate, in the confusion and carelessness which the prospect of victory will cause, he may perhaps succeed in escaping. I will will-

ingly undertake to remain till the last moment, as the defender of those he may leave. The security of our chief would then perhaps restrain the hands of the assailants, who would fear lest every hour should bring him back with sufficient force to quell their rebellious multitude."

"Well," replied don Giacomo, "you have made a handsome compromise, my friend; and when there is no hope of safety here, I will engage to seek it beyond the walls."

"Were this resolution indeed to be fulfilled, and if in the fatal crisis of affairs (should it be the will of Providence that such should occur), if then you would commit us to the care of don Paolo, and seek a refuge with our distant friends, I should be more reconciled," replied the baroness.

"When Paolo bids me fly, I will obey," said Perollo, who being summoned to attend some affair of consequence, the party separated for a time.

Count Luna received the reply of don



Giacomo, or rather the detail of what had taken place between his messengers and the baron, with threats of vengeance and extermination.

Talyavia having concluded his account of the circumstances which occurred during his interview, Adriano observed that he also had some intelligence to communicate; and with affected humility and calmness related the contemptuous treatment which he had personally met with, rousing still higher the passion of don Sigismund; and finally detailed his successful attempt to excite a spirit of disaffection and desertion amongst the troops of Perollo, in whose custody he had been left when Talyavia withdrew with don Giacomo, assuring the count he might calculate upon the retreat of part of his foes when the assault should be renewed. These tidings excited the greatest satisfaction, and the coming day was impatiently awaited by all the party, who now looked forward with confidence to the

speedy termination of their fatigue and labour.

With the earliest light count Luna was on horseback, surrounded by his chief officers, and on his way to the scene of havoc and destruction. Infontanetta was ordered to occupy the station which don Michele Pugiades had abandoned in the valley. Ferrante Luchese was stationed on the north, to renew the attack upon the great tower, where don Paolo commanded; and Calogero Calandrino succeeded to the post on the western side, which Luchese had held on the day preceding: as the south side presented no practicable point of attack, and was not likely to afford the besieged an opportunity of flight (being bounded at no great distance by the inaccessible rocks which overhung the sea, and surrounded by the ruined mansions of Cosmo Luchese, Geronimo and Paolo Perollo), it was now abandoned by the besiegers, who renewed their attacks with violence on the north and on the west.

Upon the first assault made by Luchese, the companions of don Paolo refused to resume their arms; they had resolved no longer to support a fruitless contest, and since don Giacomo had refused to consult their safety, by accepting the honourable terms which they knew had been offered, they would no longer be the victims of his pride and obstinacy.

Astonished at this sudden defection, their commanders exhorted them to return to their obedience, declared the terms which had been offered were such as they would themselves have indignantly rejected, and pointed out the little hope there was of their being received by Luna; to this they replied, that the baron Adriano had given them assurances of favour and protection.

Don Paolo saw that the case was hopeless, but endeavoured by every argument to awaken a sense of honour, and those feelings of attachment which they had so frequently and so ardently professed to cherish for their chieftain and his family.

During the debate, Pandolfina arrived upon the spot, and learned the defection of the party.—“Let them instantly depart,” exclaimed Perollo. “Heaven forbid that I should retain one unwilling arm to aid my cause; let them abandon the chief they have sworn to defend; let them give up his family and friends to the fury of their murderers, and seek with what satisfaction they can another leader more fortunate than Pandolfina.”

The men appeared to hesitate.

“Will your excellenza accept the terms offered by count Luna?” they inquired.

“No,” replied don Giacomo: “first let me perish, and let the name of Perollo die with me, rather than be disgraced by such dishonourable submission.”

“Propose then other terms.”

“None will be accepted, nor will I condescend to offer them.”

“Then let us lay down our arms,” cried the ringleader, and they piled their weapons on the tower.

“Escort them to the gate,” said Gia-

como; "before the sun has set, they will repent them of this dishonour."

Not above ten of the party remained behind, the rest descended the stairs, accompanied by don Paolo, who halted in the portal.—"Once again, my friends," he said, "reflect, and do not stain your late heroic deeds by desertion and by flight."

The men were however deaf to all entreaties, the wicket was thrown open, and they departed. Their approach was hailed by the partisans of Luna with loud shouts of triumph, and they passed unresisted through the hostile squadron. The few remaining friends of Perollo were witnesses of this final blow to their hopes from the dilapidated walls, but prepared to meet the increasing dangers with a spirit and resolution worthy of such a chieftain and of such a cause.

With fresh ardour the bombardment recommenced. Ferrante Luchese had observed the useless labour which had been expended in attempting to destroy the



great tower and gate, and turned his fire upon a weaker part of the walls, where Pandolfina had lately erected stables for the horses belonging to his retainers. The effect of this was soon visible ; the newly-constructed buildings gave way in every direction, and drew with them in their fall parts of the adjacent bulwarks ; practicable breaches were soon made, and Luchese again prepared to storm the fortress. The exertions of the besieged were greater than could have been supposed possible from men so reduced by fatigue. Their numbers, diminished by death, wounds, and desertion, were scarcely sufficient to man one side of the battlements, and on every part ruin and dismay presented themselves.

By the breaches made by Luchese, the north tower had become nearly isolated from the other parts of the building. The companions of don Paolo were reduced to two or three, and incapable of offering further hostilities. Don Giacomo and a

small body of men still fought from an adjacent turret, but all communication was cut off between him and don Paolo.

The troops of Luchese now began to pour in through the undefended aperture in the walls, and butchered some wounded and defenceless men whom they found in the apartments they had entered. The cries of the sufferers caught the ears of don Paolo; he descended from the tower, and rushed sword in hand amongst the assailants; wherever he turned himself, his foes were scattered before him; his white armour was dyed of the deepest crimson; for a few moments he stopped the ingress of the enemies; but the force of numbers was not eventually to be resisted, and he began to give ground, when Luchese forced his way into the room, where, alone and unassisted, the gallant kinsman of Pandolfina supported himself against a host of foes.

“Your valour, signor, is useless,” he said. “I would save your life at the hazard of my own. You may yet be of

service to your friends ; I ask no submission—resign your sword, and mine shall defend you.”

“ Thanks, brave Luchese,” replied Perollo ; “ but my existence is useless, and after defeat worthless.”

“ Disarm him then,” cried don Ferrante to his soldiers ; “ but, at the peril of your lives, injure him not.”

His command was soon obeyed, and don Paolo a captive in the hands of the besiegers.

“ For the helpless females and children I demand your quarter, signor Luchese ; for myself, I must yield to numbers.”

Don Ferrante returned his sword.

“ You will not,” he said, “ use this weapon again to resist the force of Luna and Peralta ; and mine, signor, shall now aid you in protecting the defenceless. Where are the ladies ?”

“ On the eastern side, in the interior court,” answered don Paolo.

“ Hasten thither instantly,” said Luchese ; “ as soon as I can quit my post, I

will be with you, which will be before any other of our party can have reached the spot. Don Paolo," he continued, in a tone of authority to those about him, "is my prisoner; treat him no longer as an enemy."

Perollo was then allowed to make his way through the furious crowd, who were filling the northern court, and hastily taking his way to the quarter in which don Giacomo fought, he desired him and his companions instantly to save themselves—"Resistance," he said, "is now useless; I am myself a prisoner, but have secured the safety of the ladies through the generosity of Luchese."

Giovanni and Geronimo Perollo waited no further bidding, but retreating into the interior apartments, escaped through different communications with outer walls; and the whole force of count Luna being drawn to the breach at which Luchese had entered, the avenues were left unguarded.

Pandolfina threw himself for an instant

into the arms of don Paolo—"Commend me to my wife," he said, "to my children and my friends. I shall not yet retire, but will not voluntarily sacrifice my life. Best and most faithful of our devoted race, farewell!"

A few vassals still rallied round their lord, and declared their resolution to share his fate. As don Paolo retired, they closed the portal of the turret, and awaited the coming storm.

The rage of the assailants seemed to know no bounds: every living soul they had encountered, except don Paolo, had instantly been cut in pieces; the very horses in the building through which they had entered were sacrificed to their fury, and two-and-twenty animals were butchered in this indiscriminate massacre.

The troops of Luna now impetuously made their way towards the post which don Giacomo occupied, shouting loudly to the besieged to throw down their arms, to open their gates, and yield to Luna and Peralta. The baron ordered the door



of the tower to be thrown open, and as the enemy crowded to the entrance, poured upon them a shower of balls and arrows: they fell in heaps before the portal.

“Thus shall we surrender our arms, and thus welcome our assassins!” cried Perollo, and another volley from his party arrested the approach of the multitude.

Confusion spread through the crowd; they had expected that the interior of the castle once gained, all resistance on the part of the besieged would cease, when the gallant and unlooked-for defence of don Giacomo caused them again to retreat to the north court.

The chief availed himself of their panic, and prepared for flight, exhorting his companions also to save themselves, and then took his way towards the south side of the building, which was cleared from the assailants. He was followed only by Andrea Carusello, the old and affectionate servant of his house, who for several generations had loved and honoured the lords

of Pandolfina. During the siege he had attended his master through every danger, and now resisted every entreaty to seek his safety with don Paolo and the baroness, peremptorily insisting to follow the fortunes of his lord to the last.

From one of the southern towers the baron prepared to descend, but as Andrea could not be prevailed upon to remain, don Giacomo first endeavoured to provide for the safety of the old man, whom he lowered from one of the windows by a rope, and immediately following him, both reached the exterior of the castle in safety.

The partisans of don Sigismund soon recovered from their temporary dismay, and again rushed forward with redoubled fury, spreading havoc and destruction on every side. The great gates of the castle were beaten down, and afforded free access to the sanguinary ruffians, who thronged in crowds to satiate their vengeance, and to riot in the spoils of Pandolfina's wealthy and magnificent abode.

The ferocious Calandrino seized the ar-

tillery of the castle, and pointing it to the yet-uninjured buildings on the east, began to batter the walls of the apartments in which the females were assembled, regardless of the signs of submission and truce which Luchese and don Paolo had hoisted. The former instantly dispatched a messenger to request the interference of don Sigismund, who commanded the firing to cease, and prepared to take possession of his conquest.

CHAPTER V.  
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Già non si deve a te doglia, nè pianto ;
Chè, se mori nel mondo, in ciel renasci :
E chi dove ti spogli il mortal manto,
Di gloria impresse alte vestigia lasci. TASSO.

THE baroness Pandolfina had repeatedly entreated Costanza to quit the melancholy scene of death, and to remain with herself and the children ; but this she persisted in refusing, and declared her firm resolution to watch by the body of her mother, till the last moment it should be kept from its final abode. Marguerita remained with her, as did also the father Angelini, and occasionally the baroness revisited the mourner ; but from the moment when the bombardment recommenced, she had been so absorbed in the idea of the peril to which her husband and children were ex-

posed, that her thoughts could not wander from their intense anxiety at the event which each succeeding instant might be expected to produce.

For one short moment she had seen Pandolfina, and the sad change in his appearance declared that adverse circumstances had added to their misfortunes. He mentioned not, however, the desertion which had taken place, and which was undoubtedly the eventual cause of his defeat, but still endeavoured to cheer her drooping spirits, and promised to seek safety in flight, should his affairs assume a hopeless aspect.

Dismay and terror seemed to have stopped even the grief of such as had been most loud in their lamentations, previous to the present alarming posture of affairs. The count Sambuca, who had been able to get into the apartment of the baroness, was some support, and kept the ill-timed complaints and loquacious misery of the countess silent. His wounds entirely prevented his being useful in the contest, and

he thought he might be of some service in aiding and consoling the baroness, which he most assiduously endeavoured to do.

With breathless anxiety and alarm the party listened to every sound which they could catch amidst the roar of the artillery; at length a shout, which seemed to announce their fate, was heard distinctly nearer than any of the confused noises which had before caught their attention. A wounded vassal rushed into the room, and exclaiming—"All is lost!" fell on the floor, and instantly expired.

A second shout, louder and nearer than the first, burst upon their ears before they recovered from the alarm caused by the dying soldier, and the name of Luna was distinctly heard amidst the cries and screams which mingled with the tumult. The baroness threw herself upon her knees, and clasped her arms around her children. The count Sambuca attempted to rise and place himself before the door, when the countess, with a shriek of terror, cast herself upon him, and entreated to

be saved. He implored her to be tranquil, and to rely on the protection of Heaven. She still continued clinging round him, and vociferating her entreaties to be rescued. He commanded her to be silent, and she obeyed.

After a pause of some moments, which seemed ages to the expectant sufferers, a footstep was heard approaching. The eyes of all were directed to the door; no one either moved or breathed, and don Paolo entered the room. The baroness Pandolfina was the first object of his attention; she was still kneeling with her children round her; her face pale as if death had already seized its victim—"We are lost!" she exclaimed. "The mercy of Heaven alone can save us!"

"I have, I trust, secured the safety of yourself, signora, your children, and companions; these ladies will meet with a generous and gallant protector in the signor Ferrante Luchese."

"And Pandolfina?" asked the agitated wife.

“Is safely escaped, I hope, from the pursuit of his enemies. He fled with his remaining friends a few moments back, and as I came this way, I perceived that his adversaries have not followed him, and he may, I hope, succeed in eluding their search. He is in the hands of Providence, and to its dispensations, whatever they may be, we must submit ourselves.”

The baroness bowed her head upon the bosom of one of her children, and wept in silence.

The countess sprung upon the neck of don Paolo, and embraced him with boundless joy—“Tell us the dreadful particulars, Perollo,” she said, and was proceeding to pour forth her terrors, when the count commanded her to retire, and not to begin a course of interrogatories, nor to occupy the attention of don Paolo, which must be fully engaged on more important subjects than listening to her effusions.

“The fortress is then in the hands of Luna?” continued Sambuca.

“It is, or it will be so in a short time,”

replied don Paolo. "Luchese commands the party who have entered, and has promised me his protection for the ladies here assembled. Our kinsmen Geronimo and Giovanni have also escaped, and will, I trust, succeed in eluding pursuit till the present dangers have subsided."

Perollo then inquired the cause which had brought the body of the dead retainer into the apartment. Sambuca informed him of the circumstance of his unexpected entrance and instant death; after which don Paolo raised the body, and removed it into an adjacent chamber.

As he was returning, he saw don Ferrante enter the court, and instantly entreated his aid, as the tumult seemed approaching. Luchese joined him immediately, and desired that a white banner might be hoisted on the building, to save it from the attacks of his party; but his order was scarcely obeyed, when the artillery, by command of Calandrino, was opened upon it.

Luchese lost no time in seeking don

Sigismund, and in obtaining his orders to arrest the firing. Count Luna was just entering the castle as don Ferrante met him, and preferred his request.

“ We did not war against defenceless women and infants,” replied Sigismund: “ let the bombardment instantly cease, and spare all who make no further resistance. The chieftains of the faction shall hereafter meet their punishment.”

“ For one amongst the number,” replied Ferrante, “ I stand pledged to secure his safety. Don Paolo Perollo is my prisoner, and has been by me received to quarter.”

“ And who shall presume,” said Luna, “ to pardon the murderer of Gilberto? Signor Luchese, the prisoners are mine. The fate of don Paolo is determined, and he shall die, for the vengeance which the fall of don Pietro demands.”

“ He shall not die, count Luna,” answered Luchese undauntedly. “ If the other chieftains of your party have lent their aid to accomplish your purpose, as vassals and retainers, Luchese desires to

be considered as an ally and an equal; and before a sword shall be drawn against the person of don Paolo, your arms must be turned against those to whom you owe your victory."

"This insolence, signor Ferrante, is not such as I shall submit to with impunity."

"As you think proper, count Luna," replied Luchese. "I have aided you with no want of spirit, I trust, in destroying one tyrant in Sciacca. It is not my intention to transfer the power, but to extirpate it; at the same time, I wish not to disturb the pleasure of our triumph by any disobedience or schisms in our party, and therefore request, as the reward of my services, your grace for don Paolo."

Somewhat appeased by the apology, and unwilling to provoke a farther contest with Luchese, Sigismund granted his request, though with reluctance and dissatisfaction, and followed to the part of the castle where the ladies were awaiting the termination of the horrors of the siege.

Attended by Ferrante, Infontanetta, and

Talyavia, don Sigismund ascended the staircase; the door was thrown open, and he halted at the portal, struck with the distressing scene before him. The baroness had risen from her knees, and was standing surrounded by her children, supported on one side by don Paolo, and on the other by Marguerita, who had flown to her the instant she heard how it had fallen with the fortunes of Perollo.

Costanza still persisted in remaining at her station, and as her young friend deemed her safety to be secure beyond a doubt, from her connexion with don Sigismund, she hastened to share the fate of her beloved protectress.

The majestic figure of the baroness Pandolfina seemed to have acquired new dignity from her misfortunes; she stood amidst the ruins of her house, as if superior to fate, and commanding the homage of her conquerors. The paleness of her countenance, and the sadness of her brow, alone pointed her out as a sharer in the scenes around her. Her children clung

trembling about her, and the floor, upon the approach of Sigismund, was strewed with prostrate females, whose fate appeared to hang upon his lips. But it was the patient yet dignified sorrow of the baroness which awed and overcame every feeling of enmity to those about her; and as Sigismund gazed in respectful admiration, he felt a tear of sympathy bedew his cheek, and confess the conquest she had gained. He advanced with a salutation as submissive as the Imperial person would have required, and lamented the circumstances by which she was surrounded—"May Heaven," he said, "pardon him who has been the cause of all this ruin! but for yourself, signora, and the ladies by whom you are attended, command my services, and those of all my friends."

The baroness returned her thanks for these expressions of courtesy, and begged permission to withdraw from the scene of havoc, and that the remnant of the followers of Perollo might be spared.

"Your excellenza," answered the count,

“ is at liberty to repair to any asylum you may choose, and I have already given orders that when resistance ceases, my soldiers should no longer pursue their enemies. Whither would you wish to be conducted ?”

“ My kinsman, don Paolo, will have the goodness to escort me to the convent of Santa Martha, with such ladies as may wish to follow me.”

“ The gentlemen whom the fortune of war has made our captives, I had not intended to include in this capitulation ; but for don Paolo, he is the prisoner of Luchese, and to him I have resigned him.”

“ Here, signor,” interrupted Talyavia, “ is a wounded kinsman of mine, for whom I must prefer a similar petition to that which has been offered by don Ferrante—the count Sambuca.”

“ I bear no enmity to the race of Talyavia,” answered Sigismund. “ The count has chosen his party, and met with all the punishment I can wish : I will not increase the sufferings of his wounds and defeat.”

During this time Sigismund had looked anxiously round him for the persons of Costanza di Solanto and her mother—“All the ladies in the castle are not assembled here, I think,” he said, turning to the baroness Pandolfina.

“The lady Costanza,” she replied, “remains with the body of her mother in an adjoining chamber. You will allow her, signor, to accompany the corpse of her departed parent to Santa Martha also.”

Luna started at the information, and heard not the petition—“Let me be conducted to her presence.”

The baroness was about to lead the way, when Luna hesitated—“Excuse me, signora,” he said, “if I request some other escort. I will myself conduct the signora di Solanto to a place of security.”

“You will not, I hope, distress the lady Costanza, by opposing her wishes at the present moment, signor, and the treatment I have received at your hands, makes me hope she is also free to choose an asylum.”

“The future bride of Sigismund di Luna can have no asylum so proper as the castle of her affianced husband. Excuse me, lady, upon this head; my resolutions are decisive.”

“Allow me,” said Marguerita, “to conduct the count.”

The baroness saw that opposition was fruitless, and yielded to necessity.

The courts were now filled with the victorious soldiery, and all the authority of their officers was necessary to keep them from penetrating to the apartments of the ladies.

“The sooner you retire the better,” said don Paolo, addressing the baroness, “or we may find it difficult to defend you from the lawless rioters.”

“I wait only the return of Marguerita,” answered the baroness, faintly.

“Commit the signora to my care, madame,” said Luchese, “and I will see her in safety to Santa Martha.”

“She will be here immediately, I doubt

not, and I cannot leave her, or allow her to be separated from me."

Don Sigismund followed his conductress in silence; his bosom was agitated by the most conflicting passions. His love for Costanza was, if possible, more impetuous, for the restraints which it had met with, and he was now resolved, at all events, to make her his wife; yet he dreaded the spirit he should have to encounter, and the just reproaches which he had prepared himself to receive. But the death of the baroness was an event upon which he had not calculated, and it rendered his task greatly more difficult. Her gentle and complying disposition, the consideration she had always shewn him, the interest she had taken in the union, and the favourable manner in which she had interceded in his behalf, had taught him to consider her as one of his best allies. Now he felt aware that he should have to contend with the spirit of Costanza, uninfluenced by filial tenderness and submis-

sion. He had expected to find the baroness terrified and weak, incapable of resistance, or of even wishing to counteract his plans; but how far the sorrows of her orphan child might reduce her, it was impossible to tell, and this doubt and uncertainty made him look forward to the interview with no little uneasiness.

Marguerita preceded him into the room, and announced the unwelcome visitor. Costanza was kneeling beside the couch upon which reposed the remains of her dead parent, and the confessor had been praying with her. She rose at the entrance of the count, and instinctively seized the cold hand of her mother. Her face was pale, and she looked thin and in ill health from her long confinement, and the sorrow she had experienced; but as the name of her persecutor was announced, a slight suffusion overspread her cheek, and her eyes sparkled with indignant animation.

Sigismund thought she had never looked so lovely, but unable to stand her gaze, his eyes were instantly withdrawn, and

fell on the lifeless body of the baroness Solanto. There his conscience again reproached him for the misfortunes to which he had been accessory, and he stood silent after Marguerita had announced him.

“Has the destroyer of the parents,” asked Costanza, “come to witness how well his work has been achieved, and to complete the downfall of Solanto’s house by the murder of his orphan child?”

“It is my misfortune still to be misinterpreted,” replied Sigismund: “my grief, lady Costanza, is only equalled by your own. I am come to offer every consolation in my power.”

“Death, signor, is the only consolation I expect from your hands; the only one which would be welcome now.”

“I have been compelled, signora, to vindicate a long-continued train of insults by the sword; but it is only against my enemies it has been drawn.”

“If every insult were to be thus avenged, count Luna would pay dearly for this intrusion. Retire, signor; I have

suffered sufficiently from you. You would not wish to follow up your persecution beyond the grave."

"I am come to protect and conduct you hence, signora."

"Your protection, count Luna, is the last which I either wish or ought to accept, and it is not my intention to quit the remains of my last parent."

She threw herself on the couch beside her mother, and regardless of the presence of Luna, yielded herself up to the agony of grief, and uttered the most passionate expressions of affection and despair.

Sigismund could scarcely support himself at beholding her affliction, and he said, in a subdued and altered tone—"Dearest Costanza! this mansion is now in the hands of my victorious troops, and no longer a proper abode for you, or a secure receptacle for this lost object of your affection; permit me to order it to be conveyed, with every mark of respect, to Luna Castle, and vouchsafe to accompany it yourself, when my mother will endeavour

to replace the loss you have sustained, and I will strive——”

Here Costanza interrupted him by an hysteric sob, and she said—“ Be content with the ruin you have heaped upon me, but do not insult my misery by mentioning the countess Caltabellotta as a substitute for my gentle and angelic mother.”

“ Moderate this excess of passion, my child,” said the confessor ; “ the professions of count Luna promise every consideration to your feelings.”

“ The professions, padre, of count Luna, brought his father’s friend, the ill-fated baron di Solanto, to this devoted city. The professions of count Luna induced Solanto to listen to his offers, and to propose an alliance with his daughter ; the professions of this same count Luna promised to myself love, confidence, devotion, and respect. Mark how these professions were fulfilled : on our first arrival at his castle, this departed saint was subjected to the insults of his unfeeling mother ; my father nearly consigned to slavery by

the violence of Sigismund himself, since which he has torn one parent from me by secret machinations, and hurried another to an untimely grave by open outrage; and would you have me trust the faith of this most faithless one, who has violated every tie of honour, of humanity, of justice, of religion?"

"Hush! hush! dearest Costanza!" exclaimed Marguerita, terrified at her vehemence, and the effect it produced upon the agitated form of Luna, who trembled from the excess of his emotion—"Dear Costanza," continued her friend, "our protectors are no longer able to afford their aid; we must submit to the mercy of count Luna. He has been generous in his conduct to the baroness Pandolfina; he will not be less so to you, and indeed the castle is no longer an asylum for the living or the dead."

"And are you too deceived by the promises of count Luna? Would you, Marguerita, consign me to the care of him who

has made me an orphan, and destroyed those who would have sheltered my defenceless state?"

"Lady, you must be removed from hence. Your friends are detained by your resistance, and exposed to dangers which I cannot avert," said Sigismund.

The count summoned Geronimo Calandrino from the court below, and spoke a few words to him at the doorway, as the baroness approached to seek the cause of Marguerita's delay.

"I am sorry," observed Luna, "that the lady Costanza persists in opposing our desire to remove her; she must be compelled to submission."

The baroness exhorted Costanza not to give way to her feelings, and by a fruitless opposition to what was unavoidable, expose herself to unpleasant consequences.

"What is the mighty will and pleasure of this conqueror, which I am called on to obey?"

"Count Luna wishes to remove you,

my child, to a place of safety, and to convey the remains of the baroness from this scene of desolation."

"I will attend you, my kind friend, wherever you think proper, as soon as the necessary preparations can be made to convey this departed treasure with us."

"The time, signora, will allow of but little preparation, and I must request you to make Luna Castle your abode at present."

"Your power, count Luna," answered Costanza, "I cannot resist; but force alone shall compel me to become your prisoner."

The baroness felt nearly unable to support herself, but made a violent exertion over her own feelings to calm those around her—"My child," she said, "count Luna will be generous, I trust, in conquest—compose yourself;" then turning to the count, she said—"Don Sigismund, the baroness Pandolfina supplicates for Costanza di Solanto; your triumph over the one must be complete, and if you feel for the other as you profess, you cannot

refuse her request. Under the dreadful circumstances that I am, where can I take her that is beyond your influence? We ask but for the privacy and protection of a convent. Surely this is not a time to outrage the feelings of this poor orphan, by resistance to so natural a wish. Can you tear a child from her last sad duties to her mother's remains? Suffer her to go with me to Santa Martha; you may take any measures you choose to prevent her departure from thence. At any other time than this, she will be more fit to hear you; and considering all circumstances, you cannot wonder at the irritation of her mind at present. Let her depart."

Luna had listened with impatience to the baroness, and he interrupted her by saying—"The wife of Giacomo Perollo may thank her husband's presumptuous folly for these 'present circumstances;' but to her my word is given—she may depart. From you, signora Costanza, I

had expected different conduct; you might have learned ere now that Sigismund di Luna is not to be braved with impunity; your present anxiety to remain with my enemies shews me, more forcibly than ever, the necessity of removing you from such influence. No power on earth shall induce me to let you stay another hour out of my own walls. Here is my particular friend the baron Adriano; he will do me the favour to be your escort, since I cannot at present quit this place; these precious remains shall follow you instantly."

"I have not to be taught," replied Costanza, "the unfeeling tyranny of count Luna; or if I had, his present conduct would have been sufficient. He may, however, yet have to learn, that even a female may defy his threats, resist his violence, and triumph over his oppression; and when again he numbers over his enemies, Costanza di Solanto begs to rank first upon the list. To those who succoured and protected her, as long as courage could

strive against overpowering numbers, her love and gratitude will be as indelible as her hatred to the detested and disgraced name of Luna."

She fell upon her knees as Adriano entered the room, and embracing the body of her mother, wept for a few moments in silence. Then raising her head, she continued—"Farewell, dear relics of my mother! Heaven has in mercy taken you from this scene of trial and affliction: may that mercy still be continued to your orphan, and the justice of the Omnipotent be reserved for your destroyers!"

She threw herself upon the neck of the baroness Pandolfina, tenderly embraced Marguerita, and advancing to Luna, said—"Your captive, signor, waits to be conducted to her prison."

Luna repressed his anger, and turning to Adriano, said—"Let every respect and honour be shewn to the lady Costanza, and immediate preparation made to remove the baroness Solanto, with all the

ceremonials of rank which the time will permit."

Adriano offered to conduct her from the apartment; but she rejected his assistance, and wrapping her veil around her, followed him to the court below, where a litter was in waiting, in which she was immediately placed, and conveyed to Luna Castle. With a respectful salutation to the baroness, Sigismund followed the signora di Solanto to the court. The former gave one melancholy farewell to her departed friend, and yielded to the repeated exhortations of don Paolo and Luchese to retire to the convent. Don Ferrante stationed a guard at the door of the apartment, to prevent any intrusion until the body was removed.

Driven from her ruined home, her husband a fugitive, perhaps a captive in the hands of his remorseless enemies, or even a victim to their sanguinary rage, the unfortunate wife of Perollo still lingered with an aching heart, and unwillingly

abandoned the abode of many years of happiness and peace.

Talyavia had waited to lend his aid in escorting the ladies through the dangers to which they were exposed.

Don Paolo, to whom every avenue and passage in the castle was well known, conducted the sorrowing party through the interior apartments of the eastern wing, towards the gate which opened from thence into the valley Degli Giumari, in order to avoid the dreadful scenes of havoc and desolation exhibited throughout the courts, and also as the nearest way to the convent, which was situated without the Porta Degli Bagni. Talyavia preceded them a little, to remove any obstacle which might impede their progress, or give an unnecessary shock to the feelings of the baroness, and they quitted the castle without impediment.

Don Paolo had watched with anxious care every thing which passed around, to ascertain, if possible, the fate of his friend and chieftain; and as no tidings of his

death or capture had yet reached him, he hoped he had succeeded in making his escape, and at every opportunity, when unobserved, he endeavoured to cheer the baroness with the hope of his eventual safety.

At the convent they were received with every kindness which compassion and respect could devise, and the security of her children being effected, the anxiety of the mother gave way to the affection of the wife, and every thought was centered in her intense impatience to learn the fate of Pandolfina.

On returning to the court, count Luna had instantly demanded to whom the rewards he had promised for the apprehension of Perollo were due; but no one could give him intelligence of the death or capture of the baron. Since he had fired from the northern turret upon the first assailants who had entered the court, no one had seen or heard of him.

The rage of Luna, which had been in no small degree excited by the conduct of

Costanza, but which had been restrained while she was present, from the fear of increasing her dislike, now burst forth with redoubled violence. He stamped upon the ground, raved at his ill fortune, abused his friends as slack in their exertions in his cause, and protested that nothing yet had been done, if his detested enemy had escaped from his revenge.—“ We have battered down his walls, and driven out his wife and children, but the pusillanimous compassion of some has saved the secondary objects of my hatred, and Giacomo Perollo still lives to restore his fallen fortunes, and crush the house of Luna è Peralta by his reviving power. Your avarice,” he cried to Calandrino, who was loaded with spoil, “ and the disgraceful cupidity of others like yourself, have been employed in seizing the riches of the foe, whilst he himself has escaped our hands, and laughed at our lost labours.”

Mateo Benfari was brought before him in bonds, when his savage commands were

to mutilate the wretched captive and dismiss him. He fell at the feet of his inhuman conqueror, but pleaded in vain, and the barbarous sentence was executed upon the spot.

Whilst Sigismund was thus raving at his party, and gratifying his blood-thirsty hatred upon his enemies, the gates of the castle had all been levelled with the ground, some of the buildings were in flames, and the whole a scene of ruin and desolation.

Upon descending with Carusello from the window, don Giacomo had taken his course as far as possible from the principal streets, and encountered with Luca Parisi, one of the inferior magistrates of the city, to whom he had always been a firm and useful friend. Parisi beheld with melancholy regret the altered state of the fugitive chief; haggard, and worn with toil and anxiety, the joy and cheerfulness which had been wont to sparkle in the eyes of Perollo were fled; but a firm and heroic resolution had given an air of dig-

nity and grandeur to his countenance, which shewed him still unsubdued in mind, though in a state almost to excuse despair. The emotion of Parisi for an instant impeded his utterance. At length he said—"Signor, accept such services as respect and gratitude can offer. Commit yourself to me, and if we reach my house unseen, your safety may, I trust, be secured."

"Thanks to you, my friend," answered Pandolfina; "but I would not willingly involve you in my disasters."

"I shall gladly encounter any danger for so kind a benefactor, so respected a friend," replied Parisi.

"Lead on then," said don Giacomo; "our only hopes depend on expedition and secrecy; whilst my enemies are employed in plundering and destroying, we may perhaps reach some asylum unobserved."

The streets had during the late disturbances been deserted by all peaceful citizens, who dreaded the lawless violence of the partisans of Luna; and the insurgents

were now completely occupied in the spoil and plunder of the castle. The fugitives succeeded in passing some way unobserved, and were nearly arrived at the Porta di St. Ermo, where the residence of Parisi was situated, when they met at an angle of the street Antonello di Palermo, who had once been a retainer of the count Sambuca, and dismissed from his service.

“The holy saints be for ever blessed, who have preserved your *eccellenza* from your enemies !” he exclaimed.

Don Giacomo thrust his hand into his purse, and giving the man a handful of gold crowns, promised him that his secrecy and good wishes should hereafter be remembered and rewarded. He was profuse in his thanks and professions, which, however, time would not suffer Perollo to listen to ; and he hastened to the abode of his guide and protector, where they arrived without meeting with any one beside.

The family of Parisi was small, and

consisted only of himself, his wife, and one servant, who fortunately was now from home. Madame Parisi cheerfully undertook to run all hazards in protecting their illustrious guest, and observing the fatigue and faintness which both he and his attendant appeared to suffer, instantly fetched some wine for their relief, which considerably revived them, as they had both suffered severely from thirst, caused by their violent exertion and labour. Their kind host instantly prepared for their concealment, placing them in an interior apartment, frequented only by his wife and himself; and here Perollo requested to be left with Carusello, in order to compose himself, recover his strength, and deliberate on the steps it was necessary to pursue to provide for his future safety.

The promises made by Antonello di Palermo were of no avail to secure his faith. He watched Perollo to his retreat, unobserved either by him or Parisi, and had no sooner seen him enter the house, than he hastened with all possible speed

to the castle, where count Luna was still raging at his followers for suffering his arch enemy to escape, and promising rewards of unbounded value to any one who would still secure him; in consequence of which, many of his partisans had left the plunder of the castle, and dispersed themselves in various directions, hoping to intercept the flight of its lord, when the treacherous spy approached.—“Count Luna,” he said, “I claim the fulfilment of your promises, and will shew you the hare upon her form.”

“My gallant fellow,” exclaimed Luna, exultingly, “put Perollo into my hands, and more than I have promised shall be yours. Loria,” he continued, turning to Erasmo, “select an hundred of our followers; attend this guide to the hiding-place of Giacomo, and bring him instantly before me.”

Loria collected the men with some difficulty, and proceeded with Antonello towards the gate of St. Ermo. The house of Parisi was surrounded by guards, and

the orders of Loria given to force the doors, which instantly was done.

The noise roused Pandolfina from his resting-place. He started up, and exclaimed to Carusello that they were discovered. —“ My faithful friend,” he said, “ your services can be of no farther use; I will neither involve you nor my friendly host in my misfortunes; and it is my positive command that you remain where you are.”

Andrea fell at his feet, and embracing his knees, conjured to be allowed to follow him. Parisi came in terrified at the danger of his guest.

“ Their numbers,” he said, “ are overpowering, signor, but I am willing to die in your defence.”

“ Resistance,” said Perollo, “ is useless; you have done all in your power, Parisi; and farther I cannot allow you to expose yourself. I will surrender to the officer who commands the troop.”

Andrea, in an agony of grief, implored his master to defend himself, and allow

him to perish in his service; but the resolution of the baron was inflexible.

“When they have possessed themselves of my person, they will seek no further, and my friends may hope to escape. Andrea, the baroness and my children will still require your life. Preserve yourself for them. Commend me to my wife, to Federico, and my other children. My thanks and blessing be upon all my friends!”

The old man still clung about him, and the tears of Parisi and his wife bore witness to their sorrow.

Perollo, with a countenance unmoved even in this extremity of his misfortunes, again bade them farewell, committed Carusello to their care, and advancing to the door, met Loria, who was entering. Perollo resigned his sword. — “I am happy,” he said, “in meeting a cavalier like don Erasmo Loria to surrender to; and request he will conduct me to the presence of count Luna.”

Don Erasmo received the submission of

his captive with respect and compassion, and begged that he would command his services and friendly exertions; taking his prisoner by the hand, he then conducted him out, and surrounding him by the guard, proceeded towards Luna Castle.

At the instant they were departing, a cry of wild despair was heard, and Andrea rushed out in search of his master. He saw him surrounded by his enemies, and without a prospect of escape; then gazed for an instant on those about him, and perceiving the exulting looks of Antonello, the fatal truth burst upon his mind, that in him he saw the betrayer of his lord. With the speed of youth, and an energy given by despair, he ran furiously upon the traitor, and with one blow dispatched him. The soldiers of Loria were about to revenge his fall by the instantaneous sacrifice of Carusello.

“ Save him!” cried Perollo; “ it is my old and faithful friend distracted by our loss! save him, don Erasmo, I beseech you.”

“ His blow was well and justly aimed,”

said Loria; "I will do my best to preserve him. Secure his person," he continued to the soldiers, "and convey him to my quarters."

Perollo took from his neck a chain of great value, and entreated don Erasmo to receive it as a pledge of gratitude for his kindness.

In their way to the Castel di Luna, they were met by Giovanni la Liparia, a Trapanese of low birth, who having been detected by Perollo in several disgraceful and illegal proceedings in an office which he held from the viceroy, had been dismissed from his situation, and consequently became one of his most inveterate enemies.

When he saw the captive chief surrounded by his guards, he shouted with insulting delight, and forcing himself towards Perollo, requested to speak to don Erasmo. Loria commanded him to defer his communication, but he persisted in making his way through the soldiers, who knowing him to be of their party, per-

mitted him to pass. Loria demanded his purpose.

“To have a nearer view,” he exclaimed, “of this humbled culprit, who will to-day pay the debt which he owes to the world for his iniquitous tyranny and oppression.”

“Silence! dishonest low-born villain,” said Perollo; “the fate of Pandolfina depends not on such menial slaves; retire, and provoke not the anger of your superiors.”

Though a captive, defenceless and unarmed, there was a native air of dignity and command in the manner of Perollo, which the Trapanese had not the power to resist. Loria was more indignant than don Giacomo himself at the insult which had been offered to a prisoner under his conduct and protection, and he ordered the fellow to retire, under pain of immediate punishment. With looks of subdued but vindictive fury at both cavaliers, La Liparia withdrew, and after deliberating an instant with himself, flew to seek

Calogero Calandrino or the baron Adriano, to whom he had particularly attached himself, and who had brought him forward as one of the party of don Sigismund.

Amongst the most vehement of the persecutors of don Giacomo, stood the family of Calandrino; and during the siege, the two brothers, who were considered as the heads of the house, Geronimo and Calogero, had distinguished themselves by several acts of sanguinary cruelty, which shewed the deep-rooted and inveterate hatred they bore to the name of Perollo. In the debate upon accepting terms from the baron, they had both argued warmly against all compromise or treaty.

After the capture of the castle, Geronimo had wantonly bombarded the building into which the females and children had retired, and received the orders of don Sigismund to desist with much dissatisfaction and murmuring.

The dispositions of both the brothers were equally sanguinary. They had formerly been subject to punishment for

cruelty and oppression, and seemed only to live for vengeance. In the character of the younger of the two, Calogero, avarice was a passion exceeded only by his inhuman barbarity. He had no sooner gained the interior of the Casa di Perollo, than his attentions were directed to unite plunder and assassination; and both his ruling passions seemed likely to be gratified. A confidential attendant of the baroness, who had been separated from her mistress by some accident during her flight, was seized by the murderous Calogero, and regardless of her sex or her prayers, he was about to dispatch her, when she offered, if her life was spared, to conduct him to a secret deposit of some of the treasures of Perollo. The uplifted sword of the barbarian was arrested, and he desired instant proof of her power and inclination to purchase her preservation. She conducted him without loss of time to a cistern in the interior court, in which he soon ascertained that a prize of no small value was contained.

“ Know you of any other depository of this sort ?”

“ No, signor,” replied the trembling female ; “ the chief part of the baron’s money and jewels, I believe, is here.”

Calandrino deliberated but an instant, and then added the unfortunate informant to the number of victims he that day butchered. The avarice of Calandrino was now gratified beyond his highest expectations, and he lost no time in securing his acquisition, which he caused his own vassals instantly to remove to his residence ; and he had just seen it securely lodged, when La Liparia appeared, breathless from the impatience with which he had hastened in search of him.

“ What important intelligence, Giovanni, brings you here in such a hurry ?”

“ Giacomo is taken,” he replied ; “ I have seen him in the hands of our troops ; but unless some method is devised of doing ourselves justice before he comes into the presence of count Luna, I fear we shall be deprived of our revenge.

Erasmus Loria, in whose hands the prisoner now is, seems more inclined to fight his battles than to conduct him to execution. Luchese and several of the other chiefs will, I know, be clamorous to dismiss him uninjured; and I doubt the resolution of don Sigismund to resist their united importunities: but tell me, signor, where is Adriano?"

"With the count and my brother Geronimo still in the castle."

"Decision and expedition only can prevent the mischief I apprehend," said La Liparia.

Calandrino contemplated the escape of Perollo and the probable consequences; the punishment to which he would bring all his enemies, and the restoration he should have to make of his ill-gotten wealth: he commanded La Liparia and his own retainers instantly to follow him, and hastened towards the Castel di Luna.

On the way thither he met with Onofrio Imbiagnia, and several other partisans of Luna, whom he desired to attend him.

to the castle, where Erasmo was nearly arrived with his prisoner. Without suspicion of his purpose, he saw Calandrino following him with great impetuosity, and was just assuring Pandolfina of all his interest with count Luna to accommodate matters honourably to both parties, when the villain Calogero ran up, and buried his sword in the back of his unarmed victim ! As Perollo fell, the weapons of Imbiagnia, Liparia, and most of the party present, were sheathed in his body ; and he expired beneath the innumerable blows of his infuriated murderers, near the fountain of San Martino, opposite the gates of Luna Castle.

The sword of Loria was not drawn in vain to revenge the fall of his ill-fated captive. Calandrino received a deep wound, and La Liparia was felled to the ground ; but don Erasmo was soon disarmed, and his reproaches and remonstrances regarded with inattention or contempt. He had engaged his word to protect Perollo till he had brought him to

the presence of count Luna, and therefore considered himself bound to defend him; but his single exertions were soon overpowered, and the body of Perollo was left defenceless in the hands of the murderers, who wreaked their fury on his lifeless remains, with a barbarity as disgraceful to themselves as it was harmless to their victim.

CHAPTER VI.

Sveva.—*Signor del mondo a te che manca?*

Narunt.—*Pace.*

ALFIBRI.

CALANDRINO and his associates had scarcely completed their atrocious act, when Sigismund rode up with impatient speed, to receive his prisoner from the hands of don Erasmo; the crowd made way before him, and exposed the mangled form of Pandolfina weltering in his blood. He threw himself from his horse, and contemplated for some moments in silent delight the dreadful spectacle; at length exclaiming—"Thus perish all the enemies of our house! Destruction to Perollo! Liberty to Sciacca, and long life to the emperor!"

His partisans, who now crowded around the scene, rent the air with acclamations. "Viva Luna è Peralta! viva l'Imperadore!"

è morano i nostri nemici!" rung throughout the city. Inebriated with their triumph, the soldiers and vassals of the victorious chieftains scattered themselves through every part of the town, and soon told the melancholy tale of the fall of the brave and ill-fated Perollo.

The ruffians who remained with Sigismund about the body, encouraged by the approbation with which the bloody deed had been received by him, resolved on gratifying to the utmost their vengeance against the lifeless object of their hatred. A cord was tied round the body, and fastened to a horse, upon which one of the adherents of Calandrino being mounted, they proceeded to drag the mutilated remains through the streets, whilst count Luna, who encouraged this act of savage barbarity, remounted his charger to follow the disgraceful procession.

Ferrante Luchese arrived as they were setting forth, and beholding the conduct of his party, indignantly seized the bridle of don Sigismund, and besought him, that

if neither the common feelings of humanity, nor regard for his own character, could stop this shameful act, that he would consider the infamy it must affix upon all his family and connexions.

“ I want no advice from Ferrante Luchese to teach me what is due to the friends of count Luna,” replied Sigismund; “ he has already snatched from my just revenge the murderer of Gilberto, and the destroyer of half my people. Proceed, my brave fellows,” he continued to his soldiers, “ and shew to the citizens of Sciacca how Sigismund di Luna punishes their tyrant and oppressor.”

Luchese tore from his shoulder the badges of his party, and trampled them beneath his feet.—“ The lowest citizen in Sciacca,” he exclaimed, “ will now learn to despise the dishonoured name of Luna, and not a man amongst them but would prefer the situation of the brave Pandolfina to that of his vindictive disgraceful butchers.”

The trumpets and drums of the party,

the shouts and cries of the soldiers and vassals, drowned the farther reproaches and remonstrances of Luchese, and he retired in silence to seek don Paolo, and vent his rage in declaiming against those with whom he had leagued himself.

Don Sigismund was now surrounded by those who, like himself, had given up every regard to their own honour and reputation for the gratification of their impotent revenge. Geronimo and Calogero Calandrino, Onofrio Imbiagnia, and his brother, the malignant Adriano, and Del Nadore, formerly the flatterer of Perollo, and the object of his bounty, now amongst the most vehement of his insulting foes—all these now crowded round their chieftain, who, in complete armour, except his helmet, and with a naked sword in his hand, immediately followed the body of Perollo as it was drawn through the streets of Sciacca. But even in this hour of triumph the pride of Luna received a severe and grating wound; the citizens who met the procession fled with horror in

every direction, whilst the females who beheld the sad spectacle from the windows, bewailed with loud and piercing exclamations the loss of their father and benefactor. Many of the lower class, tearing their hair, and imprecating curses upon the murderers, rushed out into the street, and followed Sigismund with every species of opprobrious abuse, in defiance of the ill treatment they met with from his adherents. The praises of his rival, low as he now was laid, were to Luna proofs of the indelible affection his generous liberality had purchased, and conveyed more bitter pangs to his heart than had the greatest display of power and pomp which had ever been exhibited by Perollo in his days of joy and splendour.

When the party arrived opposite the house of Imbiagnia, where the wounded Della Bardia still lingered in a hopeless and dying state, the recollection of his fate roused the assassins to another ebullition of fury, and they redoubled their cries of triumph and revenge. The coun-

tess Caltabellotta had not quitted the house since her first arrival, but watched every turn of Della Bardia's changing countenance. For hours he had appeared not to remark her presence. Again she thought that at times he recognised her, when she would throw herself beside his couch in agony, imploring him by some means to relieve her anxiety respecting the depository of her secret. But he paid little attention to her supplications. Every exertion brought on a new convulsion, and except at the approach of don Sigismund, or count Giorgio, he gave no signs of being interested by those about him; for some time previous to the murder of Perollo, he had lain in a quiescent state, gradually growing weaker. The countess had dreaded every instant would bring on the termination of his existence, and had been revolving within herself the means of discovering the secret so important to her future comfort and security. To seize the person of count Giorgio, the friend and confidant of Accursi, was the only

plan she had yet devised, and was fully resolved that the death of Della Bardia should be the signal for the Greek's destruction.

As the sound of the approaching cavalcade reached her ears, she rose from her seat to observe the cause; an attendant entered, and informed her that the conquerors were dragging the body of Perollo in triumph through the city; the lady threw open the lattice to feast her eyes upon the shameful spectacle, and could not restrain her exclamations of delight when the mangled form appeared in view. Wrapt in exultation, she forgot for an instant all her anxiety respecting Della Bardia, and contemplated with barbarous pride the disgraceful vengeance of the friends of Luna and Peralta.

When the shouts of the party rose beneath the windows, she was advancing into the balcony, but felt her arm grasped violently by some one behind her. She turned and saw the ghastly form of Della Bardia standing erect upon the couch, his eyes

flashing with demoniacal expression, and all his features terrifically distorted. She stood transfixed in horror and amazement. The eyes of the wounded man caught a momentary view of his destroyer. With a tremendous voice he shouted out—"Io moro contento! io moro felice!" and fell a lifeless corpse at the feet of the countess and her attendant. They attempted in vain to raise the fallen form of Della Bardia; its gigantic and stiffening weight resisted all their efforts; and the lady having ascertained that death had terminated her hopes of making any discovery, prepared to return to Luna Castle, still tormented with the uncertainty of what might be the result of those threats which alone had saved Accursi d'Amato from the poniard of a secret assassin.

In the meanwhile Sigismund and his companions held on their way, unconscious of the event which had taken place, and it was nearly sunset when the barbarous procession closed before the gates of Francisco Perollo, the captain of the city, who

was absent at Partanna, raising troops, it was supposed, to aid his murdered kinsman. Here the mangled body of Pandolfina was left, covered with blood and dust, and so deformed and disfigured by the treatment it had received, as to render it impossible to be recognized even by his dearest friends. He who but a few days back had been surrounded by every domestic blessing, by numerous gallant friends and retainers, whose will and whose word were law throughout the country, who was followed by the blessings of the poor, by the respect of thousands, and the envy of now a few, was not left without a friend to save his mangled body from insult and indignity, or to remove it from the spot where his enemies had cast it forth, when sated with their inhuman revenge.

To have been enrolled amongst the friends of don Giacomo Perollo, was but a short period before the ambition of his equals, the fortune of his inferiors; now his very name was the signal for perse-

cution. The dearest objects of his love were mourners and fugitives, indebted for their existence to the murderer of the husband and the parent; his faithful followers buried beneath the ruins of his splendid abode, or escaped wounded and spoiled, reduced to misery and want.

Nor was the situation of the victor more to be envied. Don Sigismund had now obtained a full and complete revenge. The power of Perollo was apparently annihilated, the house of Luna triumphant, and all their injuries and insults, real or imaginary, fully and amply repaid. The daughter of Solanto was completely in his power, deprived of every friend who might support or encourage her in resisting his will and pleasure. Every thing had yielded before him, and of all his purposes, not one had failed in being accomplished, even beyond his most sanguine expectations. Yet even in the moment which completed his triumph, and crowned him with victory, he was an object of greater compassion than the most

miserable of those from whom he had torn every earthly happiness. The lamentations and the praises he had heard lavished upon the fallen Perollo, and the curses poured forth against his destroyers, had checked his enjoyment even at the instant of gratification ; and his sanguinary hatred now gorged to its utmost, his thoughts necessarily wandered from the present to the future ; the lives and fortunes of his house, of all his friends and adherents, were justly forfeited to the outraged laws of humanity and justice. The vengeance of Monteleone would be swift to punish the murder of his friend ; and to resist the viceregal forces, was a task he could not expect to accomplish. The emperor was known to be inflexibly just, and to punish without mercy all insults offered to the sovereign authorities and to the laws of the realm, and the massacre of Statella would alone have been an unpardonable crime. On the other hand, the interest which Lana had with Pope Clement, and in which he trusted to make his peace,

might possibly be dilatory, at all events could not be exerted before the viceroy had an opportunity of trying his strength, and perhaps of completing his final ruin; he had been abandoned and insulted by several of his party, who stood highest in reputation for gallantry and honour. Pugiades, Luchese, and Erasmo Loria, had forsaken him with reproaches and contempt; Talyavia had left him in silent indignation; and his own heart secretly whispered that he was dishonoured and disgraced, though even to himself he would neither have allowed or acknowledged it. Many of his bravest troops had fallen in the siege. Gilberto had long been a firm and faithful friend, and Della Bardia, with all his faults, was a zealous and devoted partisan. On the subject of Costanza di Solanto, the mind of Sigismund was even more disturbed; his love had increased by the obstacles thrown in his way, and the sight of her, even in sorrow, illness, and in anger, had blown the flame, till he felt that it would be impossible for him to

live without her; yet the spirit she had manifested upon every occasion, promised a resistance he dreaded to encounter, and the abhorrence she had expressed against himself, augured but ill for his prospect of inducing her to accept him, by the gentler means of persuasion and affection.

Arrived at Luna Castle, he learned from his mother the conclusion of Della Bardia's sufferings; and after some debate upon the necessary steps to be taken with regard to Francisca, whom he resolved to commit solely to the guidance of his mother, the count enjoined her to use every possible means of soothing the lady Costanza, and to see that all the respect due to the memory of the baroness was scrupulously attended to. The body had been removed from the Casa di Perollo, and Costanza again allowed to attend upon it.

Don Sigismund then proceeded to hold a consultation with Adriano and his remaining friends, upon the necessary steps to be adopted to secure themselves against the viceroy, and the machinations of the

scattered friends and adherents of Perollo, who were still numerous, and might, if united, become powerful.

Several of the chiefs of the insurgents continued during the night their devastation and plunder within the walls of the Casa di Perollo, whilst others were employed in perpetrating various schemes of petty malignity against the vanquished. Simme Maurici, with a numerous company, paraded the streets, defacing the insignia of the Perollo family from every public building which their munificence had embellished; and so great had been their power, so princely their liberality, that few of the principal ornaments of Sciacca but exhibited the emblems of their illustrious house; in every place where these appeared, Maurici and his band, with the minutest care, endeavoured to efface them.

Another act, the memory of which will endure as long as the names of Luna and Perollo are remembered in Sciacca, is recorded of Pietro Imbiagnia, equally disgraceful to himself and his friends. In a

garden beyond the city walls, belonging to one of the poorer citizens, was a pear tree, the fruit of which had long been celebrated for its flavour and perfection; and the possessor of this garden having, in common with most of his class, a grateful sense of the kindness and protection of Perollo, was annually accustomed to present him with an offering of the fruits of this celebrated tree, which, in honour of his favourite chief, was called "l'albero Perollo:" to this garden Imbiagnia, and a large concourse of the followers of Luna, took their way, early on the morning after the death of Pandolfina; when not contented with cutting down the tree, they burnt and destroyed its roots, that no shoot might afterwards arise from the stock, to recall the memory of the name which they abhorred. The tree itself they then bore in triumph to the city, shouting through the streets, "Let us not leave a scion of Perollo!" which has since become a proverb in the neighbourhood of

Sciaccia, to signify the extreme of vengeance and extermination.

When don Sigismund and his friends were assembling in council, they were interrupted by the arrival of a deputation from the monks of the Carmelite convent, to beg his permission for the interment of the body of Statella and his unfortunate companions, who still remained without the rites of sepulture. To this don Sigismund consented, desiring the body of the commander to be buried in the sepulchre of don Geronimo Leggio, formerly captain of the city, who had been punished with death for treasons discovered through the activity and exertions of Pandolfina. The situation in which the remains of Perollo had been abandoned, was at that time unknown to the monks, who retired as soon as their request was granted.

The intelligence of the murder of don Giacomo had been conveyed by Luchese to don Paolo, who, after seeing the baroness and her companions in safety to the

convent, had retired to the residence of his brave preserver; he now received the information with firmness, and without any observation on the conduct of the assassins; but when he reflected upon the widow and the orphans to whom the fatal event must be communicated, his resolution forsook him, and he gave way to the feelings with which he was oppressed.

Luchese, with as little detail as possible, mentioned the unworthy treatment which was about to be inflicted upon the body, and entreated don Paolo, if possible, to save the baroness from hearing of this outrage. Perollo heard with indignation the barbarous proceedings of the enemy, and agreed with Ferrante in the necessity of apprising the ladies of their loss, and preventing, if possible, any of the particulars from being known.

Luchese offered to attend him to the convent, to save him from the injuries and insults of the partisans of Luna.

As they proceeded on their melancholy embassy, the distant shouts of the in-

human triumph reached their ears; don Paolo trembled violently; Luchese supported him, and loudly exclaimed against himself for having ever joined with so disgraceful a banditti, and lent his aid in furthering so iniquitous an end; from henceforth vowing to renounce all intercourse and communication with the house of Luna, and with every one who had participated in the shameful scenes which disgraced their victory.

They reached the convent, which was without the walls, unmolested and unseen, and were immediately conducted to the baroness, who anxiously awaited intelligence of her lord and husband. The countenance of don Paolo was the herald of his tidings. Luchese had remained without, not to intrude upon the afflicted family; and as the messenger of new misfortunes entered the apartment, his pale countenance and altered eye, his quivering lip, and the hesitation of his manner, too clearly told his tale.

“ My children are fatherless, and my-

self a widow !” exclaimed the baroness, in a tremulous tone.

Don Paolo stood silent and incapable of utterance, and the wife of Pandolfina sank lifeless at his feet. The children screamed in agony. Marguerita attempted to raise her fallen protectress, and exerting all the power she possessed over her own feelings, endeavoured to quiet the lamentations of the young ones, who clung round their mother with loud and bitter cries of grief and terror. Don Paolo appeared bereft of all his powers; he could neither act nor speak, and catching the youngest child in his arms, wept over it with unrestrained and inexpressible agony. The entreaties and exhortations of Marguerita roused him at length, and he tried to follow her example, and endeavour to recover the baroness, who remained for some time relieved by insensibility from the misery to which she was destined to awake; at length she slowly unclosed her eyes to returning sense and wretchedness.

Her first request was to be taken immediately to the body of her husband.

Don Paolo represented the impossibility of any of their party adventuring themselves amongst their enemies during the first effusion of their violence.—“ Tomorrow,” he said, “ Luchese shall demand the restitution of their victim, who shall instantly be removed hither.”

The night was passed by the afflicted family of Perollo in deep and bitter lamentations, and don Paolo requested Luchese to apply for the restoration of the body, who not supposing that the barbarity of count Luna would extend beyond the first ebullition of his frenzy, had desired his brother, don Marco, to make the demand, which was rejected by the count with the most unfeeling and decided resolution.

To attempt to remove it without his permission, was impossible, his adherents being entirely masters of the city, and scattered through it in every direction. Upon the fall of Perollo, their numbers

had been increased by all the idle and ill-disposed persons in the town and neighbourhood, who flocked eagerly to the standard of don Sigismund, in the hopes of sharing in the enormous plunder; an hundred thousand florins having been seized in the Casa di Perollo, and it being expected that the rage of Luna would next be directed against other members of the family of Pandolfina, who must undoubtedly fall easier victims than their chief. Collecting round him a numerous body of men, was considered by the count as likely to overawe the viceroy, and to secure more advantageous terms; on which account he encouraged all who chose to enrol themselves amongst his adherents.

The refusal of interment to the body of don Giacomo was communicated by Luchese to Perollo, with every expression of indignation and disgust at such conduct, and with an offer of his services in any way to accomplish the undertaking secretly, or to attempt, by remonstrating

with the more honourable members of the faction, to induce them to compel their chief to grant the desired permission.

Don Paolo received the intelligence with horror and regret, and requested a short time for deliberation before he determined how to act. In the meanwhile he was obliged to revisit the convent of Santa Martha, having promised the baroness to be absent but a short time.

Upon his arrival, he found that she had sunk for a few minutes into a disturbed state of slumber, and Marguerita appeared to request he would remain, as she was aware that her protectress would inquire, the instant she awoke, for her kind friend, and be distressed at his absence.

Don Paolo willingly consented to stay, and Marguerita anxiously inquired when the body of her second parent would be restored. Perollo could scarcely articulate the refusal which had been made to their demand; his companion asked by whom the request had been preferred?

“By don Marco Luchese,” replied don Paolo.

“It is impossible,” said the lady, “but that a few hours reflection, and the remonstrances of his friends, will bring count Luna to a just sense of his wanton inhumanity.”

“Those by whom he is surrounded are equally strangers to every feeling of honour and charity,” said Perollo, despairingly.

The orphan of Landolini remained a few moments silent, as if deliberating with herself.

“Allow me, signor,” at length she said, with some hesitation, “to undertake the task of inducing count Luna to grant our petition.”

Perollo looked in wonder at his young companion, and shook his head in despair. —“I possess no powers of oratory, signor, nor perhaps any persuasive arguments, but I think I can rely upon my perseverance in the cause; and from the conduct of the

count when he granted us permission to withdraw from the Casa di Perollo, he cannot be totally devoid of humanity, though warped by passion and revenge. For myself, I fear no dangers in the service of the baroness, and devotion to the memory of my murdered parent and protector, will give me resolution to surmount any obstacles which may be thrown in my way. To aid me I shall have every argument which human feeling and Christian charity can give, and to oppose me only a barbarous revenge, which is not always the sole inhabitant of the bosom of count Luna."

Don Paolo knew no other feasible plan, and although the one proposed by Marguerita was not such as to excite any sanguine expectations, he listened to it with attention.

"To expose yourself alone and undefended to the insolence of the brutal ruffians by whom Sigismund is surrounded, cannot be permitted," he said.

“Surely the abbess and some of the sisterhood will lend their aid in accomplishing an act so consonant with the duties of religion; the father Angelini, I know, would attend us: do, signor, permit me to attempt this act of gratitude to the memory of him to whose noble generosity I am so eternally indebted.”

“If the lady abbess objects not, my opposition shall give way to your wishes; but let us not distress the baroness, by informing her of the necessity of this measure.”

Marguerita withdrew to request the abbess would attend don Paolo, and decide upon the propriety of her request. The venerable superior had long been affectionately attached to the baroness Pandolfina, and her house had experienced the liberality of don Giacomo. She therefore received the helpless fugitives with the tenderest sympathy and consideration; warmly entered into all their sufferings, and shared their grief: with unfeigned abhorrence she now heard the detail of count Luna's conduct, but at the proposal of

Marguerita, she hesitated, terrified at the difficulty, and astonished at the idea of so great a breach of the usual discipline of her order.

The signora Landolini trembled for the fate of her petition, when the father Angelini entered the room ; he had come to visit his patroness in her affliction, and was ignorant of the new distress in which her friends were involved.

To the confessor Marguerita now addressed herself, and to her infinite satisfaction succeeded in engaging him in her cause, which he advocated so successfully as to persuade both the superior and Perollo to compliance, and to aid in furthering her plans. The abbess, from age and infirmity, was unequal to the task of attending her, but did not object to part of the nuns joining in the procession.

Angelini undertook to ensure the attendants of the monks of San Francisco, to which society he belonged, and had no doubt but that the Carmelite brothers

would again assist in so charitable and pious an undertaking. In a few hours he engaged to be in readiness, and requested the permission of the signora to communicate her intentions to some of the principal ladies connected with the family of Perollo, or who favoured his party, and lamented his untimely end, that their company might have every addition which was likely to produce an effect upon the mind of the vindictive Sigismund.

Marguerita willingly consented to leave every thing to the disposal of the confessor, and it having been determined to keep the whole proceeding from the baroness, she withdrew to see if the object of her anxious care was roused from her temporary repose.

When she left the apartment, the abbess remarked to don Paolo her astonishment at the conduct of Marguerita—"Any other girl," she said, "under such circumstances, would have required support, instead of being able to give it; but the signora Landolini seems to acquire cou-

rage and resolution by every fresh difficulty."

"Your observation, signora," said don Paolo, "is perfectly just; but the firmness and steadiness evinced by Marguerita, are no more than might be expected from her education; and, unhappily for her, she has, ere this, had opportunities of shewing the support to be derived from good sense and good principles in the hour of trial."

The baroness was risen from her couch when her adopted child entered the room, and was kneeling before the crucifix in silent prayer. Marguerita joined in her devotion, and when she had risen, inquired tenderly if she felt refreshed by her repose. The mourner was more composed than she had been since the event, affectionately replied to her questions, and asked if don Paolo had yet arrived? Being answered in the affirmative, she prepared to receive him. Their feelings were again violently agitated at meeting, and the ba-

roness could with difficulty ask if any reply had been received from count Luna.

“No final arrangement has yet been made,” said Perollo; “as soon as it is, your excellenza shall be informed.”

“It will be a melancholy satisfaction to pay the last offices to him we have lost,” she said, after some hesitation, finding it impossible to pronounce the name of her murdered lord.

Don Paolo endeavoured to turn her thoughts into another channel, by mentioning a private dispatch he had forwarded during the night to the viceroy, by means of a secret messenger, to communicate the state into which Sciacca had been thrown by the violence of the rebels.

“And Federico,” exclaimed the agonized mother, “will then learn the horrors of our situation.”

A fresh burst of grief once more impeded all conversation; but after a time, Perollo succeeded in turning her attention to her children, and especially to her absent

son. He then observed that Marguerita had not had any rest, and proposed to remain in her station, if she would retire for an hour or two.

“The dear child,” said the baroness, “has had no thoughts but for our afflictions: it will be a comfort to me if she can find repose.”

Marguerita understood the purpose of don Paolo in dismissing her, and instantly retired, not to take the rest she so much wanted, but to prepare for her eventful expedition to Luna Castle, and to try the powers of persuasion on the relentless Sigismund.

The confessor, father Angelini, at length arrived to attend the young petitioner; he was accompanied by the monks of his own convent, and was to be joined by the Carmelite brothers; many of the noble ladies in the city he also hoped would attend the procession; and six of the nuns had been engaged in the charitable undertaking.

Marguerita was still attired in the weeds she wore for her father, and her com-

panions, the sisters of Santa Martha, enveloped in the thick black veils of their order, formed a sad and funereal train. Slowly they entered the adjoining gate of the city, and as they held on their way through the streets, several ladies of rank, and females of all classes, joined the lamenting cavalcade. The Carmelites met them near the plain before the castle of count Luna, and the whole assemblage arrived at the gates without meeting with any obstruction.

The prior requested to be conducted to don Sigismund, and all the party were admitted into the great hall, where they awaited his appearance. Marguerita now trembled with agitation, and leaned upon Angelini for support.

At length the count entered: the signora Landolini tried to advance towards him, but her limbs refused their office, and she could only fall at his feet in an agony of tears. The other females followed her example, and for some time their sobs and lamentations were the only sounds heard

throughout the assembly. Luna seemed affected, and stood waiting an explanation of the scene.

The prior of San Francisco stated their request, and demanded permission to remove the body of the baron Pandolfina for the purpose of interment.

Displeased at so public a testimony to the worth of his rival, and indignant at the general commiseration excited by his fate, Sigismund declared that his determination was already taken, and that he had decreed the carcass of the tyrant as a prey to the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field.

The prior attempted to remonstrate.

“My resolution is fully fixed,” said Luna, in an angry tone; “let any one who dares presume to contradict it.”

Marguerita rose from her position, and firmly, but modestly, asked if such was his final answer?

“Yes,” he replied, scarcely regarding the questioner.

ten, in her deep interest and anxiety, every fear which at first had overpowered her; her veil was thrown back, and displayed her striking beauty, inspired by the enthusiasm with which she was transported.

Don Sigismund stood speechless in admiration and astonishment; the lamentations of the other females had gradually sunk in wonder, and the whole assembly were fixed in various attitudes of attention, when the voice of Marguerita ceased for an instant. Not a breath disturbed the silence of the hall; the changing manner and softened aspect of the count gave encouragement to the pleading damsel, and after a short pause, she renewed her supplications—"Count Luna, I have received one favour already at your hands; in the moment of triumph, you preserved the life of her who has been more than a mother to the orphan child of Landolini, and your conduct in that hour of distress convinces me that your heart possesses the feelings which I now seek once again to awaken.

You have numbers attached to you by the bonds of affection and of blood ; think what would be their sufferings, could your situation be exchanged for that of him for whom I plead ; you have known the force of human affection, and of love, signor, in the various ties by which they bind us to our kindred. Report speaks loudly of the filial piety of don Sigismund di Luna, and, I doubt not, there are other chains around your heart, which would teach it what our sensations must be in imploring such a mercy as we now seek to obtain. Count Luna, again let me entreat you to revoke your barbarous resolution."

Marguerita was about to kneel a second time, when Sigismund prevented her—
" You have prevailed, signora, and upon certain conditions your request is granted."

The lady expressed her thanks, and asked upon what terms he acceded to their petition.

" That the body be removed," he said, " without pomp or ostentation—without

announcing to the citizens the celebration of the obsequies by the clangour of bells, or the parade of crosses and flambeaux; let it be conveyed to its final abode quietly and privately."

Marguerita accepted the concession of Sigismund with additional thanks, and the party withdrew from the castle, for the purpose of conveying the body to the Convent of Santa Martha. A bier was soon procured, and the mourners proceeded to the house of Francisco Perollo, before which it had been left. The mutilated remains were raised from the earth with every mark of respect, whilst the unceasing tears of the attending multitude proclaimed the value of the friend and protector they had lost.

In sad and silent state the procession then took their way to Santa Martha, gaining numbers as they passed along, who all united in testifying their respect to the worth and honour of the departed. More than an hundred of the principal ladies in Sciacca, covered with mourning veils, at

tended the body to the convent, and when placed in the church, they gave way to the vehemence of their grief in cries and lamentations.

The baroness Pandolfina was apprised of the event, and rose instantly to make her way to the place where the remains of her lord were placed, but the representation of her friends induced her still to delay for a short time till the crowd was abated, when every precaution was taken to conceal the outrages which had been committed on the body. A large pall was thrown over it, and every part covered, when don Paolo led the afflicted widow into the church, and earnestly entreated her not to indulge her feelings more than she could avoid. She summoned all her resolution, and conducted herself with the most heroic fortitude: her wish to remain some time with the body was acceded to, and she could only be persuaded to retire when the necessary preparations for the interment began.

On the following evening, the last re-

mains of the illustrious baron Pandolfina were removed to the Carmelite church, with none of the usual appendages of funeral pomp, but followed by the best and noblest of his fellow-citizens, embalmed with their sincere and generous sorrows, hallowed by their prayers, and consecrated by their love.

The monks received the honoured relics at the great gate of the church, and conveyed them to the chapel, in which many of his noble ancestors reposed; but never had one of their race been consigned to his last abode more sincerely lamented, more ardently beloved, or more devoutly admired, than don Giacomo Perollo.

CHAPTER VII.
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Oh, Memory ! thou fond deceiver !  
Still inportunate and vain ;  
To former joys recurring ever,  
And turning all the past to pain. GOLDSMITH.

THE first messengers who had been sent from Sciacca, unfortunately arrived two days after the viceroy had departed for the continent of Italy : they had followed him into Calabria, and met him on his return, he being ordered back soon after his landing, in consequence of the final conclusion of the negociations between the emperor and the pope, which had rendered an increase of troops in Italy unnecessary ; whilst the proceedings between Margaret of Austria and Louis of France at Cambray, promised a general termination of hostilities throughout Europe.

Upon his return to Messina, the duca



di Monteleone learned the fatal termination of the struggle which Perollo had made against the insurgents, and the subsequent conduct of the partisans of Luna; his horror and indignation at the barbarous transactions, at the violation of the laws, and the insult offered to the person of the emperor in the murder of don Geronimo Statella, were increased by the deepest sorrow for his own personal loss, in the death of his faithful friend the baron Pandolfina. But the grief of Federico was beyond all powers of description; and although his own departure from Sciacca had been in obedience to orders he could not resist, and the return of the troops with him an affair in which he had no voice, yet, in the agony of his grief, he reproached himself for having deserted his parents and family when his presence was most necessary.

The viceroy kindly felt for his distress, and assured him that all possible expedition should be used in sending him over to revenge his father's death, to protect his

widowed mother and his persecuted friends, and to inflict the severest punishment upon the rebels. Gaetano also most sincerely sympathized in the calamity of his friend, and from his visit to Sciacca, had acquired an affection for don Giacomo, which made him lament his untimely fall with unfeigned sorrow, independent of his regard for Federico.

A council of state was called as soon as possible, to which were convened all the general officers attached to the army. The viceroy opened the assembly in much agitation, and under much distress, stating that the event which had called them together was such as must fill every loyal subject, every one possessed with the spirit of humanity, with astonishment and horror. He then informed them that count Sigismund di Luna, having collected together eight hundred conspirators, had made himself master of Sciacca, slain don Geronimo Statella, with all his officers, guards, and legal attendants, who had been sent to that city, in order to chastise some previous

outrages which had been committed by some of the friends of count Luna; and that after this massacre, they had besieged the castle of don Giacomo Perollo, baron of Pandolfina, which, after three days fighting, they had taken, and murdered its gallant defender, whose body they had afterwards inhumanly insulted, drawing it through the city at the tail of a horse, and denying to it the rites of sepulture. They had also, he informed them, murdered and cut in pieces the vassals and retainers of the baron, burnt and destroyed his castle, and making themselves masters of the city, committed every species of violence and rapine, not sparing even the sanctity of religion.

Exclusive of the barbarity of these atrocious deeds, they were to consider the treason and the insult offered to the person of the emperor, not to mention himself, and those to whom the powers of government had been delegated; and he called upon them to punish these unheard-of offences in such a way as might vindicate the out-

raged laws of humanity and justice, and be sufficient for ever to deter others from similar crimes.

The assembly were unanimous in expressing their detestation of the offences of count Luna and his adherents, and in advising his highness to dispatch an overwhelming force to crush the insurgents, before they could have time to escape or elude the sword of justice. It was also resolved that Cala Palastra and Giovanni Regnati, two of the principal judges of the kingdom, should be sent to pronounce legal sentence upon the offenders, and with full power to punish all who were concerned in the transaction.

A large body of men, under experienced officers, were instantly ordered to be in readiness to march on the third day, with Gaetano and Federico, whose impatience to reach his mother was such, that he was only restrained from proceeding alone, by a promise which the viceroy had insisted on his making, not to expose his person, by entering Sciacca, until the pub-

lic peace was ensured by the presence of the soldiers.

The state of the city during the days immediately succeeding the death of Perollo, was one of continued discord and disorder. The peaceful citizens were prevented from proceeding in their usual occupations, by the dread of the lawless bands, who were continually plundering and spoiling those whom they considered either as their enemies, or likely to afford a valuable booty.

The course of justice was entirely stopped; the magistrates and principal officers had either fled or joined themselves to the party of count Luna, and there was no power or influence exerted to restrain the outrages of these licentious brigands. In the principal church the sacraments and all religious rites were suspended, part of the troops of the rebels being quartered there and in the open space adjoining, who, regardless of the sacred place, indulged in every excess, and polluted the altars themselves by their drunkenness and debauch-



ery. In these excesses the Greek followers of count Giorgio particularly distinguished themselves, most of them being ruffians stained with every crime, and schismatics from the true faith.

Don Sigismund had endeavoured, by every display of attention and respect to the lady Costanza, to conciliate her, and to recover her good opinion; but she persisted in treating him with open aversion and contempt, and whenever he approached, either received him with silent displeasure or the bitterest reproaches. Every honour which could be paid to the remains of the baroness Solanto had been most carefully shewn, and her body deposited in the church of Santa Maria d'Istria, together with that of Gilberto.

Adriano and the countess continually urged Luna to complete his nuptials without delay, and not to throw away the power which he now held, or, by waiting till the government could proceed to measures of retribution, to permit Costanza to communicate with his enemies, or the sur-

viving members of her family, or to run the hazard of her being rescued from his grasp; but he still hoped that perseverance would disarm her resentment, and that it would be unnecessary to proceed to violent measures, which in the present state of her mind he must have done, and he knew her spirit too well to dare to provoke it to the utmost.

The countess had several times attempted to intrude upon her sorrows with consolation and advice, but her presence always excited such a tempest of indignation and grief, that Luna had requested his mother to indulge the wayward and impetuous disposition of his mistress, under the plea of her violent grief, and the wretchedness which oppressed her, that produced an irritation upon her spirits likely to yield only to time and indulgence. For a few days therefore Costanza was left to the melancholy satisfaction of weeping over the memory of her parents, undisturbed by any intrusion except occasional visits from Luna.

The countess, after the death of Ac-

cursi d'Amato, had resolved to discover, if possible, to what extent his confidence had been placed in count Giorgio, and whether he was the depository of her own secret. On the evening after Accursi's death, she sent to request an interview with the Greek in her own apartment, determining to use all the art she was mistress of to discover how far she was in his power ; and unless she could rescue from him the evidence which Accursi possessed, to remove him speedily from the power of betraying her.

The count was however fully a match for her, both in art and villany, and hoped to obtain an influence over her, equal to that which his deceased friend had possessed, and to use it for the furtherance of his interest, in any way which might most materially promote it.

He was punctual to the appointment of the countess, who received him with every possible mark of distinction and respect, bestowed the greatest encomiums on his conduct during the siege of the Casa di Perollo, and extolled the obligations he

had conferred upon her son and his family.

Her flattery had no effect upon its object, who however replied with many expressions of thanks for the honour and distinction which her approbation conferred.

There was nothing in his manner which gave any indication of his possessing power or influence, if he chose to exert it; nothing which could manifest an acquaintance with her character, or excite the smallest suspicion. He was distantly respectful, and appeared unconscious of any motive which could have induced her to request this interview.

The countess felt rather relieved from her fears, and proceeding with her artful commendations, said, that amongst the many favours for which the house of Luna and Peralta stood indebted to him, were the kind friendship and regard he had always shewn towards their dear kinsman, the barone della Bardia.

She watched the countenance of the Greek as she thus ventured to approach

nearer to the subject she had at heart. It betrayed no expression to alarm her, and she continued the conversation—"His loss has indeed been a severe one to count Luna, but more particularly to myself; we were nearly and intimately connected."

"By the marriage of the lady **Francisca**?" said count **Giorgio**.

The lady started, and was silent for a moment. Here was a proof that **Accursi** had at least communicated part of his secret affairs to his friend.

"You were acquainted, I doubt not, signor, with all the proceedings of our departed relative?"

"**Della Bardia** concealed nothing from me, I believe," was the reply.

"Indeed!" said the countess, evidently discomposed; but soon recovering, she continued—"As one of his nearest connexions, it will probably be my melancholy duty to arrange his affairs, and I shall feel infinitely obliged by your kind assistance, signor, in making the final disposition of them."



The Greek expressed his sense of the honour conferred upon him by the confidence of the countess.

“Some of the joint inheritance,” she said, “which Accursi and myself received from the elder Luchese still remains, and in consequence of his death, would devolve upon me; but I know no means of bestowing it which will accord with my own sense of your services, signor, and with what perhaps would have been the wish of Della Bardia, as in requesting you would consider it as a legacy to yourself.”

The count, astonished for an instant at this generosity, was eloquent in his thanks, but almost immediately considered that it was, in all probability, intended as a bribe for some services to be hereafter required.

“It will be necessary,” said the countess, with some hesitation, “to procure all the papers and documents my ill-fated kinsman has left. Perhaps, signor, you may have some in your possession which may assist in completing the necessary arrangements, and if you will have the

goodness to transfer them to me, the affairs may all be speedily settled."

"That my friend Della Bardia has left documents in my hands," replied the wily count, "is a fact I am willing to confess to your *eccellenza*; but how far I may be justified in giving them up at present, I know not. Your proposal requires some consideration on my part, and an examination of the papers themselves. As soon as things are in a more quiet state, I will inspect what documents I hold, and give you the necessary information upon the subject."

He fixed his eye upon the countenance of the lady as he spoke; her colour changed, and she averted her face in confusion. — "It is no matter, signor," she said, with some disorder; "I had hoped to find you more obliging in the business, which would probably have been as much to your own interest as to mine; but I do not apprehend the papers in your possession are of any very great importance."

"From the manner in which they were confided to my charge, I doubt not but they

relate to matters of some import," answered count Giorgio; "but I can report farther upon them after I have inspected them."

"And where are these documents now deposited?"

"They are in perfect safety, signora, and beyond the reach of accidents."

"Are they in your own hands?"

"They are not with me in Sciacca."

The countess was fearful of betraying too great an interest in the affair, yet her anxiety to ascertain the extent of her danger made her still continue her inquiries.

"You are not aware then of the contents of these documents, signor?"

"Not entirely, madame, though conjecture enables me to form some idea of them; but as I may possibly be mistaken, you will, I trust, excuse my not being more explicit."

"They very probably allude to the affairs of Luchese, and will perhaps be necessary in the adjustment of that business," said the countess. "If you would entrust them to me, count Giorgio,

for a short time, I should not be dilatory in repaying the obligation, and will return them when called for."

"The instant I have made myself master of their contents, they shall be at the service of your excellenza, if, consistently with my honour, I can part from them."

"You must be aware, signor conde," continued the persevering lady, "that there are in all families various domestic arrangements, which it is uncomfortable to all parties to have disclosed to those who are not deeply interested in them, and such may be the case with the papers Accursi has deposited in your hands. I would willingly redeem them unread, at any price, or at least must be most anxious to know where they are deposited, in case of accidents to yourself, which Heaven forbid, as you wish them not to fall into other hands, I presume, than those in which Della Bardia himself has placed them."

The bribe thus held out might have purchased the accordance of the Greek to

any terms, but he hoped to get the lady more completely in his power, and was not fully aware of the strength of those ties by which he held her in subjection.

“The solemn pledge which I have given to my lamented friend upon this subject, is my only motive for not complying instantly with the wish of your excellenza,” he replied, “and whatever may be the contents of them, I trust you may rely upon my honour and secrecy, in their being buried in oblivion as deeply as if committed to the flames unopened.”

“I possess both the means and inclination to be grateful, count Giorgio, for any obligation you may confer, though you still object to favour me, in the highest possible way, by the immediate restoration of the deeds: but you have not yet relieved my mind from its natural anxiety respecting the present place in which these secret records are kept.”

“That they are perfectly secure your excellenza may rely: more I am not permitted to say.”



The countess was disappointed and provoked; but it was not expedient for her to irritate the count; and after a few more fruitless efforts at discovery, she desisted for the present, and entered upon general topics of conversation.

“The baroness della Bardia has, I presume, been informed of the death of her lord?” said the Greek.

“The continued state of bustle and fatigue in which all our attendants have been kept by the funerals of the baroness Solanto and Gilberto, have prevented don Sigismund hitherto from having any communication with his sister; but I believe it is his intention to invite her over shortly to Bivonia, and there too the obsequies of Della Bardia are celebrated; but I doubt not Francisca will prefer returning to her convent.”

“It is melancholy to think of such charms being sacrificed to the rigour of a monastic life,” said the count.

“It has always been my daughter’s

choice, and now, I doubt not, but it will be still more earnestly so, since her engagement has ended so fatally."

"The repugnance of the lady to her matrimonial connexion appeared extreme," replied the Greek; "but it might be timidity and reserve incidental to her secluded education."

"She has always expressed the warmest admiration for the retirement of Santa Caterina, and I would not willingly induce her again to quit it," was the answer of the lady; and after a few minutes more of unimportant conversation, the count retired to reflect on the events of the interview, and the countess Caltabellotta to devise means to circumvent his purposes, and wrest the documents from his possession. Upon the subject of Pietro she had not ventured to make any inquiries; but she had convinced herself that upon the wary Greek her chief care must now be placed, either to purchase his silence, or secure him by death or imprisonment from betraying her.

Intelligence of the proceedings of the viceroy was not long in reaching count Luna and his partisans, who lost no time in preparing for resistance, by strengthening, in every possible way, the fortifications of his castle at Bivonia, whither he removed with all his friends and adherents, his ranks having been considerably recruited by the numbers who had joined him after the fall of don Giacomo. The lady Costanza di Solanto was also conveyed to the fortress, and again Adriano vehemently pressed the celebration of the nuptials; but the health of Costanza appeared to have suffered considerably from the late events, and Sigismund was too sincerely attached to her, notwithstanding the treatment he received, to proceed to any measures which might tend to increase her malady, or risk her life, which he feared would be the consequence of using force, to a spirit so high and independent. He therefore resisted all the arguments of Adriano, and even reproached him for the ill success of some of the previous schemes;

he had devised for bringing the union to the wished-for conclusion.

Peralta had long been accustomed to bear with the violence and hasty temper of his kinsman, but his end was now gained. He had, through his means, obtained a full and complete revenge against the baron Pandolfina, and neither the ties of kindred, the bonds of friendship, or the calls of honour, would have kept him longer with the party, who he perceived were approaching the end of their prosperous career, could he have made a separate treaty for himself, and by betraying the cause of which he had been the original support, have gained advantageous terms; but it was understood that the most inflexible justice would follow the victory of their opponents, and that none would be received to mercy who had been concerned in the various acts of assassination committed during the insurrection. His safety, therefore, like that of the rest of the party, consisted only in a strict union of their forces, by which they might compel

the viceregal commanders to compromise the affair, and pass a general act of amnesty; and although the baron Adriano had not now the same motives and purposes in view, as had hitherto induced him to submit to the humours of count Luna, still he considered it politic to keep on terms with him; and after a slight, though with him unusual remonstrance, he bore the reproaches of his chieftain quietly, and offered little contradiction to the complaints alleged against him.

On the tidings of the approach of the troops being brought, the most vigorous preparations were made; the whole of the spoil was removed by its different possessors to Bivonia, as the most secure asylum, and all who had ranged themselves beneath the banners of Luna and Peralta, knowing that their existence depended on their courage and exertions, made ready for the storm with all the spirit they possessed.

It was determined that they should en-



deavour, by striking a panic into their enemies, to induce them to listen to terms, before the strength of the respective parties could be brought to a trial, and by not waiting the attack, shew how little they feared the powers which could be brought against them.

Calandrino, Pietro Infontanetta, and count Giorgio, volunteered their services in conducting an ambuscade. Their offer was accepted, and a position taken up in a narrow pass amongst the hills between Castronovo and Sciacca, from whence, after having done what injury they could to the advanced guard of their adversaries, they might, with little difficulty, escape to the shelter of Bivonia.

The Imperial troops, unsuspecting any danger, and relying upon the terror their approach would excite among the rebels, advanced in an unguarded and disorderly manner; and had not the partisans of Luna been premature in their attack, might have received a severe blow; but the sig-

nal was given injudiciously early, and before any considerable number had entered the pass.

A panic seized the advancing army, and they retreated towards the main body, leaving thirty of their number dead upon the field. Federico and Gaetano were amongst the first to rally the flying soldiers, and leading them back gallantly to the charge, their enemies retired from their position, and succeeded in reaching Bivonia without any loss.

The Imperial forces advanced without any farther interruption to Sciacca, detaching a sufficient body to watch the motions of the enemy, and guard the avenues to the fortress, to prevent the future assaults or flight of the garrison. A messenger was dispatched by count Luna to the commander of the forces, but he was instantly sent back, with an order for the unconditional surrender of the place, and all the offenders, and denouncing the severest punishment against those who resisted. The lives of those who had not been

immediately concerned in the murders of Perollo, Statella, or Ferrara, or in open arms against them, were the only exceptions made, and even these were not to be granted, if they remained in the fortress after the summons to surrender had been rejected.

This answer shewed a firmness which count Luna did not expect from the general after the success he had obtained; and the desertion of the barone del Nadore during the night produced a general sensation throughout the garrison, which augured ill for the steadiness of their resolution. Del Nadore had indeed not appeared personally in any of the acts of hostility; but he had been amongst the first to join the standard of count Luna. He had quitted his post as a magistrate of the city, and during the whole proceeding, remained with the party as their aider and abettor. This he now pretended to say was merely an act of self-preservation; he called every saint to witness the remonstrances he had made to don Sigismund,

and the dangers he had run in opposing his outrageous proceedings, and with the most abject meanness implored that his life might be spared, under any circumstances, however severe, which the clemency of the viceroy chose to decree.

As the baron had not stained his hands in the blood which was shed, he might be included in the promise made by the general, and it was not considered politic to act with severity to the first deserter who had obeyed the summons, and submitted himself peaceably. It was hoped and expected that the example of a person of Del Nadore's rank, thus coming over and shewing the bad opinion he had of the cause in which he was engaged, might have great weight with the inferior soldiery; and the barone was accordingly received to mercy, and publicly conducted through the streets of the city to a place of security, till his future destiny could be properly determined.

The feelings of Federico, on approaching Sciacca, were such as all must compas-

sionate, and the most considerate attention was shewn him by all the officers. He could not but remember how recently he had viewed its "distant spires," with such buoyant feelings of delight and hope as his present distress told him he should feel no more; and perhaps his presentiments were right; for even when time has taken off the keen edge of sorrow, joy does not necessarily succeed, and there is in youth itself a capability of brilliant happiness, of which no successes in after life can ever bring a repetition. When we have lived long, and learned how often we welcome what it were better to reject, we consider before we rejoice; and while we consider the first bright hue of pleasure has passed away, and though we may be gainers by our gratifications being more lasting, still it is uncertain whether we do not, in the loss of our enthusiasm to enjoy them, pay too costly a price for their durability.

Pignatelli rode by the side of his friend; it was too soon to attempt consolation, and



he felt for him in silence. As they came within sight of Perollo Castle, Federico looked at Gaetano, and pointed to the dismantled towers; he could not speak, but his look was eloquent in grief.

When they entered the city, the change was still greater in the appearance of every thing around than could have been imagined; instead of the beautiful city they had ridden through a month before, where all was life, wealth, and bustle, they now saw ruins in every direction; the roofs, which had echoed to sounds of gladness at their approach, were now tenantless or destroyed. Federico's thoughts could scarcely for a moment wander from his loved and murdered father, and Sciacca seemed to him like one vast tomb to his memory; his manly figure, splendid costume, and cheerful countenance, as he had so often seen him in these now-deserted streets, seemed, in his mind's eye, perpetually opposed to the degrading condition in which his lifeless form had so lately traversed

these same paths; and, in the agony of his feelings, he thought that one great sacrifice of all connected with Luna and Peralta, would be too small a revenge for his father's individual wrongs.

Their headquarters, while the troops remained in Sciacca, it had been previously agreed, should be at the house of Francisco Perollo (one of the giurati who had escaped); and when they arrived there, the distress of Federico had arisen to such a height, that Gaetano feared for his senses, and determined not to let him see the baroness in that state; he therefore requested him to wait while he sent a messenger to don Paolo, that his too-sudden appearance might not overpower his mother, and during the interval this gave him, endeavoured to sooth him to more composure.

Don Paolo came to them instantly, and as Federico threw himself into his arms, he said—"Oh, what a home am I returned to! Why, why did I go away? why did I leave him whom I ought to have died to save?"

“Calm yourself, my dear child,” said don Paolo, in a voice scarcely audible from emotion, “and do not add to what you must feel by useless and undeserved self-reproaches; rather thank Heaven, which mercifully ordained that you should be preserved as a stay to your widowed mother and her orphaned children, and a chief, under whose banners your father’s death may be avenged, and your family again collected in peace. In all our trials, there is always something to be thankful for. The child of your friend, don Gaetano, now more than repays her adopted mother’s kindness, and the comfort she has been to her, in this season of affliction, has been far greater than any which human wisdom could have devised. Now compose yourself, Federico; we will go to your mother. Do not agitate her by your grief; her own is sufficient; but she bears it, as indeed she does every thing, with the patience of a woman, and the fortitude of a man. I only fear, when I witness it, that such grief will not soon

yield. Signor Pignatelli, do not leave us; your presence, after the first few minutes, will relieve us all, and the support you will be to the spirits of her children cannot fail to communicate itself to the heart of the baroness."

When they reached Santa Martha, Federico could scarcely support himself, and when shewn to the apartment where his mother was alone, he felt at first unable to enter; but at last making a violent effort for composure, he opened the door. The alteration which her sufferings had made in her appearance was so great, that notwithstanding the full occupation of his thoughts, he started with alarm at the sight. She tried to rise from her seat when she saw her son, but could not, and he could only throw himself on his knees before her, clasp her in his arms, and give way to the bitterness of sorrow.

The instant that Federico left them, don Paolo had inquired for Marguerita and the children; she was very much affected at seeing Gaetano; with him always came

the remembrance of her father, and the affection he had expressed for him; and this was not a time for such things to be forgotten. Marguerita, like all the rest of the party, was faded by watching and tears; but Gaetano thought her paleness now better than beauty, and felt his interest in her increased beyond measure in his short but eventful absence. The respectful tenderness of his manner towards her was more grateful now than it could ever have been before, and was more expressive than any professions he could have made.

After a very short time, don Paolo proposed their going to the baroness—“This first interview with Federico,” he said, “must be too painful to both of them, for us to leave it long uninterrupted, and all together we shall be less distressing than any one singly.”

When Gaetano appeared, it caused the baroness a violent struggle with her feelings to obtain any thing like self-posses-



sion ; years can pass in thought with such rapidity, that while he walked a few paces towards her, she had reviewed his arrival at the Casa di Perollo, seen again the joyous welcome and animated delight of Pandolfina, and compared them with the frightful reverse which now presented itself; and, as Gaetano stooped to kiss her hands, he felt her tears fall silently on his head, and that she trembled exceedingly.

For a minute all were silent; there seemed no safe subject to talk of; those present did but recall the remembrance of the absent, and of all the absent, they could think of none but Pandolfina.

At length Gaetano ventured to make some remark upon public affairs, and don Paolo exerted himself to inquire about the probability of peace, and to support some sort of conversation, while Marguerita endeavoured to amuse the children, and prevent their asking any unfortunate questions, or giving to their brother and his

friend any details which would distress their mother.

Conversation in such a party must necessarily languish, where the thoughts of all are directed to the one subject, which each feels must not be mentioned; but the constraint at such times is but adding another pang, and gradually the objects of their thoughts were brought to view, and they talked of the troops and the commanders, and the projected attack upon Bivonia; and as the baroness became sensible to fear for Federico's safety, her heart told her how much she still had to lose, and she almost felt her tears less bitter, and her bosom less oppressed.

They all seemed to have gained some degree of composure, when some one entered the apartment, and addressed Federico as baron Pandolfina! It was the first time they had heard it. Federico covered his face with his hands, and sobbed audibly. The baroness seemed fainting; Marguerita hastened to her, but she said—

“ No, my love, I am better; I must get used to this; the shock I have outlived must render all others comparatively light.”

It was long before the party regained the appearance of tranquillity; but the exertions of Gaetano, Marguerita, and don Paolo, in some degree succeeded, and the remainder of the day passed in calm and melancholy endeavours of all parties to lighten the burthen which each was compelled to bear. In the evening a council of war was held, to which the two young men and don Paolo were summoned; it having been the strict command of the viceroy, that every possible attention should be shewn to Federico, and to all the friends of the late gallant chieftain of the house of Perollo.

The *giurati* of the city were in the first instance displaced from their offices, and orders given for the immediate apprehension of their persons, with the exception of Francisco Perollo. Pietro Laurifici, and his companions, Baldasare and Taly-

avia, who had concealed themselves, were found guilty for their cowardice in deserting their posts, and leaving don Giacomo and Statella unsupported by the arms of the citizens, by which they might have been in all probability safely defended.

It was also determined that the troops should rest for a day or two, leaving the avenues to Bivonia guarded so effectually as to prevent the escape of the insurgents, and then by a general assault endeavour to carry the fortress.

To encourage the soldiers, the plunder was promised them ; and the panic excited by the unexpected attack upon them on their way, was soon dissipated in the desire of an opportunity to get such a booty. Orders were given through the whole body, that any ladies who might be met with in the castle should be treated with the utmost respect, and instantly conducted to the general.

Don Paolo, in consequence of having surrendered himself a prisoner to the party

of don Sigismund, could not act in hostility to them; but no entreaties were able to prevent Federico from joining in the expedition, to revenge the outrages committed against his father.



CHAPTER VIII.  
.....

And flame for flame, and blood for blood, must tell,  
The tide of triumph ebbs that flowed too well.

LORD BYRON.

**DURING** the two days which the troops remained in Sciacca, to recover from the fatigue of their rapid march from Messina, the party of don Sigismund lost several of their number by desertion. The rejection of all terms but those of unconditional surrender, instead of exciting the courage of desperation, had depressed the spirits of the men, and count Luna now felt the loss of the gallant Luchese, the undaunted boldness of Accursi d'Amato, and the intrepid coolness of Gilberto, which were but ill supplied by the vacillating irresolution of Maurici, the crooked policy of Adriano, and the rash and ill-directed impetuosity of Calogero Calan-

drino, who were now his principal advisers.

During the attack upon Perollo, he had lost the flower of his troops, and the men who had since joined him were a loose undisciplined multitude, impatient of control, and uninfluenced by any other feeling than that of personal safety, and prepared to accept any terms by which their lives could be spared.

The vigour of the first preparations had subsided in a short time, and though the success of the ambuscade had in some degree raised their courage, yet it fell again upon the reply returned to the count by the commander of the forces, and an universal gloom hung over the late triumphant insurgents.

Don Sigismund persevered in his resolution to defend himself to the last moment, and indignantly rejected the advice of Adriano to endeavour to escape to Rome, and there plead in person for the intercession of Clement in his favour. Peralta would willingly have persuaded his

kinsman to abandon Bivonia and his connexions there to the vengeance of the viceroy, and by securing their own persons, to preserve a remnant of the house of Luna and Peralta from the extermination with which it was threatened.

At length the day arrived which was destined to decide the fate of Bivonia. The troops marched soon after midnight from Sciacca, in high spirits from the anticipation of the booty they hoped to acquire, and encouraged by the representations of the deserters, with the expectation of no difficult conquest.

The assault was commenced with undaunted resolution, and for a time the conflict was maintained with a resistance unexpected by the assailants. At length however a breach was effected. Federico and Gaetano rushed in at the head of the conquerors, and the partisans of Luna gave way in every direction. Geronimo Calandrino fell by the hand of Perollo, who sought eagerly in the thickest of the fight to meet with Luna himself. The

person of Adriano was secured by Gaetano; and Sigismund, after beholding the extinction of his hopes and the carnage of his friends, escaped through a secret passage which led beyond the castle walls.

Amongst the slain were Geronimo Calandrino, Pietro Imbiagnia, and Infontanetta. Calogero Calandrino was made prisoner after a desperate resistance, and having received numberless wounds. Count Giorgio was discovered in a private apartment; but it did not appear from whom he received his death. One deep wound in the back, as if inflicted upon him in his flight, was the only mark upon his person; and it was not the character of the Greek to turn his face from danger: his fate however was almost unnoticed in the general slaughter, and the short-lived wonder it excited was soon forgotten.

The principal captives were Adriano, Marco Luchese, the two brothers of Imbiagnia, and several nobles, who had attached themselves to the party of count

Luna. They were all immediately marched under a strong guard to Sciacca, and lodged in the prisons of the city.

With frantic impatience, Perollo had cut his way through all opposition; the remembrance of his wrongs gave him resistless strength, and he was also fighting for the release of Costanza from persecution and captivity. Pignatelli kept as near to his friend as possible during the conflict, and whithersoever they directed their steps, the enemy fell before them. The instant the castle was gained, and the insurgents had ceased from opposition, Federico demanded of a prisoner where count Luna had confined his captives? The man himself could give no information, but offered to point out some one who could, and directed Federico to an elderly man who was a confidential servant of count Luna. Perollo inquired if he could direct him to the apartment of the captive.

After some hesitation, he was answered in the affirmative.



“Conduct me thither instantly,” said the impatient Perollo.

“I have not the keys of the tower, signor.”

“We want no keys; point out the way, and we will remove every obstacle.”

The man led to the interior of the building, and ascending the staircase of one of the towers most remote from the point of attack, shewed a high and massive door, which was firmly fastened, and resisted all the efforts of Federico and Gaetano. They summoned some of their men, and, after a little trouble, succeeded in forcing the door.

“There is one prisoner, signor, confined in the principal chamber of this tower, and another in the dungeons beneath, but I know of no more in the castle.”

Federico scarcely listened to the speaker, but flew forward the instant the fastenings were removed, to assure his Costanza of her liberty and safety; he threw open the inner door with the eagerness of a lover, and beheld, not Costanza, but her father,

the baron di Solanto, alone, and waiting in anxious astonishment the event of the tumults which raged round his prison.

“ Signor Perollo,” he exclaimed, “ and Pignatelli too! Then am I again restored to liberty.”

“ Where is donna Costanza, signor?” asked Perollo, hastily.

“ Anywhere, I trust, but in this abode of violence and tyranny.”

“ We must seek her instantly, or count Luna may attempt to remove her beyond the power of rescue.”

“ Is it possible,” exclaimed the baron, “ that Sigismund di Luna knew of my imprisonment, or extended his outrages to my unprotected child?”

“ We have no time at present, signor, for explanations; let us seek the signora without delay.”

“ The man who guided us hither,” said Pignatelli, “ mentioned another captive, who was inclosed in the dungeon beneath.”

“ Surely not even the barbarity of

Luna could have consigned the signora di Solanto to such a place," replied Federico; "but we will ascertain it speedily."

Having forced the doors to the dark recess under the tower, they reached the melancholy cell of a being whose appearance was scarcely human; squalid misery, in all its extremest horrors, was depicted in the unhappy creature, who was found chained to the wall of this dark and dreary prison. The appearance of his deliverers produced a wild and inarticulate cry, which made them at first fear for his senses.

Perollo waited to inquire no farther, and Gaetano commanding every care to be taken of the miserable victim, followed his friend and the baron Solanto to the court above. Federico now seemed wild with anxiety, and impatiently made his way, still attended by the baron and Pignatelli, to the great hall of the castle, where the general was giving orders for the pursuit of Sigismund, who had escaped during the tumult. A group of officers surrounded him, and by his side

stood a female in deep mourning, and closely veiled.

As the three gentlemen entered, she turned her head, and exclaiming—"My father! oh, my father!" burst through the crowd, and in an instant was hanging on the neck of the baron Solanto.

"I had intended this fair prize for you, baron Pandolfina," said the commander; "but she seems to have discovered one who has claims to which all others must give place."

Costanza wept for some minutes in her father's arms, who, as he clasped her to his bosom, was scarcely less affected.

"Where is your mother, my beloved child?" he asked with some hesitation.

Costanza looked at her mourning dress, and a fresh burst of sorrow told the melancholy tale.

"The present scene is not calculated for explanations, signor," said the commander, "and we can afford you, I fear, no means of privacy; but an escort to Sciacca is instantly at your service, and the sooner

the lady is removed from this place the better; you will command in all things my assistance. My orders are to raze this fortress to the ground, and to secure the persons of count Luna and his adherents. The count has, I am sorry to say, escaped us for the present; but I have sent out parties in all directions, and trust we shall still capture the chief of these daring insurgents."

Solanto could only comprehend part of this address, but he expressed his thanks to the officer, and looking towards Costanza, she implored him to take her to the baroness Pandolfina.

"My mother," said Federico, "has found an asylum at the convent of Santa Martha, and with all the welcome she can now give, will most readily receive the lady Costanza into her company of mourners."

A lettiga was prepared without delay, and in it the baron Solanto and his daughter proceeded towards Sciacca, accompanied by Perollo, Pignatelli, and a small



party of the cavalry. As they were quitting Bivonia, one of the people in whose hands the wretched captive had been left, approached to speak to Federico.

“The person you gave into our custody, signor, offers to confess some secret of importance.”

“Let him then be conducted to the general, who will act as he thinks proper,” replied Perollo, as he hastened after the lettiga.

On their way to Sciacca, Costanza narrated, as intelligibly as she could, the events which had succeeded her father's sudden and mysterious departure, the shock it had given to her mother's health, the kindness of the Perollo family, and the dreadful catastrophe which had rendered their hospitable mansion no longer her abode. Of the conduct of Luna, she could not think with composure, and the mention of her mother's death caused considerable interruption to her tale, both from her own distress and that of her father.

Upon the first rumour of danger, Luna had caused her to be conveyed to Bivonia, and though treated with the greatest respect, yet she was watched with the caution of a prisoner. Upon the approach of the troops to the attack, don Sigismund had sought her apartment, and in the most passionate terms implored her pity and forgiveness; entreating that if he fell in the ensuing action, she would endeavour to efface from her memory the offences which his love had induced him to commit.

Costanza, weak and dispirited, implored him in a manner which she had not before condescended to assume, that if he hoped for any diminution in her indignation, he would relieve her anxiety respecting her father. Luna was overpowered by his emotion, and trembled violently; Costanza renewed her supplications. He was about to reply, when he was summoned to the defence of his castle, and a peal of ordnance hurried him away to the walls, without a moment for explanation.

The daughter of Solanto had awaited in the extremest agitation the event of the attack, for she still hoped that the complete subjugation of Luna and his party would throw some light upon the mysterious loss of her father; and when the count was no longer present, the impression which his anguish had at the time made upon her feelings, faded before the recollection of her mother's death, the murder of Perollo, the agony she suffered on her father's account, and all the train of sorrows which had been brought on by the violence of her persecutor. She therefore ardently prayed that victory might crown the party of the assailants.

The clang of arms in the interior, and the cessation of the artillery, proclaimed the entrance of the troops. All her attendants, except old Beatrice, had fled; and when the invaders burst into her room, she was found endeavouring to support her faithful nurse, who was nearly dead with terror. The men who were entering paused at the doorway, and assured her,

that they had strict orders to shew the ladies in the castle every possible respect, and begged to be allowed to conduct her to the general.

Costanza complied without hesitation, and was conducted to the great hall, where she was received with every attention by the commander, who was just informing her that the young baron Pandolfina was anxiously seeking her, when Federico entered the hall, followed by her father and Gaetano.

In her first moments of joy at meeting her lost parent, the daughter of Solanto had paid little attention to Perollo, who did not intrude upon her notice, but felt happier than he had done for some time, in thus contributing to her release, and restoring her to the protection of her father; and as he rode by the lettiga, he watched for every opportunity which gave him a view of her features.

Having satisfied the curiosity of the baron, Costanza sought to learn the particulars of his sudden disappearance from

the cassino. His adventures were soon told; he had been wandering in the valley at some distance from his own abode, when he unexpectedly felt himself seized from behind by several persons. A cloak was thrown over his head, and he was dragged with great rapidity to some considerable distance; he was then uncovered for an instant, when he beheld several armed men around him, and one person with the vizor of his helmet closed, who seemed to be the director of the affair. Solanto in vain endeavoured to shake off his assailants; he was bound, and again blindfolded; all his entreaties could produce no explanation. He was desired to remain silent under pain of death, and being mounted on a horse, he was made secure to the person who was placed before him, and carried, at a furious rate, for a considerable time. During the whole of that night they remained on their horses, sometimes stationary, as if for the purpose of concealment, at others rapidly moving on. When morning came, they



dismounted, and he was led some short distance, when they appeared to be making their way through bushes, over a steep and rugged path, and his eyes were for the first time uncovered in some subterranean apartment, where refreshment was offered, and he was allowed to rest several hours, surrounded by his guards, from whom he could still gain no intelligence. The person with his vizor closed never left him for an instant, and from his height, and the tone of his voice, as he once or twice gave orders, Solanto thought he recognized the baron Adriano; and as he was the only person he could suppose to be his enemy in the island, he doubted not but he had caused him to be seized, on some plan of revenge. It was in vain he asked for explanation, and he was obliged to resign himself to his fate, trusting to the exertions of his friends for his delivery. Towards night he was again blindfolded, and led by a winding ascent, as he conjectured, through some parts of a large

building, to the tower from whence Federico had released him.

During his long and solitary confinement, he was treated with attention and respect; but the impenetrable fidelity of the person who waited upon him, resisted every bribe which could be made, either to aid his escape, convey the slightest intelligence to his family, or even inform him where or by whom he was thus kept in confinement. Anxiety for the fate of his wife and child, and distress at their suffering for him, weighed heavily on his mind, and had begun to affect his health, when he was thus providentially restored to liberty and peace.

The baroness received the lady Costanza and her father with melancholy satisfaction. Her joy at the return of Federico, safe and unwounded, was expressed in grateful thanks to Heaven, for preserving to her this solace and support in her affliction; and having got over the first shock of seeing him after the loss of his father, she could not endure to part with

him from her sight; and every other friend, though they might at the first interview cause a pang at the recollection of the past, yet it was comparatively so slight to what she felt when Federico returned, that the effect was not more than her calm and dignified resolution could generally conquer; and whatever her own feelings might be, she rarely displayed them, or distressed others by the sight of her hopeless misery. The attentions of Federico to Costanza were distant and respectful; yet there was something in them which could not escape the observation of the baron Solanto; and it was not long before he received from his daughter a candid avowal of all that had passed; to which he gave his most cordial approbation, but forbore, in the recent state of affliction under which all parties had suffered, to allude to or notice what he had learned, or what passed before him daily.

Upon the destruction of the castle of Bivonia, the civil power proceeded immediately to the exercise of their judicial

authority. The imprisonment of the *giurati* was followed by a general sentence against the city, which was declared guilty of the crime of lese majesty, for not having aided Statella and Perollo against count Luna, who was, with all his adherents, proclaimed rebels against their liege lord the emperor, and a reward offered for the apprehension of the count, or any of his abettors who might have eluded the search of the captors of his fortress. A heavy fine was imposed upon the city, and the estates of all the rebels declared confiscated to the use of the state. The fine was paid without loss of time, and Sciacca absolved from further punishment. From the confiscated estates it was ordered, that the losses of the baron Pandolfina, by the demolition and plunder of his father's castle, should be restored.

Don Paolo exerted all his power in favour of his friend, Ferrante Luchese, and procured the mildest sentence which could in justice be passed upon him, that of banishment from his native country,

He had been so distinguished a person in every part of the siege, and was so clearly convicted of having been the first to lay hands upon the city artillery, through which the final catastrophe was produced, that his fault could not be entirely passed over; he was however restored to his honours and estates through the intercession of don Paolo, whose exertions in his favour ceased not after the first cause for them had passed away. Erasmo Loria also met with slighter punishment than most of the confederates, in consequence of an application from Federico on his behalf, and he was only sent into temporary banishment. The barone del Nadore and Giovanni Maurici were condemned to perpetual imprisonment, and the forfeiture of their property. Calandrino, Infonnetta, the baron Adriano, with several others, were condemned to suffer by the hands of the public executioner: the former however died from his wounds in prison, and the two latter were from time to time reprieved, till their sentence was



finally mitigated to solitary confinement during life in the prisons at Messina, with the confiscation of all their property. Three days after the fall of Bivonia, a number of the inferior tools of the party were hanged and quartered, few escaping, from the prompt and decisive exertion of the administration of justice.

The countess Caltabellotta had, during all these proceedings, remained at the Casa di Luna with a few attendants. She had beheld with ungovernable fury the entrance of the troops into Sciacca, and the return of Federico Perollo; every succeeding hour brought fresh misfortunes in its train—the fall of Bivonia, and the flight of Sigismund, a rebel proscribed and abandoned. This seemed the climax of her misery; yet she was destined to suffer in all its bitterness the retribution due for her dark crimes. For some few days she remained unmolested at the castle, and was only tortured by her uncertainty as to the fate of Sigismund, and the disgrace and suffering to which her

friends were condemned. But at length the thunder burst over her head, and she felt all the horrors of her individual situation. The sentence of attainder and confiscation against count Luna had been succeeded by an order from the ruling powers to take possession of his property in the name of government.

Every delicacy was at first shewn to the feelings of the countess, but she had the grief of seeing the mansion of Luna and Peralta, for so many ages the seat of their illustrious line, taken possession of by the emissaries of a party she abhorred and detested; whilst their fortress at Bivonia, the strength of their family, was ruined and destroyed. The seals of office were affixed to every remnant of their property, and she was about to quit for ever the abode which it had been the highest ambition of her life to call her own. She was awaiting, in an agony of grief, the litter which was to convey her to a cassino of her own, and contemplating, with the extremest feelings of deso-

lation, the future fate of herself and all who were dearest to her upon earth, when an officer of justice, accompanied by several attendants, entered the apartment. She rose from her seat, and with no abatement of the proud and haughty demeanour which in her brightest days had been so conspicuous in her character, demanded what brought them thus unannounced into her presence, and indignantly commanded them to retire.

“ I have an order,” said the principal officer, “ to attach the person of Maria, countess of Caltabellotta, Bivonia, and Selafani, to answer for sundry high crimes and misdemeanours.”

“ What !” exclaimed the lady, furious at the insult, “ have these Spanish butchers no other victims to drag before their murderous tribunal, that they thus seek the unprotected females of Luna and Peralta, to punish for high treason against the person of Giacomo Perollo? Pray who are my accusers?”

“ Your excellenza,” replied the officer,

“ stands charged, upon the confession of Pietro di Forni, with various crimes, which at their leisure the high justiciaries will investigate. In the meantime I have an order to remove your person to the penitentiary convent of Santa Lucia, where you will remain till proceedings can be instituted to inquire properly into this affair.”

From the moment the name of Pietro was mentioned, the spirit of the countess sunk into abject despondency. She inquired no further, and regarded with sullen dismay all that passed around her.

On arriving at the convent, her person was searched, to remove any secret means she might possess for self-destruction, which was apprehended from the known violence of her temper. Jewels of immense value were found upon her, which were instantly taken away, and she was removed to one of the dismal cells in the most wretched of all abodes, a penitentiary convent, and there abandoned to her lonely meditations, which soon produced

so powerful an effect upon a mind which had neither innocence to support its agony, or patience to endure it, that before morning the countess Caltabellotta was a maniac, from which state, during the remainder of her miserable existence, she never for an instant recovered.



## CHAPTER IX.



————— Even-handed justice  
 Returns th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice  
 To our own lips. MACBETH.

WHEN Sigismund perceived that all was lost, and the fortress in the hands of his enemies, he hurried from the scene of contest, and succeeded in gaining the subterranean passage by which the baron Solanto had been conveyed into the castle, the entrance to which was so carefully concealed in the building, as to render it almost impossible to be discovered. As soon as the count had gained this place, and secured the doors which led to it, he paused for some time to consider the best method of securing his ultimate retreat. The mouth of the passage, which was at some short distance from the castle, required an acquaintance with the existenc

of the place to make it an object even of suspicion ; and it was so well covered by a thicket, and huge fragments of rock, as to make it difficult to be found by a stricter search than was likely to be made in the tumult and eagerness with which he expected to be pursued.

One of the great objects of his enemies would be, beyond a doubt, to possess themselves of his person ; and upon his escape depended the future safety of such of his partisans as might be so fortunate as to survive the general destruction which threatened all connected with the house of Luna è Peralta. He therefore determined to remain concealed in the cavern till the darkness of night might favour his escape, and having from his infancy been well acquainted with the surrounding country, he hoped, by keeping along various tracks in the mountains inaccessible to the cavalry, to elude pursuit altogether.

During the hours he passed in this solitary asylum, the mind of Luna suffered all the pangs of remorse, disappointed

ambition, hopeless love, and desponding wretchedness; so mixed and yet so varied, that there was scarce a subject on which his thoughts could fix, which was not replete with anguish and despair. It was true, he had accomplished his purpose to the fullest extent, as far as the destruction of Perollo was his object; but even in his proudest moments of triumph, the reproaches of Luchese, and the honours paid to the memory of his enemy, had clouded all his enjoyments; and now that nothing remained of all he had laboured to effect, but the sad and heavy punishment for his offences, which had already lighted on so many of his adherents, and hung over his own head, as it were suspended by a single hair, he felt the weakness as well as the wickedness of his deeds. Thus to look to the past, was to recall only the baneful product of his own inhuman revenge, to conjure up the shades of Della Bardia, Gilberto, Ferrara, and the multitudes who had fallen in his cause, or what was worse, to remind him of the honours which had

been shewn to his enemy, when stripped of all those attributes which purchase the applause of man. Defeated, murdered, and insulted, the body of Pandolfina had been as much an object of public veneration and respect, as when living in all the pomp of splendour and affluence, dealing round him the favours of government, and environed by all the honours of popularity and power; whilst he himself, in the hour of victory, had been pursued by the curses of the people, and the reproaches of those whom he loved and esteemed.

If the thoughts of Luna were fixed upon the future, there was as little cause for hope or satisfaction. He had calculated, beyond a doubt, during the tide of his prosperous fortune, on the success of his application to the pope, whose petition he thought the emperor could be in no situation to resist; but now that the hour was come when this protection was most needful, he felt the insecurity of the hope on which he had relied. It was a con-

siderable hazard whether he should escape to make the trial, as he was well aware that his enemies would endeavour to prevent him from applying to the pontiff; and even should he succeed in effecting his escape, it was by no means certain that the representations of Clement would be attended to. He had now adjusted all his controversies with the emperor, and it was not probable he would again jeopardy his state, or risk the event of another contest, even if he were able, in order to support so distant a connexion; and Charles had in several instances shewn an inflexible regard to justice, which no persuasions had been able to move. There was still another subject from which Sigismund would willingly, if possible, have diverted his thoughts, namely, the daughter of Solanto.

Cut off from all chance of success with her, he now trembled at the thought of her being in the hands of his more fortunate rival; and when she should discover the treatment her father had received at



his hands, through the instigation of Adriano (who had in this, as in every other instance, made the friendship of Sigismund a tool to work his own schemes of revenge), the influence this must have upon her mind would increase her dislike of himself.

A prey to reflections like these, Sigismund awaited the approach of night. As soon as the shades of evening had darkened the surrounding objects, he ventured into the thicket, and carefully examined, as far as he could, the state of things around him. The towers of Bivonia were still red with the glare of the flames which had enveloped a considerable part of them, and told but too clearly the fate of his friends and adherents. Cautiously he advanced from the shelter of the thicket, and taking his course along the craggy side of an adjacent hill, he could distinctly hear from the valley below the trampling of steeds, and the voices of his pursuers. He was well acquainted with every turn and winding of the hills, and keeping

carefully along the highest and most difficult passes, he eluded the numerous bands who were spread over the country with the hopes of intercepting his retreat.

The Castle of San Bartolomeo presented to Sigismund the nearest and best asylum he could hope to reach, and his unknown sister Francisca was almost the only connexion with whom he could expect to be safe, as her existence was known to but few, and those his nearest relatives. Thither then he determined to direct his course. Several times during his hazardous journey, he was within so short a distance of his pursuers, as clearly to distinguish their conversation; at others he was in the greatest danger from the badness of the paths through which he took his way; but just as morning dawned, he arrived near the ruined towers of San Bartolomeo, after a long and most fatiguing march over the worst route which could be found through the rugged mountains of the Val di Mazzara.

It was with difficulty the count as-

cended the pathway to the castle, so nearly overpowered was he by fatigue, and had the asylum he sought been a short distance farther, he could not have reached it.

Della Bardia had brought all his retainers to serve his kinsman at Sciacca, and it was not therefore probable that there were many inhabitants in the falling mansion, and the early hour prevented his being observed by any of the peasantry in the adjacent hamlet. Sigismund long thundered at the gate without any person appearing. At length an old man demanded from a grated window, who thus disturbed the inhabitants of the castle?

“A messenger from count Luna,” he replied, “who must instantly see the baroness della Bardia.”

The man withdrew from the window without making any reply, and Sigismund was again compelled to wait some time, and was renewing his calls for admission, when the old man again appeared, accompanied by another person, who repeated the questions. This proved to be the

castellan, who had been left by Della Bardia in charge of the fortress, and who having been in Sciacca, knew the person of count Luna, but not immediately recognizing him in the dim light of the morning, seemed to hesitate as to the propriety of admitting a stranger. From his appearance however he perceived he must be some cavalier of rank, and descending to the great entrance, he slowly unclosed the wicket, and admitted the weary fugitive. Instantly remembering the chief upon this nearer view, the castellan uttered an exclamation of surprise.

“ Silence !” said Sigismund, pointing to the old man who had followed him ; “ conduct me to some apartment where I may rest myself, and inform the baroness della Bardia that a messenger from her brother requests an immediate interview.”

The castellan understood the injunction, and conducted the count in silence to one of the most habitable of the rooms. When they had left the old man, Sigis-

mund enjoined the strictest silence on his attendant, and commanded him, at the peril of his life, to secure the other man from mentioning his arrival beyond the walls of the castle; and as soon as he had informed the baroness of his arrival, to procure him some refreshment, of which he stood in the greatest need.

Count Luna had always been to the inhabitants of San Bartolomeo as a person to whom all the emperors and monarchs in the universe were far inferior. The castellan himself had seen him in Sciacca, attended with all the feudal state of Luna Castle, beyond which his ideas of worldly grandeur could not mount; and though he now came stripped of all external ceremonies, yet there was a dignity in his manner, which, united to a knowledge of his greatness, caused his commands to be received as edicts from a divinity.

“ Shall I announce your altezza in person to the baroness ?” asked the man.

“ No,” replied Luna, “ inform her that a friend of her late lord, and a messenger



from her brother, requests to see her upon business of importance."

The time of Francisca had passed in a dull uniformity at San Bartolomeo, which to any one else would have been the most irksome state of existence; but she had, from her earliest childhood, been habituated to the strict confinement and dull monotony of Santa Caterina, and the exchange was scarcely for the worse. The conversation of old Beatrice might be less edifying than that of the nuns, but it was frequently more entertaining, and less likely to be disturbed by petulant ill-humour, than her former companions. The only employments to which she was accustomed were her beads and her embroidery, and those were easily continued. So firm was her reliance on Providence, that even anticipating the return of Della Bardia did not much disturb her composure, and she was resolutely determined to undergo any trials, rather than abandon her intention of devoting herself to the cloister. She had learned the death of her

persecutor, and considered it as a manifest instance of the protection of her tutelary saint.

Awaiting the communication with her family, who she did not doubt would assist her in returning to Santa Caterina, the summons which she now received was not unexpected; and rising from her couch, where Beatrice had awakened her, she prepared with alacrity to receive the commands of her mother or brother by this messenger, who, she supposed, was to communicate their decision upon her future destiny.

At times she had felt great anxiety and curiosity to see those near but unknown relatives; yet when she considered the separation which was to take place as soon as an intimacy could be formed, she thought it was perhaps more to her peace not to create any links which might bind her to the world, and excite regrets at parting from it. The life of the novice had been a constant course of deprivation, and her mind was strengthened by a habit of self-

denial, which might have been impossible to many older and more prudent reasoners than Francisca, and by the various examples by which her memory was stored, of saints, virgins, confessors, and martyrs, who had broken all the ties of natural affection, and been chronicled by the writers of their legends for such acts of unamiable supererogation.

Count Luna had, during the time she prepared herself, obtained such refreshment as the castle afforded, and he was still at his repast when she entered the room, and modestly, but with an air of dignity, required the purport of his visit. Sigismund looked at her for a few moments in pleased astonishment, and rising from his seat, affectionately approached to embrace her, forgetful that he was to her an unknown stranger. Francisca retreated in some confusion.

“Forgive me, my dear sister,” he said, “for not first announcing myself as your brother, Sigismund di Luna; we meet indeed under bad auspices, but let us hope

the clouds which now obscure the glories of our house will soon be cleared away, and that friendship and affection may have many years in store, to compensate the long estrangement you have suffered from your friends and family."

Francisca had been totally unused to the society of men; Accursi d'Amato was the first she had ever had any knowledge of, and from him and count Giorgio she had formed such an opinion of them, that all the ideas of relationship, the prepossessing appearance of Luna, and his gentle and affectionate manner, could not at once overcome the influence of her first impressions; and she answered with what Sigismund considered coldness and indifference, and merely said, that she hoped, now her tyrant and persecutor was no more, she should be allowed to return to Santa Caterina.

Luna looked at her habit of a novice, which she had constantly retained, and could not but think it a singular dress for the widow of his friend; her manner also

of mentioning the death of Della Bardia increased his wonder, and for some moments he forgot his own situation in the interest excited by his new-discovered relative, and he inquired, with every appearance of surprise, if she really preferred her convent to the society and liberty she might enjoy as baroness della Bardia?

“If you are really my brother,” she replied, “and can sanction so horrible an act as tearing a novice from her convent, and taking her by force to the altar, by the name of marriage, then indeed Heaven is my only hope, and that yet will save me.”

“My sister, you do not know me, or you would be assured I have no hope of comfort left equal to that of contributing to yours. Della Bardia told me you were his wife, and my mother acknowledged to have given her consent; and though I might feel offended at not being consulted on such a subject, still I had never dreamed that a girl of your age and rank could



really prefer the gloom of Santa Caterina to the pleasures of the world."

"What the pleasures of the world are," said the novice, "I know not, and Heaven forbid that I should ever be exposed to its temptations! but what you call the gloom of Santa Caterina is surely more cheering than this frightful place, where the only beings I have seen, have been the hideous wretch who called himself my husband, another whom he called his friend, a priest whom I believe they murdered, an ignorant old woman, and some ferocious-looking soldiers. Think you not the holy mother and pious sisterhood I left, must be regretted in such company?"

"You do not seem to consider yourself married, Francisca?"

"I do not; I am the elect spouse of God, and during the whole mockery of a marriage-ceremony, I constantly protested against it; and if I have no nearer relative than you, to you I entreat to be allowed to fulfil the destiny I have so long considered as mine."

Count Luna listened with the greatest attention and interest to Francisca as she spoke, and when she ceased, he said—  
“Neither you nor I, my sister, have been fairly dealt by in this business, I fear; but Accursi is gone to his account—we will not judge him. You had better remain quietly here for a short time. Neither your mother nor myself can at present afford you assistance or protection; I am in fact forced hither by necessity to seek a refuge from my enemies; but I trust to be able, through your assistance, to reach the continent of Italy, and to engage our kinsman, the sovereign pontiff, in my cause, when all will once more be as we would have it, and you shall be free either to come forth to the world as the beloved sister of Sigismund di Luna, or to return again to your seclusion.”

With considerable surprise Francisca asked what assistance it could be in her power to afford?

“Rest and concealment for the present, and a disguise hereafter to facilitate my

escape to some port, from whence I may embark for Italy."

To this the novice expressed her most ready compliance, and whilst Sigismund continued his repast, the castellan was summoned, and the injunction of secrecy most strictly enforced. It was determined that it should be given out to the few domestics in the castle, that the person who arrived was sent over on business respecting the death of the baron, and had departed again, a few hours after, from the postern, as privately as he had entered. It was settled also that Luna should remain a day or two to recover from his fatigue, during which time the old man was to procure for him the habit of a monk, which he said he could do without difficulty.

The interval of Sigismund's stay at San Bartolomeo was spent in long and interesting conversations with his sister, who listened with deep and painful interest to the details of her family and connexions; and Sigismund having his own tale to tell as he thought proper, she was led to consider

him as a persecuted and injured man, who having been driven by private oppression and public insult to redress his wrongs, and his enemy having fallen beneath his victorious arms, he was now compelled by the tyranny of the government to abandon his home, and to seek for protection with the pontiff, whose sacred name, thus connected with the cause, sanctified, in the eyes of the devout novice, every action in which her brother had been engaged, and she considered it as impossible for any one to resist his entreaties, whose commands she had been taught were at least equal to edicts published by Heaven itself. Her confidence, zeal, and affection, cheered the drooping spirits of Luna ; and as the hour of parting drew near, he felt that it would cost him a bitter pang to separate the ties which, even in the short acquaintance of two days, this new-found sister had entwined around his heart. Respecting the character and disposition of her mother, Francisca had been anxiously inquisitive, and Luna, whose filial affection ex-

tenuated many of her faults, and whose vanity blinded him to others, drew a portrait of the countess, in which few beside himself would have been able to discover the slightest resemblance to the original, judging also by his own gratified feelings, and by the thoughts of his mother's desolate and abandoned state. During his absence he earnestly conjured his sister, for a time at least, to give up the idea of returning to Santa Caterina, and as soon as possible to hasten to Sciacca, and endeavour by her presence to cheer and comfort their unhappy parent.

The feelings of Sigismund during his concealment at San Bartolomeo had been softened and subdued to a lower tone than they had known during the whole of his previous existence; his pride had been humbled by misfortune, his revenge had expired after its gratification, and his heart had been expanded to the soft influence of his sister's innocent and gentle affection, which had met with none of those obstructions or irritating jealousies he had endured



from his passion for Costanza di Solanto. He had never before appeared so amiable, and his fraternal kindness had all the effect upon the mind of his sister which could be expected from a youthful heart, to which every thing like tenderness and affection in others towards herself had hitherto been unknown. The castellan had procured the disguise, and Sigismund, stripped of his armour, his hair shorn, and changed in appearance from the warrior to the monk, awaited the fall of night, with anticipated regret at the thoughts of parting from the kind solace of his afflictions.

The cheering predictions of his sister, and the full reliance she placed on the effect of his application at Rome, had restored the confidence which he had at one time nearly lost, and he felt strengthened both in mind and body from the short time of his stay with her. For months previous to this time, his whole soul had been in a fever and tumult of all the darker passions. Jealousy, anger, and revenge, had scarcely been for an instant at rest within him, and he had been sur-

ounded on all sides by those who urged him forward in his evil and unhappy course, and by irritating instead of soothing his feelings, had added fuel to their scorching vehemence, and plunged him irretrievably in misery and guilt. He had now felt the benigner influence of all the gentle virtues, and sighed at quitting the narrow circle they illumined.

On the eve of his departure, the brother and sister sat watching the sinking sun, as he rapidly declined towards the distant ocean.

“ I have a hazardous and eventful journey before me,” said Sigismund, with a sigh. “ Upon its success depends the very existence of the name of Luna and Peralta, or else methinks this habit, which I wear but for a time, would be the object of my choice for ever, and the boundary of my wishes.”

“ The object of your mission once complete, my brother,” replied Francisca, “ and the kind friends who have partaken your fortunes restored to peace and liberty,

where can you better hope to meet with happiness on earth than in the shelter of a convent?"

Sigismund thought upon Costanza; if, as he feared, she was the prize of Federico Perollo, there was not the spot on earth in which he could hope for happiness or peace. Yet to abandon his mother, whose very being depended on his fame, to quit this loved and affectionate sister for ever, required a resolution he did not possess.

Francisca saw that he was disturbed by a conflict of distracting feelings, and beginning in a low sweet tone the first notes of the rosario, she succeeded in catching his attention. She continued her strain of simple devotion, and the whole soul of Sigismund was melted by its fascination; he threw himself on his knees beside her, and covering his face with his habit, wept with unresisting vehemence. Francisca was astonished at this conduct, and stopped for an instant; Sigismund implored her to go on, and after some moments he arose more composed and tranquil, and implor-

ing a blessing upon her head, entreated her not to abandon him should he return, but for a time to refrain from concluding her vows, that he might look forward to the consolation of her society, for a short season at least, before her abjurement of the world divided them for ever. To this she consented, and throwing her rosary over his neck, exhorted him to look forward without despondency to the conclusion of his present difficulties. The count then gave her an affectionate parting embrace, and hurried from the room, while the novice prostrated herself in prayer for the protection of the wanderer, and his restoration hereafter in happiness and peace.

The castellan conducted him some short distance from the castle, and took an humble and respectful leave of the disguised chieftain, with repeated promises of inviolable secrecy, which he most faithfully observed.

When count Luna escaped from Bivonia, he had a considerable sum in money

and jewels about his person, which were more than sufficient for his journey under his present disguise, by which he was so changed in appearance, as to give him little cause to fear discovery.

Nevertheless he considered it prudent to avoid both the cities of Messina and Palermo, as in such populous places, the residences of the court and army, his person might probably be well known to many individuals; and he therefore determined to cross the country to Syracuse, Trapani and Marsala being both towns in which he might be recognized, from their vicinity to Sciacca. And to avoid approaching Caltabellotta, he took his way at first northward along the hills to the west of Sambuca, and in the morning arrived at a small village on the bank of the river Caltabellotta, where he was kindly welcomed by the piety and hospitality of the poor inhabitants; and after several hours repose, he forded the stream, and bending his steps to the south-east, proceeded in the direction of Alessandria.



During several succeeding days he continued his route unmolested, and passed through Regalmuto, Mazzarino, and Caltagirone. Leaving Vizini on the south, he crossed the mountains near Bucchari, held on his way by Cæsara, and toiling up the western side of Hybla Maggiore, at length arrived in sight of the port from whence he hoped to embark for Italy.

Don Sigismund paused to rest himself, and cast his eyes with wonder on the scene beneath him—the widely-extended plain from Augusta to Syracuse, the towering summit of Etna, beneath whose gigantic shadow every neighbouring mountain dwindles to nothing, rising clear and unconnected with every other hill, capped with snow, and sending from its topmost crater a column of smoke, which ascended perpendicularly toward the skies, and, at an immense elevation, inclined somewhat to the south. On the other hand were the craggy cliffs once crowned by the walls of the far-famed city, and beyond them the sunbeams glittered on the sea, and sparkled on the waves of the bay, which resembled

an inland lake. The poor remains of this great city, now dwindled to a few insignificant buildings, which occupy the island of Ortygia, seemed but a speck on the landscape; and the harbour which had held the navies of Greece and Rome, could boast only a few small galleys and insignificant fishing vessels.

Luna had yet a long journey to his resting-place, and after a short pause upon the mountain's brow, he descended to the plain; and having crossed it, and toiled up the steep ascent called the Scala degli Greci, he had still nearly two leagues to reach the present town; and through the whole track which had once been covered by the habitations of man, not a single dwelling could now be seen. Even the very materials of which Syracuse was built have passed away; and of a city once two-and-twenty miles in length, so few vestiges remain, that it appears almost impossible to credit the tales of its former grandeur and extent; but the car-worn track of the wheels which had once rattled

through its narrow crowded streets, shew the direction in which they ran, and the traffic which must one day have filled them.

Luna however passed these scenes absorbed in feelings of private interest and concern, and gave no thought to the desolation which time had spread around him. The walls and fortifications of the present city had not been erected, and a slight gate and rampart admitted the traveller unquestioned and unregarded. A monk on his way to Rome was an object of little curiosity or suspicion; and count Luna remained unmolested in Syracuse till he found an opportunity of embarking for the continent of Italy; and when he bade adieu to the shores of his native island, he considered his difficulties and dangers at an end.

He reached the Imperial city without any extraordinary incident or delay, and was welcomed by his holiness with all the kindness he could wish. Clement had heard a rumour of the transactions in

which his kinsman had been engaged, but he listened with compassion to his detail of the grievances by which he had been driven to so desperate an act, as to place the fortunes of his house, the lives of his friends, and even the existence of his name, in such jeopardy, and promised to exert his influence and authority with Charles at their approaching interview, he being in a few days to set out for Bologna, for the purpose of placing the crown of Italy upon his head. The impatience of Luna was obliged to yield to circumstances, and for six months he suffered all the torments of the delay which arose, before the emperor set out on his progress to the scene of his coronation.

Uncertain rumours reached him during this time from Sicily of the sufferings of his friends; but of his mother and his sister he could hear nothing; and when his holiness did set out upon his expedition, the supplicant had been so harassed by uncertainty and expectation, that his health

was injured, and his spirit sunk into despondency.

Clement sought the opportunity most favourable for his suit; and on the day on which he placed the crown on Charles's head, before the whole assembled court of cardinals and princes of the empire, and the nobles of Spain, Germany, and Italy, implored the Imperial pardon for his relative, count Sigismund di Luna. With the deepest expressions of regret, the monarch lamented that it should be possible for his holiness to ask that which he felt it an imperious duty to deny; and with every assurance of respect and veneration for the petitioner, who might in all things else command him, declared his firm resolution never to forgive the inhuman murder of the gallant Pandolfina, the barbarous treatment of his mangled remains, the rebellious assassination of Starella, and the unheard-of outrages by which Sciacca had been visited through count Luna and his associates.

The pope attempted to change the pur-



pose of the emperor, but in vain. To shew however his inclination to gratify the head of the church, as far as a due regard to the laws of justice, and the rights of the people would admit, Charles offered to remit the sentence of attainder which had been decreed against the heirs of the offenders, and declared his willingness to restore the children to their honours. Clement perceived his prayer would be useless, and most unwillingly desisted, dreading the effect his failure might have upon the unhappy Sigismund.

The Imperial party broke up, and Clement returned to Rome in February, where the ill-fated chief awaited his sentence in agony and dread, hardly more for himself than for his friends, whom he continually heard were suffering under the severest penalties the viceroy could inflict. The pontiff sent for Luna to his presence immediately on his return, and after professing his readiness to exert his power in his own dominions to render his future life safe and honourable, broke by degrees the

fatal intelligence, which fell at length like a thunderbolt upon the subdued and heart-broken victim of passion and revenge. All the offered kindness of the pontiff was forgotten in the tide of despair which rushed upon him, and he withdrew from the interview in a state of mind but little removed from distraction.

Descending from the steps of the palace, he was proceeding along the streets with folded arms, and thoughts absorbed in misery, when the sudden exclamation of a person near him, roused him once more to a sense of external objects; he raised his eyes, and before him stood Ferrante Luchese; both remained for some time in silent surprise, and Luna was about to turn away, indignant at the remembrance of the reproofs he had met with, and the subsequent desertion of his partisan, when Luchese, who had observed the altered appearance of Sigismund with the deepest regret, and had forgotten, in compassion for his fallen fortunes, all but the love and respect he had once borne to his chieftain

and his friend, caught him by the arm, and in a voice tremulous from agitation, entreated to be heard. It was some time since the tones of affection had reached the ear of Sigismund, and not unwillingly he allowed himself to be detained.

“We parted in anger, signor—we meet in banishment and sorrow. Forget, I beseech you, all but our former friendship, and once more accept the services of Luchese.”

“I have no means of rewarding the services of any one,” replied Luna, in a voice suffocated by the violence of contending emotions; “I should have thought the party to whom you had transferred your friendship, might have found some better remuneration for their ally than banishment and disgrace.”

Luchese perceived that anguish and grief had overpowered the mind of Luna, and sought by every means to conciliate and appease him. Sigismund gradually appeared to soften, and at length, with some hesitation, inquired the fate of some

of his adherents, of which he was still ignorant.

Luchese gave him all the intelligence in his power.

Luna hesitated for an instant, and at last inquired for his mother?

“Her excellenza is retired from Sciacca.”

“To what part of the island?”

“To a convent in the neighbourhood.”

“And Francisca, the widow of Della Bardia, have you heard of her?”

“The lady, I presume,” replied Ferrante, “who was found at San Bartolomeo.”

“Found at San Bartolomeo!” echoed Luna, “and by whom?”

“By those, signor, who were sent to dismantle the fortresses of our party.”

“And did my mother suffer her to remain till she was dragged a prisoner from thence, conducted in triumph before our persecutors? and has she since abandoned her?”

“The countess is not to blame in this,

and the lady Francisca has found an asylum with——” Ferrante paused.

“ With whom ? ” asked Luna.

His companion still continued silent.

Sigismund seized him by the arm, and demanded, in a tone of alarm and supplication, with whom his sister had been placed ?

“ With the widowed baroness Pandolina.”

Luna trembled violently, and seemed struggling with his feelings.—“ I had not supposed,” he said, “ my mother would submit to this degradation. Has her spirit been subdued by our misfortunes ? We are fallen indeed, when the countess Caltabellotta allows her daughter to be an humble dependant on the widow of a conquered enemy ; I could have borne any thing but this—any thing rather than have known my mother thus yielding to misfortunes, and inflicting disgrace upon herself and family ! ”

“ The countess was not accessory to this,” said Luchese.



“ Why then did she not prevent it ? ”

“ Her excellenza possessed not the power.”

“ And who could restrain the mother and the child from sharing each other’s afflictions? they at least were innocent from our offences; nor would the injustice of our judges, I trust, seek to involve them in our punishment.”

“ The countess is not in a state to have received the lady Francisca into her care,” said don Ferrante.

“ The same convent which received her might have afforded shelter to my sister; and the countess ought to have reflected on the pangs which Sigismund must feel, when he knew of Francisca’s degradation, in being left to the charity and protection of a Perollo. I did not think my mother’s heart could have suffered by my reverses.”

“ The countess is changed indeed,” replied Luchese; “ grief and misfortune have unhinged her mind, or her maternal feelings would have shone, as they have

ever done, amongst the most prominent features of her character."

In vain Ferrante sought to conceal the dire intelligence of the malady which possessed the unhappy mother of Luna. His inquiries could neither be evaded nor unanswered, and he extorted the whole detail from the unwilling narrator, who endeavoured to soften and conceal the most afflicting circumstances.

To his great astonishment, the count listened some time without any violent manifestation of horror at the account; but stopping suddenly, he seized the hand of Luchese, and averting his face, uttered some inarticulate words. His companion requested permission to attend him to his abode.

"Not at present," said Luna, in a hurried tone. "Commend me to Francisca; tell her, as she valued the wretched Sigismund, to break off all connexion with the race of Pandolfina."

He then endeavoured to leave Luchese; but the latter wished to accompany him

to his residence, and not to quit him in such an hour of affliction. They walked for some distance in silence, Luna having refused to return either to his own abode, or to the pontifical palace, when meeting a procession, about which a considerable crowd was collected, the count suddenly quitted his companion, eluded his pursuit, and escaped through the throng, leaving Ferrante alarmed and distressed at the events of their conversation, and the perturbed state of mind into which Sigismund was evidently thrown, by the communications which he had extorted from him.

Sigismund hurried impatiently forward to escape Luchese. His feelings had reached that frightful acme of suffering, which renders even kindness importunate. He had never been accustomed to weigh any subject, or consider any incident dispassionately. Now he seemed to have lost the power of thinking; he could only feel and suffer. His mother, his sister, his mistress—all those beings to whom the

victim of crime or misfortune naturally turns for sympathy or consolation, seemed to the unhappy Sigismund but as phantoms to torment him.

As he fled through the streets, each object was to his agonized imagination a fresh source of pain. He had in his despair left the only one whose attachment and discrimination might have soothed the phrenzied disappointment of his every hope and affection. A church attracted his sight; he entered without knowing why; perhaps to escape the bustle of the streets. A marriage had just been solemnized, and the party were returning from the altar. Their mirth roused the attention of poor Sigismund, and he looked earnestly towards them; his eye rested on the bride; the misery of the moment made him fancy her like Costanza; the idea deprived him of reason, and he uttered a wild and frightful groan, and rushed from the church.

In the mean time, Luchese had been seeking him with all the anxiety which

must be felt for one whom he had been accustomed to respect and love, and whom he met, like himself, a wanderer and an exile from his native home. It was no time for a heart like his to remember any thing but the sorrows of his friend, and his fear and sympathy for him increasing every minute, he continued his search for several hours, till at last, hopeless and weary, he was returning over the Ponte Rotto, when he saw a crowd of people pressing to the battlements to look over, and by their gestures seemingly shocked at some fearful accident.

Luchese inquired of one who seemed informed on the subject, and was told that a gentleman had just thrown himself off the parapet towards the river. He felt a chill of horror at the idea that it might be Sigismund, and every joint trembling with the excess of his alarm, sought the water's edge, where he saw that a boat had put off, and they had picked up the body of the unfortunate suicide.

Before they could reach the shore, Lu-



chese rushed through the water to meet them; he found his worst fears realized, and clasped in his arms the grief-worn form of Luna; he thought he breathed, and frantically implored assistance from the bystanders.

After a few minutes, Sigismund unclosed his eyes, and Luchese's tears of joy fell upon his bosom, but they were premature. The unhappy count, in falling, had struck several times against the ruinous fragments under the bridge; and even before Luchese could speak his hopes, gave one look of grateful recognition, and expired.

Sincere and heartfelt was Luchese's grief, as he followed the remains of the proud, the great, the gallant chieftain of Luna and Peralta to his abode.—“Great were thy faults, dear Sigismund,” he mentally said, “but greater might have been thy virtues; yet they were cast aside, and thy failings only cultivated;—the weeds nourished, and the flowers left to wither upon the stem. Where are now the beauty

and the lofty demeanour which distinguished thee? where the rank, the power, the riches, of which thou wert so vain? All, all passed away, and sacrificed to revenge! Would I had met thee sooner—would almost that I had never left thee! but just are the ways of Heaven; and I, for my offences, have lived to see thee thus.”

**CONCLUSION.**  
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THE examination of Pietro di Forni was delayed for a few days, in consequence of the more important business in which the ministers of justice were engaged; he was however carefully secured and humanely treated; at length he was brought before the judges, and having obtained a promise of mercy and protection for himself, he unfolded a long train of villainy, of which he had been first the agent, and afterwards the victim.

Seduced by the promises and bribes of the countess Caltabellotta, whose servant he had been, he had administered the poison which cut off the lady Lucretia, the wife of count Luna. He had also been her confidant in the affair of Francisca; and at length became an object of dread to his employer, who resolved to rid her-

self of her fears, by the death of the unhappy tool of her iniquitous practices. To this end she applied to a notorious bravo in the neighbourhood of Sciacca. The man was connected with Della Bardia and count Giorgio, and revealed to the former the application which had been made to him. The consequence was, the seizure of the miserable Pietro, whose death was reported to the countess, and the bribe paid to the supposed assassin; whilst the prisoner was delivered into the hands of Accursi.

In possessing himself of the secrets of the countess, Della Bardia hoped to secure a fund of wealth, and an accession of influence, which might at any time further his interested or ambitious views. Every method of torture was unsparingly used to the unhappy captive, and from him the fullest discovery was extorted of all the private affairs of the countess, who was thus placed completely in his power. How that power was used, has already been detailed. Aware that fear of exposure

could alone secure his life, he had always declared that he had taken such means to ensure the publication of the facts, in case any attempt was made against his own life, that the preservation of her persecutor had become an object of the greatest interest to the countess, in spite of her hatred and alarm: and Pietro di Forni lingered in the dungeons of San Bartolomeo, and was afterwards removed to Bivonia, in order to keep the lady in constant terror of his production to the world, in case she should be prompted to resist the will of her tyrant. The whole was now brought to light by the deliverance of the captive, who was retained as evidence against the countess, and she herself committed to the convent of Santa Lucia, where the course of human justice was suspended by the awful visitation of Heaven.

The troops sent to demolish the castle of San Bartolomeo had received orders to forward, as prisoners to Sciacca, any persons discovered there who might have been amongst the late insurgents, and to search

carefully for the person of count Luna, who was supposed to be concealed in some of the abodes of his friends; but as Pietro knew nothing of Della Bardia's marriage, Francisca was naturally supposed from his confession to be in the convent of Santa Caterina, and in consequence, no directions had been given as to the disposal of her person.

Every possible courtesy was however shewn her by the officer commanding the detachment, and an offer made to conduct her safely whithersoever she chose to go. To return to Santa Caterina would naturally have been her wish, had not her promise been given to don Sigismund to seek her mother in Sciacca, and thither she requested to be sent.

Upon arriving in the city, and learning the arrest of the countess, the distress of Francisca was unbounded. Ignorant of the world, unacquainted with any one, and herself unknown to all, she was for some time unable to decide on what steps to pursue—to abandon her parent in af-

fliction and imprisonment, was however impossible; and she requested to know if she might not be permitted to share in the captivity of the countess. She was necessarily referred to the principal authority in Sciacca, and conducted to the residence of the commander in chief. Her narrative and her appearance equally interested the gallant general, who assured her that every thing she wished should be complied with as far as possible; but that some delay was inevitable; forbearing to shock her with the detail of her mother's malady; and he was considering to whose protection he should commit the friendless novice, when Federico and don Paolo Perollo were announced. With every mark of respect and attention, he requested Francisca would retire to another apartment for a short time, whilst he deliberated on the necessary steps to be taken with respect to her petition; assuring her of receiving every indulgence it was in his power to afford. Having communicated

the circumstances to his visitors, Federico instantly offered the services of his mother.

“Our injuries,” he said, “have excited no vindictive feelings towards the innocent members of the Luna family; and the baroness will, I am assured, be most ready to extend her protection and kindness even to the sister of don Sigismund.”

“It may be more prudent,” observed don Paolo, “to prepare the baroness for the meeting, and to consult her on the subject. She may not be strong enough to stand the shock of encountering any of the family of Luna, whose name alone might serve to keep up too constant a remembrance of the sad ideas with which it must be associated.”

Federico proposed instantly to consult his mother on the affair, and the commander having accepted his offer, he returned without loss of time to Santa Martha. Whatever might have been the private feelings of the baroness Pandolina, grief had not so changed her, but that the claims of humanity overcame

every other consideration; and Francisca di Luna became her *protégée*, and the companion of Marguerita and Costanza.

What at first was perhaps a painful duty, soon became a subject of pleasure and satisfaction. The manners and appearance of Francisca pleaded with irresistible force, and her new acquaintance became, ere long, warmly and sincerely attached to the stranger thus accidentally thrown on their benevolence, while to the novice the scene of social affection was captivating beyond any thing she had fancied or heard of.

The anxious and devoted maternal love of the baroness, the innocent and unrestrained happiness of the children, the courtly polish and elegance in the manners of Costanza, Marguerita, Federico, and Gaetano, were equally new and fascinating to the recluse; but accustomed to consider all pleasure as sin, she enjoyed with fear and trembling; and more than once, when her growing affection and confidence for those around her had tempted her into

pains or the pleasures of memory predominated, it could not be discovered if the nun of Santa Caterina lamented or cherished the recollections of the world.

After the adjustment of the affairs in Sciacca, Federico, at the express desire of the viceroy, exerted himself to persuade his mother to remove for a short time to Palermo, which, as she had no ties that bound her to her former home, she consented to do, and was received with fraternal kindness by the duca di Monteleone, whose affectionate care for the children and widow of his murdered friend remained through life unshaken and unchanged.

The lapse of a few months witnessed the celebration of the double marriage of Federico Perollo and Costanza di Solanto, and that of Gaetano and Marguerita. In contemplating the happiness of her own and her adopted child, the baroness enjoyed all the consolation her widowed heart could know on earth.

The future destiny of one more of the

performers in these memorable events may be worthy of note. Don Ferrante Luchese, soon after the death of count Luna, was introduced, through the recommendation of don Paolo Perollo, to don Virgilio Ursino, conde dell Anguillara, through whose interest he obtained at length a military command in Italy, in which he acquitted himself with the same gallantry he had manifested in the unfortunate and criminal affair of Sciaeca, and enjoyed, during the remainder of his long and honourable career, the reputation of a brave and noble cavalier.

FINIS.

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