

SOME FASCINATING WOMEN
OF THE RENAISSANCE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BORGHIAS

Illustrated Translated by BERNARD MIALL

Second Impression

"There can be no question of the industry and acumen with which he has studied the contemporary records of the lives of that infernal trio nor of the interest his book inspires."
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SOME FASCINATING
WOMEN OF THE RENAISSANCE

by
GIUSEPPE PORTIGLIOTTI

Translated by
BERNARD MIALL

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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A FLOWER OF THE CLOISTER

Il mio Sposo è tutto luce, amore e fedeltà.

CECILIA GONZAGA

A FLOWER OF THE CLOISTER

NEVER, perhaps, has the flower-like charm of girlhood been more tenderly evoked than in Pisanello's beautiful medal of Cecilia Gonzaga.

The grace of the design and the delicacy of the symbolism are equalled by the excellence of the workmanship. Although the wings of time and the hands of men have somewhat abraded its contours, yet the whole exhales so delicate and poetic a fragrance that even to-day, at a distance of nearly five hundred years, this gem of art arrests the attention and touches the heart. It has the gentle charm of early morning; the sun has hardly begun to tinge the heavens with gold and crimson, to dispel the silent shadows of the cloister, or disturb the silent absorption of the cloistered in the mysteries of the other world.

On the reverse of the medal Cecilia, her head uplifted on her long, slender neck, seems to be watching, in motionless and inaccessible remoteness, the gentle dawning of a dream. Under her clinging garments her breath scarcely stirs her girlish bosom. Her hair is pushed back as though it were a useless burden, and the ribbon drawn so tightly round her tresses seems to be offering them to the shears as a sacrifice to God.

The scene portrayed on the obverse of the medal has a charm even subtler. A young girl is seated on a grassy bank, and lying meekly at her feet is

a unicorn, the emblem of purity. Chaste, indeed, must be her thoughts, for her hand does not even seek to veil her virgin nudity. For that matter, no mortal eye can surprise her in this nocturnal silence: protected by the white sickle of the moon, she alone is waking, absorbed in her pensive nostalgia and her cherished fancies.

The pale rays of the moon, from a sky full of dreams and shadows, flow gently into the night, in whose vast and solemn expanse only one little heart is beating: here are motives which we might describe as romantic, but for the fact that the adjective refers us to a period which is almost of yesterday. Yet what is romanticism, fundamentally, but a state of mind? To seek out solitary places, to dream with open eyes, to follow the errant flight of fancy, to sigh for things unreal and undefined, to be wrapped always in a veil of melancholy—in all ages there have been those for whose sick and uneasy spirits these things were nourishment and life.

Of such was our Cecilia.

And thus Pisanello's medal allows us to glimpse much more of her than the few documents which have come down to us. Besides the victory of chastity, represented by the unicorn, we see in this landscape natural details and intimations which, thanks to the artist's genius for comprehending the soul of his subject (and he was not only a most admirable engraver, but also a supreme psycholo-

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gist), reveal sentimental motives of which we shall find no hint in the documents.

This is not, then, an allegory, for Pisanello had no great love of allegorical inventions; but we find here, as always, a quick and lucid touch, a complete and penetrating synthesis, a suggestive and appropriate representation. Nevertheless, there is symbolism here; and yet the very essence of reality, invisible but profound: that is, of the spiritual reality.

What do the documents tell us of Cecilia Gonzaga?

She first appears at the age of ten, at her father's court.

A monk, Ambrogio Traversari of Camaldola, while travelling from Rome to Basle, the Pope having dispatched him to the Council, wished to break his journey at Mantua, in order to see with his own eyes a school whose fame had spread throughout Italy. Gian Francesco Gonzaga and Paola Malatesta had brought thither, some years previously, in order to educate their six children, a scholar, then obscure, who, though he did not wear the scholar's gown or the cassock, was a man of the most exemplary life, a life all goodness and love of study and religious zeal.

This was Vittorino da Feltre, an admirable teacher, whom Pisanello afterwards depicted on another of his most vividly expressive medals. Like the pelican of the legend, Vittorino fed the

souls confided to him with his own blood, his own faith. A great mathematician, he was supreme in all those branches of instruction comprised in the "humanities", which revealed not only the gifts of the mind, but also the more precious and fruitful qualities of the heart. *Omnis humanitas pater* are the words incised on the medal.

To this school, then, which the Marchese Gian Francesco and his wife Paola had instituted in the spacious and beautiful "Casa zoiosa", already a centre of worldly pleasure and recreation, came our Camaldolese. Resuming his journey, and arriving at Basle, he sent Cosimo the Elder an account of the school, in which he praised it highly. Amongst other things, he told Cosimo that he was impressed by the precocious talents of two of Gonzaga's sons:

"Vittorino came to meet us. . . . He presented me to Gian Lucido, the little son of the Lord of Mantua, a boy of fourteen years, instructed and educated by himself. This youth recited to us two hundred verses of his own composition, in which is described the pomp displayed when the Emperor Sigismund entered the city; which he did with such grace and with so pleasing a delivery that to me, at that age, it seemed prodigious. I believe that Virgil, when in the presence of Augustus he recited the sixth book of his *Æneid*, delivered himself with no greater grace. It was the most beautiful little

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CECHIA CONZACA

D H A

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poem, but the affability with which he recited it added to its nobility and elegance. This amiable youth then showed us two propositions which he had added to the Geometry of Euclid, together with his figures; whence already it may be judged what fruits his genius will presently bring forth.

“There is, moreover, a daughter of the Prince’s, of about ten years of age, who already writes in Greek with such elegance that I was ashamed, thinking that of all those whom I have hitherto instructed there was not one who wrote so well. . . .”

This child of ten, who already knew so much Greek as to amaze the Camaldolese monk, was our Cecilia.

After this history is silent for awhile. Cecilia grew up at her father’s court, amidst books and music and the practices of religion. When we once more behold her, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, we are spectators, behind the scenes (whence we have but a foreshortened view) of a little spiritual drama, of which not only some of the cues, but some of the passages escape us.

The family was enveloped by a more than religious atmosphere.

The mother, Paola, had grown more austere in her conduct as time went on. Putting off her court raiment, she dressed only in black, of a simplicity and austerity almost monastic; “every day she said the whole office, like the priests”; and as early as

1420—that is, five years before Cecilia's birth—she had founded in Mantua a convent which she was afterwards to enter, and there she ended her days.

It was impossible that her example should fail to influence her daughter. So often the mother spoke, in her conversation, of the ephemeral nature of earthly joys, that her daughter's heart could but aspire to something higher and more durable. Thus, little by little, there arose within her the first inclinations toward the life of contemplation and the silence of the cloister. On the other hand, her family had little to offer her, nor was she too greatly attracted by the good things of this world.

What melancholy invaded the court as the years passed! It seemed that an adverse fate, powerless to subdue the spirit of the Gonzagas, was bent upon afflicting their bodies. All were more or less afflicted by a humiliating deformity.

With all her gifts, with all her moral qualities, Paola Malatesta had brought into the family and bequeathed to her children a painful and melancholy physical inheritance—a spinal curvature—which in her made its appearance shortly after her thirtieth year, but which developed much earlier, and in a much more conspicuous form, in several of her offspring. Yet Paola, on her marriage, was erect and lovely and graceful. She was then little more than a child; a flower so fresh and charming that all Mantua flocked to admire her. In those

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days a poetical chronicler, Bonamente Aliprandi, sang of her in crude but enthusiastic verses :

Parìa un anzelò ne la faza,
di la persona grande e distese,
biancha e bionda, belli man e braza.

Honesta, gratiosa e cortese,
da lei zaschun bene resposte avia,
li sue virtù a ugnun eran palese.

Quando lei andava per la via
parìa a la zente una dea vedire
e per vedirla zaschun si corìa.¹

The eldest son (afterwards Marquis of Mantua) and Carlo, the second born, grew up strong and healthy, but Alessandro, who in youth had seemed an Adonis, suffered a sudden arrest of growth, and in the end a pitiful deformity. It maybe that his mental timidity and his tendency to mysticism made him his mother's favourite. Matteo Bosso, a regular canon, who was one of his intimates, and was probably a fellow-student of his under Vittorino da Feltre, draws a portrait of him in his dialogue *De tollerandis adversis* which even to-day we cannot read without a sense of pain.

“While the youth was growing up in beauty of disposition and in virtue, of a sudden he began to

¹ She seemed an angel in the face,—in person she was tall and goodly,—white and golden, lovely hand and arm.

Frank and gracious and courteous,—from her each had a pleasant reply,—her virtues to all were manifest.

When she passed along the street—it seemed to the people that they beheld a goddess—and all ran to see her.

be hunchbacked, and so deformed that it seemed as though his head was attached to his chest and his shoulders were set above his head. Thus, liking little to appear in public, he led a private life in pleasant idleness, applying himself piously and religiously to letters and the exercises of religion. He greatly loved the servants of God, and especially us, the regular canons, whom he treated as familiars, and with whom, for solace and distraction, he often took pleasure in eating, and diverting himself with friendly liberty.

“Sometimes, in allusion to his figure, he would say of himself jestingly: ‘Oh, a fine body is mine, worthy indeed to exercise the brush of the most skilful painters!’ Being asked seriously by someone what sum he would be willing to expend, in order to purchase health and beauty, ‘I am so far’—he replied—‘from desiring strength of body that even if I could easily obtain it I should not wish for it; and that I say this from my heart that God is my witness Who perceives the remotest corner of my mind; since when I look at myself there is born in me a great disdain for all that which to others seems sweet and joyous, as fleshly delight, and honours, and dignity.’ ”

Even Gian Lucido, perhaps the most illustrious member of the family, was early touched by the hand of this cruel and mocking destiny. But while his brother Alessandro had grown normally in the

first few years of his life, he was born with a constitution which nothing could undermine.

The magnificent festivals which were held in his father's court in the year 1433, on the advent of the Emperor Sigismund, and of which he sang in the two hundred Latin verses which so astonished Ambrogio Traversari, he himself was unable to witness, being in bed with fever. It was only later, when his illness permitted him, that he devoted himself to composing and polishing this poem. He was then thirteen years of age, and as his work pleased his father several copies of it were distributed.

One was sent in homage to Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini, and this, which is now in the Ambrosian library, contains five Latin verses in the hand of the Cardinal, in praise of the young author :

"I believe that Virgil at thy age could hardly have achieved so much in poetry, and I believe even that the Æonian sisters hardly instilled into Homer, or any other, so much of their milk, when I see how much thou hast imbibed, O Giovanni, resplendent, rather than in body, in conduct and in genius."

This boy, truly *ingenio magis quam corpore lucens*, subsequently wrote other poems, notable for their polished style and their delicate feeling. His name began to be known, and a damsel of like attainments, Costanza da Varano, daughter of the lord of Camerino, sent him a friendly request, in Latin

hexameters, that he would send her, by way of a present, some poetical composition, or some essay in oratory, or some verses in Greek; all things in which he excelled.

But the burden of flesh was too heavy for the wings of his spirit and imagination. It would seem that even as life withdrew from him Nature, as often happens in the case of such constitutions, insisted on her rights, and in a fashion which could but hasten the fatal course of events. It is a fact that a manuscript which records his death, on the 2nd of January, 1448—at the age of twenty-seven—contains these words: “Messer Zoban Lucido died at Cerexaris, because he wantoned to excess with these base women.”

One delicate flower was spared awhile by destiny: Margherita.

She was six years older than Cecilia, and she had the same goodness and the same charm.

In the courts of Italy the times were favourable to study; so that Margherita, too, did a little in the way of literary composition. Cecilia was ten years old when her sister left Mantua for Ferrara, whither she went to wed Lionello d’Este. But before the wedding epistles in Latin were exchanged between the *fidanzati*. Lionello, who was “a flower of courtesy and learning”, praised her accomplishments, and did not fail to extol Vittorino; to whom, for that matter, Margherita attributed the “little merit” that was hers.

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It seemed that all things smiled upon this marriage. Yet it pleased the Fates to cut it short; after barely four years the lovely Margherita was carried to her tomb, amidst the heartbroken laments of Lionello, and the no less profound regret of all the people of Ferrara.

These family misfortunes, and the spectacle of so much suffering, weighed heavily on Cecilia's mind, and her secret aspirations became more urgent.

Her Greek and Latin studies had by no means estranged her from the Christian faith. It may even be that the world of antiquity, though cherished for the splendour of its history and the perfection of its eloquence, aroused in her, by reason of its pagan character, a secret repulsion, sending her more and more frequently to the humble texts of the Gospels and the unadorned pages of the Fathers of the Church.

She felt in her veins, though a fragile maiden, a little of the blood of her maternal uncle, Carlo Malatesta. Carlo (when Regent of the State of Mantua, during the minority of Gian Francesco, her father, or, according to some authorities in 1397, when he was in command of the troops of his cousin, Francesco Gonzaga, her grandfather) saw the Mantuans one day lighting candles and bringing flowers to the statue of Virgil. Indignant at the thought that a worshipper of the false and heathen

gods should be an object of Christian adoration, he promptly gave orders that the statue should be thrown into the Mincio. And since the figure of the poet was displayed on the city standard, he had it cut out and replaced by the emblem of Christ.

To Christ Cecilia was drawing ever closer. One day, putting aside her classic authors, she took a vow to dedicate herself wholly to him, body and soul. The cloister which her mother had founded seemed to call upon her to enter its silent precincts, to cherish no longer the things of earth, but only things heavenly.

One evening, when the cloister was calling her more clearly than ever with its voice of mystical invitation, she summoned up her courage and confessed what was in her heart. Her whole family was against her, with the exception of her mother, and since harsh and humiliating words and insults were of no avail, her father resorted to even less creditable means in his endeavour to drive such an idea out of her head. Prendilacqua, indeed, one of Vittorino's pupils, relates that Gian Francesco "gave way to the most shameful excesses, since not content with tormenting his daughter with bitter reproaches, he even went to the length of maltreating her by striking and slapping her"; and believing that Cecilia had been inspired by his wife, he struck her also, and forbade her to come into his presence.

But since even blows failed to achieve their

object, he conceived the idea of finding a husband for Cecilia, and officially betrothed her to Oddantonio, Count of Urbino. Needless to say, her consent was not required, and she was kept in ignorance of the whole affair. One day, however, she heard some rumour of it, and since there was only one man to whom she could look for any help, she opened her heart to Vittorino, even informing him of the vow which she had taken to consecrate herself to God: "Father (she concluded), men are vain and deceiving shadows; I have already chosen my Spouse, Who is all light, love, and fidelity."

Vittorino encouraged her to stand firm: God would not fail to succour her. On the following day he sent for her, and to encourage her in the midst of her adversity he commented with unaccustomed warmth on certain pages of St. John Chrysostom's, in which the saint condemns the detractors of the monastic life. A little later he accompanied Paola to Florence, and while there he begged Gregorio Cornaro that he would write to Cecilia in a similar strain; and Cornaro immediately sent her an eloquent and affecting letter on the treasures of the contemplative life. Cecilia had no real need of encouragement in her design; yet the words of her friends were precious to her, falling upon her heart like a soothing balm.

Hardly had Vittorino returned to Mantua when he repaired to the court, and to such purpose that he succeeded in appeasing Gian Francesco. It would

seem that he had little good to foretell of Oddantonio's future, whose conduct, for that matter, was more than sufficient to justify rumours, and even the most gloomy predictions. The nuptial contract was declared void; nevertheless, Cecilia made no further mention of the convent, for her father, had she entered it, would have dragged her away with his own hands.

It was fortunate not only for Cecilia, but also for Gian Francesco, that this bond was severed. The young Duke of Urbino (he was then in his nineteenth year) was leading a dissolute life, and his excesses were soon to have a tragic result. He was aided and abetted by two persons of his court, who, considering the offices which they filled, should have done their best to restrain him. But these two men, Tommaso del' Agnello and the Protonotary Apostolic Manfredi, shared his propensities, and far from seeking to check him on his downward course, they urged him on, believing that in the shelter of his cloak they themselves would enjoy complete impunity.

And then, without warning, the catastrophe was upon them. One night a small party of men, brandishing bill-hooks and axes, forced their way into the ducal palace. They were led by the physician Serafini and a country landowner by the name of Ricciarelli, whose wives had suffered violence and outrage at the hands of the Duke or his worthy councillors. The Duke was the first to

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fall, his head being cloven by a bill-hook while he was trying to hide under his own bed; then came the turn of the Protonotary Manfredi, who was dispatched with a halberd; and then that of Tommaso del' Agnello, who was killed with the axe (July 22nd, 1444).

Agostino Dati, who was then Oddantonio's tutor, wrote of his death in a heart-broken strain: "This most unhappy young man, the lord and heir of so great a State, endowed with such magnificence of honour and of fortune, most vilely slain by conspirators." But Ugolini, historian of the Counts and Dukes of "so great a State", who had access to documents which were unknown to the simple-minded tutor, concludes his narrative of the massacre in very different words: "A frightful, horrible, and pitiful affair, which shows how tremendous may be the explosion of the despised populace against those Princes who violate the eternal laws of justice."

Cecilia, on the other hand, saw in this tragedy the hand of God, and more than ever withdrew into her longing for a cloistered life. It is likely that her father, too, was impressed and shocked by the affair, and, without yet giving way, he may have treated his daughter with greater tenderness, feeling that the hand of Providence had saved her from extreme peril. A few months later he died, and on his deathbed he dictated his last wishes. As though in remorse for having opposed her wishes

for so many years, he not only gave her full liberty to do what she so greatly desired, but he also insisted that no other member of the family should oppose her or molest her in any way: *Item concedo inclitae filiae meae Ceciliae, quod libere et sine contradictione alicuius haeredum meorum possit ad suum beneplacitum Monasterium ingredi.*

Her father died on the 23rd of September, 1444. On the following day the little gate of the convent founded by Paola closed in silence upon the passage of Cecilia. She was, indeed, no longer Cecilia, but Chiara. She was then nineteen years of age.

Six years later she died within the cloister; and no further record of her has reached us. But it was not long before the martyrology of France adorned its pages with the name and life of the Blessed Cecilia.

Pisanello struck his medal in 1447; that is, three years after Cecilia had taken the veil; when the memories she had left behind her were still fresh; and with the help of the story which he had heard, and even more of those little episodes, and that indefinite complex of actions and vicissitudes, which so largely colour the intimate character, the artist conceived the obverse of the medal, half mystical and half romantic, which is, as I have said, more eloquent than the brief and scanty historical documents.

The silver crescent of the moon, the silence of the solitary landscape, the maiden's gaze, lost in

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the misty distance, tell us not only of heaven, but also of that vague region of the earthly fancies and dreams to which Cecilia must have been prone. We may be sure that she took with her into the twilight of the cloister that lovely and unreal world on which her imagination had been nourished, and there she was at last to find, not in a tangible being, but in her love for her celestial Spouse, the where-withal to assuage the thirst and hunger of her spirit.

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

Frate Filippo, agli occhi tuoi la Vita
danza come colei davanti a Erode
voluttuosa: e il tuo desir si gode
d'ogni piacer quand'ella ti convita.

D'ANNUNZIO

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

FIVE years Fra Filippo Lippi had been at Prato, absorbed in his task of painting frescoes in the cathedral, when he received the appointment of chaplain to the convent of Santa Margherita.

He was, without a doubt, the very last man who should have crossed its threshold. Scarcely a year earlier a Brief of Calixtus III had suddenly deprived him of the office of rector and permanent commendatory of the church of San Quirico at Legnaia, which had been conferred upon him by Eugenius IV; and in this Brief, after a laconic exposition of his least edifying adventures, the Papal scribe, as though penning a summary of his character, referred to him as a man *qui plurima et nefanda scelera perpetravit*—who had perpetrated many and nefarious crimes. It would seem that there was nothing left for the salvation of his soul but to urge him to don the gown of the eremite and to flee the perils of the world. Instead, as though deliberately, he was given free entry into a cloister of women.

To tell the truth, his crimes had not been excessively nefarious; the pen of the Roman abbreviator must have run a little ahead of the pontifical mind. It is true that the Frate was convicted of untruthfulness, and then of the falsification of documents and signatures, but the affair, in those days, as in our own, was not such as to touch the very summit of criminal behaviour. Nor could his continual divaga-

tions into more or less lawful love affairs—even remembering his cloth—arouse any excessive indignation in those days, even in the neighbourhood of the cathedral.

But assuredly these escapades should have carried at least some weight in the question of appointing him chaplain. Many young men were cast out by their families and forced through the gates of the monastery, and in not a few of them the lack of any sort of vocation involved the secret smouldering of a fire that had nothing celestial about it. But at all events the guilt of this unhappy appointment was not his. It was a sign that even the severest of Briefs had lost their force, and that even in the most delicate matters the Church was none too fastidious. It may be that his age—he was then nearly fifty—gave rise to the conclusion that the old fire was now spent, and that in any case it would no longer constitute a serious danger for those who were brought into contact with him.

He had come to Prato in 1452; poor almost as a church mouse, although his artistic labours had been profitable enough. But money had never stuck to his fingers:

“He was so venereal (says Vasari) that on seeing women who pleased him he would give all that he possessed if he could have them.”

He could have earned much more if such instincts had granted him a little respite :

“He was so given over to this appetite that when he was in this humour he gave little or no attention to the works which he had undertaken ; so that on one occasion Cosimo de’ Medici, who was employing him to do some work in his house, locked him in, so that he should not go out and waste his time ; but he, having been there for two days, urged by his amorous and more than bestial fury, one evening, with a pair of scissors, cut strips from the linen of his bed, and letting himself down from a window, devoted himself for many days to his pleasures ; whereupon Cosimo had search made for him, but did not find him ; in the end, however, he returned to his labours. . . .”

Since there was no way of restraining the impetuous Carmelite, Cosimo granted him greater liberty ; to their common advantage.

Not infrequently the painter’s ever-excitabile senses invaded even the religious paintings on which he was working. In him the man overcame the artist, and even the believer.

In the lower portion of the *Coronation of the Virgin* is a group of saints ; and since heaven, for him, was only a world of beauty and splendour, they are clad in sumptuous clothing, and their bodies, throbbing with eternal youth, have a suave and suggestive grace of outline. Moreover, he could not

refrain from painting his own portrait; he is kneeling with his hands joined in prayer; but his eyes are not uplifted to the glory on high, or to the choirs of angels, with their rosy garments, on either side of the Madonna and God the Father, nor do they look down upon the spectators of the picture: they are fixed with strange intensity on one of the saints. This figure, not celestial but earthly, so gracious and so near to him, is more than enough to make him forget the angelic visions and the apotheosis of the Mother of God. In this self-portrait, and this silent contemplation, which seems but the mask of secret desires, we have the very man himself.

But the moralist must not throw too many stones at Fra Filippo. On him, too, weighed the same heavy fate that oppressed so many of the young monks of his time.

An orphan at the age of two, he was adopted by an aunt, and since she found it increasingly difficult to support her little household, he was placed, when eight years of age, in the convent of Santa Maria del Carmine, in Florence. Here he was sure of bread, and even of some sort of position in life. But Latin, and sacred oratory, and theology, and, above all, mysticism, were not food for his palate, and the brothers left him free to devote himself to drawing, in which he displayed unusual talent. At seventeen he assumed the monk's gown, just as he would have adopted any other uniform. "A little

later", says Vasari, "he hardly discarded it." But in reality he continued to call himself, and to be called, Fra Filippo, and it was not until his fifty-sixth or fifty-seventh year, and in consequence of the scandal at Prato, that Pius II absolved him from all his vows. The Order to which he had belonged never denied this son who had estranged himself from it by his sinful ways, and in its necrology, under the date of his death, it describes him as Frater, with words of high praise for his artistic merits.

When he was nearing the age of fifty, then, we find him chaplain of the convent of Santa Margherita. The grey mists of autumn seemed already to be closing about him, when, all unforeseen, a breath that was like a zephyr of early spring swept across the heavens, dispelling their gloomy shadows. The little satyr drowsing within him woke with a start, and amidst the columns and in the gardens of the cloisters gazed, with secret and covetous eyes, upon one who seemed no nun, but a lovely nymph.

The abbess of the convent, Bartolomea de' Bovacchiesi, of a noble and ancient family of Prato, closed one eye to the chequered past of the new chaplain, in the hope that the great picture which was being painted for her in the cathedral, whose magnificence was the subject of general admiration, might shed a lustre on the humble house of God for which she was responsible. And when Fra Filippo repeatedly begged her to allow

him to paint a canvas or fresco in honour of the patron of the convent, she was highly delighted. The painter made a cartoon of the scene which he proposed to represent, and since it was highly appreciated he promptly set to work on it, without, however, neglecting the frescoes in the cathedral.

It seems clear that for the first few months he spent, in this cloistered solitude, a quiet and peaceful life; a solitude interrupted only from time to time by the silent passage of the sisters or the notes of some liturgical chant. Then, little by little, the distance between them was lessened, giving place to a respectful familiarity. The nuns, becoming interested, would draw near to see the work of art which was to adorn their high altar, asking him for explanations and begging him to proceed with his task. Framed in their immaculate linen, the faces of some of these mystic spouses were so fresh and sweet, and their eyes were so limpid and tender, that they might have touched the most refractory heart. Fra Filippo, at all events, was not unmoved. The old instinct, which had led him astray so often, and which had seemed for ever buried, suffered a sudden awakening; but since the painter could see no way to satisfy it he was forced to assuage his inward fever by devoting himself to his art.

The banquet of Herod, of which he was then painting a fresco in the Duomo, is in truth the artistic expression of a secret and unappeased passion. Three motives of the same episode are

shown in the same scene, as though his hand and his imagination were never weary of reproducing the features of the maiden depicted there. This pictorial emphasis is so overwhelming that the eye scarcely notices the dish in which is laid the severed head of the Forerunner. This is the first time that Salome appears in Italian art with the gestures of passion and seduction.

Frate Filippo, agli occhi tuoi la Vita
danza come colei davanti a Erode
voluttuosa: e il tuo desir si gode
d'ogni piacer quand'ella ti convita.¹

It was truly said by Vasari:

"And being unable by any means to have the ladies who pleased him, he represented them in his painting, tempering with reason the flame of his love."

Who, then, guided and inspired Fra Filippo's brush in the representation of this dancer, who

. . . in sua frode e in sua melode
magica ondaggia?²

The breath of inspiration reached him, of course, from a youthful sister of the convent, whose sacred habit did not discourage his ever "infirm desire", but offered it rather an added stimulus and entice-

¹ Brother Filippo, in thine eyes Life—dances as she who danced before Herod—voluptuously: and thy desire enjoys—every pleasure when she incites thee. (D'Annunzio.)

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ment. His gaze had fallen on one "who was of most lovely grace and bearing".

Thenceforth the ageing faun kept his eyes fixed upon his prey. But how approach her, how wrest her from so many vigilant guardians? There was only one means, and to this he applied himself with address and tenacity, for

"he so worked upon the nuns that he got leave to make a portrait of the young sister, in order to put it in a representation of Our Lady".

Lucrezia Buti was then in her twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth year, and had spent six years in the convent of Santa Margherita, together with her younger sister, Spinetta. Having passed through their novitiate, they had taken the veil together.

But they, too, had surrendered passively to the harsh necessities of life. Their father, a silk-weaver of Florence, had died without leaving his family any great resources, and Lucrezia and Spinetta had perforce to sacrifice themselves in order to lighten the household expenses. The two young women and Fra Filippo were victims of the same fate.

Lucrezia was taken into the presence of the chaplain-painter, who proceeded, promptly and joyfully, to reproduce her lovely features. The protracted sittings, the lax supervision, the continued meetings and the little whispered phrases increased the ardour of the painter, and the perplexity and compliance of his model.



THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN (Fra Filippo Lippi)

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

The first dazzling ray of light filled the girl with a sweet confusion. The man had only to gather to himself the victim for whom he had sighed; she was stricken to the heart:

“And with this opportunity becoming even more enamoured, he then effected so much by his expedients and practices that he alienated Lucrezia from the nuns, and took her away on the very day when she went to see the girdle of Our Lady exhibited, an honoured relic of that castle: by which affair the nuns were covered with shame.”

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Poor nuns, they were to suffer many more tribulations! It was as though a diabolical hand had opened the door of the cage in which so many blackcaps were imprisoned. The flight of the first was followed by the escape of Spinetta, who took refuge in the same nest with her sister. This was immediately followed by the flight of three young sisters who sought asylum, here and there, with men who had access to the convent, and with whom they were guilty of “culpable familiarity”.

In those days the unhappy abbess must have blushed with shame and dismay when she entered the church and saw, above the high altar, the image of herself upon her knees, at the feet of Santa Margherita, who was presenting and commending her to the Virgin. For Santa Margherita was none other than Sister Lucrezia, the original cause of so

many scandals ! She may well have lifted her hands, in a first access of wrath, to destroy the work of this deplorable friar, who had certainly been sent by Satan !

Lucrezia, meanwhile, who was billing and cooing with her elderly lover, soon presented him with a handsome infant.

But one day the idyll was interrupted with some abruptness ; whether by reason of remorse, or lack of means, or pressure on the part of the abbess, or threats of ecclesiastical authority, the fact is that Lucrezia put the baby out to nurse and knocked one evening on the door of the convent. Her sister, too, returned, and thither, now contrite, returned the nuns who had flown off with such a flutter of wings.

The spirit, then, was victorious over the flesh. All these wayward sheep were welcomed with joy by the abbess and the sisters. But since the condemnation of their error had been public and emphatic, and since all desire to quit the flock had left them, they had to read, before the whole convent, and in the presence of the bishop, a solemn declaration in which they swore upon their oath to change their conduct, to live in chastity in future, and to submit themselves in obedience to all the Rules and to the Order of the convent. A notary, summoned for the occasion, drew up the document and attested the signatures.

A slippery oath ! It was not long before the abbess told herself that the evil spirit had again

entered the cloister. Was this not perhaps a case in which the walls should be sprinkled with holy water? This time the scandal reached even greater proportions. The sudden wailing of a newborn child was heard one night in one of the convent cells.

A document dated the 8th of May, 1461, notified the Officers of the Night and of the Monasteries:

“ . . . Ser Piero d'Antonio, son of Ser Vannozzo, has frequented and is frequenting the Monastery of Santa Margherita of Prato, and it is already two months or thereabout since the said Ser Piero had a male child in the said Monastery. And the said boy I sent out of the Monastery by night through a certain hole, and he was carried to Petrichio, and the morning after he was taken to Prato for baptism.”

This document proceeded to denounce the affair of three years earlier, in which Fra Filippo was involved, and concluded by saying that the two seducers had always the entry to the convent, “on the pretext that the one was the chaplain and the other the procurator”.

Whether moved by the maternal instinct, or by the affection which she cherished for the painter, Sister Lucrezia quitted the convent one morning and hastened to embrace her son and her lover. The little family which had known such happy days came together again in the old atmosphere of peace and happiness.

Was it possible to part them again? And would not the second scandal have been followed by a third and a fourth?

Cosimo the Elder, who took a benevolent interest in Fra Filippo, for the painter had often worked for him, intervened with the Pope, and Pius II—who, after all, could see no other way of silencing the voice of scandal—ended by liberating Filippo and Lucrezia from their religious vows, releasing the friar from the Order, and proclaiming the union of the lovers to be lawful.

With all respect to the abbess of Santa Margherita, Fra Filippo and Suor Lucrezia were not incarnations of Satan, nor did their adventure really bring any extraordinary disgrace on the convent.

Almost all the convents of those days had similar incidents to record. Was it the fault of the times? Strictly speaking, no. Sooner or later every State has compiled laws and issued ordinances to prevent such unedifying episodes; the oldest of these date back to the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and the most recent were promulgated on the eve of the French Revolution. Yet the times may have been to a certain extent responsible, for Christian sentiment, confronted by the Pagan revival, was growing more and more lukewarm.

In its gradual but continued decadence the Christian faith was little by little robbed of its spiritual content, losing all inner dominion over its

confessors, and was at last reduced—even in many of those who wore the sacred robe—to a superficial ritual; when this was performed the conscience was at rest. It is undeniable that at this time the evasions and abductions of nuns were becoming more frequent, and since, on the other hand, the punitive laws were losing their severity, they were regarded with indulgence, almost with complacency. Intrigues were more likely to excite salacious jests and witticisms rather than horror.

The early laws were terrible. In 1399 Gian Galeazzo, Duke of Milan, still punished with death the man who had had intimate relations with a nun, whether in the convent or beyond its walls: *in monasterio aliquo monialem aliquam aut aliam religiosam professam, vel etiam extra monasterium intendentem in habitu, corrumpere ipsam carnaliter cognoscendo, capite puniatur . . .* and in 1401 a certain Giudotto was sentenced to death, he having climbed into a convent by night, *ibi pluries et pluries Antonellam de Gambaris professam cognovit.*

At a later period the penalty was no longer capital, but touched the offender's liberty—and his purse. In almost the whole of Italy, in fact, the penalty for such crimes was limited to imprisonment and the infliction of a fine, or to the exaction of a fine alone; it was enough to prove—and this was not difficult—that the nun had not suffered violence, but had complied without excessive reluctance.

The "Statuti del Podestà" of Florence left the

nature of the penalty to the discretion of the Podestà himself; while one offender might be banished for ten years for abducting a sister from her convent, others who were guilty of the same offence escaped with a brief term of imprisonment and the payment of a given sum of money. The statutes of Brescia made the most subtle distinctions in such matters: a fine of 100 lire was inflicted on anyone who entered a convent "with evil designs and intentions", and a month's imprisonment and a fine of 400 lire on anyone who should abduct a sister "without offending her"; while he who went farther than this was awarded two years' imprisonment and had to pay a fine of 500 lire.

Fra Filippo and Suor Lucrezia, then, profited by this general spirit of tolerance, and they suffered nothing more serious than the shrill complaints of the abbess and the other elderly nuns. The fame and artistic merit of the friar had not a little to say in the final cancellation of his amorous adventure, which savoured of a twofold sacrilege.

Lucrezia, no longer a nun, enlarged the little family by a daughter, Alessandra. The painter worked with greater vigour, in order to meet the increased expenditure of his household; and in his canvases and frescoes there was now perceptible something like a sincere religious feeling. But he could not repress his new affections, and we see the Madonna and the divine Child assuming, under his brush, a human expression which had hitherto



Photo]

MADONNA AND CHILD
(Fra Filippo Lippi)

been lacking in religious art. The Virgin no longer lifts the Bambino in her arms, but placing him gently on the grass, gazes at him with joy and proud adoration. In the exaltation of the Divine Mother Lippi has given us the earliest glorification of the human mother. And if there is something of his Lucrezia in some of these Virgins, so in more than one of these infant Saviours there is something of his poor, beloved Filippino, whom he was to leave in the dawn of life, and whose radiant morn he was never to behold.

THE ROMANCE OF A POPE

Disprezzate e respingete ciò che
io scrissi da giovane sull'amore.
Ripudiate Enea, accogliete Pio.

PIUS II

THE ROMANCE OF A POPE

ENEAS SILVIO PICCOLOMINI (better known as Æneas Silvius) had already entered on his fortieth year when he resolved to take holy orders; not because he had the religious vocation, but simply because he wished to establish his position, and to look forward to the future with a somewhat more tranquil mind.

As it happened, he suddenly found himself on the highroad to power. And, indeed, his wide and profound culture, the fame which he had acquired in the highest circles of Italy and the Empire, his character, his mental agility and freshness, and the rare mental equilibrium which he preserved in spite of his humanistic passion for antiquity—all these qualities were bound to lead to his rapid advancement.

In the following year he was created Bishop of Trieste. A few months later he received the pastoral staff of his beloved Siena, where he blessed the nuptials of Eleonora of Portugal and Frederick III. He himself had initiated the negotiations for this match in Naples, and never perhaps did his pen move more swiftly and gladly than in writing the description of the nuptial meeting outside the Porta Camullia.

“Then the Emperor beheld the bride from afar, and turned pale, for it seemed to him that her

stature was too small. But when he beheld from close at hand her lovely countenance and her royal bearing he blushed red and was most glad, having discovered that no one had sought to deceive him, and that his bride was far more beautiful than fame had declared. She was sixteen years of age, of medium height, with a joyous countenance, her black eyes sparkling, her throat white, her cheeks faintly incarnadined, her shape of perfect beauty; but still more splendid were her spiritual gifts."

What memories were his! Not only had Frederick III received him into the Imperial Chancellery, but on another occasion, after the Diet of Ratisbon, he had set upon his brows the laurel crown of the poet. And the advent of the Emperor recalled to his mind the day long past when, at the age of twenty-seven, he left Siena for Basle in the company of Cardinal Capranica; then followed, in the service of Cardinal Albergati, the long secret journeys to Scotland; and then the years at Siena as abbreviator to the Council; and then, a fresh schism having broken out in the Synod, his employment at the court of the Antipope, Felix V (Amadæus VIII of Savoy); and finally, in 1442, the more secure and lucrative post at the court of the Empire.

These were years full of movement, rich with dreams. His careless, wandering youth had been

spent in strange countries, under skies that were perhaps too grey, but under whose cool shadows the lovely faces of women had shone in suggestive contrast. And then the tranquil years of approaching maturity, full of study, brimming with incident, rich with observation; a period of embassies, legations, journeys, and receptions; he was always on the move, always in touch with the most exalted personages, always in epistolary contact with a multitude of dignitaries, ecclesiastics, and writers in every language.

Frederick III quickly returned to Germany with his lovely bride, and Enea strode swiftly along the path of honour and preferment. He was invested in the purple by Calixtus III; in 1458 he ascended the Papal Throne under the name of Pius II.

Though barely fifty years of age, his hair was already almost entirely white; his chest was troubled by a slight persistent cough, and his body was a prey to arthritic pains which had begun to afflict him in a long bygone winter, when passing through "frozen and snowclad England".

Beyond the weight of the tiara he was still more conscious of another burden, which had for some time been weighing on his mind. And one day, as though at the close of a minute examination of his conscience, he appealed to the faithful to forget certain ideas which he had expounded in the past, and, above all, certain "fancies" which had escaped his pen:

“Do not regard the private man more than the Pontiff. Disregard and reject what I wrote as a young man. Repudiate Æneas; accept Pius.”

The ideas to which he alludes referred to the absolute autonomy of the Council, which he had defended so hotly when he was the secretary of a schismatic Pope and in the service of an Emperor who gave his full support to the spurious Vicar of Christ; but the “fancies”, and to some extent his actions, were those of the private man.

Let us inquire into these last.

They were not very gravely reprehensible, even though his sins of thought and commission were not all precisely venial. Enea's life had not been so very different from that of other young men of his class and education, and if in some respects it was irregular, this irregularity was perhaps explained by his continual roaming from country to country and from court to court, which offered him more frequent and more seductive opportunities for departing from the beaten track. He was not born for sainthood; he had felt, confronted by the enticements of carnality, all the frailty of his flesh and spirit.

His temperament, which had little inclination to mysticism, and much to worldliness, is reflected in his letters, which, though hasty and unadorned in style, are undoubtedly among the most living and spontaneous and brilliant things in literature. Here are no stately and pompous periods, as in the im-

mense body of his other works, whether historical or geographical; these letters are brief, limpid, and fresh, and attain with the fewest possible touches a really wonderful precision of expression. But the most valuable quality of his correspondence is not the flexibility and—one might almost say—the modernity of the style, but the frank and breezy tone, the complete confidence, the frank spontaneity for which it is remarkable. Enea Piccolomini opened his mind without restraint to his friends, and so he opens it to us. Thanks to this great body of correspondence we enter into his inmost feelings, his most secret instincts, his most hidden frailties.

The bloom of youth faded, and the years of maturity brought him poise and tranquillity. In the end the life of a nomad, though not without rewards and honours, began to weary him. Above all, he was weary of the grey heavens that made him sigh for his own country, that distant land of blue skies and sunshine: for Italy, Tuscany, Siena!

“Seek (he writes to the apostolic abbreviator Pietro di Noceto) all the possible and impossible means thou canst imagine or discover by which thy Teutonic Enea may once more become Italian.”

But for mercy's sake let not Pietro advise him to embrace the ecclesiastic life! He fears that it will be beyond his powers to live chastely. How is he to conquer certain instincts? “Purity is the habit of the philosopher rather than of the poet.”

WOMEN OF THE RENAISSANCE

And yet, after all, he is weary of women, dear though they have always been to him: *nauseam mihi Venus facit*. Henceforth he is useless to them, as they no longer delight him: *nec ulli ego foeminae possum esse voluptati, nec voluptatem mihi afferre foemina potest*. He has paid a sad farewell to the Cyprian goddess; he is sacrificing to the fair god with the vine-leaves in his tresses: *Baccho magis quam Veneri praebo: vinum me alit, me juvat, me oblectat, me beat: hic liquor suavis mihi est usque ad mortem*. And more than wine, whose sweet company (he says) he will savour as long as he lives, he loves a good table, which, moreover, enables him from time to time to reconcile himself with Venus:

“I have here thy letter (he writes to his friend. Berthold von Lunenburg, employed in the Imperial Chancellery), which invites me to dinner. I accept, and am preparing my stomach for its grateful labours: thou wilt see that it does not remain empty. Above all, thy guest will not complain if thou shouldst cheer him with capons and partridges. I shall be glad to see thy other guest; and if it is permitted I shall not be backward for once, for on such fare I always have the amorous force of a mule or stallion (*non erimus inertes, semper malum habesmus et quasi muli et equi ferimur in libidinem*).”

I reproduce the words as he wrote them, without mitigation. No longer youthful Æneas, who flung these phrases on the paper as your instinct or your



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ÆNEAS SILVIUS PICCOLOMINI BISHOP OF SIENA BLESSING THE NUPTIALS OF
FREDERICK III AND ELEANORA OF PORTUGAL.

(Pinturicchio)

Detail

heart dictated, little did you think that indiscreet hands would one day ferret amidst these confidential notes!

About a year earlier one of his entanglements went so far that to the title of poet laureate he added the more common title of father; though his paternity was not within the law, whether sacred or secular. He allowed some time to pass before he admitted the matter to his own father; but at last he summoned up his courage and penned one of his most lively and picturesque letters.

Not daring to confess at once, he began with generalities. "What is sweeter to mankind than to procreate a being like unto themselves, and perpetuating their blood? Even so have you chosen to do" . . . and so on, at a lively pace. Then, when he thinks that the preamble may have had some effect, he comes to the point: he, too, has reflected that someone ought to survive him. For that matter, how could he have behaved otherwise? It is not his fault, for "thou didst not make me of stone nor yet of iron, since thou art of blood and bone, and well thou knowest what a cockerel thou hast always been; and so it is that I am not a eunuch, nor among the frigid" (*scis qualis gallus fueris; ac nec ego castratus sum, neque ex frigidorum numero*). And to the words which he can already hear on his father's lips, to the effect that it would have been better to think of a lawful union before bringing a child

WOMEN OF THE RENAISSANCE

into the world, he had a ready reply: "But how restrain the appetites in time? Do not such things happen in the very cloisters?" Two years ago such a thing had happened to him.

He had found himself in Strasburg, at a loose end, when a Breton lady, "somewhat fair and seemly", had come to lodge in the same hostel. The two soon became friends. The lady, who was intelligent, wished to learn Italian from him, so that their conversation should be more unconstrained. But his fellow-guest was not only a woman of culture; she was a woman of ready wit, and Enea, tangled in her net, passed many hours in listening to the arguments that flowed from her lips, and still more in gazing into the bright and transparent depths of her lovely blue eyes.

"If by the eloquence of Cleopatra Antony and even Julius Cæsar allowed himself to be snared, what could I do, poor wretch? Cupid, taking advantage of me, began to inflame me, and forced me to entice the lady with a hundred cajoleries. But my burning words, alas, met only with disdain, and for three days she no longer spoke to me. . . . Then it so happened that she was forced to depart; the shades of night fell, and I feared that my prey would escape me on the morrow for ever. I besought her not to bolt the door of her chamber that evening, saying that I would come to her in the depth of the night. She made a sign of refusal, and

left me not a shred of hope. I insisted ; but the reply was always the same. She retired to rest. I questioned myself: had she done as I had asked her? And I remembered the case of that Florentine, and I reflected that she, too, would perhaps imitate his friend. I said to myself, I will try. And as all the house was wrapt in darkness and silence, I decided to enter her room. The door was closed but not bolted. I opened it slowly and went in, and I had the lady in my arms. So, my father, was my son born."

Thus Enea did not grudge his father the minute particulars of his adventure in the Strasburg hostel; which was, for that matter, neither complicated nor arduous. But what was he now to do with the child? It seems that the lady had deserted it, or that she could not without scandal keep it with her. Enea begged his father to receive it in Siena, and to bring it up until such time as he himself could take charge of it.

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We have heard Enea, at the age of forty, confessing in melancholy tones: *nauseam mihi Venus facit*. Was this really true, or was he speaking only in a moment of lassitude? His pen, at all events, knew no such reluctance. It was at this very time that it slipped most readily into a venereal strain. Turning aside from works of greater scope and importance, it began to sketch amorous fantasies. Let us confess

the truth: he wrote a romance; and more, an erotic romance.

It was about this time that the *Tractatum de duobus se amantibus* saw the light in Vienna; that is, at the very time when the author was on the eve of entering the priesthood, though somewhat against his inclinations.

Voigt, who has written much of the Renaissance, though he has never succeeded in apprehending its intimate spirit, declares bluntly that Enea "speculates on the physical sensibility of his readers". This is saying rather too much. Fundamentally this short romance was not very different from the numerous works in prose and verse, in Latin and the vulgar tongue, which then held the first place in the public favour; nor, in the last analysis, did it differ greatly from the verbal treatment of the same themes when these formed the subject of conversation in society, while in liberty of expression it did not greatly exceed that which was then permitted even in the presence of ladies.

Boccaccio, in short, was supreme; and the *Tractatum* is essentially Boccaccio in Latin; and like Boccaccio, Enea did not waste his talents in refurbishing mythological love-stories or classical adventures, but allowed his lovers to move and sigh and love in his own age. And under his skilful and lucid pen the background of his story, the manners and passions of the characters, and the whole environment are represented so naturally,

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and with such a fresh and novel grace, that we are at once reminded of Boccaccio. These qualities, together with the continual titillation of the senses, contributed to win for the *Tractatum* a quite extraordinary circulation.

In his preface the author writes: "If anyone wishes to know how many evils are concealed in love, here he can see them and understand." But it assuredly never occurred to any reader to resort to this book, with its licentious plot, in order to guard himself against the assaults of Eros. A moral justification is thus uncalled for, and more than a little temerarious; it was only included in the preface in order that wares which the writer knew to be in some degree contraband should pass for lawful.

If, however, he thought it prudent to preface his work by such a declaration, when addressing himself to Mariano Sozini, who was a priest, and possibly a man of austere mind, he did not think it necessary to treat his friend Kaspar Schlick, the Imperial chancellor, to any such idle periphrasis. For that matter, the amorous history of Eurialus and Lucretia is related so frankly, and is so innocent, in the most licentious passages, of any discreet attenuation or modest veiling of the facts, that even Sozini must have smiled over such a prologue.

The scene is laid in Siena, and the Emperor Sigismund is approaching.

Four ladies go forth to receive him who are noted for their beauty, but one excels them all: Lucretia,

the wife of Menelaus, a man undeserving of such a flower of loveliness, inasmuch as he deceives her: *quem uxor deciperet et cornutum quasi cervum redderet.*

For this lady all is harmony and splendour. She is most lovely when she smiles: "in either cheek there came a little dimple, so that no one beheld her without longing to kiss her". Her body was most admirable: "in short, the beauty of its outer parts gave a hint of the beauty of what was concealed, so that no man could behold her but the desire for her was born in him".

If the Emperor was impressed by such a miracle of youth and grace, a handsome knight in his retinue, Eurialus, was even more captivated. Lucretia, too, as we shall see, was conscious in her heart of a profound and mysterious trouble.

Returning to her house, the sight of her husband disgusted her, and very soon the image of Eurialus overcame any feelings of reserve or shame. "Helena longed to be ravished, and was willingly led astray by Paris; but what need have I to remember other ladies? it is enough for me that one is not deserving of blame who offends with many others." She will follow him, then; she will flee her home; "he will be always mine if it so befalls that even once I delight him with my embraces".

So, little by little, her senses are inflamed, and she seeks the means of attaining her end; and if at times the inner fire seems to slacken, it is fanned to a

blaze by the daily appearance of Eurialus as he rides past her house, for his eyes always seek her window, where they meet her own. How shall she contrive to "delight him with her embraces"?

Sosia, the old and faithful German servant, who has seen many years of service under Menelaus' roof, may play the go-between, as he speaks both German and Italian. But he opens his eyes with horror at the amazing proposal of his beautiful mistress, whose frenzied passion henceforth discards the restraints of decency. While Lucretia admits the justice of his moral admonitions, she confesses that she cannot comply with them, so resolved is she to pursue her desired end: "In me the passion and the most potent love that rule me conquer all reason, and therefore I shall resolve to submit to his sovereign empire." But Sosia returns to the attack, and Lucretia, declaring herself to be subdued and penitent, swears that she will no longer seek the embrace of Eurialus, but that in order to escape all temptation she will yield herself to death. Confronted by this threat of suicide, Sosia feigns surrender; "We will give effect to thy love; I am willing to lead the affair to the desired end". And he sets to work, but he takes as long as he possibly can to execute his commission, hoping that in the meantime Lucretia's sinful passion will have spent itself.

But the two lovers long for one another more ardently than ever. Eurialus also has a morality of

his own to justify the passion that burns within his breast, and he, too, not to be outdone by Lucretia, cites historical examples in his own defence: "Art thou not aware (he says to himself) that neither Julius Cæsar nor Alexander the Great nor the proud Hannibal was able to defend himself against the assaults of love? A female rode on the back of Aristotle, the prince of philosophy, as though he had been a mule", and more in the same vein. For the rest, all is love in nature; "so that we, too, give way to love, since he conquers all things". And just as Lucretia had chosen an intermediary, so he selected an old woman to carry to the fair Sienese his first declaration of love.

The old woman presented herself before Lucretia; but the lady, knowing why she had come, drove her away with contumely, after snatching the letter from her hand and tearing it into a hundred pieces. The unfortunate messenger departed; but she did not make too much of Lucretia's anger, "well knowing the ways of gentlewomen". Hardly had she gone downstairs when Lucretia gathered up the scraps of paper and put them together, kissing again and again each several word that made her tremble with delight.

And so began an exchange of letters, and if at first these were conceived in cautious phrases, they soon became more and more outspoken and passionate. Lucretia allowed herself without too much difficulty to be conquered by Eurialus'

promises, and her last letter is full of resolution: "I give myself to thee; I will not begin to be thine if I am not to be thine for ever."

At this point the literary expression of their passion naturally gave way to attempts to contrive a meeting.

Old Sosia caught Eurialus at the window of a tavern, where he stood conversing with Lucretia, whose room was directly opposite, divided from his only by the width of a narrow alley. Someone besides himself might notice the lovers, and to-morrow perhaps Eurialus would be seen descending from Lucretia's window. It was urgent, therefore, to avoid any scandal; and Piccolomini puts words into Sosia's mouth, when the latter confesses to his ardent lady that he knows her secret, which express a most accommodating morality: "The first degree of prudence is not to love; the second, after one is snared, is to love in such wise that nothing is known; and this cannot be done without method." And here Lucretia suggests a method, and he at once undertakes to assist her in every way.

The lady bids him tell Eurialus to disguise himself as a porter, and to mingle with the men who are carrying corn up to the loft of her house; at a certain point on the stairs he will find a door which leads to her chamber. He does as he is told, and Lucretia, whose diaphanous raiment reveals all the beauty of her proffered body, closes the door

by which Eurialus enters, and he, casting off his countryman's smock, appears in a magnificent jerkin of gold and silver. And there, for the time being, we will leave the lovers, who are happy to find themselves at last alone.

We will not linger over the story of their subsequent adventures, their flight and concealment, and the unexpected arrival of Menelaus; as usual, all goes well.

While this is not its first appearance, the thing that recurs most persistently in these pages, in the form of comment, is the author's indulgent morality. According to this adultery is not in itself a sin, because the imperious might of love rules the destinies and subdues the will of all mortals; but scandal may arise from the public knowledge of it. If the flames of passion involve two human beings, let them at least make sure that the blaze is not seen by others. Æneas goes even farther: desire, he says, should be given the reins, for only by full satisfaction can it be finally appeased and the blaze extinguished.

It is, we must admit, a doctrine which might easily inspire only too many Eurialuses and Lucretias!

But the *Tractatum* contains more than this; there are pages in which Æneas gives free rein to his taste for erotic descriptions; he loves to linger over them, nor does he refrain from giving the picture such suggestive touches that the Latin of the humanist

outdoes the Tuscan of Boccaccio. Here, for example, is such a passage; we regret that we cannot spare the reader the trouble of translation:

“Papillae quasi duo punica poma ex utroque atere tumescebant, pruritusque palpitantes movebant. Non potuit Eurialus ultra stimulum cohibere.

“In talamum pergunt, ubi talem noctem habuerunt, qualem credimus inter duos amantes fuisse, postquam navibus altis raptam Helenam Paris abduxit, tanquam dulcis nox ista fuit, ut ambo negarent, tam bene inter-Martem Veneremque fuisse. *Tu meus es Ganimedes, tu meus Hyppolitus, Diamedesque meus*, dicebat Lucretia. *Tu mihi Polixena es*, Eurialus referebat: *tu Aemilia, tu Venus ipsa*. Et nunc os, nunc genas, nunc oculos commendabat. Elevatque nonnunquam lodice, secreta quae non viderat antea plabatur, et *plus invenio*, dicebat, *quam putaram*. Talem lavantem vidit Acheon in fonte Dianam. Qui his membris formosius, quid candidius? Jam rendem pericula. Quid est quod propter te non debeat sustineri? O pectus decorum! O papillae praemendae: vos ne tango? vos ne habeo? vos ne meas incidistis manus? O teretes arctus! O redolens corpus, te ne ego possideo?

“Fiunt blanditiae, dantur oscula, itur in Venerem tensis velis. Stringebat illa; ille stringebat. Nec lassi jacebant sed ut Antaeus ex terra validior resurgebat, sic post bellum alacriores illi robusti robustioresque fiebant. . . .”

The most pleasant contests of love, in which each sought to overcome the other, were soon to have an end. Eurialus had perforce to leave Italy with the Emperor Sigismund, and to set his face to the north, with the image of the lovely Sienese in his heart and before his eyes. Lucretia shut herself up in her apartments, and the anguish of this separation so grieved and wasted her that ere long death took pity on her, and closed for ever the eyes that were red with weeping.

This love-story was not wholly the work of the poet's imagination.

He himself declares that he wrote the story as it was told him (*scripsi duorum amantium casus, nec finxi*).

For that matter, there are many who can testify to its truth; in particular, Kaspar Schlick, the Imperial chancellor. Was he not himself in Siena at the time, and had he not personal knowledge of the case?

“In Siena, city of Venus, thou didst burn fiercely in the flames of love, so that no one was more galliard than thyself: thou shouldst be able to say if my story is true; nor shalt thou permit memory to afflict thee with remorse, if there is anything here that befell thyself, since as a man thou didst bear thyself well.”

Eurialus, then, is no imaginary character; indeed, it would seem, from what Piccolomini tells us, that he may have been this very Kaspar Schlick of ten

years earlier, a Kaspar not yet steadied by the years and the burden of preferment. And since the letter is addressed to him, Æneas does not waste time over such futile justifications as we see in the prologue dedicated to Mariano Sozini, but exalts the joys which the lovely goddess lavishes on mortals:

“He who has never felt within himself the fire of love is a stone or a beast: *ille utique vel deorum medullas non laceat igneam favillam.*”

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Dedicatory letter, and prologue, and *Tractatum*: all filled him with contrition when he was no longer Æneas but Pius. The thought of this brief romance, more than a little erotic, which had passed into the hands of so many readers, and which shed such a curious light on the supreme Shepherd of Christendom, was a continual torment to the pontiff. He must summon up his courage; and since his repentance must be salutary and complete, he must beat his breast in public.

He wrote, then, a long letter to some person unknown to us (we know only that his name was Carlo) deploring and repudiating the book, which, he said, he had composed in his youth (*olim sensu pariterque aetate juvenis*); which is none too truthful a beginning, for the *Tractatum* was published when Æneas was in his fortieth year. His sorrow (he confessed) was lively and profound; since in this

tale of love he had given too much space to licence and lasciviousness (*apertam, sed heu lascivam nimis prurientemque amoris historiam*). And addressing himself not to Carlo alone, but to all the faithful, he admonished them :

“For which reason, let that which I wrote of love in my youth be contemned and rejected by youth, and let that be followed which I tell you now. Believe the old man rather than the young. Do not think more of the private man than of the pontiff. Repudiate Æneas and accept Pius ; that pagan name the parents imposed upon the infant ; this Christian name we have assumed upon the throne. And so, if still you read the story which we wrote of Eurialus and Lucretia, *o miseri, o insipientes huc propensum jamjam accidite.*”

A sorrowful and remorseful confession ! The confessed and repentant sinner takes shelter under the spiritual head of the Church, who points out the true path to all writers :

“Let those who wish to write their fantasies address themselves not to the love of two human beings, but to the love that includes all loves, that is, to the love of God.”

Even more than the freedom of the narrative, Pius must have regretted the moral levity with which, at the moments most fraught with danger to Lucretia’s frailty, he had, so to speak, encouraged

his heroine to overcome any inward resistance to sin. A pretty doctrine, he must have thought, in the mouth of a future Pope! And in his mind's eye he saw yet other Lucretias followed the dead Lucretia down the primrose path!

But his letter, though eloquent and full of genuine feeling, was of little, if any, avail. The book was passed from hand to hand, and this retractation only stimulated its diffusion. For the rest, it was impossible that a romance which turned exclusively on one of the most imperious of the instincts, and which was intended to arouse and excite this instinct, should disappear from circulation.

Nor was the author's request acceded to in later years. We find the *Tractatum* included in the various editions of the *Opera omnia*, together with the letter from which we have quoted. No one seems to have felt that it would injure the prestige of the Pope if the man were revealed beneath the sacred vestments of the pontiff; and since the romance was written before the poet had taken orders it might even edify the faithful to perceive so profound a change in the writer on his entry into the ministry of the Church.

But although the *Tractatum* appears in the collected works, we shall look in vain for any sign of a comedy entitled *Crysis*, which was written while Æneas was at Nuremberg, and which appears to have been far more licentious than the amorous history of Eurialus and Lucretia. It seems that only

a single copy of the comedy existed, and this was stolen from the author by a friend. For this and for other reasons all relations between the two were broken off, as we may see by the following letter from the pen of Æneas:

“Thou dost aim at making money, I esteem it but little; thou dost sometimes apply thyself to letters for gain, I cultivate them for my pleasure and peace of mind. Thou art abrupt and austere, I am frivolous and gentle; thou delightest in the table more than in Venus, and I love the latter more than the former. . . . Neither canst thou deny having taken from me the comedy *De Criside* which I wrote at Nuremberg.”

With a heart even more sorely burdened with bitterness and remorse, Pius II once again did penance in public, and made an even more solemn renunciation (not this time in a letter, but in a Bull) of all that his pen had ever dared to write, in Germany and in Basle, against the supreme authority of Rome. In this Bull, which was known as the Bull of Retractation, and was addressed to the University of Cologne, we hear the accents of extreme humility and profound remorse:

“Wandering astray, like Paul, we have said, written and done many reprehensible things, and through ignorance have persecuted the Church of God and the Roman See. And therefore we now



[1]

[*Unlorn*]

PIUS II ARRIVES IN ANCONA FOR THE CRUSADE
(Pinturicchio)

implore: Lord, forgive us the sins of our youth! In the meantime our writings are no longer within our control, but are in many hands, and, being abused by the wicked, may give rise to grave scandal. Like St. Augustine, I confess and retract my errors before all men: not the Council, but the Pope is the depository of the laws and the Divine authority. On Peter alone did the Saviour confer the supreme government: the primacy descends only through him and his legitimate successors."

In order to make the faithful forget this twofold series of errors, he never omitted, even in the pains of sickness and in the hostile atmosphere which he felt about him, to challenge every obstacle, always acting with the greatest energy, and displaying a tempered yet inflexible severity. One of the cardinals, none other than the vice-chancellor of the Church, Rodrigo Borgia, once exhibited himself in a far from edifying light, and Pius, without undue delay, sent him a sharp admonition, with the object of constraining him to change his way of life for one more becoming to a cardinal:

"Beloved Son,—When, four days ago, various ladies of Siena, dedicated to worldly vanity, assembled in the gardens of Gianni de Bichis, your eminence, heedless of the office you fill, diverted yourself with them from the seventh to the twenty-second hour. . . . There was dancing of a dissolute character: wherein not one of the enticements

of love was withheld, and your demeanour differed in no wise from that of the company of worldly young people. As to that which occurred during this dancing, shame imposes silence, for not merely the fact but its very name is unworthy of your exalted rank. The husbands, brothers, and kinsmen of the young ladies and gentlemen present were not admitted, in order that your pleasure might be the more unbridled. . . . Our displeasure is beyond utterance, since this does dishonour to the State and to the sacerdotal office."

Poor "admonition"! Such words could have no echo from a heart that was closed to any moral appeal.

For that matter, the Borgia was not alone in his failure to remember the dignity of his office. Pius II, obsessed by the idea of a new crusade against the Turks, who were threatening to overrun the whole of Eastern Europe, addressed many of the other dignitaries of the Church in terms of equal severity:

"It is said that we live surrounded by possessions, and that we amass money, and permit ourselves luxury, and mount ourselves on noble horses, and trail behind us the fringes of our mantles, and that there are those of us who go about the city with chubby cheeks under the red hat, and that we keep hounds for hunting, and that we lavish gifts on jugglers and parasites, but do nothing in defence of

the faith. And all this not invention: there are several among the cardinals and others of the Curia who conduct themselves in such a fashion. Hence it is that the people bear us hatred, nor do they heed us whenever we speak to them seriously. We must pursue other courses. Abstinence, chastity, innocence, zeal for the faith, fervour for religion, disdain of death, and eagerness for martyrdom have uplifted the Church of Rome above the whole world. All that it is profitable to uphold for the health of the flock entrusted to us should enter into our own lives."

These were melancholy truths, which aroused, in those that heard them, not repentance and a resolve to live a more seemly life, but sullen hostility toward the importunate critic.

And, indeed, when Pius II threw himself with all the ardour of which he was capable into the preparations for the Crusade he became aware of the painful void about him. Above all, the cardinals endeavoured by every means to dissuade him from this perilous enterprise, in which he himself wished to participate, not only in the spirit but in the flesh, taking with him bishops and cardinals: earthly delights were only too dear to them! Ailing and delicate, with only a few months, or it might be with only a few days to live, he nevertheless dared, despite the uncertainty of the outlook and the opposition which confronted him, to address

them in tones of proud reproof and admonishment:

"If we send orators to implore the aid of kings and princes, they are derided. If we impose a tithe on the clergy, they appeal to a future Council. If we promulgate indulgences, and by means of spiritual privileges incite the faithful to help with money, lo and behold, we are accused of cupidity. It is believed that everything is done with the sole intent to amass money; no one puts faith in our word. Like a merchant who cannot satisfy his creditors, we find ourselves without credit. . . . Wherefore we ourself, despite our age and bodily infirmity, shall undertake the war for the Catholic faith; we ourself shall go forth in battle."

And since his own voice had little effect, he assembled the cardinals, and in a solemn Consistorium gave public notice of his decision:

"We dedicate this hoary head and this feeble body to the mercy of God. He will not forget us. If He will not permit us to return, we hope that He will deign to receive us into heaven, and will keep intact and spotless the First See and His celestial Spouse."

And so, in dull and melancholy weather, he set out from the Eternal City, with gladness in his soul. "Farewell, Rome; I shall never see thee again."

It was a painful journey, for his "infirm body"

was racked with pain. Moving by easy stages, for he was sick of a fever, he at last arrived in Ancona.

He seemed but a shadow of himself. And here, within sight of the sea which was to carry not the pontiff but the soldier of Christ to wage war upon Mahomet II, he succumbed to his protracted exertions and his internal maladies.

It was a melancholy death for one of the most cultured and far-sighted Popes of the Renaissance. Destiny might at least have spared him the bitterness of knowing that the vice-chancellor of the Church, who was almost always at his side, was oblivious to the austerity and solemnity of the moment. *Non solus in lecto dormiverat*, wrote an ambassador from Ancona. The cardinal who felt the need of a bed-fellow on the eve of the Crusade, in this time of fervent prayer and propitiatory ritual, was Rodrigo Borgia, on whose head the thrice sacred and august crown was one day to rest, to the distress and dishonour of the Spouse of Christ.

A VOTIVE TEMPLE

Isotta, bella sola ai nostri giorni!

SIGISMONDO MALATESTA

A VOTIVE TEMPLE

THE church of San Francesco at Rimini is completely *sui generis* among the sacred buildings of Italy.

Pius II, although so great a lover of the arts and letters (of which latter he was himself a conspicuous ornament), noted with vexation this "noble" house of God, which was then being adorned with "the works of Gentiles only". "It seems (he wrote) not a temple of Christians, but of infidels worshipping demons." But he cherished too much resentment against Sigismondo Malatesta to be entirely just to him; if personal rancour and political hatred had not clouded his judgment he would perhaps have admired this ample and joyous efflorescence of pagan myths and legends.

It is, however, too reminiscent; too much of a return to the classic age.

That which in other churches of the period is isolated and fragmentary—which is seen in a pavement, a statue, a picture, a tomb, the arch of a doorway, the frescoes of a vault, the walls of a chapel—is here general and organic and dominating. The whole temple is humanistic. And humanism, in its nostalgic passion for antiquity, while it forgets Jesus and looks jestingly askance at the foolish prayers of humble believers, here sings that hymn to the joy of beauty and of life that resounded but faintly after the fall of Rome, and was finally extinguished in the long night of the Middle Ages.

Overcome now is the resistance of Isotta, who had smiled, ingenuously and a trifle circumspectly, at the timid Petrarchian songs of the youthful Sigismondo. And now the church which he is renovating and embellishing (as a votive offering in respect of the perils escaped in the bloody war which he fought under the standard of Pope Eugenius IV) is invaded by a troop of artists who are to immortalize the name and the graces of his lady, no longer reluctant, and the memory of their mutual passion.

It is not, therefore, a Christian church; dedicated to her who "was wholly seraphic in ardour", it is a marble poem in praise of a fair earthly creature. The chaste espousals of the son of Bernadone with our Lady Purity, which Giotto depicted at Assissi, between choirs of angels and ranks of saints, are here replaced by very different nuptials.

It is a building unique in Italy, unique in Christendom; the splendour of art which illuminates and pervades it has immortalized the memory of this pair of lovers, one of the most singular couples in the literature and psychology of love.

No trace has survived of Sigismondo's *Canzonero de Sonitti*, of which mention was made at the time of his death in a legal document dating from October 1468. It is impossible to say how many sonnets it contained: nor do we know how many other poems he composed. But we do know that the court poets refer to him in the *Isottaes* as a "fertile writer", and

A VOTIVE TEMPLE

make Isotta herself declare that it is to his verse that she owes her fame :

Factaque sum celebris carmine sola suo.

Tracalo da Rimini, too, who is one of the band of “Isottaicans”, though he does not contribute to the *Isottaicus*, declares that the renown of Isotta will live eternally, by reason of the noble poems which she inspires, “and first in grace and excellence those of her lover”.

To her lover, however, more compositions have been attributed than were really his. Above all, the threefold “capitule”, which begins with the words

Succorrimo per Dio, ch' io so' mal porto,

and which was of such service to Yriarte in the interpretation of certain bas-reliefs in the Temple, is not Sigismondo's; it is, as Volpi has shown, the work of the Sienese poet, Simone Serdini, who died in 1419 or 1420, at a time when Sigismondo would have been just learning to talk.

I believe, however, despite the harsh and laconic judgment of Massera, that Yriarte, though he was mistaken as to the paternity of the work, has hit the mark as regards its influence on the artistic decoration of the Church. Serdini, an imitator of Petrarch, had intimate relations with the lords of Rimini, who were themselves enthusiastic Petrarchians whenever the wars and factions of the time permitted them a little leisure; so that we are quite free to believe that Sigismondo, who was then

adolescent, and was likewise a follower of Petrarch, may have had a special affection for this poem, whose phrases, though a trifle ingenuous and archaic, are quite in harmony with his own feelings for his lady.

At all events, the fifteen sonnets which the critic assigns to Sigismondo are imitations of Petrarch; five of them being dedicated to the living and ten to the dead Isotta. In the first he laments the indifference of the beloved; nevertheless, he will persevere in his love and adoration, being encouraged in his constancy by so many examples ancient and modern; moreover, her eyes have at times flashes of light and languors which seem to promise him the desired victory; and he prays that it may not be the decree of fate that she shall be reaped by the sickle of death before he has gathered the sweet fruit of a passion so ardent and devoted.

*Quella che, sola, più che gli altri vale.*¹

Here, as an example, is one of the sonnets of this series: Sigismondo had to leave Rimini on a military expedition in a distant region; his grief at parting from the "dear home" and the "fair and serene countenance" of his beloved Isotta is expressed, however inferior the lines may be to Petrarch's, in delicate and heartfelt tones:

Addio, con voce mesta e con sospiri
Io dico, lasso! o bel volto sereno,
Dolce mio caro loco, o bel terreno
Che fu principio à miei alti desiri!

¹ She who alone is worth more than the rest!

A VOTIVE TEMPLE

Partenza dolorosa, chè al moriri
Tu mi riduci! O mio piacer ameno,
Ove te lascio? Sì che il tristo seno
Ne starà sempre pieno di martiri.

Non ròse sì giammai il tarlo legno
Come fa questo i tristi sensi miei,
Aspra fortuna ria, sommo dolore.

Lacrime fian mio cibo e mio sostegno
Fin ch'io non torno a riveder colei,
A cui per pegno li ò lasciato il core.¹

The second group of sonnets, those which are dedicated to Isotta "in death", are still more Petrarchian in manner. As a matter of fact, Isotta did not die until many years later, surviving Sigismondo himself by a year; but the Malatesta could not resist the poetical fiction of untimely death, a fiction which was then the fashion, and therefore obligatory on every poet. He beheld his beautiful lady grow pale, fade, and vanish from the earth; her eyes closed for ever to the light of day, her cold and lifeless body was carried to the Temple which he had built for their love, and laid in the magnificent urn which he had striven to make worthy of her. Deprived of her smile and her com-

¹ Farewell with mournful voice and sighs—I say, alas! O fair serene countenance,—O my dear home, O fair land—that was the source of my high desires!—Grievous parting, thou bringest me near to death!—O my sweet delight—where do I leave thee? Truly my sad bosom will ever be full of torment.—Never did worm gnaw wood—as this gnaws my mournful senses,—harsh, evil fortune, supreme anguish!—Tears are my bread and my nourishment—until I return to behold her—with whom as pledge I have left my heart.

pany, he lifts his tearful eyes to the silent tomb in which she is lying :

Splendido lume, ed o mia donna cara,
Rinchiusa tra questi aspri marmi e duri,
Isotta, bella sola ai nostri giorni!¹

Flattered though she was by the passionate accents of the young lord of Rimini, in whom the discipline of classical study seemed to have tempered the ferocious character which he had inherited from his ancestors, it was a long while before Isotta could bring herself to comply with his desires. And Sigismondo, who, despite the Petrarchism and Platonism which were then the fashion, and to which he applied himself so eagerly, was unable to restrain his instincts, sought to drown his disappointment in short-lived connections which at least appeased his senses.

For that matter, these were not the first affairs of this nature. When the death of Ginevra d'Este left him a widower—she died in 1440, in her twenty-third year, and it was said that he had poisoned her—he had a son by Vannella di Galeotto, who afterwards obtained from the Pope Nicholas V a Brief of legitimation. His connection with Vannella was very short-lived; and for the sake of his own political prospects and the future of the State he asked and obtained the hand of Polissena, the daughter of Francesco Sforza, the lord of Milan

¹ Resplendent light, and O, my beloved lady—shut in between these stern hard marble walls—Isotta, fair sun of our days!

(1442). For Sigismondo this meant a passionless marriage of convention, and for Polissena a most unhappy union.

He soon began to neglect her, just as he neglected his sometime friends; and the unhappy daughter of the Duke of Milan had to look on at her husband's ever-increasing passion for the new "Madonna" of his heart; and now, no longer content with expressing it in poetry, he published this passion to the world, as though its object were no longer a living person. Finally, discarding or subordinating the heraldic emblems of his family, he adopted the two famous interlaced initials as the heraldic witness to his new bonds, bearing them in the tournament, and on ceremonial occasions, and even having them embroidered on the liveries of his soldiers. The medal showing the Rocca or castle of the Malatestas, which was struck about this time, still bears the old arms, with the chequers and the three heads; but a few months later—that is, on Isotta's capitulation—the lovers' monogram made its appearance and was never thenceforth erased from Sigismondo's shield. Before long, indeed, it became predominant over all other emblems, until it actually appeared alone; and whether in the court, or in the churches, or on the seals and documents of the State, it ruled supreme.

Polissena, to her great sorrow, must have looked on at this sudden and dazzling ascent of her rival; and with even greater chagrin she must have heard,

WOMEN OF THE RENAISSANCE

in her own court, the hymns which were sung in her glory. The poets sang of her beauty and gentleness. The artists immortalized her graceful form in bronze and marble. As though to sum up in a phrase this universal chorus of praise, Matteo de Pasti surrounded her image with the words:

ISOTTE ARIMINENSI FORMA ET VIRTUTE ITALIAE DECORI

Decus Italiae? She was hardly that. But the court poets went even farther than this.

Basinio Basini of Parma, who sleeps in a sarcophagus of classic style beneath the first external arch of the left wall of the Temple, tells us in his poem *Hesperidos* that the deities of Olympus recognized the celestial nature of Sigismondo's friend. A cultured Grecian scholar, a disciple—somewhat pedestrian—of Homer, he relates, amongst other things, the encounter of Sigismondo with the nymph Psyche, who leads the hero to the palace of her father Zephyrus; like the supernatural characters of Homer, the nymph has a twofold dwelling and a twofold name, and though in Olympus she is Psyche, she bears another name on earth—that is, in Rimini:

Isotheim Superi dixerunt nomine divam.

This little fable provided another humanist, who was also living at the court of Rimini, with a poetical plot of an even ampler and more eulogistic character.

Jove, looking down from the heavens and per-

ceiving the lovely Isotta, becomes madly enamoured of her, and resolves to make her his; but Phoebe and Mars, who are Sigismondo's protectors, intervene in his favour, seeking to distract Jove from such a passion. "They wish perhaps (the thunderer asks himself, in wrath and jealousy) to extinguish this love in me, in order that they may satisfy their own desires?" Never will he relinquish her, though he should plunge the whole empyrean into the abyss! The two deities, powerless to restrain the passion of Jove, turn to Saturn, who implores Diana to bear Isotta away with her in her own shining chariot. But Jove is far from being appeased, and in a great voice he repeats, to the assembled Gods, the threat of a general catastrophe. The gods and goddesses divide into two adverse parties, and the mansions of the immortals are on the point of being stained by civil war.

A terrible danger threatens all alike; the gods take counsel, and as happens on this earth in similar cases, so in these lofty spheres a compromise is effected, which for the time being saves the prestige and the unity of the Supreme Council. Unwillingly enough, Jove gives way, importuned by the prayers and complaints of the dwellers in Elysium. Isotta, so long as she lives on earth, will continue to be Sigismondo's friend, but when her earthly course is run she will for ever surrender her charms to the father of the gods. Then will Olympus shine with the splendour of the *nova stella poli*; in the mean-

time, let her be the cherished spoil of the divine Sigismondo:

Sola Sigismundi dicar Isotta dei!

So ends the little poem, or poetical romance, *De amore Jovis in Isottam*, by Giannantonio de' Pandoni, known as Il Porcellio, which was echoed by other poems to be heard in the halls of the Rocca. She who is more than woman, exceeding even the supernal goddesses in beauty (*nulla tibi par est foemina, nulla Dea*), is the motive of a Latin poem by Basinio Basini which antedates the *Hesperidos*: namely, the famous *Liber Isottaëus*. Herein are letters in verse, which are supposed to be written by various persons (Isotta, Sigismondo, the poet, Isotta's father, etc.), in which is minutely narrated the story of Sigismondo's passion, from his first repulse to his triumph, with the final addition—a perfunctory and prescribed addition, such as we see in Sigismondo's own poems—of the premature death of the heroine. A vain and illusory death, for she is not the victim of destiny, nor do the flames of the funeral pyre consume her:

Isottamque tuam, quamvis sit mortua, manes
Non capient, cunctos effugit illa rogos.

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While the poets were singing the praises of Isotta, and the most celebrated engravers of medals were recording her profile for posterity, and other noted artists were working at the frescoes or

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sculptures of the Temple, Polissena, Sigismondo's second wife, was, as we have said, still alive. She died on the 1st of June, 1449; "she was buried (we read in the *Cronaca riminese*) in San Francesco's Church in Rimini, in the presence of all the people, and the bishop of Cesena was there, with all the clergy of Rimini; *cujos anima requiescat in pace*". It was said at the time that she was found in bed in her own room "with a napkin wound tightly round her throat", the murderer being her own husband: a terrible accusation, which was revived and repeated publicly by Pius II.

Sigismondo, with his violent and impulsive character, was fully capable of the crime; but it is not possible seriously to sustain the accusation that he himself was responsible for his wife's tragic death. The mere fact that the Duke of Milan, who was by no means the kind of man to accept such a murder with equanimity, continued after his daughter's death to maintain relations with the supposed wife-murderer is enough to make us accept such a tardy accusation with the greatest caution. For the rest, if he had been guilty it is hardly probable that only two months after the crime Sigismondo would have been received by Nicholas V, in Fabriano, in such a frank and cordial fashion.

"He dismounted at the palace of the Pope with the greatest triumph. The Pope caused to be given

to him good provision of torches, sheep, calves, preserved foods, corn, and many other things; he was seen by the Pope and received with great kindness, and obtained and was renewed in the lordship of all his lands, and was given all that he asked, and never yet was there any lord who received such honour as he. And by the Pope, the Cardinals and all the court of Rome were legitimized the magnifico Roberto and the magnifico Malatesta, his sons." (*Cronaca riminese*.)

It is useless, then, to look for the motives of the hypothetical crime.

One thing is certain, however (for the fact has been emphasized by all the historians), that Isotta was not involved in the crime, whether directly or indirectly; and it is still more certain that she derived no advantage from it. While after protracted effort she persuaded her lover to obtain from the Pope the legitimation of her two natural sons (the first of whom was born in 1446 and died in the following year), it required an even greater effort, which had to be continued for some years, to persuade the Malatesta—who was then a second time a widower—at length to sanction the relation which the poets and artists had made so notorious throughout Italy.

It was not long before Isotta was the witness of fresh aberrations on the part of her husband, whose instincts were gradually finding unexpected and

even brutal expression, until at last they assumed an aspect which was definitely pathological. The memory of certain facts, moreover, may well have made her uneasy.

It is probable, however, that the descriptions of the deplorable episode in which he figured at Fano, in December 1448, have been unduly blackened by prejudiced historians; the chronicles of this period must be accepted with prudent reservations. At all events, it is said that in this city he encountered a young gentlewoman, a German, wife of Borbone's son, whose beauty aroused a sudden and violent desire to possess her.

"He sought to take her by force; two knights of the lady's retinue, who were leading more than two hundred horse, offered resistance and were killed; and thus he took her, and she not consenting, he bit her arm, tearing a piece out, and then killed her, after which the tyrant sated his brutal lust on the chaste, dead body. The Pope at once banished him from the camp, and he was regarded as a great dishonour to Italy."

Isotta, to whom the affair was reported, may perhaps have believed, in the midst of her grief and shame, that the ferocious condottiere would have returned to her subdued and repentant.

But other escapades followed, though less ferocious, which were sorely to wound her pride. Only too often he left the highway of life to dis-

appear into close and obscure byways, and these sensual excursions resulted in numerous illegitimate offspring. While in the interval between his first and second marriages he had two daughters and a son, by three young women (one of them unknown, one Vannella, the mother of Roberto il Magnifico, and the third Gentile di Giovanni, with whom his relations were to continue for some time), and while Isotta herself bore him two children, Giovanni and Sallustio, he had yet other offspring by various other women after the death of Polissena—that is, at a time when Isotta was by no means sure of her hold over him—and many other children saw the light before he finally married her.

Already the lovely Isotta must have been weary of such affairs, and in 1454, hearing that her too unfaithful lover was beginning a fresh idyll with a young gentlewoman of the city, she went straight to the house of the latter. The *forma et virtute Italiae decus*, whom Jove himself—according to the poets—beheld with admiration and desire from the heights of Olympus, poured upon her rival a flood of threats and insults. Not content with this, she reported the facts by letter to Sigismondo, then leading the forces of the Republic against the Conte di Pitigliano.

Sigismondo replied at once, in order to appease her, that his affection for her was greater and profounder than ever. But Isotta, who knew him well, was not too greatly mollified. Poems, elegies,

medals, churches, tombs, natural children—there had been more than enough of these! Let her lover now prove his devotion—it was high time!—in a more tangible fashion. In this aggressive letter, to which distance added sincerity, Isotta reveals herself—I am sorry for my romantic readers!—the good and provident housekeeper who is thinking of her own household, the mother who is preoccupied with the future of her own sons, and perhaps also the woman who is irritated (for in her the woman is still very much to the fore) because she is unable to prove victoriously to all, and especially to the envious and malicious of her own sex, that her power over the sovereign of the State is still supreme.

The correspondence continued in this tone, until Sigismondo, in an outburst of irritation, replied that it vexed him to find her “so much on her guard and so jealous”. In order to convince her of his displeasure he tried what silence would do; he wrote her no more letters.

Isotta then humiliated herself so far as to invoke his compassion, begging him to forgive his *poveretta*. But even at such a moment, with thunder in the air, she did not fail to insist on her rights, and above all she reminded him how for years she had desired, and he had promised, the public recognition of their relations.

“You swear to me in your letter, magnificent Lord Sigismondo Pandolfo, and my most singular

lord, that you desire me more than ever. And assuredly, my lord, I wish to believe it, but I should be much more clear and confident in respect of such an oath if you would put an end to that which always vexes me. I implore your lordship, by my love, and thinking of my life, and for the sake of peace, that you will consent to a true marriage as soon as you can.

“As for what your lordship writes to me, that I ought not to reply thus to your letter, like one who is always on her guard and jealous of you, I had just come to know of your lordship’s betrayal of me with the daughter of Signor Galeazzo. This fact and my other causes of suffering justified my saying something of them to your lordship in that letter which seemed to you a little abrupt.

“As for what your lordship says about not writing to me any more, scarcely had I read this when I exclaimed that now nothing was lacking to make me completely miserable; and hence I pray your lordship, if you love me as entirely as you say, not to deprive me of that which is a great happiness to me, that is, your writing, since I am deprived of seeing your lordship. Deign to have compassion on wretched me.

“Our Malatesta is well and has received the horse with great pleasure. All our other little sons and daughters are well also. . . .”

These were passing clouds; but two years and more were to go by before Isotta’s desire became

a reality (1456). And then, although Sigismondo's lawful wife, she had to witness fresh infidelities on the part of her husband, which resulted in many more children. It is true that they were but passing infidelities, as were those which had distressed her from time to time during their ten years of cohabitation, for when the desire of the moment was assuaged he always returned to her, devoted as in the distant Petrarchian dawn of their love.

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Handsome if not truly beautiful, of a lively and quick intelligence, if not so highly cultured as some of the great ladies of her time, Isotta must have been possessed of unusual qualities to exert such power over the heart and life of this truly "most singular" man.

Cantù, Yriarte, and others state that she was illiterate, and hence that the letters attributed to her are not her own; still less the poems.

The ability to write is, of course, no real measure of intelligence; but there is no doubt—as Villari has shown—that Isotta knew her alphabet and something more. At all events, when her lover, at last her husband, was away from Rimini as condottiere in the pay of this or the other power, she ably dispatched the internal affairs of the little State, and with equal ability she faced and overcame the opposition and the intrigues of other courts and republics.

For that matter, it cannot have been either her

culture, or her love of letters, or her gift of rhyming (and some say that the word *Elegiae* incised by Matteo de Pasti round a book on the obverse of a medal means that Isotta, too, had sacrificed to the Muses) that Sigismondo found most seductive. The humility and devotion with which she wrote to him, forgiving his many infidelities, show that her unconditional submissiveness was more remarkable than any of her other intellectual or physical qualities; and that this submissiveness was the result of her truly profound love for Sigismondo. Such attachment, together with the "rare riches" of her body, her wonderfully quick intelligence, her gracious manners, and her refined and subtle attentions to him, could not fail to arouse and sustain in Sigismondo—constantly in the saddle, amidst ferocious and bloody scenes of battle—a homesick longing for a grateful peace, a secure nest. It may be that the youth of twenty, the disciple of Petrarch, was not yet wholly dead in him, and sighed still for those desirable things, shaming the savage and momentary sensual intoxications into which he plunged, urged on by an atavistic force.

It was not, then, the lover that he sensed and found in Isotta, but the friend. His Platonism, the vein of poetry that was innate in him, his love of Petrarch, and still more his love of the classics (and Pius II, much as he hated him, did not begrudge him his admiration in this respect)—all these were so many spiritual levers which tended to bring

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uppermost, in his affection for Isotta, whatever was least unhappy and barbarous in his character. In respect of Isotta, therefore, he was a true son of the Renaissance, a not unworthy child of the great generation of humanists to which he belonged.

The assertion may seem hazardous; but I do not think we can find any other explanation of the fact (and it is a fact unique in the history of the petty States of the time) that it was not his own palace which he made splendid with art, nor did he raise within the city walls any pompous monument to his own immortality, nor did he build himself a magnificent villa in the suburbs (for the Rocca Malatestiana was military in its origin and functions); he simply devoted himself to the task of embellishing, by the hands of the most eminent artists, that marvellous Temple, which, though formally consecrated to the Poor Man of Assissi, was in actual fact, from the foundation-stone to the topmost frieze, erected to the glory of Isotta; that is, in perpetual exaltation of their mutual love. To the glory of Isotta—and also of that circle of humanists who then dwelt at his court, and with whose spoils he wished to enrich this sanctuary of art and poetry.

Once again—as was so often the case in the works of the period—the builder, the Mæcenas, had almost as much to do with the building as the artist, and not infrequently even more. Not only did Sigismondo give orders that the ancient Chiesa di Classe, beyond the walls of Ravenna, should be

despoiled of its best sculptures, and not only did he bring other sculptures for his Temple from Sparta and other parts of Greece, where he had fought against the Turks under the standard of Venice, but he also suggested to the artists, or readily accepted their flattering suggestions, that the poetical images of his own youthful compositions should be perpetuated in marble. I like to think that he did not wait for the sculptors and the medallists to go to him with their proposals, but that he assigned to each of them the task which he was to accomplish. The excellence and refinement of his taste would have fully justified such directive control. The power which he exerted within the State, his easy authority, and his resolute energy, made it possible for him to materialize his feelings and his desires in this memorial church.

The church, like himself, was "most singular" in its "roseate Appollonian aspect", since for its chapels Sigismondo

trepido
cercò l'immagine di Dio nel gemmeo
pallore d'una femmina

—"tremulously sought the image of God in the gem-like pallor of a woman", and not in the "crucified Martyr" Who "contaminates the air with sadness".

The first notes of the symphony of love are sounded already in the frieze of the outer portal; in the exquisite volutes on either side the initials of the

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two lovers are fused in an indissoluble embrace. Still outside the Temple, extending along the walls like a long, unbroken fillet, or a great nuptial garland, are shields displaying the two initials, alternating from time to time with the heraldic roses of the Malatesta.

Within, from the posts and frontals of the doors, the marble balustrades of the chapels, the angels and cherubim that meet the eye in all directions, and the bases of the pilasters to the capitals and cornices, the whole Temple is a full, sonorous hymn, whose mighty tones follow an ascending scale. And when, as though deafened by this tremendous music, the visitor withdraws into one of the chapels, or gazes at one of the smaller bas-reliefs, he will find repeated there, in full or plaintive or muted notes, the motives of the same symphony. The triumphal arch with Sigismondo passing beneath it, and the temple in which Pallas is surrounded by the Heroes, in the bas-reliefs of the tomb of Sigismondo's ancestors, display in every part the two interlaced initials, like the embrace, in life and death, of two hands and two spirits, while the rose, the saw, the three heads, and the chequers appear but rarely by comparison. Not to his God has Sigismondo raised this Temple, nor to St. Francis, nor yet to his own house, but to his "delectable friend"; not to his high lineage, nor to its military virtues, but to the inner passion which consumes him.

As he had sung in his Petrarchian numbers, so

he erected for his mistress this marvellous tomb, before which he wept, though she was still alive, her untimely departure from earth; and in imitation of the poetical compositions of the poets then at his court, and of those who, though dead, had left a profound impression on his boyhood and adolescence (I am alluding here to the Sienese Serdini), he had perpetuated in marble invocations to the planets and the signs of the Zodiac, imploring their protection for his ill-starred love.

Here, then, in the Temple of Rimini, was a wonderful emulation of the brush and the chisel in honour of Isotta. It was not only to flatter their lord and patron that the artists who found in him such affinities of æsthetic feeling called him by the most glorious names of the ancient divinities. While the rosettes of the guitar of "Music" (in the chapel of San Gaudenzio) show the faces of the two lovers sculptured with accuracy and precision, and while they face one another in the medallions, the bas-relief of "Rhetoric" or "Eloquence" shows us something quite different: here Greek letters, which seemed to be indecipherable, and were for some time believed to be a bizarre trimming on the costume, run to the end of the sleeves, past the right shoulder, thence to the hem of the tunic, which hangs over the left arm, and finally to the hem near the feet; and this inscription, being translated, tells us that this is "the Jove of Rimini, the Apollo of Rimini".

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A Jove by no means too Olympian, but often inclined to exert his power in a brutal fashion; an Apollo who was not content with conducting the choir of the Muses, but who not infrequently descended to deeds of vulgarity and violence which little befitted the fair Hellenic deity!

Sigismondo was in many respects a true son of his period: in his keen and eager love of the arts, in his cultivation of poetry, in his worship of women, in his search for the refinements of life, in his study of the philosophers (he knew Plato by heart and was fond of reciting some of the dialogues), and in the versatility and flexibility of his mind ("to whatsoever he applies himself", wrote Pius II, who was so bitterly opposed to him, "in that he quickly excels"); but he was not a true son of his period in the savage instincts and impulses which so frequently had such sinister results.

In the fifteenth century manners were becoming softer and more refined, and were gradually losing the crudity which so often made its appearance in the preceding century. The magnificent renaissance of the arts, the general impetus derived from the classics, the numerous jousts of love, the academies which were opening on every hand, the poetry which flooded the courts of the rulers, the public places, and the homes of the people with songs of praise and elegies and sonnets, all tell of a nobler

and more refined society, rich in personal graces, and sensitive to beauty.

The embattled castle, the palace of the Podestà, the house of the Commune, the citadel of the prince—grey masses of stone pierced with narrow loopholes and surmounted by watch-towers which were also strongholds of defence—gave place to city mansions, which, if they had not as yet the airy loggias and serene outlines of the great palaces of the sixteenth century, had none the less lost their old form and function of fortress. And the churches, which still retained something of “the rock and the mountain”, like the generations that built them, were abandoning their gloomy façades, enlarging their windows, and embellishing their chapels with painting and sculpture, while broad beams of light, as though announcing a new spring, were filtering and falling into their naves.

But Sigismondo was not only a son of the fifteenth century: he was also the child of his own ancestors.

In the field of love, through which he passed with such devastating fury, pausing only before that delicate flower, Isotta, hideous tragedies and bloody episodes had already shaken the house of Rimini. The fratricide of the lame Giovanni was still a living memory, and the echo yet lingered of the heartbroken lament of Francesca for the “bella persona” who was taken from her, and on whose body she fell lifeless. Still fresh in memory, too, was



SICISMONDO MALATISA DEDICATES THE TEMPLE OF SAN FRANCISCO
TO ISOLTA

(Ludovico Pogliu)

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the tragic fate of Parisina, and her love for her stepson, Ugo d'Este.

Hatred, rivalry, cupidity, and the lust of power had always rent the house of Malatesta; and in this heavy and stifling atmosphere the dagger and the poisoned cup had strewn the halls of the palace with corpses. Nor was Sigismondo the last to swell the dismal record of crime and violence. After he was laid in his tomb, leaving Isotta and his son Sallustio (his favourite among his children) at the helm of the State, a natural son of his, Roberto, who was subsequently granted the title of Magnifico, killed Sallustio without undue temporizing, and may have given Isotta the poison which sent her before her time to the sepulchre which her husband had prepared for her.

In Sigismondo, then, the humanist was defeated by a pathological heredity. Pius II, in hurling at him the excommunication (1460) which preceded the burning of his effigy, paints his portrait in the darkest colours:

“Epicene in puberty, then a corruptor of boys, and subsequently a violator of young women and of nuns; a slayer of husbands, the strangler and poisoner of his own wives; denying the immortality of the soul and the existence of God; albeit he erected a ‘noble’ church in Rimini, he adorned it only with heathen works, thereby converting it into a temple of unbelievers and worshippers of

demons, and within those walls which should have been sacred to purity and to God he raised the sepulchre of his concubine, *et artificio et lapide pulcherrimum, adjecto titulo gentili more in hoc modum Divae Isotta sacrum.*”

Apart from these last sentences, and the perhaps excessive harshness of the first, the portrait is one of a man whose wickedness set him apart from the common run of men; that is, of a type abnormal even for his age.

In conclusion, it cannot be denied that Sigismondo belonged to the company of the great condottieri, a company unique in history and in Italian society; indefatigable fighters, implacable pillagers, wreckers of dynasties, and artisans of princely fortunes. Turbulent, tumultuous, and magnificent figures, who, with their rugged features, their furious outbursts of violence, and their arrogant dreams of dominion and splendour and glory, are surrounded by an aura of peculiar fascination.

AN ARCADIAN PRELUDE

Ciprigna, se tu hai potenza in cielo
Perchè non hai col tuo figliuol difesa
Costei, de' regni tuoi delizia e zelo?

BERNARDO PULCI

AN ARCADIAN PRELUDE

YESTERDAY I left the little church which her forefathers built in a picturesque corner of old Genoa, and a little later ascended the stairs of a patrician house which may have been the very home from which she set out one morning long ago, in her sixteenth year, wearing her nuptial garland. Although no trace of her remains here, and although fortune did not reward my constancy in searching the old family parchments by the discovery of any new document, I do not regret the fruitless search: for no forgotten letter, no unknown legal document could ever add a leaf to the crown of glory and of love which was set upon her head by the artists and poets of the Renaissance.

Few women, in truth, have left a more luminous track in the Italian heavens than this fragile and lovely Ligurian girl. No less than by her beauty of form, her memory is perpetuated by the brief history of her days on earth.

She died, on the banks of the Arno, in 1476, at the age of twenty-three, of consumption; not at the fall of the leaf, but at the first opening of the buds, a season equally fatal to such pale and delicate blossoms. All Florence assembled to marvel at this flower untimely plucked; and immediately a courier bore the tragic news to Lorenzo the Magnificent, who was in the country at the time:

"The blessed soul of Simonetta has departed into Paradise; it might well be said that this is the second Triumph of Death, for truly, if you had seen her, dead as she was, she would not have appeared to you less gentle and lovely than she was in life: *requiescat in pace*."

Lorenzo, walking with a friend some evenings later, was struck by the unusual brilliance of a certain star, and at once thought of the beloved Simonetta:

"It is no wonder to us (he said) that the soul of this most gentle lady should have been transformed into this new star of the firmament, or that it should have been wedded thereto."

But her real triumph followed her disappearance from the earth. Never was her gentle image so present to men's eyes and hearts. Fleeing the gloomy silence of her tomb in the church of Ognissanti, she still went roaming amidst the Florentine woods and hills. Bernardo Pulci saw her plainly:

Qual musa o qual furor sarà, che spiri
Quante lacrime intorno a lei fur sparte
Fra tanta pompa e tanti incliti vivi?

Ma forse che ancor viva al mondo è quella,
Poi che vista da noi fu, dopo il fine,
In sul feretro posta assai più bella.

And while her "divine" image inspired not a few of the works of Sandro Botticelli, Agnolo Poliziano

(Politian), to mention but one of a great choir of poets, wrote the fresh and musical octaves of the *Stanze* in memory of the passion which Giuliano de' Medici had conceived for the dead girl; and Lorenzo the Magnificent himself, touched by the untimely end of the "most gentle lady", wove for her the garland of his Petrarchian and Platonic *canzoniere*. Here, then, amidst all the sensuality of the Renaissance, is a tender and lyrical interlude; like a legend of Arcadia, or an anticipation of romanticism.

Giuliano de' Medici appears in the *Stanze* as a solitary dweller in the glades and forests of Arcadia:

Facea sovente pei boschi soggiorno,
Inculto sempre, e rigido in aspetto;
Il volto difendea dal solar raggio
Con ghirlanda di pino o verde faggio.¹

Knowing nothing of

Le dolci acerbe cure che da Amore,²

he laughed at those who were caught unawares in the net of Cupid. Love, for him, was a ridiculous malady, a "blind contagion"; thankful that he was not subject to its harsh and fruitless servitude, he bade his friends cast off the yoke, for life offered to all men other delights, more peaceful and more actual: the chase, the shade of the woods, the peace of the valleys, the goodly and restful pleasures of

¹ Often he made sojourn in the woods,—untamed as yet and austere of aspect;—his face he sheltered from the solar ray—by wreath of pine or verdant beech.

² The sweet, sharp troubles caused by love.

rustic life. And we hear him delighting in the agile capers of the kids, the gentle music that a little herd-boy draws from his syrinx, and even the mere sight of a little peasant girl who

. . . scinta e scalza

Sta con l'ocche a filar sotto una balza.¹

The magnificence of his palace has no charm for him; he does not delight in sumptuous clothing nor in refined and joyous company. He dreams of the ancient Saturnian age, in which man found shelter and nourishment in the forest, in the

. . . frondosa quercia e grande

Ch'avea nel tronco mel, ne' rami ghiande.²

Simonetta, too, loved the lonely valleys, the recesses of the woods, and the limpid waters hurrying between their shady banks. It is in the heart of a forest that Giuliano—tracked one day by Cupid, when hunting in company with his friends—is taken, on seeing Simonetta, in the net of love.

Ella era assisa sopra la verdura

Allegra, e ghirlandetta avea contesta:

Di quanti fior creasse mai Natura,

Di tanti era dipinta la sua vesta.

E come in prima al giovin pose cura,

Alquanto paurosa alzò la testa:

Poi colla bianca man ripreso il lembo,

Levossi in piè con di fior pieno con grembo.³

¹ . . . ungirt and barefoot, rests with her geese to spin under a rock.

² . . . tall and leafy oak, which had honey in the trunk, acorns on the boughs.

³ She was seated on the gay verdure—and had woven a garland:—as many flowers as Nature ever created,—with so many was her



Phot]

[Brogi

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

AN ARCADIAN PRELUDE

The sudden, lovely apparition profoundly troubled
the wandering knight, since

Tosto Cupido, entro à begli occhi arcoso,
Al nervo adatta del suo stral la cocca.¹

Giuliano, his innate reluctance being overcome,
accosts the nymph and begs her to reveal her
identity:

Chè tua sembianza è fuor di guisa umana.²

A creature of earth am I, and not of heaven, she
replies: born in Liguria and brought in wedlock to
Florence; a lover of the silence of the meadows,
the quivering of the grass, and the whispering of
the flowers.

Sovente in questo loco mi diporto
Qui vengo a soggiornar tutta soletta;
Questo é de' miei pensieri un dolce porto:
Qui l'erbe, i fiori e'l fresco aër m'alletta;
Quinci il tornar a mia magion è corto.
Qui lieta mi dimoro Simonetta,
All'ombre, a qualche chiara e fresca linfa,
E spesso in compagnia d'alcuna Ninfa.³

raiment pight.—And when she first gave heed to the youth,—some-
what fearfully she raised her head: then with her white hand gathered
up her skirt,—and rose to her feet with her lap full of flowers.

¹ Quickly Cupid, in lovely eyes alert—fits his arrow to the string
of his bow.

² For your semblance is beyond human guise.

³ Often in this place I disport myself,—hither I come to sojourn
all alone;—this is a sweet haven for my thoughts:—here the lawns,
the flowers, and the fresh air entice me;—from here it is but a short
way to my house.—Here gladly I, Simonetta, remain—in the shade,
by some clear and cool spring,—and often in the company of some
nymph.

WOMEN OF THE RENAISSANCE

What with her waywardness and Giuliano's timidity the time passes quickly, and the first shadows of evening are falling on the forest, wrapping the trees in their violet veils; wherefore she takes leave of the strange lord, and wends her way out of the fragrant woodland:

Feciono i boschi allor dolci lamenti,
E gli augelletti a pianger cominciorno:
Ma l'erba verde, sotto i dolci passi,
Bianca, gialla, vermiglia, azzura fassi.¹

Cupid, who has witnessed the scene, rather than directed it, suddenly wings his way to heaven, in order to tell his divine mother of his unexpected victory:

Il bel Giulio che a noi stato è ribello,
E sol di Delia seguito ha il trionfo,
Or dietro all'orme del suo buon fratello
Vien catenato innanzi al mio trionfo:
Nè mostrero giammai pietate ad ello
Fin che ne porterà nuovo trionfo;
Ch'io gli ho nel core dritta una saetta
Dagli occhi della bella Simonetta.²

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Is this a literary idealization of Giuliano de' Medici? Yes, to be sure; yet it must be admitted that while the poet improves upon his hero, he

¹ Then the woods made sweet lament,—and the little birds began to mourn:—but the green turf, under her light steps,—turned white, yellow, vermeil and azure.

² The fair Giulio, who was rebellious to us,—and followed only in the triumph of Delia,—now, like his good brother—comes chained in the van of my triumph:—nor will I ever show him pity—until I triumph over him anew;—for I have sped into his heart an arrow—from the eyes of the lovely Simonetta.

does not paint an unduly flattering portrait. The flattery of the courtier had its limits, both when he represented his patrons as celestial apparitions and—even more definitely—when he called them by their own names and described them in their sublunary existence. Politian, therefore, could not exaggerate the colouring of his picture to the point of giving it absurd and untruthful tones; that is, it must not be grotesque in the eyes of his contemporaries. The sense of balance and measure which was so acute in the Renaissance saved its writers from the bombastic hyperbole which was so common in the seventeenth century. It is probable, therefore, that the Giuliano represented in this psychological sketch corresponded in many respects with the reality, at all events at a certain period of his youth; nor is the hypothesis a hazardous one, since we find not a few points of affinity with the portrait which his brother—who was many years younger, though more illustrious in history—has drawn of him in his own poems.

Who, to all appearance, is more remote from this Arcadian atmosphere, this sentimental cloudiness, than Lorenzo the Magnificent? The commercial network of which he held the threads, the vast political fabric with whose weaving he was busied day after day, the wealth that poured in upon him from all directions, the wonders of his palaces and villas, the luxury that surrounded him, the Florentine atmosphere, so full of the pagan spirit—all this

was bound to result in a thirst for pleasure, in the lust for power, in the dream of supremacy in the State. But while he did not neglect these and other things, he none the less looked elsewhere for the flowers so dear to his soul.

“How dear the immoderate desire for lordship was to cost this Virgilian soul (says Carducci, with rare penetration), who saw all beauty as akin to the beauty of the fields and the sky, and for whom the face of the ideal woman was commonly set against a background of the infinite circle of the horizon, and surrounded by the green of the woods and meadows!”

“A Virgilian soul”, who nevertheless “debased himself” (says another great writer) by vulgar amours, and poured oil on the uproarious and often indecent disorder of the Florentine carnival. But in his jovial little ballads and his Platonic rhymes we hear a continuous and irrepressible undertone, that tells us of his nostalgic longing for a different life, more in accord with his secret preferences :

Cerchi chi vuol le pompe e gli alti onori,
Le piazze, i templi e gli edifici magni,
Le delizie, i tesori. . . .
Un verde praticel pien di bei fiori,
Un rivolo che l'erba intorno bagna
Acqueta molto meglio i nostri ardori.¹

¹ Seek who will pomp and high honours,—the marts and temples and mighty buildings,—delights and treasures . . . a small green meadow full of lovely flowers—a rivulet that bathes the grass on either side—far better satisfies our longings.

AN ARCADIAN PRELUDE

It is for Arcadia that he sighs; so that Arcadia is not a literary invention of the seventeenth century, nor was romanticism invented in the shade of weeping willows or the melancholy silence of moonlight nights by the roving and disconsolate youth of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Arcadia and romanticism alike, as we have already remarked, are in reality states of mind, and as old as the world; transitory in most persons, but permanent in a few; sporadic or isolated in certain periods of literature and history, but in others so widely diffused that they constitute the true psychological foundation of those periods. Man is always a special aggregation of atoms, and a no less special compound of emotions and ideas.

In any case, the atmosphere of the *Stanze* is pastoral and romantic. If the pastoral quality was more or less of literary derivation, the romanticism was proper to the age of the two persons who fill the scene of this short poem. Giuliano was twenty-three, and the lovely nymph whom he encountered in the heart of the woods, intent on adorning her slender body and her fair curling tresses with chains of flowers, was in her twentieth or twenty-first year: an age given to fanciful pastimes and to day-dreams.

Giuliano, moreover, even though he, too, "debased himself" by dubious amours—and an illegitimate son of his assumed the triple crown under the name of Clement VII—was inclined, at all events in

adolescence and early manhood (at the age of twenty-five he was assassinated in the church of Santa Maria del Fiore by the adherents of the Pazzi) to arcadian pleasures and to Platonism. He was a lover rather than a philosopher, like his "truer and greater brother".

And more inclined to love than to philosophy was "his most graceful friend", Simonetta Cattaneo, whom Marco di Piero Vespucci made his wife in 1468, bringing her from the rocky Ligurian shore to the flowery banks of the Arno.

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"La bella Simonetta", even more than Giuliano, loved the sylvan solitudes that are so favourable to fitful meditation and cloudy dreams.

The malady that was soon to cut off this fragile flower, and which must have made its first appearance some little time before her meeting with Giuliano, is one that gradually creates a special psychical condition, which was clearly understood and portrayed by the poets, novelists, and playwrights of the romantic period; a psychical condition which the modern clinicist, with less art but with more scientific accuracy, describes as being peculiar to many if not all the victims of the bacillus of Koch; that is, an exaggerated sentimentality tinged with melancholy, a tendency to indulge in day-dreams, an emotional lability, resulting in alternate exaltation and depression, and an exacerbation of the sexual instinct, though this is

often given a Platonic colouring, as though to "sublimate" its material nature; hence, rather than actual passion, we find a history of flirtations, of idealistic languors and day-dreams, a longing for adventure, mute abandonment, and not rarely, in the end, a tragic death.

Think of the more famous heroines of romantic literature; of their extreme delicacy, their love of the shadow and silence of the woods, and deserted gardens, and ruined castles, and moonlit nights, and their secret expectation of encountering one night a fair-haired hero from an unknown land. The stage is darkened; the notes are muted; the erotic vein is more or less disguised; here, even to-day, we have the affective content and the intellectual heritage of a victim of slow consumption whose mentality is a little above the average.

It is true that the romanticists have idealized this state of mind; they have purified it and made it more poetical; and it may be that Politian's evocation of Giuliano's "most lovely friend" has been subjected to this process of artistic and psychological refinement. But, fundamentally speaking, there are common features and similar characteristics which are perceptible in the appearance and the mentality of all such sufferers, in whom the malady, while it does not, in its progressive development, create a new soul, does none the less modify the original mentality, and, above all, gives it a more or less uniform colouring. Simonetta is indeed the

far-off sister of these morbid and dreamy young women.

A far-off sister, and a greater; for she has left a more luminous track in the poetry and art of her country than any of the literary heroines of the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. For the rest, the fair Ligurian is no figment of the imagination; she is a real person, who lived her life in the green bosom of the Tuscan hills, amidst the jovial gaiety and serene splendours of the Florentine Renaissance.

The masterpieces of Botticelli, directly or indirectly inspired by her, would suffice to immortalize her, a cherished and grateful memory.

All the women in Botticelli's earlier pictures, rather short of stature and inclining to prettiness, are of quite another type and character. His Venus is tall, slender, and almost immature; she is chastely or modestly clad, and her flesh has not the warm tones of Titian's Aphrodite; it is faintly shadowed by a faint, bluish patina. The face is oval, the chin pointed, the shoulders sloping; the breasts are pointed, the torso long and slender, the hips narrow; the whole person is delicate and almost virginal; here is a chastity, a purity, which arouses no sensual desires in the beholder.

Tall, straight, and slender are the Three Graces of the *Primavera*, moving so lightly that it seems the grass can hardly feel the light burden of their nude young bodies; and the Spring herself, and Flora



National Gall[ies]

VENUS, MARS, AND SATYRS La Bella Simonetta as Venus
Sandro Botticelli

Il 9 Anters n

pursued by Zephyr, from whose arms she is seeking to escape, are of the same tall and slender type; and in the figure of Spring especially we may note the tapering of the throat, the salience of the muscles, and the accentuation of the pit above the breast-bone that we see in so many consumptives. The *Primavera* is believed by many to be the portrait of Simonetta; and she is indeed a faithful pictorial representation of the forty-third and forty-seventh octaves of the first book of the *Stanze*, in which Politian describes the lovely Genoese in the wood as she appeared to Giuliano de' Medici. But in spite of this perfect correspondence between the poem and the picture, a true or at least a probable portrait must be sought elsewhere.

Other masterpieces of Botticelli's are indirectly derived from the bride of Marco Vespucci. It is always from the *Stanze* of Politian, written for her, or to record her Platonic idyll with Giuliano (was it no more than Platonic?) that the great Florentine painter draws the motives of his pictures.

The *Birth of Venus* is simply a magnificent reconstruction of one of these octaves. Cupid, in his delight at having conquered the intractable Giuliano, flies swiftly to his mother's palace, and in an intaglio on the door of the celestial mansion he sees

. . . . in atti vaghi e lieti
Una donzella, non con uman volto,
Dà Zefiri lascivi spinta a proda,
Gir sopra un nicchio; e par che'l ciel ne goda. . . .

Giurar potresti che dell' onde uscisse
La Dea premendo con la destra il crine,
Con l'altra il dolce pomo ricoprisse.¹

The painter has reduced to one the three nymphs of the poem who "envelop" Venus in "spangled vestments"; and he does not show us the following scene, in which the nymphs adorn the goddess with necklaces, and pearls for her ears, and a wreath of gold and gems for her temples. Still, we must not demand a precise copy of the passage which has taken his fancy, or—which is more probable—has been set before him by his patron.

The *Primavera*, the "Allegory of Spring", is itself a picture from Politian's *Stanze*, though skilfully remodelled by the painter. It has lent itself to many interpretations, and has given rise to many doubts in the minds of the critics of art. With all due modesty, I venture to differ from Supino, who held that Botticelli was inspired not by Politian, but by Lorenzo the Magnificent, who thus describes the flowery haunts of Spring:

Vedrai nei regni suoi non più veduta
Gir Flora errando con le ninfe sue.
Il caro amante in braccio l'ha tenuta,
Zefiro; e insieme scherzan tutte due.²

¹ . . . with gay and lovely gestures a damsel—whose countenance is not human—urged to the shore by lascivious zephyrs—veering upon a shell; and heaven seems to rejoice in her. . . . You might swear that she had issued from the waves—the goddess pressing her tresses with her right hand. . . .

² Thou shalt see wandering through her realms, no longer seen—Flora with her nymphs.—Her dear lover has held her in his embrace—Zephyr; and the two are dallying together.

This is a very brief description; that given in the *Stanze* is much fuller. And while it is true that in Botticelli's picture the Venus and the Mercury have been added by the painter, he would have had to add a much larger number of figures if he had drawn his inspiration from Lorenzo's lines.

Jacobsen's interpretation of the picture is complicated and artificial. According to him, two of the figures are two representations—that is, two different phases—of Simonetta; in one she is the living woman, and in the other she has entered upon her new existence in the Elysian Fields. The figure which is usually known as Venus is, for him, Simonetta, “with the beloved and suffering expression of her last days on earth, in the garments that she wore when alive; it is ‘la bella Cattaneo’ herself”; but he sees her also in the half-nude girl who is seeking to escape from the arms of a dusky, winged demon; seeking to escape into the garden of the Graces, while the flowers spring from between her rosy lips in token of her new celestial life: a complicated symbolism which never would have occurred to anyone—and least of all to Botticelli.

Jacobsen's interpretation of the Venus is, however, acceptable; and it is difficult to understand how Supino, in order to prove that this figure is the incarnation of the goddess of love, should have thought it necessary to employ so illogical an argument as the following: “Of their ancient origin [he is speaking of the pagan divinities] only

so much is left in Botticelli as will enable us to recognize what the painter wished to represent." But consider the three Graces, flaunting their youthful nudity before the so-called Venus; have we here only "so much of their origin" as will enable a perspicacious spectator to understand the meaning intended by the artist? Moreover, when Botticelli wished to represent Venus, he did not cover her, as this figure is covered, with severe and closely fitting garments, but revealed her in the fullness of her bodily beauty. The painter knew very well—and so did his contemporaries—where the line should be drawn between the human figure and the representation of an Olympian divinity.

The source of the whole picture is to be found in Politian's poem; yet since the artist's imagination had rights of its own, we have not the mere pictorial translation of an octave, but rather the combination of two or three episodes into one; that is (as I see it), the first meeting of Giuliano (Mercury) with Venus (Simonetta), while above them Cupid

Al nervo adatta del suo stral la cocca,¹

and after this the description which is given in the *Stanze* of the garden of Venus. It is true that the goddess herself does not appear, but the Graces are languidly dancing there, and Flora, followed by Zephyr, bursts upon the scene:

Al regno ove ogni Grazia si diletta;
Ove Beltà di fiori al crin fa brolo;

Fits the arrow to the string of his bow.

AN ARCADIAN PRELUDE

Ove tutto lascivo dietro a Flora
Zefiro vola, e la verde erba infiora.¹

As for the Mercury in the extreme left-hand corner of the picture: according to some he is shaking the foliage with his caduceus, and according to others he is touching the fruits of the earth in order to demonstrate (for what reason one really cannot understand!) his dominion over agricultural produce and commerce; but he seems to me to bear such a close resemblance to the very few portraits of Giuliano de' Medici which have come down to us that only a very active imagination would discover in this figure yet another pagan divinity. The explanation of his presence given by Supino is, moreover, so unconvincing that I will not do more than allude to it: he is present merely in his quality of the messenger of the gods, an office which would permit him to appear more or less appropriately in a very great number of pictures, and, therefore, in this!

Moreover, the pretended Venus is not too dissimilar, as regards her features, from the figure in another of Botticelli's paintings, which, though described as a Venus in the catalogues and the literature of Italian art, is held by many, and by Supino himself, to be probably a portrait of Simonetta. The picture was inspired by the *Stanze*,

¹ Into the realm wherein all the Graces take delight;—where Beauty makes for her tresses a wreath of flowers;—where all desirous after Flora—Zephyr flies, and the green turf breaks into flowers.

or perhaps by a conversation with Politian; demonstrating once again, and not for the last time, the profound influence which the delicate grace of Simonetta exerted over her contemporaries.

The picture is in the National Gallery of London, and it bears the erroneous title of *Venus and Mars*. In reality it does not depict the goddess of love and her celestial lover, but a scene derived, though somewhat elaborated, from the *Stanze*, whose characters are living on this earth, and not in the Olympian heavens. Cupid, rejoicing that he has subjected Simonetta, flies to the palace of his mother, and finds her in loving converse with Mars:

Trovolla assisa in letto fuor del lembo,
Pur mò di Marte sciolta dalle braccia;
Il qual rovescio le giaceva in grembo,
Pascendo gli occhi pur della sua faccia.
Di rose sopra lor pioveva un nembo,
Per rinnovargli all' amorosa traccia:
Ma Vener dava a lui con voglie pronte
Mille baci negli occhi e nella fronte.

Sopra e d'intorno i piccioletti Amori
Scherzavan nudi, or qua or là volando;
E qual con ali di mille colori
Giva le parte rose ventilando;
Qual la faretra empiea di freschi fiori,
Poi sopra il letto la venìa versando.¹

¹ He found her seated on a bed, unclad—even that moment released from the arms of Mars;—who lay face upwards in her lap,—still feasting his eyes upon her face.—A shower of roses was raining down upon them,—in order to renew them in the amorous pursuit:—

We find the "little loves" in Botticelli's picture, though the motive has undergone some variation, but the principal figures are very different. The supposed Venus, who is here fully clothed, is assuredly not the goddess who is

Pur mò di Marte sciolta delle braccia,¹

for she gazes with quiet serenity, and without any signs of "ready desire", at the nude figure of the youth who is sleeping at her feet. Here, as Richter has clearly demonstrated, we have Giuliano's dream as described in the *Stanze*; alarmed at seeing his lady in the armour of Pallas, he wakes, but is quickly conveyed by the vigilant Cupid into another dream, in which Simonetta appears to him in a white dress.

"If Botticelli (continues Richter) has not attempted to give the sleeping youth the features of Giuliano, it is because, if he had done so, the picture would have lost the greater part of its poetic charm; in the head of the nymph, however, we probably have the sole authentic portrait of Simonetta" (*Lectures on the National Gallery: Sandro Botticelli and his School*). Supino, too, agrees with

but Venus gave him with quick desire—a thousand kisses on his eyes and forehead.

Above and around the tiny Loves—sporting naked, or flew hither and thither—and one with wings of a thousand colours—helped to fan their rosy sides;—one filled his quiver with fresh flowers—then came to spill them over the bed.

¹ Even that moment released from the arms of Mars.

Richter and other writers in believing this to be "the true portrait of the Cattaneo-Vespucci".

It is a portrait which, in the drawing of the features, and above all in the nobility and sweetness of the expression, very greatly excels the other presumptive portraits of Simonetta; as, for example, that in the Cook Gallery at Richmond, attributed to Botticelli or to one of his pupils, in which a young woman with one breast bared presses from the rosy nipple, with her long, tapering fingers, a white jet of milk; and still more does it excel that other portrait, believed by some to be the work of Pollaiuolo, and by others that of Piero di Cosimo, which represents a young woman with both breasts uncovered and a necklace of asps writhing round her throat.

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The fair and fragile Simonetta, whose memory was to inspire so many tender poems and so many lovely paintings, became, as her health began to fail and the fatal hour drew near, the object of distressed and sorrowful attention on the part of the whole city.

Lorenzo the Magnificent watched her gradual and progressive decline from a distance, and when a fatal termination seemed to threaten he hastily sent his own favourite physician in the hope of saving her. In the meantime Piero Vespucci, Marco's father, kept him informed of the changing

course of the malady. His letters are now grave and disconsolate, and now illumined by a faint gleam of hope.

On the 18th of April, 1476—not long before Simonetta's death—he wrote to Lorenzo in despondent tones:

“Simonetta is in almost the same straits as when you left, and there is little improvement. She is diligently cared for by Maestro Stefano and by everyone else, and so it will always be.”

Two days later, on the 20th, he writes in a more cheerful tone, and even with some confidence:

“A few days ago I wrote and informed you as to Simonetta's illness, which by the grace of God and the virtue of Maestro Stefano, thanks to yourself, is somewhat better, for she has less fever and less exhaustion, and less shortness of breath, eats better and sleeps better, and to go by what the physicians say the illness will be protracted, and little medicine is needed beyond good nourishment. Since you are the cause of this improvement, all of us, and her mother, who is at Piombino, thank you heartily and are in your debt.”

Two days later Piero Vespucci informs Lorenzo that the malady is becoming more acute, and that a consultation has been held at the bedside of the invalid, with little result as regards diagnosis:

"I wrote of Simonetta's improvement, which in truth has not continued as I believed it would, and as we and you had hoped. This night Maestro Stephano and Maestro Moyse debated whether to give her a medicine, which they concluded ought to be given, and so they gave it to her. It is not yet possible to see what effect it will have. God grant it may do what we desire! . . . These physicians are not agreed as to her malady. Maestro Stephano says it is neither hectic nor phthisical, and Maestro Moyse holds the contrary. I do not know which knows best. . . ."

The continued aggravation of the malady left no further room for doubt, and Piero himself, as may be guessed from this letter, had finally to realize that Maestro Moyse was nearest the melancholy truth. There was nothing left to do but to await the coming of death.

And death, already hovering over the house in which so many hearts were shuddering at his nearness, made his final, swift descent. On the 27th of April it was not Piero Vespucci who sent the sorrowful news to Lorenzo; to do so was more than he could bear. Sforza Bettini wrote in his place, in the tender phrases which we quoted at the beginning of this chapter; phrases pregnant with the grace and spiritual freshness of the Florentine Renaissance.

In these days where was Giuliano?

AN ARCADIAN PRELUDE

We have no word of him; but it is probable that he, like his brother Lorenzo, and even more than he, felt the iron enter his soul. It was not long since he had entered the famous tournament in the Piazza di Santa Croce wearing his lady's colours, and had won the coveted victory.

We do know that at this time Bernardo Pulci, a Medicean poet, wrote a sonnet in the manner of Petrarch, in which he makes the "divine" Simonetta speak to Giuliano from heaven, in words whose spirit of resignation and expectation is so sweet and so insistent that we think of her friend and lover as suffering the profoundest anguish:

Se viva e morte io ti dove' far guerra,
Vinti d'un foco e d'un pudico strale,
Poi ch'è dato al mio vol sì corte l'ale
Duolmi se per tuo mal discesi in terra.

Ma se fato o destin, che mai non erra,
Vuol che per morte io sia facta immortale,
Se venerasti già cosa mortale,
Qual di me invidia in te si chiude e serra?

Vinci tanto furor che ti trasporta,
Se che'l pianto non guinga più nel cielo
A turbar chi ti fu sempre dilecta.

Chè piangi tu colei che non e morta,
Ma viva, sciolata dal terrestre velo,
Sol di te pensa e qui nel ciel t'aspetta?¹

¹ Since living and dead I had to make war on thee—conquered by a fire and a chaste arrow,—since I was given wings so short for flight,—woe's me if to thy scathe I descended to earth.—But if fate

The immortality which these verses foretold for Simonetta was not a vain lyrical homage to her memory and her beauty. Not posterity, but the very poets and artists who knew and loved the living woman paid her the first eager tribute of praise and admiration.

But posterity was not slow to encompass her with even greater sympathy. Before many years had passed it was not as an earthly creature that she appeared to men, but, in virtue of her brief history, and her dream-like and diaphanous fragility, as the symbol of spring, and the allegory of our fleeting human youth, cruelly crippled and defeated in its imaginations and desires by a pitiless destiny.

or destiny, which never errs,—wills that by death I be made immortal,—if thou didst once worship the mortal creature,—what desire of me is shut and hid in thee?—Conquer the so great passion that transports thee,—so that its complaint no longer reaches heaven—to trouble her who was ever dear to thee.—Why dost thou weep for her who is not dead,—but lives, freed from her earthly veil,—thinks only of thee, and waits for thee here in heaven?

PERFECT LOVE

. . . aucun
Ne la sceut voir, adviser ou oyr,
Qui n'eust desir de son amour joyr.

ANONYMOUS

PERFECT LOVE

TOMMASINA SPINOLA was a spiritual sister of Simonetta Cattaneo.

But had the Platonic idyll of this young patrician girl of Geneva and Louis XII of France any real existence? Many have regarded it as a mere poetical invention of the chronicler, Jean d'Auton; and the few who were for a time inclined to believe the story found themselves confronted by serious doubts when the learned archivists, after searching through manuscripts and genealogies, concluded that while certain women of this name were living in Genoa at the date in question, none of them died in the year which Jean d'Auton gives as the last of his heroine's life.

However, I decided that I, too, would look through the old unpublished documents which might bear on the case, and in the end, thanks to perseverance and good fortune, I found evidence that there was yet another Tommasina Spinola, hitherto unknown to history, who died at a fairly early age, and precisely about this time. We shall see that she came of a notable family, and married into one no less distinguished.

Meanwhile, I may assure the reader that Jean d'Auton did not include the episode in his *Chroniques* as a mere literary embellishment; still less did he permit himself the liberty of inventing the whole affair. It was Louis XII himself who

wished that it should be mentioned. It was not, therefore, a poetical creation; at the most it was, if you like, the amplification and embellishment of an actual fact. "The king wished (says the chronicler) that by this present writing the memory of it should be perpetuated, and to this end he gave me instructions, so that I here write it in the history (*sur les Gestes*) of France." And since the writer was not acquainted with the intimate affairs of his king, the latter referred him, for all particulars, to one who was well acquainted with them: "And he told me that Messire Germain de Bonneval, governor of Lymousin, would inform me of this affair, as the person to whom he had related it and who knew the truth."

Louis XII, therefore, was at some pains to ensure that the matter should not be passed over in silence.

It was, in truth, an episode on which he would pride himself. In that wonderful dawn of the Renaissance Italy was not merely the replendent home of art and the mother of history, but was also a land of beautiful women. It was only yesterday, indeed, that Lavissee wrote these words: "And one form of seduction made itself felt above all; that of the women: and this was lasting; the chroniclers of the time of Charles VIII and Louis XII were constantly celebrating the charm of the women of Italy; and for nearly three centuries the type of beauty was, for our artists, to remain the Italian type."

Among these chroniclers was Jean d'Auton himself, who was invested with the post of historian laureate to Louis XII. It was natural that the king should desire that this episode in his life, until then unknown, should be given publicity in the most solemn and authoritative manner: that is, in the pages of the *Gestes de France* itself.

Not only had he conquered, by arms or politics, diplomacy or prestige, a city and a State, but he had seen a gentle Italian lady prostrate herself at his feet and offer him her heart, dying of her inward passion and carrying the secret of her devotion to the tomb.

This was in itself a splendid and moving episode: and if Jean d'Auton added a few touches of his own this is no reason for denying its authenticity, just as the absence of any echo of the affair in the writings of other contemporaries need not make us too doubtful of its existence. We have here a sentimental and intimate story, which a chivalrous regard would shrink from making a subject of gossip; indeed, the whole affair had been wrapped in such a discreet secrecy that even Jean d'Auton, who was always on the alert to observe men and things during his king's travels, and to record what he saw, had seen nothing of it and had no direct knowledge of it.

Louis XII made his entry into Genoa on the 26th of August, 1502, with a splendid retinue of knights and princes, prominent among whom was

Cæsar Borgia. He took up his dwelling in a superb palace of the Fieschi in Violata. Magnificent banquets were given in his honour, but besides these public, solemn, and stupendous affairs there was no lack of private festivities. In after years he was to feel an acute nostalgia at the thought of his first sojourn in Venice, and, in particular, at the thought of a reception which the Cattaneo had held one night in his honour, in a villa beyond the walls: putting off his royal vestments, he had mingled gaily with the aristocratic throng that filled the rooms and the garden of the villa, lavishing the refinements of his gallantry on the ladies who competed to do him honour. Here, perhaps, he met Tommasina.

Let us turn to the chronicle of Jean d'Auton: "The ladies of Genoa likewise attended the banquets, arrayed in the Milanese fashion, and also their own. And among others there was present a lady of Genoa named Thomassine Espinolle, one of the fairest in all the Italies, the which often cast her eyes upon the king, who was a prince marvellous handsome, most learned, and very well spoken of."

Louis XII was not really "a prince marvellous handsome", but we must allow a little licence to the chronicler if, living as he did, at court, he endeavoured, in an episode of this kind, to throw the most favourable light on the physical appearance

of his royal hero; at all events the latter was "very well spoken of". It is probable, however, that Tommasina was attracted by the fascination of his royalty rather than by his personal charm. Overcoming all reserve, she went up to the king, and at first in the mute language of her eyes, and then in actual speech, she confessed to the sweet and profound emotion which troubled her heart. One day, finally, she implored him, as a token of courtesy and favour, that there might be a bond of love between their souls: "once among other times she prayed that she should be his *intendyo*, and he hers, which is to say honourable intimacy and amicable understanding".

This "honourable intimacy" and "amicable understanding", which preceded "cicisbeism" in the history of aristocratic manners, was in those days by no means unusual in Genoa. Whither such a platonic "understanding" led, above all if it lasted for any length of time, we may readily imagine.

At all events, Louis XII willingly consented to the proposal of the lovely Genoese who had made him the offer of her heart; and she, intoxicated with joy, was no longer willing that her body should be contaminated by earthly bonds: "the noble lady thought herself more fortunate than if she had gained all the gold in the world, and held this gift so dear that, in order that she might feel herself to be desired only by the king, she put all others

from her mind, even to refusing ever again to sleep with her husband". Even Jean d'Auton seems to think that this was going a little too far; and foreseeing the reader's incredulous and perhaps malicious smile, he hastens to add: "of which people might think what they liked; but according to the solemn word of those who should have known best, there was nothing here but all honesty". This we have no reason to doubt; nor need we suppose that the chronicler has drawn a discreet veil over more intimate relations, lest he should arouse a retrospective jealousy in the heart of Anne of Brittany, the king's second wife, or reawaken a bitter memory in the heart of Tommasina's husband, who was no longer living when Jean d'Auton recorded the story in the *Gestes de France*. For that matter, Louis was only two or three days longer in Genoa.

The parting was a grievous one for Tommasina, who "showed plainly by her shedding of tears that her heart was wedded to him, saying that never would she forget her *intendyo*". And, in truth, the noble lady never did forget her royal *intendyo*. It is said that the Vicolo dell'Amor Perfetto, near the old Exchange, the Borsa, and the narrow Piazza dell'Amor Perfetto a few steps farther on, are memorials of this episode of sentimental passion and dedication. Here, in the house in which she had shut herself from the world, in heartbroken

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longing and absolute chastity, she received the news that the king was lying dangerously ill, and was past all hope of recovery. Although three years had passed, "she showed plainly here how that the bond of love of good women is indissoluble and their constancy unshakable". She withdrew to her own room and burst into tears. She lamented, between her sobs: "Now my *intendyo* is dead, who was all my world, the sustenance of my life and the defence of mine honour; which takes from me all desire to live longer and makes me wish to end my days." Here, as we see, is a vague thought of suicide. But a "fever" set in, due to an "access of melancholy", and within a week the unhappy lady was dead. The Genoese wept her loss, and escorted her body, in great state and honour, to its eternal repose. And when the sad news reached France Jean d'Auton at once made "historical record" of it in the pages of his chronicle, "as much to show forth the novelty of the case as to magnify feminine love".

To tell the truth, the "historical record" was made at the king's own command, as we have already seen. But Louis was anxious that something more than this record should be consecrated to the memory of his spiritual friend. In July or August 1505—that is, two or three months after the death of Tommasina—certain poems were presented to him, and since they proved to be acceptable he thought of sending them, and perhaps did send

them, to Genoa, wishing that they might be placed on her tomb, "in token of continual remembrance and a memorable spectacle".

The first of these poems is entitled *La Complainte de Gennes sur la mort de Thomassine Espinolle, dame intendo du Roy*. The trumpets sound in heaven, and there are rumours high on Olympus; a voice quells the sudden tumult, inviting the gods and goddesses to rise, to turn their eyes upon the earth: for there has breathed her last a lady who, by her virtues and her beauty, deserves to be received among the immortals. From their seats, scattered over the immensity of Elysium, the gods in emulation prepare to offer a worthy welcome to the fair earthly creature who will presently ascend to these lofty regions. The poet, whom these confused rumours have reached from the empyrean, does not know who it is that is expected on high after her mortal passing, but a sudden sound of tears and lamenting voices reaches him also from the earth, and it is from Genoa, whose people are weeping over the corpse of Tommasina Spinola.

In the second poem, *Complainte elegiacque*, the poet, who now knows what is amiss, feels it his duty to sing the virtues and the most transitory life of the fair lady for whom Genoa is weeping such bitter tears. Truly a life most brief, which Atropos chose to cut short so soon with cruel fingers! But of the untimely victims of the Parcæ, who most deserving of pity and of tears? She, assuredly, who

P E R F E C T L O V E

summed up in herself the fairest gifts of woman.
Now the body

Qui fut le chief des œuvres de nature¹
will become

. . . ville pourriture,
Et aux vermetz de terre estre submys.²

Let the people of Genoa put on mourning for the
loss of their most lovely fellow-citizen,

Qui seulle estoit myeulx digne d'estre améc,³
and let them ever remember her with sorrow and
pride, since through her they will win eternal fame.

Celle est morte qui pour vous renomner
Sur les autres a trouvez le moyens.⁴

But the lament of those who knew her in life is
not enough for the poet; he turns to Neptune and
Aurora, to Æacus and Pluto, to Apollo and the
Naiads—in short, to the major and minor inhabi-
tants of Olympus—to ensure that when the fair
Genoese arrives in heaven they may heap upon her
all the honours of which she is worthy. Even
Narcissus, who

avoist en dedain
La douce eco, en bon pont jeunc et belle,⁵
and who certainly would not have hurried off to

¹ Which was the masterpiece of Nature.

² . . . vile corruption, and given over to the worms of the earth.

³ Who alone was most worthy of being loved.

⁴ She is dead who above all others found means to give you renown.

⁵ . . . disdained the sweet Echo, in person young and fair.

gaze at Tommasina, is suddenly moved to honour her, since no one

Ne la sceut voir, adviser ou oyr
Qui n'eust desir de son amour joyr.¹

No lady, indeed, can prevail over her, whether in grace of person, or the gifts of the spirit, or steadfastness and purity of love; her image should always live in men's eyes and hearts, as a cordial and a balsam. But the poet, choking with grief, can continue no farther:

 si fort je me deuil
Que mes soupirs, qui tousiours son en l'er,
Me sincoppent et rompent le parler.

And now, in the third poem, *L'építaphe parlant par la bouche de la diffuncte*, Tommasina herself, in the silence of the beyond, tells of her passion for the king of France. She laments that destiny should have forced her into the tomb while yet so young:

Suys morte, hélas! et perye avant age,
Sans nul respit avoir pour l'avantage
De jeunesse dont j'estoye emparée,
Et de beaulté moult richement parée;³

She then describes her meeting with the king, and lastly, their oath of mutual devotion. Since that day she had refused all contact with earthly life,

¹ Could see or hear or think of her—but he longed to enjoy her love.

² . . . so greatly I grieve—that my sighs, which are always in the air,—make me swoon and interrupt my speech.

³ I am dead, alas! and perish before my time,—without reprieve for all the youth with which I was endowed,—and the beauty most richly adorned.



Enmes.



impetueuse et cause d'ultime.
 En orient menant bruit d'ultime.
 Contre aquillon descendant de son poste.
 lassus en l'air faisant leur monoposte.
 Et bruyant arce sur leur intempete.

TOMMASINA SPINOIA LAMENTS THE DEPARTURE OF LOUIS XII FROM GENOA

Miniature from a French manuscript

in order that her new bond of fidelity may be preserved in greater chastity:—

ne lassay approucher
Homme de moy, non certes mon mary.
Qui maintes foyz en a esté marry.¹

And she recalls the false news of the king's illness, and her anguish and despair at hearing it: and a few days later, unable to endure such suffering, when her body already lies in the cold sweat of death, she begs the king that the victim of a love so great may never be forgotten:

Ne mettez pas celuy corps en oubly
Que vous avez tant de grace ennobly;
Puisque pour vous il est mort; soulz la lame,
Veuillez avoir souvenance de l'ame.²

Louis XII (in the last poem, *Regret que faict le Roy pour la mort de la dame intendy*), bitterly reproaches Death for having torn his "most devoted friend" from him by "pestiferous fever". Her life had not yet begun to decline; it had not yet reached its noon; she was,

Dans le printemps de son florissant age,
Belle, bonne, sage, rich et discrète;
Or, est elle morte par ton oultrage;
Toujours la plains et sans fin la regrette!³

¹ . . . I did not let man approach me, not indeed my husband, who was often vexed thereby.

² Do not forget this body—which you have ennobled by such favour;—since for you it is dead suffer the stroke—and deign to remember the soul.

³ In the spring of her blooming years—fair, good, wise, rich and discreet;—now she is dead by thy assault;—always I mourn and endlessly regret her!

Then he in his turn tells of their meeting and their mutual bond of spiritual union; and confesses that

pour son bien maintenir en usage
J'eusse bien faict a Gennes ung voyage.¹

He will publicly pronounce her name, since not his heart alone, but all men know for whom it is that he longs and has longed in silence:

Qui veust savoir commant el se clame,
Je ne la veulx certes celler a ame:
Thomassine Espinolle se nome
Celle.²

Now was this charming and sentimental Genoese patrician, whose praises were sung beyond the Alps with such tenderness and lyric passion, a real person, or was she only a gracious creature of the imagination? Her idyll with Louis XII of France is so fresh and delicate that any attempt to confirm by research its truth or even its probability is a tacit tribute to the poetical beauty of the story. This tribute I think I am in a position to pay, though in a somewhat indirect fashion.

Examination of the archives and the relevant genealogies led Achille Neri to declare, years ago,

¹ To keep this bond fresh—I should have done well to make a journey to Genoa.

² For him who wishes to know how she is named,—I surely do not wish to conceal it from anyone:—this woman is named Thomassine Espinolle.

that of the various Tommasina Spinolas who were living in Genoa in the time of Louis XII there was not one who corresponded with the lady of Jean d'Auton's narrative, whose brief history was terminated in 1505; they were all still living in 1510, and the Tommasina who seemed in some respects to correspond most nearly to the impassioned heroine died in 1516. She was the daughter of Giuliano Grimaldi and the wife of Luca Spinola. Not a few writers have believed that she might be our heroine; amongst others, Lacroix, and, though with certain reservations, De Mauld La Clavière, who in 1895 published a new edition of the *Chroniques*.

But another Tommasina, likewise the wife of a Spinola, and who escaped the notice of the investigators, was living at this time, whose birth and position after marriage were greatly superior to those of her namesakes cited by Neri. I have found mention of her in three testaments of Francesco Lomellini, whose daughter, Lombardina, was her mother.

Lomellini, who filled many high offices under the Republic, was noted for his enlightened and inexhaustible munificence. Even during his lifetime (*viventi ac rikusanti*, as we may read in the inscription) the officials of San Giorgio raised a statue to him in the great hall of the Palazzo di San Giorgio, *unico in patriam pietatis exemplo*. The words which are incised on the scroll which he holds between

his hands well express the spirit of this great and generous man :

AD REM PUBLICAM AUGENDAM CONTENDITE

All his life he had endeavoured to increase the power and wealth of the Republic ; now, old and weary, after the strenuous labours of the day, he was ready to go to his rest in the silence of the noble tomb in San Teodoro di Fassolo.

Three testaments of his, made at different times, mention his granddaughter Tommasina. In the first, dated 1495, his daughter Lombardina being already dead, he names Tommasina as the heiress to his property : and it appears that this granddaughter is shortly to be married to Battista Spinola. In the second, dated 1502, Tommasina is to divide her future inheritance with a nephew of the testator's, Andrea, the son of one of his sisters, by name Argentina ; Tommasina is now the wife of Spinola. In the third, dated 1508, and perhaps after the death of Andrea, he appoints as his universal heiress his great-granddaughter Luiginetta, the daughter of Battista Spinola and the late Tommasina Lomellini. Hence this Tommasina Spinola, who has hitherto been overlooked, must have died before 1508. Since there was an interval of some years between the dates of the different testaments, there is nothing to show that the date of her death does not correspond with the date given by Jean d'Auton.

And while our Tommasina's birth is superior to

that of any of her namesakes, her husband also was a person of greater importance than any of the other Spinolas who were at this time married to wives of the name of Tommasina. His purchase of the castle of Belforte in 1501 and his appointment in 1504 as ambassador to Pope Julius II prove, on the one hand, his wealth, and, on the other, his prestige. And his personal distinction, civic virtues, and illustrious lineage led to his promotion, in 1531, to the supreme magistracy of the Republic. He was, in fact, the second of the biennial Doges of Genoa.

He died in 1539, at the age of sixty-six; he was therefore twenty-two years of age when Tommasina's grandfather made his first will, and twenty-nine when Louis XII visited Genoa in 1502. Even in respect of her age, Tommasina, then, who was doubtless some years his junior, corresponds, far better than any of her namesakes, with the young and lovely patrician whose beauty was so praised by the French poets.

Louis XII paid a second visit to Genoa in 1507; he came not in peace, but with arbalests and bombards. Before opening the assault on the city, he paused for a day at the Benedictine convent of San Niccolò al Boschetto, on the right bank of the Polcevera, some five or six miles from the fortifications. Was this a casual visit? Surely not, for it was here that our Tommasina was sleeping her last sleep.

It was this convent, too, that the Doge Battista

WOMEN OF THE RENAISSANCE

Spinola chose for his last resting-place; he was buried beside his wife, who had laid here for more than thirty years. The inscription at the foot of his recumbent statue closes with these words:

HIC UNA CUM TOMASINA PRIORE CONIUGE QUIESCIT

She was, then, his first wife; his second, who survived him, was Maria or Mariola de Marini. It is more than possible that it did not add to her happiness to realize that her husband's attachment to his first wife was unchanged, even after half a lifetime. Yet she herself must have been young enough when she married him, since we find her, twenty years later, in June 1559, signing a power of attorney with all the ladies of the house of Spinola; and that she was not then very old appears from the fact that in 1540, the year after that of her husband's death, her father was still alive, with whose authorization she signed a power of attorney to her own brother, Tommaso de Marini, whom the Lombards contemptuously called "the tax collector", and for whom Alessi built the superb palace which is to-day the headquarters of the municipality of Milan.

Have we then found the Thomassine Espinolle who was the *intendyo* of Louis XII? The nobility and wealth of her family, her age, the date of her death, the sojourn of the French king at the abbey of Il Boschetto, and her husband's profound attachment to her memory, all incline us to reply in the

affirmative. A creature of delicacy and grace, whose purity of spirit was rivalled by her bodily beauty, she bore unspotted to the tomb her ideal of love. And Battista Spinola must have indulged the innocent and fantastic romanticism of his young wife, and may even have heard of the French poems written in her honour; just as a few years earlier Piero and Marco Vespucci had regarded with indulgence the *Stanze* of Politian which recorded the idyllic love of Giuliano de' Medici and their "bella Simonetta".

A strange period was that of the Renaissance, when the faint gleams of mysticism shone beside the fires of paganism, and the flowers of chastity and fantasy rose above the fevers of the senses. In the same church of San Niccolò in which Battista Spinola laid him down for his eternal sleep beside his beloved Tommasina, another Genoese lady of patrician blood, to whom both Battista and his wife were nearly related, was laid to rest after a life of almost monastic purity; and the man who had been hers in marriage, Tommaso de Franchi, recorded his homage to her virtue in the following inscription at the foot of her wonderful tomb:

SEMPER POTIUS RELIGIOSE VIXIT QUAM CONIUGATE
TOMAS MARITUS PRO SUIS ULTIMIS DONIS HANC FIERI FECIT

It was an age of spiritual aspiration, and of readily awakened passion, but there were those in whom the flush and intoxication of passion were

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evoked by things heavenly. Who was that gracious woman who went so early to her rest in the ancient church of San Francesco in Castelletto? No record remains of her but the inscription on her tomb: a brief poem of two lines:

HAEC ERAT INSIGNIS FACEI VIRIDIQUE IUVENTA
DIVIS OPUM, INCESSU TOTA HABITAQUE VENUS
HUNC LACRIMIS DECORATA SUIS EN SPECTAT OLIMPUM
NOSQUE DOCET TOTAM SPIRITUS IGNIS AMOR

Lovely of countenance was she and in the flower of her youth, of fortune wealthy and like Venus in her bearing.

Lo, lovely in her tears, she looks toward this Olympus: inspiration, fire, love—this tells us the whole woman.

Remote indeed is the Christian faith; the rosy phantoms that drift across the heavens are those of Aphrodite and Apollo.

A LADY LIGHT AND LEARNED

Fasseli gratia per poetessa.

COSIMO I

A L A D Y L I G H T A N D L E A R N E D

IN October 1546, Cosimo I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, promulgated certain restrictive laws regarding the oldest of the professions. It had become impossible, even in Florence, to distinguish its followers from "ladies of honest and virtuous life"; they wore the same sumptuous garments and the same wealth of golden ornaments, and their jewels were no whit inferior; and if a patrician lady appeared in public in garments of a special fashion there was at once a rivalry among them as to who should be the first to appear dressed in the same manner.

The new laws, while they were liberal in respect of the golden ornaments and jewels, forbade the wearing of any garment of silk or velvet; but above all they insisted on the display of a badge which would plainly inform the passer-by of the wearer's profession:

"And the prostitutes shall be required to wear a veil, or a proper napkin or kerchief or other covering on the head, which shall have a stripe of the width of a finger of gold or yellow silk or other yellow material, and in such a position that it may be seen by all; under penalty, if they fail to do so, of ten golden scudi for each offence."

The magistrates whose duty it was to execute the sovereign's will went to work immediately, notifying all followers of Aphrodite Pandemos of the new

decree. There was at first a general shriek of protest; but since there was nothing for it but to comply or renounce their profession, they all set the prescribed sign upon their heads.

But there was one of them who flew into a rage the moment she glanced at the injunction. She might, though much against her will, have put away her rich and magnificent clothing; but wear this infamous token on her head whenever she left the house—Never, never, never! Moreover, was her vocation really and truly the sale of her body, like that of these other women? No, she told herself; it was not! There was no question here of more than minor favours, lavished with discretion on a restricted circle of friends, most of whom were shining lights in the world of politics or letters; no question, in short, of anything more than courtesy shown to scholars. And did she not herself cultivate letters with no little success?

Her discreet mode of life, and her origin (her mother was given to telling everyone—in confidence—that the blood of a cardinal, and even of a king, flowed in her veins), together with the private nature of the clientèle from which she drew her daily income, might well have led to a mitigation of the severity of the law where she was concerned. Why, indeed, should it seek to abase her to the level of those women who picked up their customers in the street or at their windows, and offered them merely the satisfaction of an animal instinct?

She summoned up her courage and wrote a letter to Don Pedro, a youthful nephew of the Grand Duke, who had paid her special attention and held her in the greatest esteem and affection. Don Pedro, either because he did not wish to be involved in the affair, or because he really thought he was suggesting a better way of going to work, advised her to write to the Grand Duchess. The hetæra, although she was a practised writer, appealed for assistance to one of her most illustrious and devoted friends; and her petition, a few days later, was duly conveyed to the great lady.

In this letter the writer protested that in her mode of life she was very different from the true courtesan; "not behaving as they do and hardly ever leaving my room, nor the house". Then, without more words, she touched upon the point that had most offended her:

"Let her deign to obtain so much grace from the most excellent and most illustrious Lord Duke her consort, that even if she (the writer) may not make use of the few clothes that she has left, she may at least not be compelled to observe the rule of the yellow veil."

The letter was passed on to the Grand Duke. At the foot of the page he wrote, with his own hand, the following words: "*Fasseli gratia per poetessa.*" The magistrate who had notified the courtesan of the original decree was at once advised of the privilege

accorded, and he hastened to inform "the poetess" that "the Duke, wishing by a special favour to recognize her rare knowledge of poetry and philosophy", exempted her from such laws, and also accorded her permission to "wear such garments, fashions, and ornaments as best became and pleased her".

Her victory, then, was complete. But in these eighteen weeks what humiliations had she not suffered before her friends! Making one excuse or another, she had never left her house. She would have starved to death within the walls of her room rather than descend into the street with that badge of shame upon her head!

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The noble courtesan on whom the Grand Duke conferred this favour was Tullia d'Aragona, and the friend who came to her assistance in the prickly matter of the yellow veil was the historian Benedetto Varchi.

Varchi was then nearing his fortieth year; Tullia was well past her thirtieth, but she still retained a beauty which, while not magnificent, was none the less extremely seductive. Of the group of friends who surrounded her he was the most celebrated for his talents; and the *hetæra*, though his professions of love may have failed really to touch her, none the less cherished him greatly for the glory which his friendship reflected on her, and

also, it should be added, for his secret offices as revisor of her poems, an office which was left vacant when Girolamo Muzio was dispatched to Siena.

Tullia's house in Florence gave hospitality from time to time to men of letters, soldiers, and signori of illustrious lineage. They formed a small but distinguished circle, from which their young and lovely hostess derived a sufficient income to enable her to live with a certain liberality. Music and singing and poetry were among the amenities of the house. Benedetto Varchi declaimed with unconcealed passion his sonnets written in her praise; but some of them, more intimate than the rest, he gave her privately, as though ashamed to confess too plainly to the flame which she had kindled. She, too, recited sonnets which her friend had previously polished for her; and she entertained her little circle of admirers by playing on the mandolin and singing, in which she excelled, like all *hetærae* of repute. Apart from the dismal history of the yellow veil, which had greatly perturbed and afflicted her, she had been comfortable enough in Florence. It was true that the first vague signs of the approach of middle age were beginning to appear in her face; but the placidity that comes with years made her more inclined to enjoy a tranquillity which the previous years of roaming through Italy in search of a clientèle had not always brought her. Hence she could apply herself with more diligence

to letters; and if when she took up the pen the phrases that occurred to her were vague or refractory, there was always someone within call who would gladly undertake to file and polish them for her.

The little poems and essays which she sketched in outline, and which were secretly completed by other hands, were thought so beautiful that not a few of her friends bestowed on them the most hyperbolical praise. What a magnificent genius! they sighed. Niccolò Martelli wrote that "the paper rejoices with amazement that is written upon by such an erudite hand"; he compared her, amongst others, to Sappho and Corinna, to whom she was even superior; and since the comparison with mere women, however illustrious, seemed to him insufficient, he went still farther, playing upon her name, and ascending to Elysium in search of the greatest orator of ancient Rome:

"Of eloquence in private and public I do not speak; for if in those days there was a Tullius Arpinus, there is to-day in the world a Tullia d'Aragona, who may truly be called second in honour, and with whose soul poetry and noble philosophy make celestial accommodation."

This, of course, was going too far; but the lady, who had a very high opinion of her own genius, believed in her heart that it was fully justified.

In good faith, too, she accepted all the other



[Il nati

III RODIAS
(Morotto da Biscia)

praises which the enamoured Martelli showered upon her, and which were, for that matter, even less deserved; for example:

“That virtue which exalts you and shows you to be thus supreme, which fills men with amazement on hearing you so sweetly sing, and with your white and beautiful hand gracefully play upon whatever instrument you will; and then your agreeable converse, adorned by virtuous bearing, and your courteous manners cause others to sigh with most chaste desires.”

As for the “most chaste desires”, even in the enamoured Martelli they must from time to time have been replaced by others of a less exalted quality, for Tullia herself, while approving of the former as agreeable to the mind, would have taken good care to rouse the latter, which were more profitable to the domestic budget. Although passionately enamoured, he did not fail to perceive the fading of the beauty which was once so fresh and sweet. He even tried to tell her as much, but he wrapped up the bitter medicine in such honeyed words that Tullia swallowed the honey and overlooked the rest.

“Grace and virtue, generous lady, because they are gifts and riches of the soul, and participate more of the divine than of the human, are not subject to the violence of the years. Granted that you are

still young and beautiful, so beautiful that the outline of your delicate countenance has that angelic semblance which it had at first, and will have even to your last hour; since that beauty with which the heavens have so largely endowed you is infinite, time, which has to make an end, cannot bring himself to destroy, in a moment, all the rights of that beauty. Similarly, the whiteness of the flesh, superior to alabaster and the purest snow, is maintained in all its freshness by your being most moderate and continent, not only in the matter of eating, but in all your other actions, so that you still appear to the eyes of others with the gracious tokens of Love in your countenance."

Tullia's life had been very much the same as that of other *hetærae* then in good repute: the same restricted groups of adorers and patrons, the same rather nomadic existence in search of a livelihood, the same music-lessons and the same somewhat amateurish essays in literature. In these last she was doubtless far superior to most of her colleagues in the amatory arts. They reveal, if not a real personality, at least an intellect above the average, lacking only that perfection of form which assiduous cultivation alone can give, and which the writer's wandering life had made impossible.

As regards her profession, she was treading the same path which her mother had already followed with no less renown. Her mother, when she realized

that her own "virtues" were ceasing to attract, had launched her, fresh and rosy, at little more than fifteen years of age, on the lucrative career in which she herself had won not a few victories. Of one of these she was extremely proud: that is, of a prolonged intimacy with a cardinal; and it was to this Prince of the Church, Luigi d'Aragona, who had, moreover, royal blood in his veins, that she attributed the birth of her daughter. Whether or not her story was true, it enabled her to give a fresh lustre to her own charms, inveigling exalted personages to pay court to her; and it was one day to be of even greater service to her daughter, when, having reached years of indiscretion, she was ready to place herself at the disposal of *magnifici signori*; the daughter of a cardinal was a rare and savourous fruit for dainty palates.

Retiring in due season from active commerce, she instructed and controlled her daughter in the prudent distribution of her favours and the circum-spect selection of her friends, and perfected her education in the manners and methods of the courtesan. She followed her from city to city, keeping her accounts, scenting out propitious opportunities, and helping her to cast her nets where the fish were plentiful. The family had known moments of great prosperity and hours of unpleasant scarcity. But the good lady had no great fear of the morrow; for when Tullia's day was over—and already she was well into the thirties, and a little

faded after so many amorous contests—she expected to make good her position by exploiting the promising but still unripe beauty of another daughter, Penelope, who was already beginning to attract a flattering attention from her mother's and sister's lovers.

This, then, was a family of professionals; so that Tullia had not much justification for refusing to wear the abhorred veil. It would have been not so much a personal insignia as the emblem of the whole feminine line of her family.

Poor Penelope! A little courtesan in the bud, on whom it may be that some roving butterfly had already alighted, she died in Rome two years later (1549), at the age of fifteen. She was buried in the church of Sant' Agostino, where her mother and sister were one day to rest; a modest flagstone covered her remains, with an inscription which praised her "beauty of body and acumen of intellect". Nor was there lacking a need of poetical eulogy: and he who offered it was that very Muzio who had sipped a little nectar from all these flowers as they opened.

Before returning with her household to Rome—that is, while she was still casting her nets on the banks of the Arno—Tullia published her *Rime*. Wishing to show her gratitude to the Grand Duchess Eleonora, who had obtained "for the poetess" permission to appear without the yellow veil, it

was to her that she dedicated these poems, adding—to advertise herself the better—the odes and sonnets which the poets of the day had composed in her honour. Here, then, was a twofold garland; one part was woven with her own hands, and one was the work of others; and together they were calculated to confer lustre and intellectual distinction on her person—that person which an odious law had sought to mark with a badge of infamy.

A little later than the *Rime*, and before her removal to Rome, the dialogue *Della infinità di amore* was published, and dedicated to the Grand Duke Cosimo. Not only was he the head of the State in which she was sojourning, but he was also the man to whom she owed the words “*fasseli gratia*”. In the dedicatory letter she alludes to this, but with a discreet and subtle touch:

“Most ardent in me is the desire to offer your Excellency at least some little token of the affection and obedience with which I have always regarded your most illustrious and most fortunate house, both for the duty which I owe to it and in particular for the benefits received from it.”

This dialogue was prefaced by a letter in which Girolamo Muzio apologizes to Tullia for having given it to the printers, after taking it with him to Venice, and reading it with keen enjoyment. It was a letter of conventional compliment, but written

with such courtesy and such graceful emphasis that his friend must have been greatly flattered by it.

“For me the dialogue which you have written *Della infinità d’amore* has been a great revelation and augmentation of your beauty; the which, in writing to you, I will not trouble to adorn with becoming praise, for it seems to me that I cannot give it any more particular praise than that I have judged it worthy of being no longer buried in darkness. You, such is your courtesy to me, gave me a copy of it as a thing that you were pleased to communicate to me, and not as a thing that was to be published; and I (such is my love for you, which makes me studious of your honour no less than of my own) have not been able to bear that it should not be brought to the light of day.”

He declared, in a later passage, that he had only changed the name of “Sabina” into that of “Tullia” because the other speakers in the dialogue were real and living persons.

“To nothing further has my revision extended. As to this my boldness, and that of having it published, Love assures me that you will take it as well done, since none other than Love was the occasion of my so doing. Though you should be highly content with this publication, effected without your consent, since if the matter were not such as were worthy of true praise, not you, who wished

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to keep it hidden, but I, who have sent it forth, should be blamed therefor. But I am certain that, to your eternal fame, the world will be for ever grateful to me for the publication of your labours.”

In reality Muzio’s “revision” had been extended to a great deal more than the name of one of the persons of the dialogue. His pen had industriously pruned and amplified and altered Tullia’s periods; and another pen—that of Varchi—had already done some work on them. In short, the dialogue was really the work of three hands, but the two men of letters were pledged to make it appear the work of their common friend.

Let us now examine some passages of this dialogue.

It opens with a discussion, in Tullia’s house, between men of letters and philosophers, on the theme: “If love can ever have an end.” The lady of the house is delighted to see Varchi enter:

TULLIA.—No one could appear in more timely fashion than you, most virtuous Messer Benedetto, nor be more welcome, nor more eagerly expected by us all.

VARCHI.—It pleases me greatly that this should be as you say, most noble Lady Tullia. And the more so, in that I feared that even if I had not wholly spoiled, I had at least in some degree interrupted your arguments, which I knew could not be other than beautiful and concerning high

matters, and so, in fine, worthy of this place, where some matter for debate is always proposed that is no less weighty and useful than joyous and agreeable. . . . Wherefore I was half repenting of having come by myself, and was just saying to myself, Alas! Love is carrying me whither I would not go, fearing that I may be, I will not say presumptuous, but vexatious to her whom above all I desire to please.—Since this is not so, I ought all the more to congratulate myself, and indeed to thank your great courtesy, and also that of these other lords and gentlemen, with whose good leave I will take a seat. It is, however, understood that you will pursue the arguments which you had commenced, unless by chance they are such that you do not hold me worthy to hear them.

TULLIA.—On the contrary, no less for this than for other reasons, we greatly desired your presence. But I for my part am much more inclined to think that it may seem to you that you have been incommoded rather than otherwise, and for this reason may regret having come hither, and especially in respect of my discourse, for reasons of which you are aware. For besides that I am a woman (and women, for I know not what philosophical reasons, you esteem to be less worthy and complete than men) I have, as you well know, neither doctrines of things nor ornaments of speech.

VARCHI.—I do not believe, most gentle Lady Tullia, that you hold me for such a Cymon, and so

uncouth and unversed in the things of the world and of nature, that I do not know, I do not say wholly but in some degree, of what women have been and are and will always be capable in respect of men; ay, with the virtue of their minds, and especially with their bodily charms; and this I should say had I never seen or heard any other lady than yourself. But of this we shall have time to reason on some other occasion. Now I shall say only that you do too great a wrong, I will not say to the very great affection which I bear you, and to my judgment (the which, if indeed in all other things it is less than middling, in this matter of being aware of your virtues, and of loving them no less than cherishing them, it is most singular), but, in truth, to your innate courtesy and kindness, inasmuch as it could enter your mind that I, finding myself in your presence, and beholding you and hearing you, could be conscious of anything other than incredible pleasure, ineffable grace, and incomparable content. . . .”

The attack and riposte of mutual compliment continues for some time longer, until the two speakers pass on to the theme which was under discussion before Varchi entered. Of the dialogue which follows we will confine ourselves to reproducing a few passages which serve to make us better acquainted with the persons speaking, or which cast some unexpected ray of light on the mode of

thought which was characteristic of the period in arguments of this nature.

There are two kinds of love, says Tullia; it is "vulgar" or "virtuous"; and the lovely hetæra, who has a smattering of Platonic love, once more tears off the shameful veil which the law had sought to bind upon her candid brow. Varchi and those others of her friends who were present were under too many obligations of different kinds to dare to check her, even for a moment, in her almost lyrical exaltation of "virtuous" love.

TULLIA.—And I now reply to you, and say, passing over many other divisions which might be made, that love is of two kinds: the one we will call "vulgar" or shameless, and the other "virtuous" or decent love. The shameless love, which is found only in vulgar and plebeian persons—that is, in those whose mind is vile and degraded, and who are without virtue or courtesy, and this whether they are of lineage low or high—is generated by the desire to enjoy the thing beloved; and its object is none other than that of the brute beasts themselves—that is, to have that pleasure and to generate something in their own likeness, without thinking or caring for anything else. And he who is moved by this desire and loves with this love, so soon as he has attained what he desired and has accomplished his will, loses his incentive and loves no more; very often, on the contrary, either because

he has recognized his fault, or because he regrets the time and labour which he has expended, he holds love in detestation. And of this I was not speaking.

VARCHI.—I assuredly believe you, for I know well that the loftiness of your most noble mind would not descend so low that it would enter your mind to discuss matters so vile. But continue!

TULLIA.—Virtuous love, which is proper to men of noble nature—that is, men of gentle and virtuous mind, whoever they may be, whether rich or poor—is not generated by desire, as is the other, but by reason; and it has for its chief end the transformation of the lover into the loved object, with the desire that the latter shall be transformed into the lover, so that two shall be made one, or four; it is of this transformation that Messer Francesco Petrarca, yes, and the most reverend Cardinal Bembo have spoken so elegantly and so frequently. And since it cannot be effected in other than a spiritual manner, in this kind of love only the spiritual sentiments are uppermost—that is, seeing and hearing, and above all, as being more spiritual, the imagination. It is, indeed, true that as the lover desires, beyond this spiritual union, likewise a bodily union, that he may make himself as far as possible one with the loved object, and as he is unable to do this, for it is not possible that bodies should penetrate one another, he can never accomplish this his desire, and thus he never attains his

end; and therefore his love cannot be transient, as I concluded above. And although an infinite number of things might be said about these two lovers, it is enough for me that I have said what sufficed to show that my conclusion is indeed most true.

VARCHI.—All that you have said pleases me extremely, and has filled me with ineffable delight. And although some doubt arises in me in respect of some of the things which you have said, they are at all events trifling doubts; and above all it has pleased me to see that you have not only read Philon, but have understood and remembered him.

TULLIA.—Oh, by whatever affection you bear me, since you have mentioned Philon, tell me your opinion and judgment of him.

VARCHI.—Of all those whom I have read, whether ancient or modern, who have written of Love in whatever tongue, Philon pleases me better than any, and it seems to me that I have learnt more from him; because, in my poor judgment, not only does he speak more generally, but with greater truth, and perhaps greater knowledge.

TULLIA.—Have you read Plato and the *Convivo* of Marsilio Ficino?

VARCHI.—Yes, lady, and both seem to me miraculous; but Philon pleases me better. . . .

These passages are doubtless introduced here in order to show that Tullia could bear comparison,

in the matter of refinement and culture, with Aspasia herself. This was a comparison of which the hetæra was very fond. She was a poetess, to be sure; but she was also—or rather, above all—a philosopher, and, for a woman, a philosopher in the highest and purest sense of the word. No vulgar instincts were hers, but a rational and intellectual mind; she was a creature not of frail and perishable flesh, but of an eternal and victorious spirit.

From what a pulpit did she preach her sermon—so Varchi must have thought to himself! But he was too much of a gentleman, and also too much in love, to smile other than benevolently at all that fell from the rosy lips of his “most elect” friend.

VARCHI.—I do not understand for what reason you blame and call “shameful” that love which is common to all animate things. I speak of these lower beings, each after its own kind, which are made for this rather than for the other love; as is seen in the herbs and plants, which have a vegetative soul; and in all the brute creatures, which have a sensitive soul, besides the vegetative soul; and in men again, who, besides the vegetative and the sensitive soul, have, in addition, the rational or intellectual soul. Wherefore Aristotle says that a man who can no longer generate is no longer a man, not being able to do that which he was brought forth by nature to do. Then, I do not know what you

will say of those who love youths, whose end, manifestly, cannot be the desire to generate something similar to oneself. Beyond this, it does not seem true that all those who love with vulgar and lascivious love, renounce love, when they have attained their desire; but rather there are many who are the more inflamed. And for the moment I will content myself with uttering these three doubts concerning this kind of love.

TULLIA.—These doubts are by no means trifling and of little importance, as you maintain. Well! I know that it is your custom to record everything minutely, but I shall reply to you as best I can. First of all, I say that I know well that those things that come to us from nature cannot be blamed or praised: and hence neither in the plants nor in the animals can such a love be blamed, nor in them can it be called lascivious and shameful, nor yet even in men; rather it may and should be praised. And all the more in men, inasmuch as they produce things more perfect and worthy than do the plants and animals; provided that this appetite is not frantic nor too excessive, as does most frequently happen in men, who have free will: whereas this does not happen in the plants and animals; not because they are animals . . . but because they are guided by an intellect which does not err. Now, as no one deserves blame who eats or drinks, but rather praise, since by these means are restored the natural heat and the radical

humour by which life is maintained, so he deserves praise and not blame who generates a thing similar to himself and perpetuates himself (not indeed in the individual—that is, in himself—but at least in the species). But as one who eats and drinks more than he ought, or out of place and season, so that that which ought to be beneficial is harmful to him, is deserving not only of reprobation but of punishment, so, and even more, does he merit reprobation and punishment who without any rule or measure surrenders himself to the carnal appetites, subordinating reason, which should be queen, to the senses, and, in short, becoming not a rational man but a brute beast. . . . While the brutes never become plants, as we become brutes, yet they cannot by any means become men even as we, by means of love, become angels. Hence, as he cannot be greatly blamed who from the rank of man, which is so perfect, descends by means of shameful love to that of the beasts, so that merit cannot be praised, however great, by which man ascends, by means of divine love, to the level of the gods. . . .

But Tullia, not content with this dissertation of hers on “vulgar” love, returns to the subject, and even descends to discussing mere carnality. She felt, at heart, that this was her weak point. It was of no avail to cite Bembo and Plato, Petrarch and Ficino; her way of life was too notorious; too many

knew to which of the two kinds of love she was more especially dedicated. She had, therefore, to prove that not all is vile in the "delectations" of the flesh, and that from these it is possible to ascend to "honest and virtuous" love. It is true that the mere desire to "join oneself bodily with the loved object" is reprehensible, because, more often than otherwise, when "this end is attained" love is extinguished; but the paths of the senses sometimes lead to an unexpected goal.

TULLIA.—All those who love with vulgar love and do not desire anything more than to join themselves bodily with the loved object, so soon as they have attained this conjunction desist and love no more. Is not this the truth?

VARCHI.—It is most true. But I ask: whence is it that some do not merely cease to love, but begin to hate? While some not only do not cease to love, but feel a greater love?

TULLIA.—Do you admit that if such a carnal act or conjunction is achieved, the motive ceases and the love subsides?

VARCHI.—Why do you think I shall not admit to you that which is true and cannot be denied of this kind of love? The which being desire or true carnal appetite, it is necessary that when such appetite fails by reason of the conjunction of the body, love must suddenly fail. But why does it sometimes turn into hatred and sometimes increase?

TULLIA.—. . . To reply first to this last question, you contradict yourself, because you admit to me that it is necessary that in all men love should cease when carnal enjoyment is attained: then you ask me why sometimes it not only does not cease, but increases.

VARCHI.—I do not know which of us it is that is trying to confuse the other. You accept as a thing evident that which is being disputed. I admit to you that love fails in all men, because it is so; then I ask you why sometimes it increases, knowing by experience that many men, when their desire is achieved, love more fervently than before.

TULLIA.—I have understood you, and I thought you had understood me; I say that when carnal desire is achieved, in all men that wish and appetite suddenly fails which so tormented and consumed them, and this in accordance with that universal and most true proposition, which has been stated so many times, that whatsoever moves towards a certain end moves no longer when that end is attained; and indeed the senses of taste and touch, in which the delectation of such lovers principally consists, are material and not spiritual, like the sight and hearing, and are therefore able to sate themselves immediately, and are sometimes so surfeited that they not only cause love to cease, but turn it into hate. And thus the first doubt is resolved; as for the second: all men, necessarily, the moment they have attained their desire, cease to pursue it,

but do not cease to love, and often indeed their love increases; because, besides the fact that they are never fully contented, and the desire remains to enjoy the loved object exclusively and by means of union (whence such love cannot be without jealousy), very often, like intemperate persons, they desire to conjoin themselves and to experience this delectation yet again, and after this yet again, and so on, and so on. I do not wish to deny that even in this love there is liberality—that is, I do not say that there are not many degrees, according to the nature of the persons who love, and those who are loved, so that they not only find themselves more amorous of one another, but more prudent or of better character; inasmuch as this vulgar and lascivious love may sometimes, in some persons, be the occasion of honest and virtuous love, just as honest and virtuous love may sometimes be transformed into lascivious and vulgar love by the motive of the lover or by the fault of the person loved; just as when plants, very often, in accordance with their nature and the soils in which they are placed and transplanted, may become wild from being domesticated, and domesticated from being wild.

Varchi, however, had alluded to a very prickly question—that is, to the problem of “those who love youths”. Here we have one of those passages that cast a ray of light which enables us, as we have

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said, to enter a little into the thoughts and feelings of the age. Was "Greek love" really so general then as would appear from certain contemporary Latin lyrics? Or was it not rather an abnormal deviation (æsthetic, physiological, and psychological) in a few persons only?

Tullia's question is embarrassing, but Varchi replies with great ability and extreme lucidity.

TULLIA.—Coming now to your second doubt, I say that those who lasciviously love youths do not so love them according to the ordinances of nature, and are deserving of that punishment which has been imposed upon them not only by the divine and canonical laws, but also by the civil and human laws. And I can hardly believe that anyone who practises so ugly and infamous and nefarious a vice, whether designedly or in accordance with an established custom, can be human. And I shall be glad if you will then tell me your opinion, for I know very well that according to the Greeks it was the contrary, and that Lucian has written a dialogue in which he praises this vice, and Plato likewise.

VARCHI.—I will not delay answering this question, but will reply to you now, because you are confusing the log with the hatchet, and you are very greatly mistaken if you intend to compare Lucian with Plato, or if you think that Plato ever praised this foul offence. For God's sake, rid your mind of

such an ugly belief, or rather such a grave error, unworthy not only of your most courteous mind, but even of the vilest person.

TULLIA.—Forgive me. I had understood that Socrates and Plato not only loved youths publicly, but esteemed it a glory to do so, and made dialogues on this subject, as we still see in the *Alcibiades* and *Phaedro*, which speak most amorously of love.

VARCHI.—I do not say that Socrates and Plato did not love youths publicly, and glory therein, and write dialogues, speaking amorously of love; but I do say that they did not love them to the end that the vulgar suppose, as you, too, seem to have believed. And I do not know who has spoken more amorously than Solomon in his Canticle.

TULLIA.—I will believe what you tell me. But tell me, were they lovers?

VARCHI.—What, were they lovers? They were very great lovers.

TULLIA.—Then did they desire to generate something similar to themselves?

VARCHI.—Do you doubt that?

TULLIA.—I do not know how to reply to you, for you turn everything against me; and yet I know that in this case they cannot achieve their end, and that no one can reasonably desire those things that cannot be and that he cannot accomplish.

VARCHI.—On other occasions you have seemed to me more judicious, and not only of better judgment, but of better understanding than to-day. . . .

You know that as pregnant bodies desire to generate, so, and even much more so, do pregnant souls; wherefore Socrates and Plato, whose minds were rich with all goodness, filled with all learning, endowed with every virtue, and finally, pregnant with all manner of fair and most holy customs, could not desire otherwise than to deliver and generate things similar to themselves. And who says or believes otherwise does not blame them but exposes himself. And this is the true and proper virtuous love; the which is as much more worthy than the other as the body is less perfect than the soul; and such lovers deserve all the greater praise, as it is more praiseworthy to generate a beautiful soul than to make a beautiful body. And do not be deceived by the customs of to-day; let it suffice to you that those who do thus are to be praised all the more for doing so in proportion as the habit of doing so is less general. . . .

TULLIA.—. . . For all that I know that what you say is very true, still I should like to know why it is not possible to love a woman also with this same love; for I certainly do not think that you intend to say that women do not possess the intellectual mind, like men, or that they are not of the same species, as I have heard it said by some.

VARCHI.—It has been the opinion of some (although it is a very false one) that the difference between women and men is not essential. And I say that not only is it possible to love women with

honest and virtuous love, but that it is done; and I, for my part, have known those who have done so and continued to do so.

TULLIA.—You have quite consoled me. . . .

She is “quite consoled” to hear that Varchi is acquainted with not a few men “who love women with honest and virtuous love”. The allusion is only too transparent. If she was rearing the Platonic seedling in her own house, why that notorious attempt to force the yellow veil upon her?

The *hetæra*, in process of drawing this delicately tinted portrait of herself, invokes the aid of a second painter, who is no less obliging. Not only is he prepared to lend beauty to her face and her mind, but in the background he shows, in the half light, a whole throng of aristocratic persons who serve to give her still greater prominence.

BENUCCI.— . . The lady Tullia may call herself most fortunate among all women, inasmuch as few indeed are those who have been or are in our own days excellent either in arms or in letters or in any other esteemed profession, who have not loved and honoured her. And I was mentioning to her so many gentlemen, so many scholars of every kind, so many lords, so many princes and cardinals who have gathered and flocked to her house at all times, as to a universal and honoured academy, and who have honoured and celebrated her and still honour and celebrate her; and this for the

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most rare or rather unique gifts of her most noble and most courteous mind. And already I had named to her an infinite number, and was still naming them, almost against her will, for she spoke to me in an undertone and sought to interrupt me. And just as we heard by your knock that you were coming, I was about to pass on to Siena, where she was admired and adored even more instantly than she was praised and loved, and chiefly by all the most noble and virtuous.

TULLIA.—Messer Lattanzio, if you are not quiet I shall break the rules and shall be vexed with you.

VARCHI.—After all, up to the present he has not said anything that I did not know myself, and perhaps even better . . . unless indeed you think that I do not know what is known by Italy, or rather by all the world.

BENUCCI.—But here comes Penelope: it is better that we should say the rest some other time; and these others will say their part.

VARCHI.—Let it be so.

TULLIA.—Yes, but if other things are spoken of besides my affairs, you will allow me first to listen to you, and then to thank you as would be incumbent upon me.

To discuss anything beyond her own affairs in her own house was hardly possible: and for that matter, she, the complete hetæra, would soon have brought the conversation back to the central figure

of every discussion—that is, her own. She could never take a back seat, never leave herself in the shade. She still had enough physical charm to make it seem that the terrible years of decay were still far distant; and even though her mirror may sometimes have told her that her youth was slowly fading, the melancholy vision was at once banished by the confidence born of her effusive poetical temperament, and by the reflection that she belonged to the exalted ranks of the philosophers.

Did she really believe all this? It may well be that her life was a continuous struggle between the senses and the spirit, in which the transient victories of the spirit found utterance from time to time in her poems, and in the dialogues which we have been examining. But the flesh was always victorious in this internal conflict; and perhaps, even more than the flesh, the necessity of earning her daily bread, and also her secret pride in being the centre of such a circle of masculine adorers as no other woman could boast.

Girolamo Muzio, perhaps because he saw that she was ageing, or perhaps because he really believed in the possibility of a change of heart, advised her about this time to marry. But it was late in the day for marriage; not only would any child that might have been born to her have been a hindrance in her adventurous life, but none of her admirers would have been anxious to enter upon a permanent connection.

Her destiny, indeed, was already decided. After a life of such fame and luxury she was to know the misery of abandonment, the bitterness of solitude, the squalor of poverty: she died, like so many of her kind, in extreme indigence, in March 1556; when the flush of youth had long vanished from her tired and faded features.

Four years later her voice was heard from beyond the tomb, but so faintly that none gave ear to it. Her poem, *Guerrino Meschino*, was published in Venice, and this, as Bongi has observed, "is the most important document bearing on the writer's inner life".

Once again the courtesan, then nearing her melancholy decline, had sought to win a spiritual victory over her frail and sinful flesh. While her clients were falling away from her she applied herself to writing verses, which, however weak in poetical inspiration, are full of Christian repentance.

Instead of the Platonic reminiscences of the *Dialogo*, we have a moral sermon of almost professional excellence. Her preface is full of heart-felt lamentation that the *Decamerone* of Boccaccio, "vicious and irreligious" as it was, should have enjoyed so great a circulation, and that other books, even more corrupt, including Ariosto's *Orlando*, were read with great avidity: They are books (she added) that "not only nuns, maidens, married women, or widows, but even the public women"

would be ashamed of having seen in their own rooms, but which they none the less devoured in secret, thus arousing "most ugly desires".

"I therefore, who in my early years had more notice from the world than now, with more wisdom, I should wish to have had, and have also seen, in myself and many others, what great harm may be done to youthful minds by the discussion, but much more by the reading of foul and lascivious things . . . offer here a poem which may freely be placed in the hands of any young girl or any lady, since it is all most chaste, all pure, all Christian."

And in the close of her preface she invokes, like all penitent Magdalens, the merciful forgiveness of God,

"from Whom alone comes all good, and to Whom alone I owe this great grace, that He has, at my age, not yet very old, but fresh and youthful, given me light whereby to turn my heart again to Him, and to desire and ensure, so far as I can, that all others shall do the same, whether men or women".

Poor Tullia! Even in this desperate attempt to free her spirit she could not quite shake off the vanity of the world, and though already disfigured by the years, she still persuaded herself, when she gazed into the mirror, that she was "fresh and youthful".

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But now her life was over. With the final disappearance of beauty a chill silence envelops her, as though to prepare her for her tomb.

And even her posthumous poem was to be lost, without an echo, amidst the laughing voices of new hetærae, offering to Aphrodite Pandemos their garlands of rose and myrtle, and receiving from other admirers their offerings of gems and their garlands of poetry; gay, splendid, and reckless sirens of the night, priestesses of an eternal Pan-athenæa, whose voluptuous beauty, after its season of fitful splendour, would flicker out as quickly as the torch which she herself had borne for a time under skies as gloomy and desolate.

NON MORITURA”

Giulia Gonzaga, che dovunque il piede
Volge e dovunque i sereni occhi gira
Non pur ogni'altra di beltà le cede,
Ma, come scese dal ciel, Dea l'ammira.

ARIOSTO

“NON MORITURA”

WIDOWED in her nineteenth year, on the death of Vespasiano Colonna, Giulia Gonzaga chose for her emblem an amaranth, with the words *Non moritura*. Like the flower that is always revived by contact with water, so the memory of the husband who had just been laid in the tomb should never fade, being eternally refreshed by her tears.

Yet no great passion had preceded or followed her marriage. Each party brought to the union the prestige of a great house; but there was nothing else to make them truly one. Giulia's years were then but fourteen; her beauty was still unripe, though splendid in promise; her husband was more than forty years older; he was, moreover, *infirmus, clausus ac mancus*. Add to this that he was always under arms, and could only permit himself the briefest moments of repose in the Castello di Fondi, where Giulia was unfolding into a miracle of beauty. So it was that on his death this lovely flower was still unspotted.

Her vow, then, was an almost monastic vow of perpetual fidelity and chastity.

Was she perhaps affected by the austere and intense piety of her early surroundings, which had already inspired a sister to seek the silence of the cloister? One thing is certain: that she soon tired of the company of the poets who frequented the little court, and if she cultivated new friendships,

it was only among men better versed in matters of faith, with whom she applied herself to such purpose to the problems of the Church and of God that she was barely in time to escape the pyre whose flames were preparing to enfold her. Or was it perhaps her first and most unhappy experience of love that evoked the decided repugnance to all earthly ties which was to characterize her whole life? Or was her magnificent body preserved from sensual troubles by a congenital anæsthesia? Did not another Gonzaga, whose "heroic" virtue was exalted by all her house, live fifteen years in chastity beside her husband?

At all events, setting before herself this symbol of imperishable memory, Giulia showed herself unapproachable; an inaccessible tower, an impregnable fortress. Vain was the sweetest flattery, the most ardent devotion of her suitors; and even the man who loved her with a tenderness delicate and constant enough to soften the hardest heart carried his fruitless dream within him to the tomb. This lasting passion, this long romance, was to the chatelaine of Fondi only a faint troubling of the waters, destined soon to pass.

Fate had endowed her not with beauty alone, but had lavished on her qualities of heart and mind that made her a singularly complete personality. It was this wealth of intellectual and spiritual

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qualities that Tasso praised in the dedication of a volume of poems :

“. . . With your rare virtue is conjoined that divine beauty, the like of which I think Heaven has never bestowed on another. Neither could soul thus gentle and purified be housed in more worthy dwelling than your most lovely body, and Nature verily showed herself your friend when with all her industry she adorned your virtuous mind with so perfect a beauty that not even the smallest defect can be discovered : hence is born the lively affection which urges every gentle spirit untiringly to give your name renown in every part, and by praise of you to exalt you even to the heavens . . . knowing no better means of delighting the ears of the world than with the sweet memory of your name, I have desired that these my compositions should wear it on their front. . . .”

Naturally, however, her physical beauty meant more to the poets than even her spiritual qualities ; if the latter inspired them with respectful admiration, the former gave their verses more colour and vitality. In his *Orlando* it is almost exclusively of her beauty that Ariosto speaks.

Ecco che a quanti oggi ne sono, toglie,
E a quante o greche o barbare o latine
Ne furor mai, di quai la fama s'oda,
Di grazia e di beltà la prima loda,

WOMEN OF THE RENAISSANCE

Giulia Gonzaga, che dovunque il piede
Volge e dovunque i sereni occhi gira,
Non pur ogn'altra di beltà le cede,
Ma, come scesa dal ciel, Dea l'ammira.

This *come scesa dal ciel Dea*—this goddess who seems descended from heaven—is described with minute particularity by the father of poor Torquato Tasso, in octaves full of lyric feeling. He sings of her “lofty and serene countenance”,

la fronte alta e serena
Di cui le Grazie fan dolce governo,
Ove di man d'Amor scritto si mira
Felice chi per me piange e sospira;¹

and the pearls and rubies of her mouth: her mouth which

perle e rubini
Avanza di vaghezza e di valore;²

and the “soft and delicate” cheeks which seem

Purpurra grana sparsa in picciol colle
Di bianca neve pur caduta allora;³

and above all her fair ringlets:

Il biondo, crespo inanellato crine
Che con soavi errori ondeggia intorno

¹ The lofty and serene countenance—which the Graces sweetly govern, where is seen, written by Love's hand,—“Happy he who for me weeps and sighs”.

² Excels in beauty and colour pearls and rubies.

³ Crimson berries scattered on little hills—of white snow but newly fallen.

“NON MORITURA”

Mosso da l'aure fresche e peregrine,
Ne'd'altro mai che di sè stesso adorno.¹

And when the lovely lady moves, flowers spring
from the earth beneath her feet, as though she were
the sister or daughter of Spring :

Da le sue piante par ch'erba novella
Esca e forme di fior leggiadre e nove,
Onde dice ciascun, per meraviglia,
Quest' è di Primavera o suora o figlia.²

And the canto closes with the vow that men shall
never forget, even in the far-off future, her celestial
image and her noble spirit :

. . . . poscia d'avra mill'anni e mille
Sepolti il tempo, de la costei gloria
Ardin nel mondo ancor l'alte faville
Nel dotto sen d'ogni purgata istoria ;
E sè come di Cesare e d'Achille
Si serbar ognor fra noi cara memoria,
Viva di Giulia il glorioso nome
Mentre spiegherà il Sol l'aurate chiome.³

This “divine” beauty of hers, whose fame the
poets had spread throughout Italy, was one day

¹ The fair, crisp, curling hair—that in sweet disorder tosses about her—moved by the fresh and wandering airs—and never adorned but by its own beauty.

² About her feet it seems that fresh grass—springs, and shapes of new and lovely flowers—wherefore all declare in amaze,—this is the sister or the daughter of Spring.

³ . . . after Time shall have buried thousands and thousands of years, the high radiance of her glory shall still shine in every truthful history ; and even as the cherished memory of Cæsar and Achilles is still preserved among us, so the glorious name of Giulia shall live while the sun displays his golden tresses.

to bring her into deadly peril. In July 1534 a Musulman fleet of eighty galleys, under the command of Khair-ed-Din Barbarossa, appeared off the Tyrrhenian coast, sacking towns and villages and carrying off young wives and maidens.

But was not the most resplendent jewel at Fondi? One night the pirate leader, at the head of two thousand men, "marching through the rough hill country and impeded by briers", made a quick dash at the castle, hoping to offer this "wonderful Christian" as a gift to his Emperor. And "so great was their speed—so that it might be said that it was by flying that they reached the castle and broke down the gate—that Donna Giulia had hardly time to mount on horseback, half-naked, and then, having already seen the enemy, to escape into the mountains" (Giovio). As Barbarossa could not find his coveted prey he proceeded to track her with his men. Believing that she might be hidden in a convent of Benedictines that lay about a mile from Fondi, he went thither in all haste; but the cloister, though ransacked in every corner, gave no sign of her presence or her passage; in his rage he bade his men ravish and then kill the twenty nuns, who, terrified by this invasion, had not even breath to answer his questions. In the end he withdrew, while Giulia continued, through brake and brier, her flight towards a distant and more readily defensible stronghold.

The Pope and the Sacred College, horrified at

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such audacity on the part of the corsairs, a handful of whom had already made their way into Terracina, gathered together a body of troops which was placed, at his own request, under the command of the young Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici. It was a small force, insufficient for the task, but fortunately the corsairs, who moved very rapidly, had already boarded their galleys, and were carrying fire and rapine elsewhere, to the scathe of Christian folk.

Cardinal Ippolito, moving southward from Rome to Gaeta, found no trace of the enemy. In his heart he must have regretted the lack of any opportunity to distinguish himself; and when he restored the keys of Fondi to Giulia's hands he may have felt that Fate had defrauded him of the halo of achievement which would have added to the value of the gift in the eyes of the lovely Duchess, and would have made it even more acceptable to her.

The poet Muzio Justinopolitano sings of this perilous adventure in an eclogue, *La Ninfa fuggitiva*; and from his narrative, which he enriches with episodes of a more or less imaginary nature, he seeks to draw a sort of practical moral for the benefit of his heroine. (The legend that Giulia caused the young page or the old serving-man who had seen her escaping half-naked from the castle to be killed is of later origin.) Why, he asks, this solitude? Why

should youth and beauty be the cause of terror,
and not of the sweetest joys?

Pensi cosè forse perpetuamente
Passer la verde tua fiorita etade,
Vedova e sole, senza alcun diletto?
Senza voler di pianta sì felice
Che si colga giammai frutto nè fronda?
Tolga sì rio voler il sommo Padre
De la tua mente. Or mie ragioni ascolta.
Lo starti a guisa di silvestre vite
Scompagnata da l'olmo, in stato acerbo
Ti tiene ognor; ma se ti ricongiungi,
Tutta addolcirsi in mezzo il petto l'alma,
Gioire il cor e di nova letizia
Tornar più belle tue sante bellezze
Vedransi immantimente. . . .¹

The "elm" to which the "wild vine" might attach itself was the Cardinal Ippolito, who had for some time been hotly in love with Giulia, and who may privately have inspired Muzio to write his eclogue.

Young, handsome, wealthy, generous, more the knight than the cardinal, more the soldier than the gentleman of leisure, magnificent, a poet and musician, a nephew of Leo X, a cousin of Clement

¹ Dost thou perchance think thus perpetually to pass thy green and flowering time widowed and alone, without any delight? Without wishing from a plant so fortunate ever to gather fruit and foliage? May the Supreme Father banish so evil a wish from thy mind! Now listen to my arguments. Thou livest alone like a wild vine detached from the elm; thou remainest continually green; but if thou marriest again it will forthwith be seen that thy soul will be softened in thy breast, thy heart will rejoice, and thy sacred beauties grow more lovely with new gladness. . . .

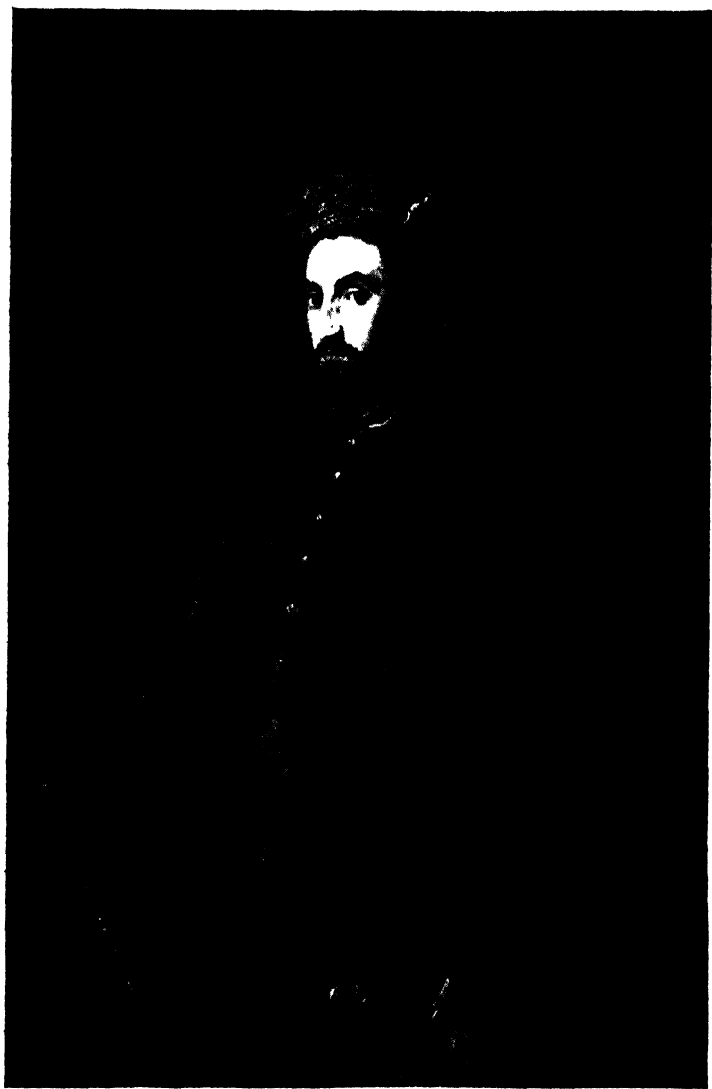
VII, a natural son of the Duc de Nemours, he exercised a great fascination on all who came into contact with him. Leo X had a great affection for him, and seeing the boy playing between his feet, with his active little body and his fair head, he had himself painted thus by Raphael in one of the Papal apartments. Clement VII continued his predecessor's protection and good will, and after an attempt to ally him with some exalted family (he had thought even of Isabella Colonna, Vespasiano's daughter, and hence Giulia's stepdaughter) he created Ippolito cardinal in January 1529—he was then eighteen years of age—and almost immediately afterwards Vice-Chancellor of the Church. In the following year, when he went to Bologna to meet Charles V, he took Ippolito with him. The young cardinal, profiting by the presence of Titian in Bologna, had his portrait painted “in Hungarian costume, and in a second smaller picture, fully armed” (Vasari). No purple here, no sacred emblems! He wore, indeed, a costume of his own: a tunic of pomegranate—red velvet with gold buttons—and a red bonnet with a great jewel and a waving plume; in his right hand the commander's baton, and in his left a curved sabre.

Clement VII, who had conferred the cardinalate upon him, “believing that he would be able to adapt himself and acquire gravity of mind”, soon, to his great disappointment, saw him relapsing into a round of “exercises and pleasures unworthy of a

prelate"; "he solemnly reproved him, and, knowing that he would not on that account cease to dishonour the dignity of the hat, foretold that he would soon suffer the penalty of his importunate folly" (Giovio). "This crazy devil"—as the Pope often called him—listened in silence to the angry reproaches of the pontiff, and then, leaving the Vatican, shrugged his shoulders and went his own way.

His youth, his temperament, his habits, and the company he kept all inclined him to lead a gay, festive, and worldly life. The melancholy twilight of the churches was not for him, nor the dismal pontifical court, whose sovereign, niggardly and miserable, always tormented by sickness, was incapable of a cheerful smile. So he gathered about him a court of his own, which offered a generous hospitality both to friends and strangers, provided they served to distract him by some new "invention".

"He took pleasure in a variety of things, in theatrical plays, and in jousts and tourneys, and he was even more smitten with an incredible desire for great hunting parties, and with very great labour he maintained an infinite number of fine hounds and valuable horses, and even in this pursuit he lived in such a splendid fashion that he very often had the table set in the midst of the woods near the fountains for all the court and the youth of Rome.



Photo]

CARDINAL IPPOLITO DE' MEDICI
(Titian)

“. . . He loved inordinately to have in his court barbarians who spoke more than twenty tongues. Among these were Moors of Barbary, born of the blood of lords, whose mastery in the saddle and with the bow filled with amazement the eyes of all beholders. Besides these were Tartars, incomparable archers, and Indian Moors, who overcame the most valiant in wrestling. He had also Turks, most skilful in handling the weapons of the chase, so that day and night he had them always on guard over his person. . . .” (Giovio).

Clement VII deplored this spectacle of perpetual gaiety and this continued waste of money, but expostulation was useless. He consequently decided to send Ippolito away from Rome, and dispatched him to Hungary as Papal legate. Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga wrote of him in those days: “I for my part say that the principal pretext may have been the Pope’s despair of removing him from the life he leads without sending him where he will be under the discipline of the Emperor, which is heavy and severe.” The Emperor had no liking for Ippolito; indeed, as a result of a certain feat of bravado which made him suspect some secret intention, he was overcome with fury, and rather inconsiderately ordered the legate to be arrested. His imprisonment was brief, as it was judged that his motive had been nothing worse than youthful vanity.

He intrigued, but rather fitfully, and with a certain indolence, against Alessandro Medici; and when the Florentine conspirators were ready for action, and calling upon him, he was full of doubts and wavered, and finally withdrew. Then, by indirect means, he kindled in Lorenzino a fire which no one else had been able to light; after which he broke off all relations with the conspirators and protested his devotion to Alessandro. He was always uncertain and changeable; hence he was not really dangerous, and was not feared; and if he aspired to the lordship of Florence the difficulties and delays that confronted him quickly damped his ardour. So, one fine day, weary of all these petty and futile secrecies and subterfuges, he broke with the exiles, and Alessandro, and Lorenzino, and the Strozzi. Fabrizio Peregrino hastened to give the news to Federico Gonzaga, lord of Mantua:

“ . . . The most reverend Medici now proves to have discarded his fancy to have himself unhatted, and is willing to attend to ecclesiastical affairs and be a good son of the Church . . . and if he has not already begun he soon will begin to take holy orders so that he cannot turn back. . . . His Holiness is paying all his debts, which amount to a large sum. . . .”

As a Prince of the Church who was not as yet invested with holy orders he had been free to live a worldly life and indulge in political intrigue.

But while his desire to overthrow his cousin in Florence may have induced him hitherto to entertain the “fancy to have himself unhatted”, another and more intimate dream, of which very few were aware, may have supplied a stronger motive.

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He worshipped Giulia Gonzaga, and when hunting and jousting or travelling as Papal legate permitted him a little leisure he eagerly took horse for Fondi.

And on these journeys he set out so full of faith, and returned so downcast ! His passion was powerless to open the secret doors of her heart. Giulia and he were much the same age, and were alike in many of their physical and intellectual qualities. But an abyss divided them in one respect ; for Giulia, in her cold and reserved beauty, never showed the least indication that she might one day endeavour to overcome her reluctance to relations of a different character.

Ippolito, discouraged, begged that she would at least allow an artist to paint her portrait, so that her likeness might always be with him in his wandering life. As she consented, Sebastiano del Piombo was commissioned to paint it, “and within a month he executed this portrait, which, proceeding from the celestial beauty of this lady, and from such a skilful hand, turned out a divine picture” (Vasari).

On another occasion, as he could think of no

better means of convincing her of his sufferings, he translated the second book of the *Æneid*. When the work was completed he sent it to Giulia with a dedication overflowing with tenderness and melancholy:

“Most illustrious lady,—Since often in one oppressed by great misfortune the example of a greater alleviates his torment, I finding for my suffering no other remedy turned my mind to the burning of Troy, and measuring that fire with my own I knew without a doubt that no misfortune befell within those walls but the like is felt within my bosom; which I seeking in some degree to assuage, in lamenting the woes of Troy have manifested my own; whence I send it to you, in order that it may in truthful semblance discover to you my afflictions, since neither sighs nor tears nor my grief have ever been able to reveal them to you.”

But Giulia was firm. If such devotion touched her heart, it assuredly did not quicken its beat; their ways in life lay too far apart! Still, she was responsive to her friend's attentions, and her courtesy always gave rise to the flattering hope that he would one day attain the desired end.

Destiny, however, was to spare Ippolito this supreme disappointment. In June 1535 he left Rome, with part of his court, to join Charles V in Tunis, where he was making war upon the corsairs.

“NON MORITURA”

Of this expedition to Africa he spoke in a sonnet which he sent to Molza. It was the last that was to come from his pen :

Molza, quel vero e glorioso honore
Che Cesar volge nell' antica strada
Di gir a ricercar nova contrada
Per trova degno pregio al suo valore,

Fa che mi paion anni i giorni e l'ore
Che stato son così vilmente a bada;
Egli me chiama, e insegnami ond'io vada
Per uscir d'ozio e de l'invidia fuore.

Questi mi spinse alla più rea stagione
Dove Vienna il gran Danubio bagna,
E verso il Mar maggior superbo scendi;

Or in Africa lieto m'accompagna,
Mentre varcato il Cancro al gran Leone
L'ardente stella il largo petto incende.¹

But before leaving Italy he wished to pass through Fondi, and then, having greeted his friend, he proceeded towards Itri, which was a fief of his, and put up at the convent of San Francesco. The journey under the blazing summer sun and the sojourn amidst plains and hills infested with fever

¹ Molza, that true and glorious honour—which sent Cæsar down the ancient way—to go in search of some new country,—there to find fame worthy of his valour,—makes the days and hours seem years to me,—which have been filled with such base dalliance;—it calls me and tells me the way to follow—to get free of sloth and envy.—These urged me at the most evil season—to where great Danube bathes Vienna—proudly descending to the mighty sea;—Now I betake myself joyously to Africa—while having passed from Cancer to great Leo—the blazing star inflames the generous breast.

were fatal to him. On the 2nd of August he took to his bed, with a very high fever. In the following days his condition rapidly became serious; and he, fearing that he would never rise again, begged that his sufferings, and perhaps his last agony, might at least be lightened by Giulia's smile.

A messenger was sent in haste to Fondi, and the châtelaine set forth to give what help she could to the man who so loved her. On the 10th of August, towards noon, "this most prosperous and accomplished young man, famed for the nobility of his instructed mind, the beauty of his countenance, and the magnificence of his life", drew his last breath; "and death was to him less hard (continues Giovio, who was present) for that he was near to Donna Julia, who paid him most virtuous courtesies".

He was in his twenty-fourth year.

As almost always happened in those days in the event of a somewhat sudden death, there was talk of poison; and the steward, Giovanni Andrea, was arrested on a charge of administering poison in chicken broth. It was said that the poison had been given to the steward, with a large sum of money, by an emissary of Duke Alessandro, who was anxious to get rid of a dangerous pretender.

But the torture to which Giovanni was repeatedly subjected did no more than inflict useless suffering on the unhappy man; and even in the convulsions of his agony he persisted in proclaiming and swearing

to his innocence. The unfortunate steward was saved mainly by the deposition of the physicians who had attended Ippolito:

“More especially do they affirm that there was here no poison, which after a certain interval might have affected other parts, as we see the choler inflamed in tertian fever; because this sickness, which cut short the cardinal’s life, returned after the lapse of a definite period, and therefore they attribute the cause of his sickness to the recent inclemency of the mutation of the atmosphere, of which mutation died in similar manner several valiant young men of his company” (Giovio).

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We see, then, that Giulia Gonzaga never wronged her husband’s memory. But did the unfading flower which she had chosen as her emblem really mean that her fidelity was eternal? Was not, perhaps, the purity which she wished to preserve in her own person the external symbol of another purity which she wished to defend?

Giovio, whose mind, though he wore the vestments of a bishop, was full of pagan culture, was the last man to suspect the mystical fire that was smouldering in this beautiful body; and he was almost annoyed to see how obstinately she withheld herself from the world. “Donna Julia is crazy to wish always to live this austere and solitary life . . . she would have everyone die with their seed unsown

as she will do." But there were others who knew her much more intimately, and there were a few whom, by reason of a mutual affinity, she had chosen for her friends.

She was in her twenty-fourth year when this mention was made of her in a letter written to Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga:

"At Fondi I spent a day with this lady, and it is a great sin that she is not the mistress of all the world, although I believe Our Lord has provided thus so that even we poor wretches can enjoy her divine conversation and courtesy, which is no whit inferior to her beauty. . . ."

And then, when she was in her forty-seventh year, these words were said of her in another letter:

". . . And he gives thanks for the same to God and Lady Julia, whom he says often has been to him almost like a star, towards whose light he has set his course in the darkness of this world, being in the first place protected by her example from many unlawful and unrighteous things, and secondly, set free from superstition and false religion."

The first of these letters, dated 1535, was from Giovanni Valdes, the great reformer, who was burned at the stake in effigy; the second was written in 1558 by Monsignor Pietro Carnesecchi, sometime secretary to Pope Clement VII, who

having been found guilty of thirty-four “heretical, erroneous, temerarious, and scandalous propositions”, was beheaded and then burned in Rome. Here, then, is an interval of twenty-three years; and all this time she displays the same absorption in religious problems; and as her mind matures she is no longer the disciple who listens, or the friend who discusses such problems, but rather a teacher who resolves doubts and removes difficulties, appeasing the mind and enlightening the heart.

Sometimes, no doubt, the seductions of the world must have tempted her; but even if a congenital frigidity had not rendered her body invulnerable, the austere faith of a lifetime was always able to impose its restraint. If her life was not wholly without conflicts, they were at all events not serious, and quickly ended in victory.

In Naples one day, where she settled in 1536, a guest of the nuns of the convent of San Francesco, she heard in San Giovanni Maggiore a sermon by Fra Bernardino Ochino, who was presently to discard his monkish robes and devote himself to the cause of the Reformation. She left the church in a state of mental agitation, which she confessed to Valdes, who had accompanied her. The dialogue which followed was transcribed by Valdes himself, who inserted it in his *Abecedaria spirituale*:

GIULIA.—I am conscious of a battle within me. The words of Frate Ochino fill me with the terror

of hell; but I fear evil tongues. Ochino offers me the love of Paradise, but I feel at the same time the love of the world and of its glory. How escape from this conflict to which I am succumbing? By harmonizing the two inclinations, or by suppressing one of them?

VALDES.—This agitation is a sign that the image of God is being renewed within you. The law has inflicted the wound; the Gospel will heal it. Only I fear that you will seek to order your Christian life in such a way that those about you do not perceive the change. And I will make known to you the way of perfection. Love God above all things and your neighbour as yourself.

GIULIA.—But I have always understood that only monastic vows lead to perfection.

VALDES.—Let people say what they will; monks and nuns have nothing of Christian perfection except in so far as they possess the love of God; not a *soldo* more!

GIULIA.—What is the means by which this *caritas*, which is perfection, is produced in our heart?

VALDES.—As a fire is needed to give heat, so a living faith is needed to produce *caritas*. Faith is the tree and *caritas* the fruit. But by faith I mean that which is living in the soul, which comes by the grace of God, which clings with unlimited confidence to all the words of God. When Christ says "He who believes shall be saved", the disciple who believes

should no longer have the least doubt as to his salvation.

GIULIA.—But you do not mean that as regards faith I am to believe the first comer?

VALDES.—Have a care. Should they ask you if you believe the articles of faith, assure them that you do so; but if they ask you whether you believe that God has forgiven your sins, then reply that you believe that He has done so, but that you are not sure. If you accept with full faith the words of Christ, then, even while showing that you repent of your sins, do not hesitate to say with all confidence: God Himself has pardoned my sins.

But it is not enough to believe in God: you must practise your faith. Devote a little time every day to meditating on the world, on yourself, on God, on Jesus Christ, without binding yourself to do so in a superstitious manner; do it in liberty of spirit, selecting the room which seems to you most convenient, or even when you are lying in your bed. Two images, two books, you should have always before your eyes: that of Christian perfection and that of your own imperfection. These books will bring you farther forward in a day than all the rest in ten years. The Scriptures themselves, if you do not read them in such humility of spirit, may be poison to your soul. Listen to sermons with a humble spirit.

GIULIA.—But if the preacher is of the great

number of those who instead of preaching Christ babble of vain and useless things, treating of philosophy or this or that point of theology, and who relate fables and drolleries: do you wish me to follow him?

VALDES.—Do in such case what seems to you preferable.

GIULIA.—Two words more: what use should I make of Christian liberty?

VALDES.—The true Christian is free from the tyranny of sin and death; he is absolute master of his affections, but he is also the servant of all.

This was in 1536: that is, some months after the death of her friend at Itri. How remote from her mind were the myths of ancient Greece and the paganism of modern Rome! And how remote Ippolito had always been!

Ippolito, the poet and cardinal, the organizer of tournaments, first in the chase and foremost in the lists of love, was one of the most typical representatives of the late Renaissance. The outer man was all brilliance and magnificence. If a secret sorrow afflicted him he searched the classics for appropriate images of grief, or translated Virgil. No other shadows darkened his gay and thoughtless spirit. A Prince of the Church, he never gave a thought or a glance to the stupendous storm that was raging in the north of Europe; a true nephew of Leo X, he seemed to say to himself: "Let us enjoy the

purple which God has conferred upon us!”—not without dreaming in secret of the splendour of the tiara that might one day replace the red hat.

And this was the man whom some fatality brought into contact with a woman who must have seemed impenetrable and enigmatic, like others of her sex and period. What did he know of the return of Christ to the hearts of men? If the world of pagan antiquity had not kindled any spiritual fire within him (and the generation of the great humanists had long passed away), still less was he moved by the sacred history of the Nazarene; and if he thrust aside the profound dialogues of Plato, he wearied even sooner of the simple parables of the Teacher of Galilee. Always, as though impelled by some unknown force, he had combated this new world of ideas and feelings; and the brief history of his life found its period in the consoling smile of a woman who for him was incomprehensible.

These two figures, then, are almost like symbols of the setting of one age and the dawn of another; it was the will of destiny that their lives, with all their lights and shadows, should come together, yet never be united; as though to mark still more clearly the distance and the difference which divided them.

Giulia was to survive the untimely death of Ippolito by thirty years; but in that long space of

time not a single episode or adventure relieved the monotony of her life. Withdrawn into herself, she seemed already extraneous to the world, or if the world still interested her it was only in respect of the Christian faith. And when death came to her, almost without warning, in April 1666, she was living, being then in her fifty-fifth year, in Naples, in the convent of San Francesco delle Monache, which had always been so dear to her.

And then a man who had been watching her for years suddenly seized upon her papers. This was Pius V, who, since the days when he was Commissary General of the Holy Office, had never taken his eyes off her, scenting his prey from afar. With her papers before him, his suspicion became certainty, and certainty evoked an outburst of wrath. An ambassador wrote from Rome on the 25th of June:

“His Holiness, in respect of these writings, has said that if he had seen them before her death, he would have burned her alive!”

Being unable to wreak his wrath on Giulia, he had search made for Monsignor Pietro Carnesecchi, her most intimate friend and her most enthusiastic teacher, hundreds of whose letters were among the sequestered papers. Learning that he was in Florence, a guest of Cosimo I, the Pope requested the duke to send him immediately to Rome, and the duke, being unable to refuse the request, which

was actually an injunction, had Carnesecchi put in chains while he was seated beside him at his own table.

The result was a long trial in Rome, before the Holy Office. The Inquisitors were not long in discovering that the “pestilence of the Reformation” had made proselytes in social circles which they had believed to be immune. Not only Giulia, but a whole group of ladies of distinguished family—among them the Marchesa Vittoria Colonna and the Duchessa Catterina Cibo—regarded the innovators with sympathy; and, what was even more serious, some of those bishops and cardinals who were most noted for their zeal and intellect and learning appeared to be infected by the new ideas: Pole, Morone, Contarini, Sadoletto. . . .

Let us take a few interesting points from the enormous *dossier* of this trial.

The inquisitors not only laid hands upon the living heretics, but searched for offenders even in the tomb. Vittoria Colonna had been dead nearly twenty years, and the Englishman, Cardinal Reginald Pole, who had enjoyed the respect and admiration of many Italian innovators, had been dead about half as long.

Monsignor Carnesecchi gave evidence relating to Vittoria Colonna, the great friend of Michelangelo:

“. . . I knew her and observed her, as her virtue merited. The first time I saw her and kissed

her hand was here in Rome, in the first year of Pope Paul III, on her introduction, if I remember rightly, by Cardinal Palmieri, who was a great friend of this lady's. Afterwards I saw her again in Florence, she having gone into those parts in order to visit the baths of Lucca, where, having gone thither at the same time, for the good of my health, I had an opportunity of becoming more intimate with her, and this intimacy continued until the close of her life, so that in this way I saw her again many times, both in Rome and in Viterbo, at the time when I was with the English Cardinal, she having retired into a convent of those parts, in order, as she said, that she might apply herself to serving God in greater tranquillity than in Rome. . . .

“. . . The Signora Marchesa, before she made the acquaintance of the Cardinal, so tormented herself with fasts, hair shirts, and other means of mortifying the flesh, that she was reduced almost to skin and bone, and in doing this she perhaps placed too much confidence in such works, imagining that in them resided the true piety and religion, and consequently the salvation of her soul. But afterwards she was admonished by the Cardinal to the effect that she was offending God rather than otherwise by employing such austerity and rigour against her body. In the first place, because St. Paul says *ad Thimoteum* that *corporalis exercitatis admodum valet ad pietatem*. . . . The said lady began to withdraw herself from this so austere life,

gradually returning to a reasonable and virtuous moderation. . . .

“. . . Not only was the English cardinal the friend of this lady, but he professed to love and honour her as his mother, and she, conversely, regarded the cardinal as her son, and indeed gave proof that she so regarded him, having made him heir to nine or ten thousand ducats which she had on deposit with the Mint of Venice.

“. . . I cannot say of certain knowledge that this lady digressed in any article of the Catholic faith, but I am indeed of opinion that she held the article of justification by faith, although I do not remember that she ever opened herself to me so completely that I could testify otherwise than by conjecture, founded principally on her intimacy with Fra Bernadino Ochino, and then with Priuli and Flaminio, besides the indication given by the sonnets composed and signed by this lady.”

When Carnesecchi knew Giulia she was no longer very young, but even at forty her beauty was still dazzling. The prelate had subsequently to confess that he himself was not insensible to her “earthly” shape:

“I began to love her for human reasons; later our love became spiritual and divine by reason of the conformity of our religion.”

As the years passed, then, the first stirrings of his heart were subdued by the restraints of religion;

but if Giulia employed, in her very frequent letters to him, some phrase more affectionate than her usual language, he still experienced an irresistible delight. For that matter, Giulia herself seemed to find, in this community of thought and feeling, an outlet for her suppressed womanhood.

Cardinal Pole died in the autumn of 1558. The news of his death was a grief to both the correspondents, and this grief was expressed in their letters. His death, which occurred not long after that of the English Queen Mary, to whom the cardinal had been greatly devoted, was a great blow to both of them.

In his first letter after the receipt of the news Carnesecchi said :

“I have received news, amongst other things, of the death of my most amiable patron of England, which has indeed pierced my heart, notwithstanding that I had already armed myself with the thought that it must needs follow after so long and serious an illness. And in this connection I pray God that He will preserve Donna Giulia for me, and if nevertheless He should see fit to take her from me before her time, may He at least grant me the mercy which He granted my friend of England—that is, that I, too, may follow my Queen.”

Giulia replied that this death had caused her such profound mental anguish as to “reduce her to no longer caring for anyone”. She begged

Carnesecchi to console her, and he did not fail to make her realize what intense sorrow her determination would bring to one who so loved her. Giulia grew calmer; but in writing she made use of expressions which touched her friend so greatly that he replied to her immediately:

“I received yesterday your ladyship’s letter with the enclosure for Carnesecchi; although all your letters are commonly most grateful and most joyous, none the less this seems to have given him fresh life and soul, notwithstanding that one might have thought quite the contrary on seeing him weep when he came to that passage which said that Donna Giulia would gladly die accompanied by such a friend as he, if one had not known that this was owing to tenderness of heart, seeing that the love which he bears Donna Giulia is courteously and affectionately returned, which makes him feel that he is happy to be in this world.

“It is certain, my lady, that friendship is a beautiful thing, especially when it has arisen from virtuous motives, and has increased and become confirmed with years and judgment, and has at last found its goal in God, as may truly be said of that which is between these two, since God blesses them and concedes to them the privilege of being enabled to live and die joyfully together, conformably with the holy desire which both the one and the other confess of attaining this, although

Carnesecchi says that he has not truly made up his mind whether it may not be proper for him to desire to leave this world some time before Donna Giulia, not so much in order to be the first comer, since there could not be any great interval between the one and the other, as because he reflects that if they departed at the same time he would not be able to do her any service, whereas in that other world he would hope that he might at least take heart from the aid and the favour which God in that state might grant him, serving thus as escort, so to speak, through that horrible pass.

“The which it cannot be denied proceeds from a pious and loving affection for his friend, but I doubt that he is taking a little too much upon himself; and however this may be, I repeat that they are a rare pair of friends, and that they may in a certain measure be compared with those who have died in England.”

Giulia, we may be sure, cherished this letter, but she had slightly to check the transports of her distant admirer, as we may see from the following letter from the cardinal, in which he drops, as usual, into the third person :

“I thank your illustrious ladyship for her charity in warning me of the prohibition against ecstasies, as otherwise I might innocently have run into danger; though I cannot believe that that excellent thing is meant which sometimes lifts us up to

heaven on the wings of thought, and there enables us to speak with the angels face to face; in which respect Carnesecchi says that he has often proved as much in writing to Donna Giulia, inasmuch as she seems to him, with her likeness to the one and her imagination of the other, to be and to speak almost like an angel; and I say that it would seem strange to me if this manner of going into ecstasies were forbidden, since apart from the fact that it is not possible to constrain anyone to refrain from thinking or imagining that which indeed occurs to him, I cannot see that it can be productive of any but good results, inasmuch as the mind unites itself with its object, and this, being of the dignity and excellence which I presuppose, fills it with thoughts and conceptions similar to itself. However, since your ladyship says that she has seen this noted among the things prohibited, I am forced to believe that this is true, and thus from now onwards I will refrain from sending my mind a-roving. . . .”

Such faint, passing clouds but increased the beauty and glamour of the sky. And Giulia, in the pious tranquillity of her Neapolitan convent, heard in the far distance the tender and sorrowful voice:

“. . . He says that all the queens in the world would be too few to separate him from Donna Giulia, and make him renounce the hope of seeing her again and living beside her for the rest of the time that is granted him . . . moreover, there is

some hope of his again seeing Naples and of living the last years of his life in the company of Donna Giulia."

Pathetic dreams! These friends, who had not seen one another for twelve years, went their ways to death by different paths. Neither was able to watch unseen by the other's corpse.

In the sentence of the Holy Office Carnesecchi found one last consolation in hearing the name of his friend ("a person most friendly to thee, accused of and arraigned for heresy") and then calmly faced the torture that awaited him.

"He went fully attired, with a white shirt, a pair of new gloves, and a white handkerchief in his hand" (Serristori).

This was early on the morning of the 1st of October, 1567; a dismal, persistent drizzle was falling.

The Florentine ambassador, writing to his sovereign, described the execution of the sentence:

". . . At the break of day this unfortunate Carnesecchi, accompanied by this friar, was led to the Ponte Sant' Angelo . . . the execution took place thus early not out of regard for him, but because the Consistorium had been assembled; so that the cardinals, on passing over the bridge, should not behold so cruel a spectacle; but a fine rain falling, and the wood not blazing, all the

cardinals saw him hanging by the feet and naked as he was born. While it was yet early I went thither to hear if he said anything before he was beheaded; he showed that it was his desire to speak, but he was not allowed; he only commended himself twice to God, which was heard; in his bearing he showed no fear. . . . After he was decapitated the master of the gallows stripped him naked as he was born, since the wearing apparel and vestments were his by right, and dragged him by the feet to convey him to the stake where he was burned.”

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To return to Giulia: we must not overlook her maternal inheritance.

Her mother, Francesca, belonged to one of the greatest Guelf families of Italy, which had supplied two occupants of the pontifical throne—Innocent IV and Hadrian V—and which could number no less than sixty-two cardinals and three hundred patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops. Three years before Giulia was born a member of this family had died in Geneva whose head wore the halo of sainthood; and while she was following Valdes and Ochino another of her relatives was living in the cloister a life of purity and zeal which subsequently won her the title of Beata. Both these holy women left ascetic writings behind them, such as Giulia herself, according to some historians, produced in her Neapolitan convent. In both mother and daughter,

though they lived in opposing camps, we find the same transports of faith.

And in addition to the same religious atmosphere, we find in both the same tenacity and the same pride, though this was veiled by a sense of humility. Giulia, when advised to flee because she was regarded with suspicion by the Holy Office, remained unafraid at her post.

“. . . Donna Giulia has told me that she will never follow Morone and the Pope; let God do what He will, since it is not for her to make changes founded on imaginations, which are so apt to deceive mankind, and moreover are extremely diverse; and she held it much more fitting to adhere to a thing in opinion than to form another opinion of it against that which God Himself has inspired in her. . . .”

And when the whole of her mother's family was overthrown by the wretched conspiracy of 1547, and Charles V and Andrea Doria applied themselves to demolishing its almost royal power, she alone raised her voice to demand, not mercy, but justice for those of her kinsfolk who were innocently suffering under the fury of the vendetta:

“The disaster which has befallen in Genoa has grieved me very greatly, by the loss of two valiant young men; but since the thing is irremediable, and the poor count has suffered such bitter penance for his error, I desire greatly that those who are



Photo]

Anderson

SANT' AGATA
(Sebastiano del Piombo)

left, such as youths and those less guilty, and any who are not guilty at all, such as the brother called Scipione, should receive such consideration as befits equity and even justice. And believing your lordship to be the most influential after his Majesty, I have desired by this letter of mine to implore him as urgently as I can that he will, by whatever good expedient he can contrive, undertake to protect this house, which is, after all, noble and worthy of being assisted by one of its peers.”

Giulia, both in blood and in temper, was a Fieschi even more than a Gonzaga.

A TRAGIC PASSION

“ . . . faceva forza con le gambe, con le braccia e con la vita tutta, ma non si potea muovere; et cosi la strangolorno. . . .”

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IN Rome, on the 1st of January, 1559, in the house of Andrea Lanfranchi, the secretary of the Duca di Paliano, there was a scene characteristic of the period.

A lavish and jovial host, Lanfranchi had gathered about him, to greet with due festivity the dawn of the new year, a little company of his friends; men addicted no less to the pleasures of the table than to those of gallantry. In fact, says a chronicler, "so that to the incitations of gluttony those of wantonness should not be lacking", the invitations had been extended to include a very beautiful courtesan, Martuccia, who was then in great repute in Rome. Beside her, gay and salacious, sat a cardinal, Innocenzo Del Monte, known as Il Montino, whose dissolute life had already earned him a series of quite ineffectual admonitions; and since the purple, or rather the prelate's gown, imposed too much restraint on his movements, he had donned, for the occasion, an elegant cavalier's costume, with a velvet mantle embroidered with golden flowers. Seated across the table, equally gay and enterprising, was Gian Ludovico Pio, brother to another cardinal, and one of Martuccia's most assiduous admirers.

The banquet was proceeding, with gay gossip and laughter, when the room was suddenly invaded by a gentleman, Marcello Capece, who was an

intimate and a kinsman—though not within the law—of the Duca di Paliano. He was frowning, and his face was dark with fury. He had been searching for Martuccia for some hours; and having finally learned that she was with Gian Ludovico, he decided, without more ado, and crimson with jealousy, to enter the house and take her, by force if need be; but since such a venture was not unattended by danger he had come with an escort of armed and faithful satellites. The courtesan realized, on seeing him, that there was trouble in the making; and when Capece, seizing her with one hand, forced her to follow him, she had not the courage to resist. Gian Ludovico, who had no intention whatever of allowing his prey to be snatched from him, sprang to his feet. Swords were bared, and even the cardinal drew his blade in the lady's defence. She, profiting by the confusion, managed to escape into the street. Marcello flew after her, more excited than ever, and the cardinal, Gian Ludovico, and the rest rushed out of doors after him, to dispute possession of the lady. But in the street below the night was so dark that it was hopeless to attempt pursuit, so the host and his guests returned empty-handed to the house. It seems that three of the party, and among them the cardinal, wishing to console themselves for the missing lady, went into a neighbouring house and carried off two courtesans of lesser degree who were accustomed to retail their charms to all comers.

It was three days before the Pope had news of the affair. Austere in the extreme, and fiery in character, he was absolutely infuriated. He sent for his nephews—that is, for Cardinal Carlo and the Duca di Paliano—and upbraided them violently for having kept the matter from him. And then, since his wrath was by no means exhausted, he assembled the Sacred College; and in solemn session, in a voice tremulous not with age but with anger, he again fell upon Il Montino, who “appearing in public life clad in secular garments with a bared sword, had exposed his life and honour to such unworthy risk for the sake of a vile and shameless prostitute”. He even gave the cardinal to understand that he had been considering whether he should strip him of his purple.

Fortunately for Il Montino, a tempest of far greater severity burst a few days later over the heads of the same Papal nephew. In this sudden and violent thunderstorm, making himself as unobtrusive as possible, he quietly and quickly slipped away. But not so Martuccia! Paul IV found himself confronted by ignominy and intrigue on an unsuspected scale. And, first of all, there were any number of women in the business; and when the bishop of Osimo came before him, whom he knew to be “the minister to the carnal pleasures and the frailties” of his nephew the cardinal, he covered him with contumely and then and there expelled him from the Vatican. But besides the courtesans

of every quality and the epicene of all ages, who served to provide for his nephew's secret pleasures, the dark and devious political machinations which had been devised to uphold the power of the family had finally surrounded the Holy See with an atmosphere charged with hostility and a dangerous tension.

Only a few days before this the Pope had to listen to a number of serious revelations from the Duc de Guise, and soon after the ugly scene of which Martuccia had been the heroine the Florentine envoy, having made his way almost furtively into the Vatican, had added to the number of these unpleasant revelations. Amidst all these unexpected news an obscure remark of Cardinal Pacheco's suddenly assumed a meaning. In the session of the Sacred College which was convoked in connection with the scandalous adventure of Il Montino, the Pope had angrily shouted "Reform! Reform!" and Pacheco had coolly replied: "Holy Father, the reformation must begin with ourselves." The festering trouble was therefore in his own household; or here, at all events, the lancet must first be applied.

Paul IV, his eyes being suddenly opened, summoned his nephews, to whom he had given so much power, and, once more reviewing their offences, he deprived them of all their offices and expelled them from Rome. Cardinal Carlo was confined to Marino; the Duca di Paliano retired to his castle

and was deprived of the rank of general of the Holy Roman Church and commander-in-chief of the pontifical galleys—appointments which brought him 75,000 scudi a year; while the third nephew, the Conte di Montebello, shut himself up in his own fief. Only one of the cardinals, Alessandro Farnese, the son of Pier Luigi and the nephew of Paul III, ventured to raise his voice timidly above the storm, to beg the Pope to have mercy on the three, and above all on Cardinal Carlo. But the Pope sharply interrupted him: "If Paul III had made such examples your father would not have been dragged through the streets by the people of Piacenza and given to the dogs for food."

Alas, even by Paul IV the example was made too late! The statue then erected in Campidoglio by the people of Rome in gratitude for the "fortunate" expulsion of his nephews was a poor and transient compensation.

Paul IV died, a few months later, at the age of eighty-nine. Before he found peace in the tomb his life was once more embittered by a still graver family scandal, which cast a shadow over the whole Papal Court.

Marcello Capece, who, as we have seen, had been in Martuccia's company on New Year's Eve, followed his lord and kinsman, the Duca di Paliano, into exile. The duke had established himself in the Castello di Soriano, not far from Rome; but he

was now required to confine himself to the Castello di Paliano, which his duchess, Violante Garlonia, had chosen for her own residence.

Violante was none too fond of her husband; indeed, she cherished a lasting though concealed resentment against him, in respect of the humiliations which he had frequently inflicted on her, since "he had not abstained from many times taking concubines into her own bed". Whether love or sensuality or revenge was her motive, it was not long before she had balanced the account. The continued presence of Marcello in this lonely castle could not but disturb her, all the more as the young and handsome cavalier possessed insinuating manners which might have led a lady who had less cause for resentment against an unfaithful husband to stray from the narrow path.

According to some, the first clandestine relations between the two had occurred in Rome. At all events, "whether this passion had its beginning then or was of long standing, it did not reveal itself until the solitude of the duchess and the absence of the husband, together with the opportunities of open speech, gave him a better hope of subduing her constancy". It is certain that "she, finally conquered by her own and this other's frailty", did not turn a deaf ear to her "lover's prayers".

A vague suspicion may one day have occurred to one of the duchess's retinue; at all events, the lovers, perhaps because they were careless of precaution,

A TRAGIC PASSION

or perhaps because they were closely watched, “being discovered by Diana Brancaccio, the duchess’s favourite lady, were caught together”. And to remove any shadow of doubt from the reader’s mind, the diarist scrupulously adds that they were “caught in actions very near to the forbidden”; almost, that is, *in flagrante delicto*.

Here, in a world of hot-blooded Neapolitans, was matter to shake the heavens; and sure enough, the storm soon broke over the guilty pair. Marcello was taken to Soriano, where the duke threw him into a secret dungeon; Violante, well guarded, remained at Paliano.

It seems that the duke, when his first outburst of anger had evaporated, had taken counsel with himself, so far as his wounded affection and vanity would permit him. It was obvious that if he were to publish his wife’s offence he himself, a noted seducer of women, would cut but a sorry figure. Hence he hesitated, hoping that matters might be adjusted for the time being, although perfectly ready, at an opportune moment, to revenge himself for the adultery. He produced two somewhat superficial arguments: the first, intended for the outer world, was that Marcello Capece had been thrown into prison because he had tried to poison him “with some toads which he had been observed to buy some months before at a great price”; the second, which was for his own relations, was that Violante was pregnant.

In any event, whether he had poisoned the duke or seduced the duchess, Marcello's days were numbered. The duke had him brought into his presence, and called in two other persons to form a tribunal. Of these two judges one was the Conte d'Alife, Violante's brother, and the second was Giovanni Anso Toraldo. Before them appeared Diana Brancaccio, who had revealed the intrigue; and then the evidence of the ladies-in-waiting of the duke's mother was heard. Marcello, who had at first denied his relations with the duchess, yielded to the persuasions of the rack, and confessed. In his agony and exhaustion he wrote his confession and his own condemnation: "Yes, I am the betrayer of my lord! Yes, I have deprived him of his honour!" The duke, having read the document, drew his dagger and plunged it several times, with furious violence, into Marcello's breast (this was on the night of the 26th of July, 1559). It is even said that before plunging the dagger into Marcello's heart he flung himself upon his victim, scratching and repeatedly biting his face. Then, seeing his enemy at his feet, he fell with fury upon the corpse, stabbing it again and again.

There remained the duchess. Even Paul IV, taking the part of his nephew for once, is said to have asked, when he heard of Capece's death: "And what has been done with Violante?"

Violante, be sure, was having no easy time. She saw, with terror, that the hand of death was

preparing to seize upon her. She looked around her for some means of escape, but there was none: what could she do? There was only one means of escaping her imminent fate, and that was to throw her husband overboard: she therefore resolved upon this extreme course. So at least it was said; the story goes that by means of a trusted agent she succeeded in opening negotiations with Prince Marcantonio Colonna, who had been despoiled of all his possessions by the Pope and his nephews: if Marcantonio could find some means of liberating her she would surrender the duke to him, living or dead. So the rumour ran, and the duke attached some importance to it; he even gave out a variant of the story, in which it was not his wife but Marcantonio who first devised the criminal scheme, and communicated it, by means of a pretended friar, to the imprisoned duchess.

Here were delays, hesitations, and complications which did not please the duke's kinsfolk, but increased their irritation. And the duke, as though this ill-humour did not concern him, once more gave out that the duchess was pregnant; first let the child that was quickening in her womb see the light; then justice should be done. The women of his house, and especially his mother, protested, and since he was or pretended to be somewhat in doubt as to the true paternity of the child, they proved to him, "computing the time he had been apart from Violante, and the signs of the beginning and the

progress of the pregnancy", that the child could not possibly be his, but was the fruit of the duchess's secret meetings with Marcello. After the women, it was the turn of the men to beg him to move in the matter; whether the child was his or not, the duchess ought to suffer the same fate as the other offender. The honour of the family demanded it; indeed, the honour of two families. Violante's own brother insisted that the stain should be washed away immediately. A peremptory admonition from Cardinal Carlo, written by the hand of Silvio Gozzini, helped the duke finally to make up his mind: "Let him satisfy honour, or otherwise he will no longer be regarded as a brother." This would have meant ruin complete and final.

Without further possibility of choice, and without longer hesitation, Giovanni Carafa, who in spite of everything may still have loved his wife, gave orders that the hand of penal justice should fall upon the guilty woman. The executioner—for so the traditions of the age and of the country demanded—must be chosen from his own family.

The Conte d'Alife, Violante's brother, hastened accordingly to present himself at the Castello di Paliano, together with his uncle, Leonardo Cardine.

When the two men came into their victim's presence, they told her, without much preamble, that she must prepare herself to die.

"Is it the duke's order?" she asked, in a voice choking with emotion and dismay.

"Yes!" And they made her read the order.

The prospect of immediate death was terrifying to her. Desperately she snatched at the only means that might have delayed it for a time, in the hope that help might somehow come to her from God or man: she implored for mercy on the child within her womb. Let them not slay the innocent life within her; though perhaps her own death might be just, the taking of this other life would be a crime which would find no mercy in the other world. The two made no reply, but proceeded to prepare the fatal cord.

"Brother, my brother, why do you wish suddenly to kill me?"

"We are compelled by our honour . . ."

Resigned to her fate, she begged for the services of a priest, wishing to confess before ascending to the supreme tribunal. A monk was brought in, and the duchess, falling on her knees, began her confession. At a certain moment, since the confession was prolonged, Leonardo said brusquely to his nephew "that that which had to be done had better be done quickly, as he had to go on to Rome".

Violante hesitated for a moment; then she rose to her feet.

"Sit on your bed!" the executioners told her.

Pale, and trembling from head to foot, she obeyed; then, taking a crucifix in her hands, she waited.

The brother, holding a cord in his right hand, with his left hand placed a handkerchief over her face, "and turned away his eyes that he might not see"; then "the said count (it is the monk who is telling the story) placed the said cord round her neck; and because it was too long he took it from her neck and went out of the room; she, in the meantime taking the handkerchief from her eyes, saying, *what is it that is being done?* and the count replied to her that the cord was not suitable, that it was too long, and that he wished to shorten it, so that she should not be long in dying".

At last all was ready. Leonardo signed to his nephew to stop discussing the matter, and taking the woman's legs between his knees, he held them firmly. The count passed the cord round his sister's neck, and pulled hard at the two ends. Violante made one last vain effort to struggle against her fate: "she struggled with her legs, with her arms, and with all her body; but she could not move, because Don Leonardo was holding her; and so they strangled her" (August 29th, 1559).

By the time Violante had been strangled by her brother and her uncle in the Castello di Paliano, Paul IV had already been dead some days. There was no need of this fresh family tragedy to set Rome ablaze with hatred of the Carafas. Some proposed to send out those who would kill the

cardinal and the duke; but it was quite possible to strike at them, and to seize their possessions, without leaving Rome for their remote and solitary strongholds.

At first the people vented their rage on the Inquisition, which Paul IV had made as powerful as it was detested. An attack was made on the headquarters of the Holy Office; the archives were discovered and collected, and a great bonfire was made of them in the public street. Then the crowd hastened to the prisons, where more than four hundred persons were awaiting sentence for heresy; and all these were set free. But the largest and most violent crowd made its way to the church and convent of Santa Maria sopra Minerva: there "they sought to set fire to the monastery and to throw the friars from the windows; and they would have done so if Signor Giuliano Cesarini had not intervened". Lastly, as though at a common summons, they all invaded Campidoglio, where they broke up the marble statue of the Pope which the same people had raised in his honour only a few months earlier, in their gratitude for the expulsion of his nephews from Rome.

The statue was dragged from its pedestal, and the head was clubbed until it broke from the shoulders. On this poor mutilated head, surmounted by the tiara, a Jew, in derision and revenge, placed a yellow beretta, the distinctive sign which Paul IV had compelled the Jews to wear, so that they should

instantly be recognized in the midst of Christians. The mob, on seeing the head crowned with the humiliating beretta, burst into renewed laughter and showered fresh insults on the memory of the pontiff. In the end the head was rolled down from Campidoglio and kicked along the street, being finally thrown into the Tiber. A sorry scene; a chronicler who was present added that it was accompanied "by a concourse of voices, oaths, and maledictions, and with such injury and scorn, that greater could not have been uttered against some impious heresiarch or other enemy of the church of God and of Rome".

This was too much, even for those days. The cardinals, who were assembled in conclave, admonished the people of Rome to cease their rioting instantly unless they wished to expose themselves to the severest rigour of the law. Gradually the city quieted down. The election of the new pontiff was acclaimed, as usual, with joy. It was hoped that he would do something tangible against the Carafas; but as the weeks passed the people resigned themselves even to being deprived of the opportunity of sacking their houses. Things became so quiet that six or seven months after the tragic deaths of Marcello and Violante, the Duca di Paliano and his brother, Cardinal Carlo, had returned to Rome, and were spending their nights agreeably "with music and dancing and light women".

But this was a peace of the surface; and under

the surface the ground was being mined beneath their feet; and when, after an interval of silent and secret labour, it was possible to obtain, from all directions, and for every head of the arraignment, a sufficient quantity of evidence and a sufficient number of witnesses disposed to speak plainly—or rather, disposed to say what they were expected to say—the trial of the nephews of the late Pope was opened. The advocate fiscal, Alessandro Paltronieri, detailed the separate charges against each of the accused: almost all of which were punishable with death.

The trial, especially in respect of Cardinal Carlo, dealt with political crimes and intrigues which had no connection with our tragedy. To tell the truth, Paul IV had already acquitted him of the misdeeds which he had committed before he was invested with the purple; and the fact that these offences were revived in cold blood, after they had been formally expunged by the pontiff, said something—and indeed a good deal—as to the animosity of the advocate fiscal; or to be more precise, of the Vatican. Here we will do no more than allude to them; nor need we linger over the other accusations of a political character. In these likewise there was plenty of justification for condemning the Cardinal to death. But in addition to these political offences he was involved in the killing of Marcello and Violante, and especially in the assassination of the latter, having required his brother to execute justice

in defence of the family honour, threatening, if he failed to do so, to deprive him of all material and moral support.

Without a doubt the person most immediately guilty in these two crimes was the Duca di Paliano, and next to him the actual executioners, the brother and uncle of the murdered duchess, the Conte d'Alife and Don Leonardo di Cardine. The advocate fiscal summed up the *qualitates aggravantes* in respect of the first named as follows :

1.—That Marcello had not been taken in the act, nor in such manner that he could be suspected of adultery.

2.—That the duke, without hesitation or proof, without any trial, and without collecting written evidence, ordered torture to be applied to two alleged witnesses, besides Marcello, to whom he applied torture on several occasions and in an inhuman manner.

3.—That in consequence of such applications, undeserved and unjust, made by express order of the Duke, the latter succeeded in extorting from Marcello the alleged confession of adultery, a confession not truthful and spontaneous, but extorted by violence.

4.—That the Duke, the alleged confession of his guilt having been extorted from Marcello, flung himself upon the latter, biting him ferociously on the face until he tore away pieces of flesh.

5.—That he refused Marcello the Sacraments, which he asked to receive before dying.

6.—That when Marcello was dead he pierced the corpse again with twenty-six dagger strokes, there-after ordering that it should be thrown into a latrine and covered with unclean matter.

With regard to the killing of the duchess, the advocate fiscal, in addition to four *qualitates aggravantes* in respect of the lack of a true trial, the absence of sworn evidence, etc., brought forward a fifth accusation :

“—That the Duke did not admonish the assassins to cut open the womb of the victim in order to bring to light the innocent creature therein, and save its soul by the Sacrament of Baptism.”

This was not only infanticide, but an act of sacrilege of a most serious nature.

The trial was not protracted; all the accused, with the possible exception of the cardinal, had been subjected to the torture. Even the witnesses cited in their defence were generously given a taste of the rack. The intention was to show that Marcello and Violante had not been mutually intimate, and hence that their death, under the false accusation of adultery, was unjust and criminal even apart from the mode of procedure. One witness, who had the simplicity to attempt to give evidence as to the

actual existence of intimate relations, was duly racked; first, however, since he seemed rather delicate, the executioner was sent for, who, having glanced at the victim, gave it as his opinion that he could be tortured—*quod poterat torqueri*; having been racked, he adhered to what he had said; but then, at the end of his endurance, he said that there had never been any relations of any kind between the two persons in question.

When the duke, with fetters on his ankles, was introduced into the room where the trial was proceeding, and saw under the ceiling the pulleys from which the sinister cords were hanging, he made a gesture of revolt and indignation.

“A nephew of the Pope, a General of the Holy Church, a Duke, to the torture?”

“That is your lordship’s doing (replied the advocate fiscal unctuously); for since nothing is required from you but the truth, by denying it you cause yourself and us this distress.”

The distress of the advocate fiscal and of the Pope was not long protracted, since all parties were in a hurry to have the Carafa question settled and buried out of sight.

On the 3rd of March, 1561, Pius IV, the cardinals being assembled in consistorium, caused the findings of the trial to be read. The session lasted eight hours, and in the end the conclusions of Paltronieri were approved: all the accused were sentenced to death. Once again Cardinal Farnese begged for

mercy for Cardinal Carlo, imploring the Pope that the Sacred College might not be fated to see yet another of its members perish at the hands of the executioner, as had happened after the murder of Alfonso Petrucci under Leo X. No one supported his appeal, and in a glacial silence the Pope gave orders that the sentence should be executed.

Carlo Carafa, who was imprisoned in Castel Sant' Angelo, confessed and communicated; he then expressed the desire that he might be permitted to wear the purple. His prayer was not granted; but as a Prince of the Church he was spared the disgrace of decapitation. The executioner, passing a cord round his neck, strangled him.

In the dungeons of the Tor di Nona, where the Duca di Paliano, the Conte d'Alife, and Leonardo di Cardine were imprisoned, a moving scene was enacted. The duke, crucifix in hand, exhorted and encouraged his two companions. He had undergone a profound change of heart; the arrogant, dissolute, mocking, and cynical cavalier was transformed, by the imminence of death, into a totally different man, who displayed a religious fervour so intense, a resignation so serene, and a piety so sincere that the friars, and even the jailers, were moved to tears. An hour before the executioner arrived to carry out the sentence of the Sacred College, he asked that he might be given a little paper, as he wished to send his last words of counsel to his son.

“DEAR, LOVED AND BLESSED SON,

“May our glorious God grant you His grace and those sacred blessings which His Majesty alone can bestow upon His elect; ever praised be the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. These I believe will be the last letters, words, and admonitions which I shall be able to give you in this life. I pray the Lord that they may be such as a good father owes to an only and a beloved son.

“The first, and most necessary, seems to me to be, that I should remind you that in all your actions and in the affections of your heart you should be and show yourself a good and true servant of God; loving His Divine Majesty far above yourself, and putting aside your own satisfactions, desires, and wishes, of whatever kind, even though they promise you greatness and honour and felicity in this world; in order that you may not offend your Creator and Redeemer; and with this good and necessary beginning, it will follow that you will perform all the rest well and honourably. And since, after God, it is necessary to be faithful to the Prince whom He has set over you, you will serve his Majesty of the Catholic Realm, doing all that is incumbent upon a good and honourable Christian and knight.

“Flee sin, because it is the parent of death, and be willing to die rather than to offend your soul; be the enemy of the vices; delight in good and virtuous companions; confess yourself often; frequent

the most Holy Sacraments, which are the true medicine of the soul, and those which effectually destroy sin and make man grateful to God; be pitiful to the afflictions of others; exert yourself in pious works, and as far as you can avoid idleness, yet do not apply yourself to unseemly exercises; constrain yourself to acquire something of letters, which are very necessary to a true gentleman, and especially to one who is a lord and governor of vassals, and also in order that you may enjoy the pleasant fruits of Holy Scripture, the which are most excellent for the soul and body; and when you taste these you will be able to disdain the things of this lamentable world, and find not a little consolation in this present life.

“I desire that you should think like a grown person in this matter of my death, and that you will not behave like a child, but like a sensible man, and will not regard what the flesh says to you, nor your affection for your father, nor the tittle-tattle of the world; and that you will rather resolve and consider that whatever happens, all is by the will of the great God, Who rules the universe with infinite wisdom. And to me it appears certain that He is using me with the greatest mercy in taking me sooner in this manner than in any other more ordinary; and I thank Him for this continually, and so should you do. It pleases Him to make me change this life for the other, eternal life, and to leave this false and deceitful world. Do not yourself

be in anywise troubled by what may be said or written or reported: say rather to everyone: my father is dead because the blessed God has vouchsafed him very great favour, and I hope that He has saved him and given him another and better life; and with this I die, and you have to live, nor shall you ever give any explanation.

"It seems to me necessary that you should marry honourably and take a wife. And then you will procure a marriage for your sister, and with Paola do what God inspires you to do, for I recommend both of them to you. I beg you earnestly to satisfy any who ought to have received anything from me in respect of their services; in this appease my mind and conscience. As for your vassals, love and honour and cherish them, and do not ever touch the honour of their ladies, and be chaste and continent as far as you can, which is a great virtue and very grateful to God.

"I should have many other particular things to say; I have not the time, and I am going to death, and also to life. Be a good servant of God: He will guide, help, and counsel you; and be you blest with that blessing with which Isaac blessed his beloved Jacob, and may your years be long and fortunate in the fear of God.

"The last day of this deceitful life, which is the 5th of March, 1561, at five in the afternoon.

"Your father, the *Duca di Paliano*."

An hour later the Duca di Paliano, the Conte d'Alife, and Don Leonardo Cardine had been decapitated.

Their bodies, together with that of Cardinal Carlo, were immediately hoisted up and exposed to the public, at one end of the bridge of Sant' Angelo.

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Six persons had now met their deaths in this affair, including Marcello and Violante.

But the unhappy company was not yet complete.

There was still one man left on the stage, and for him, too, Fate was whetting the axe.

Pius V desired that the trial should be revised. To revise it meant more particularly to cancel the imputation of crime. Paltronieri, the last of the *dramatis personae*, would therefore be in danger of ending his life at the hands of the headsman. And, indeed, as in the old tragedies, the curtain falls because no one is left on the stage to continue the performance.

With the advocate fiscal beheaded and the memory of the Carafas rehabilitated; with their possessions restored to their heirs, and the purple to the tomb of Cardinal Carlo, and with the vestments of a Prince of the Church all the orders and honourable distinctions which had been his in the days of his power and splendour, the sombre tragedy had reached its close.

A tragedy still obscure, veiled in shadow and

dense with mystery. Even to-day, when the tragic phantasmagoria is over, the spectator is left unsatisfied and doubtful. There are too many hazy passages between the scenes, with sudden digressions, and changes of lighting, and clashes of opposing opinion. No sooner does one of the characters make his appearance than he is drawn into the obscure and sanguinary atmosphere of the drama.

Not only has the season of pomp and power enjoyed by the Carafas reached its bloody close, but the long period of Papal nepotism is ended. The pontiff's nephews will still take their ease in the shadow of the Papal throne, enjoying all the material and moral advantages to be derived from their position; but none of them will henceforth seek to lay violent hands on the political order of Italy, or, bold in his impunity, commit, without much hazard, the blackest of crimes.

*AN ADVENTURESS
ON THE THRONE*

la pessima Bianca.

FERDINANDO I

AN ADVENTURESS ON THE THRONE

AT fourteen or fifteen years of age Bianca Capello displayed, besides the promise of magnificent beauty, an imagination so restless and an activity so audacious as to suggest, and almost more than suggest, a subtle vein of amorality. The slightest breeze was enough to send her gliding down the most perilous declivities; and when the first impulse reached her from the outer world she offered it no resistance, but abandoned herself to it with her eyes closed, not ignorant but rather indifferent, and it may be curious also, as to what awaited her.

It was enough that a youth to whom rumour gave a certain fame as a conqueror of hearts should surround her with his somewhat assiduous attentions, and at once her imagination and her blood won the upper hand.

One night, when darkness had fallen on the Grand Canal, and Venice lay slumbering in her mantle of dreams and moonlit waters, she furtively slipped out of her father's palace, and did not return until the dawn was near. On returning to her room she shed no tears over what she had lost; but again, when darkness had fallen, a swift and eager girl sought her lover's nest. No Leander came seeking his Hero, but Hero set forth to appease if not to rekindle her fever in the arms of her lover.

Our Leander bore the modest appellation of Piero Bonaventuri.

Twenty-four years of age, he had little money and even fewer scruples. Like a good bank clerk, he had scented a lucrative affair in this compliant and passionate daughter of patricians. Skilfully and gracefully enough, he set about spreading the net which was to take her captive. Lest the distance between them should seem too great, he told her casually, at the outset, that he was a nephew, and indeed the favourite nephew, of the wealthy Florentine Salviati, whose bank, in which he was actually employed, but in a subordinate position, was situated exactly opposite her father's palazzo. Obsessed by her passion, Bianca paid little attention to his statement; and it seemed to him that a subject so delicate had better be avoided in future. But when one day she had to tell him that a child was quickening within her he felt that he could no longer maintain his little deception, and confessed precisely who he was.

The girl, who knew her father only too well (her mother had long been dead, and her step-mother had never taken any interest in her), was for a moment bewildered and dismayed. As the nephew of a Salviati Piero might indeed have expected a storm to break over his head, but sooner or later the surly Bartolomeo would have acquiesced in his daughter's feat; but being poor as a church mouse, he had not only brought disgrace upon a

noble house, but had made it ridiculous. For him, then, the dungeon, and for her, the tomb of the cloister.

The vision of the convent must have made the girl shudder with horror. She loved life far too well to resign herself to leave it; and since the adventure had run more than half its course she had better pursue it to the end, and then surrender herself to the will or caprice of destiny. Flight was her only salvation; far from the wrath of her people, beyond the reach of the Serenissima, she could surely find, in some corner of the world, a safe and quiet place of refuge.

But how could she set out, with only her two feet to carry her, with no wealth but the fruit of their mutual passion?—Either of her own accord, or on the suggestion of her Leander, the fair Hero, precocious in all things, ransacked her father's coffers one night, and carried off jewels to the value of 20,000 scudi. Notwithstanding the weight of the treasure, the lovers felt lighter for its possession, and promptly left Venice for Florence, where a priest consecrated their union, whose fruit was now nearing maturity.

In the modest Florentine dwelling of Piero's parents Bianca heard the echoes of the outcry made in Venice when her flight and her theft were discovered. All her paternal and maternal kinsfolk (and her parents were related to the most powerful families of Venice: the Grimani and the Morosini)

were eager for revenge, so that the Council of Ten, by an ordinance of the 4th of December, 1563, five days after the lovers' clandestine departure, set upon their heads a reward of a thousand ducats, to be paid to whomsoever should deliver them, alive or dead, in the territory of San Marco; and Bartolomeo Capello, tramping the empty chambers of his palace, crimson with shame and fury, was willing to double the reward. In the meantime, since he could not lay hands on the infamous pair, Bartolomeo demanded that an uncle of Piero's, who was suspected of having favoured the intrigue, should be thrown into prison, where he was presently followed by a gondolier's wife, an unfortunate accomplice of the lovers.

Bianca, now that she was out of danger, was not greatly alarmed, nor was she greatly affected when Piero's uncle died miserably in prison, of typhus, which had broken out there. For that matter, she had something else to occupy her, for the child which she had felt quickening in her womb would soon see the light; and one night the tiny Pellegrina, whose name was almost like a symbol of her troubled and wandering life, filled the little house with her cries.

But how could she go on living here, in circumstances that almost savoured of poverty? Bianca was homesick, not so much for her father as for the comfort in which her girlhood had been passed. Florence, gay though it was, and fragrant with the

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winds that blew from the blossoming hills, had never seemed to her so beautiful as Venice. Why not open the door of her cage, and fly, intoxicated with her liberty, into the blue distance? She did contrive to slip out of it; but hardly was this songless cage-bird at liberty than it assumed the form and plumage of a splendid bird of prey. The courtesan already latent in her at the age of fifteen now indulged her instincts to the full, and displayed all the witchcraft of her art.

How many flights did Bianca make before she could reach an exalted nest where she was sheltered from the veering winds and storms? A few, say some; none, according to others; who hold that she flew straight to this secure and splendid refuge. Now the cold narrative of the diarist gives place to the picturesque and fanciful invention of the novelist.

The novelist tells us how Bianca one day dropped a rose from her window as Francesc de' Medici was riding by (the son of the Grand Duke Cosimo I was then in his twenty-third year), and how, as the young prince raised his eyes, he beheld an indistinct vision of a beautiful young woman, lovely as a dream; how the Contessa or Marchesa di Mondragone, having accepted the office of intermediary, invited Bianca to one of her villas, where she removed some of her garments and covered her with necklaces and pearls; how Francesco unexpectedly entered the room where Bianca had been left for a moment alone with her own enchanting

some Cassandra so persistently that she finally yielded. The brothers, jealous of their own honour, proud and vindictive, intervened once more in their sister's affairs; and as the man stood rather near the Grand Duke, they first made remonstrances to him. The Grand Duke spoke to Bianca, and Bianca called her husband to order, since his conduct might compromise his position, if not her own destiny. But Piero, whose blood was afire with his passion for the woman, and whose desire to possess her was only whetted by opposition, laughed at his wife derisively. Bianca raised her voice: "Be silent! (she shouted in her husband's face) if you don't want to split your heart on the golden horn which you have set on my forehead!" The Grand Duke, who was listening behind a secret door, understood that Piero might become dangerous, and to the Ricci, who had returned to tell him that they were now decided to go to any lengths: "Gentlemen (he said), do what you will; I do not wish to know anything."

Next morning, in one of the streets of Florence, a human body outstretched on the ground attracted the attention of the first passers-by; it was the corpse of Bonaventuri, pierced by more than twenty dagger-strokes. Almost at the same hour another body, likewise pierced by dagger-strokes, was found in the bedroom of a patrician house: it was that of Cassandra Bongianni.

Once rid of her husband, Bianca began to think

how she could bind the Grand Duke Francesco to herself with more lasting and more visible chains. Now she was no longer at the mercy of chance; now the future was opening up to her ambition and her pride a vast field of power and splendour.

Francesco had only daughters by his wife, Giovanna. Why should she not herself bear the heir to the crown? It was true that Pellegrina was her only child, and that in spite of her abundant sacrifices to the goddess of love, in spite of frequent medical consultations and many aphrodisiacal draughts, no new germ of life had ever quickened within her. But she was too bold and cunning to shirk the adventure.

One evening, joyfully, and perhaps with a blush on her cheeks, she confided to Francesco that something unexpected was stirring within her. Touched and exultant, he surrounded his mistress with kindly attentions, and certain physicians were instructed to offer their services. As time went on her figure grew fuller, and she gradually fell a prey to undefined pains and sudden languors.

One afternoon of August 1576 heartrending groans, followed by piercing shrieks, were heard from her room. All hurried thither. Bianca, writhing in convulsions on the floor, was lifted and carried to her bed, and Francesco soon arrived. The attacks of pain returned; then they grew slighter, and passed off; and with every fresh attack her helpers flocked around her.

That night there was a brief return of pain, followed by a long spell of comparative ease. Late in the night Bianca asked Francesco and the physicians to withdraw, assuring them that the event was not imminent, and that they might all take a few hours' rest. They left her alone with her faithful maid, Giovanna Conti. And then, silently, a woman entered the room, placed on the bed an infant, wrapped in a bundle, and went as quickly as she had come. Shortly afterwards the silence of the night was broken by piercing shrieks. The physicians, Francesco, and the waiting-woman hastily threw on their clothes, but when they came to the threshold of Bianca's room they were greeted by the cries of an infant.

The whole scene was acted in such a masterly fashion, and the accessories were provided with such completeness (the bundle, besides the infant, containing the indispensable *sequelæ* of parturition), that no one entertained the slightest suspicion.

When Francesco realized that the new-born infant was a boy he could not contain himself for joy. Legitimate or not, henceforth there was an heir. The child was called Antonio, since the mother regarded it as a favour granted by that saint. The father began to lavish gifts upon it.

The unexpected birth of a probable heir to the Crown of Tuscany cannot have been pleasing to the poor Archduchess Giovanna, whose life had become more lonely and melancholy than ever.

ANCISCVS MED. FLOR. ET SENAR. PRINC



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FRANCESCO I DE' MEDICI
(Angiolo Bronzino)

No longer able to endure her position, she confided to her Imperial brother, as her last consolation, the humiliations which had secretly tortured her for so many years. The Emperor, furiously angry, swore that the Medici should pay dearly for the affront put upon her.

Giovanna, plucking up her courage a little, no longer regarded her rival with such submissiveness. One day, meeting her on the Ponte Santa Trinita, she even dared to order her retinue to throw her into the Arno. Fortunately for Bianca, the Conte Eliodoro Castelli was standing at Giovanna's side, and he persuaded his pious mistress of the extreme gravity of her proposal.

But the skies were suddenly dark and full of menace, not only for Bianca, but also for the Grand Duke. A wind was blowing from Austria that presaged a tempest.

Of her own accord, or perforce, the lovely favourite left Florence for Bologna. There, cast down by her sudden change of fortune, she thought of bidding farewell to the world and entering a convent. In a few days, however, she abandoned the idea; she still had too much confidence in her own beauty and her own cunning to believe that she was at an end of all her resources. To aggravate her situation still farther, the news reached her that Giovanna had borne the Grand Duke a son; a delicate child, it was true, but still the lawful heir. Farewell to her dreams of power and splen-

dour! What use to her henceforth was this small intruder, this Don Antonio, for whom more than one person had already died a mysterious death?

After a time her courage revived. At thirty she was in the superb summer of her charms; once more she might seek to grasp the skirts of the fickle goddess. Nor did her hand, swift and sure, miss its stroke.

Returning to Florence, she soon had the Grand Duke again at her feet, more passionately devoted than ever. On the following day Giovanna met her rival in the court. Bianca's pride in her rapid reconquest of Francesco had given her a subtle air of impertinence. As Giovanna passed her husband's mistress she could not contain herself, and whispered, though preserving a calm and serene countenance: "You are but a base creature: the justice of God will avenge me."

It would seem, if we are to believe certain of the chroniclers, that so far from the heavenly vengeance falling on Bianca, an earthly vengeance descended on Giovanna, for she died not long afterwards, it was said of poison (April 1578). But whether she was the victim of poison, or whether, as other historians say, she succumbed to the pains of parturition, the unhappy Archduchess left the way clear for the two lovers. In her last agony she sent for her unfaithful husband, and said, in a voice that was almost inaudible: "I commend my sons to you, and I recommend you to live a more

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Christian life than you have done hitherto, and remember always that I have been your only wife before God and men, and that I have loved you tenderly."

Francesco cannot have been greatly moved, since even before the death-struggle was over he was proclaiming throughout the city that Bianca would presently share the Grand Ducal bed and throne.

She did indeed promptly ascend the throne, and other high honours were conferred upon her.

But she had to face two serious obstacles. One was the silent enmity of Cardinal Ferdinando, her brother-in-law; the other the ugly stain of the penal ordinance of the Council of Ten. First of all she must so deal with the matter that the shame of her flight, and still worse, her robbery of her father, should be expunged from the judicial archives of the Serenissima; and then she must contrive that her husband's brother should become, if not her ally, at least indifferent, and not an enemy.

The cardinal was gradually placated with large donations. Generous and extravagant, always short of money, he readily accepted the considerable sums which his brother, at Bianca's suggestion, bestowed on him at opportune moments; but at heart, notwithstanding, he remained Bianca's enemy.

He was not made to be a cardinal, and he had dreams of one day succeeding his brother on the

throne of Tuscany. The little Don Filippo, the son of the Grand Duke and the poor Giovanna, was so delicate that he had little hold on life; there was no hope of his future succession. As for the intruder, Don Antonio, furtively introduced one night into the Medici palace, the cardinal did not take him into account. From the very first he had heard rumours that spoke more or less plainly of fraud; then he had undertaken a prolonged inquiry, with all possible caution, so that he should not arouse suspicion; and finally, when he knew the truth, he allowed not a word to escape him, but wrote everything down and kept it in reserve for a more favourable occasion. He was about to call check to Bianca when she, by a sudden and surprising stroke, frustrated all his manœuvres. The cardinal, his attempt having failed, withdrew prudently into the shade.

Bianca and Francesco had been secretly married two months after Giovanna's death. Now the marriage must be made public and consecrated with due solemnity. Bianca suggested that the Grand Duke should announce it to the Venetian Senate, and at the same time declare himself a faithful son of Venice; and she in exchange would receive the august title of "Daughter of the Serenissima".

Francesco accordingly wrote to the Senate of Venice to this effect; and the Senate hastened to reply:

“It having pleased the Grand Duke of Tuscany to select for his wife the lady Bianca Capello, a gentlewoman of a most noble house of this city, adorned with those most noble and most singular qualities which have made her most worthy of any fortune, and seeing that a fitting sign should be given of the very great satisfaction which our Republic has received from this event, and in response to the esteem in which the Grand Duke has shown that he holds us by this his important and most prudent resolution, it is enacted that the above-mentioned most illustrious and most excellent lady Bianca Capello, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, is by the authority of this Senate created and declared a true and particular Daughter of the Republic.”

So that all these superlatives might in some degree correspond with the truth, or at least with the declarations made in this letter, the Senate gave orders that the legal documents referring to Bianca Capello and Piero Bonaventuri should be burned. Political expediency is always capable of defiling the purest and cleansing the foulest.

Bianca, though familiar with such matters, must have smiled to herself at the inflated and fatuous solemnity of human laws. What had she done, after all, but traffic in her own body, first to satisfy her thirst for love and then to gratify her ambitions? And what was Venice doing, what were her kinsfolk now doing, harsh and ferocious though the

latter had once shown themselves, but deriving, at second hand, from this body of hers, as much political or personal profit as they could? The infamous names they had showered upon her were forgotten, and the lips which had formerly uttered nothing but insults were now breathing the most honeyed praises, of whose mendacious tone and false emphasis she was perfectly conscious. Yesterday a thief and prostitute, to-day she was the "true and particular daughter of San Marco"; but had there been any change in her? Were not "the most noble and most singular qualities which had made her most worthy of any fortune" simply those of the courtesan? Was it not only as a courtesan that she had now attained so splendid a height and would now see many a stately and solemn backbone bending itself before her?

She had no leisure now to lose herself in meditation, for banquets and solemn ceremonies followed one another in quick succession. No sooner had the two letters been exchanged than Venice sent a pompous embassy to consecrate her "Daughter of the Republic"; and the solemn rite was performed on the 12th of October, 1579, in the cathedral of Florence, the golden cap of the Doges being placed on her head. This was more than a reconquest; it was an apotheosis.

Daughter of the Republic and Grand Duchess of Tuscany, her path lay henceforth in the sun.

Even the death of little Filippo brought her joy

instead of sadness: now that the son of the Grand Duke and the poor Archduchess was dead—that is, the lawful heir to the Crown—the latter might more easily be obtained for Don Antonio; neither her child nor Francesco's, but recognized by Francesco as the child of both, and hence, in the more or less distant future, a docile instrument in her hands.

Nevertheless, from time to time her rosy outlook was a little clouded. Her brother, Vettore, who had come to Florence with the Venetian embassy, and on whom the Grand Duke had showered titles and preferment, had not been long in the city before he began to show signs, in another direction, of the amorality of which she had given so many proofs: besides squandering public money, he had even falsified figures and signatures; so that he was presently politely invited to return to his native city. This was but a fleeting cloud, for the receipt of the Golden Rose from Pope Sixtus V was enough to make up to her for this new family scandal.

It seems that Bianca had heard some rumour of the secret inquiry which her brother-in-law, Cardinal Ferdinando, had made in respect of Don Antonio. Somehow she must parry the blow; but her imagination could suggest nothing more than a second edition of the fraud of ten years earlier. At the first report of her new pregnancy Cardinal Ferdinando sniffed the air and pricked his ears: this time his

prey should not escape him. He had his sister-in-law surrounded by trustworthy persons, and their vigilance was so great that the lady lost patience, and presently abandoned the comedy. She wrote to him one day that "it had all passed away in a colic".

Ridicule, even though it does not kill, always inflicts a wound. Bianca realized that an enemy who was stronger than herself was working against her in the dark. The cardinal, unable for the moment to do more, circulated the comical history of the unsuccessful pregnancy. Florence laughed over the story; pungent and salacious epigrams made the rounds of the city. Bianca was now in her fortieth year; after a girlhood so precocious and a maturity so passionate and stormy, her beauty was rapidly fading. Nothing is so fatal to a woman as the knowledge that her powers of fascination are failing her; at the approach of evening even idols lose all majesty.

Cardinal Ferdinando awaited his opportunity. The time seemed to be slow in passing; when suddenly and unexpectedly catastrophe overtook the Grand Ducal pair, and his way lay open to the crown of which he had dreamed.

In the month of October 1587, Bianca, the Grand Duke, and the cardinal, with their respective retinues, went to the villa of Poggio di Caiano for the hunting; on the tenth the Grand Duke was



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BIANCA CAPELLO
(Angiolo Bronzino)

attacked by a fever; he died three days later, and nineteen hours afterwards Bianca too was dead.

These sudden deaths were bound to set men's imaginations working. It was said that Bianca had caused a poisoned pasty to be prepared for the cardinal, but that he was warned of his danger by a change in the colour of a special precious stone which he wore in a ring; he refused to help himself first, and passed the pasty to the Grand Duke, who, unsuspecting of danger, ate of it; whereupon Bianca ate of it in her turn, to escape the rack or the headsman's axe which would have been her fate had she survived. The Duke and Duchess soon developed alarming symptoms, and were carried to their beds, where they were left unattended, in convulsions of agony, to await their deaths. It was even said—as though to paint the scene in even darker colours—that the cardinal had not only forbidden anyone to approach the sufferers, on penalty of death, but had himself, with two pistols in his hands, kept watch with his own confidential servants to make sure that he was obeyed.

There was another version of the story, less in the spirit of the Grand Guignol. According to this, Francesco I died a natural death; but Bianca, when her husband had breathed his last, was compelled by the cardinal to follow him.

“It was related by the elder Borbottino, who was the court apothecary in the time of the Grand

Duke Francesco, that when the latter was dead, Bianca, distracted by grief, went to bed; and she being in this condition a medicine was sent to her, the person who brought it telling her that she should take it in order to comfort herself. She refusing to comply, he went back to tell the person who sent it that she would not take it. He was commanded to make her take it by force, even if she choked. Whereupon she, making a virtue of necessity, as it was useless to say no, drank, and soon fell upon her (as it proved) eternal sleep."

But here Borbottino, the court apothecary, is talking at random; and in any case the tittle-tattle of the pharmacy is not likely to have much historical value.

For that matter, there were plenty of documents accessible to the public which certified what had really happened. Most people, however, preferred to trust to their imaginations, or to accept what others had imagined for them; and, after all, they could hardly be blamed, for the Medici had accustomed them to murky tragedies and mysterious deaths.

We will not examine these documents here. A few passages will suffice to enable us to see how readily history is replaced by legend.

Three days before the Grand Duke's death, Bianca wrote to her brother Vettore:

"... The day before yesterday the Grand Duke, my lord, had a benign fever, which was the occasion

why I, too, was overcome by a similar attack. Of mine, as it happens, I am almost free, and His Highness's, although last night it returned, was much less than at first, so that we hope it will not return again; especially as preparations are being made to drive it away with potent remedies and emission of blood when it may be judged necessary; as indeed has been done this morning, greatly to his relief. But I have little joy of this, since I cannot be there to serve him, being myself obliged to stay in bed: of which do not say a word to my father, so as to spare him this distress."

Though Bianca, in bed with fever, could not help her husband, Pellegrina, equally kind and careful, was able to take her place: Pellegrina, the daughter of Piero Bonaventuri, who was born soon after the flight of the two lovers from Venice.

"The lady Pellegrina (wrote the Ferrarese envoy) has always been able to rule the Grand Duke, and has told my wife that he had a great fire in his body; that putting vine-leaves on his back, steeped in rose-water and in other refreshing liquids, in a moment they were so scorchingly hot that it seemed as though they had been in the fire; and that he did nothing but ask for drink, saying that he was on fire."

The secretary of the court of Tuscany, in a dispatch dated the 16th of October, explained the nature of this fire:

"Our lord the Grand Duke has two substituted tertians, which is to say continuous fever, and a very great thirst . . . also her Serene Highness my mistress has much the same illness, which aggravates the malady of his Serene Highness my master: and also she cannot be with him, nor tend him, which is a great drawback."

Three physicians were attending the Grand Duke and Bianca: Baldrini, who had been physician-in-chief to Cosimo I; Cappelli, lecturer on medicine in the Pisan Academy, the physician-in-chief to the court, and in high favour with Bianca; and Cini, Cardinal Ferdinando's physician. We may believe that they did their best; and when the violence of the fever defeated their efforts they received the usual reward from the bishop of Acqui, Francesco Blandrate, the envoy from the Duke of Mantua: "they deceived everyone, not understanding the gravity of the disease".

.

Bianca and the Grand Duke were dead, and the universal heir of their private and personal estate was Don Antonio, the intruder. This did not suit Cardinal Ferdinando. As regards the last wishes of Bianca, which had been attested by her confessor, Domenico Maranta, friar of San Marco, the bishop Ottavio Abbioso, and the physician Giulio Angeli of Barga, each of these witnesses subsequently, and more or less spontaneously, retracted his own

signature, thus putting an entirely different face on the matter.

“The Grand Duchess, who was held up a little in bed by several persons, did not speak a word [when the will was read over to her] nor make any reply, neither did I hear nor see that she gave any sign of having heard anything. Also shortly after this she expired, and this is how it happened.”

Doubtless Cardinal Ferdinando had something, if not everything, to do with this “declaration of rectification”. This, at all events, we know: that in order to make short work of any claims of Don Antonio’s and Pellegrina’s, but more especially of Don Antonio’s, he published a document whose curt and inconsiderate language betrays the writer’s delight in his complete if tardy revenge:

“His Royal and Serene Highness the Grand Duke my brother and Bianca his wife having recently passed from our life into the eternal life, and the government of the State having fallen into my hands, I wished to reassure my conscience by means of a fresh inquiry; and I now have complete assurance that Don Antonio does not in any way concern us, being the son neither of the Grand Duke my brother nor of the most wicked Bianca.”

The most wicked Bianca! Few women who have lived in such splendour can have suffered so rapid

an eclipse. The hymns of adulation had hardly died away when her memory was thus dishonoured.

Her body, which was removed to Florence from the Villa di Pioggio, accompanied by a modest escort ("with thirty or fewer white tapers", we read in the diary of Agostin Capini) was not placed in the chapel dedicated to the eternal sleep of all the Medici, and which only a few hours earlier had received the remains of the Grand Duke Francesco; it was to be buried "where anyone who wished to bury it and can do so pleases". The man who wished to bury her, and could, was, as we know, the cardinal; who is said to have given orders one night that her body should be exhumed and buried outside the church of San Lorenzo, in the pit reserved for criminals and the unidentified dead. The rumour would seem to be confirmed by some verses which were presently found there:

In questa tomba, in quest'oscura buca,
Ch'è fossa a quei che non ha sepultura,
Opra d'incanti e di malie fattura,
Giace la Bianca, moglie del Granduca.¹

Another quatrain was even more ferocious:

Qui giace un caratel pien di malie
E pien di vizi, la Bianca Cappella,
Puttana, strega, maliarda e fella,
Che sempre favori furfanti e spie.²

¹ In this tomb, in this dark hole, the pit for those who have no sepulture, a maker of spells and a worker of witchcraft, lies Bianca, wife of the Grand Duke.

² Here lies a load of witchcraft and vice, Bianca Capello, whore, witch, sorceress, and wicked woman, who always favoured rogues and informers.

Surely Venice will be wroth at these insults to her own daughter!

But no; Venice was unperturbed. Bianca was no longer of any value to the State. And since the cardinal was about to become the Grand Duke, the Serenissima, not content with holding its peace, ordained that none of Bianca's relatives should wear mourning for her. There was no need to offend the splendour of the new luminary, from whom some beneficent ray might fall on the Republic. Politics, after all, is stronger than spiritual dignity and pride.

Ferdinando, wishing to silence the rumours which suggested that there was something mysterious about the sudden deaths of his brother and sister-in-law, gave orders that an autopsy should be held. The reports of the surgeons emphasized the profound degeneration, in both bodies, of the lungs, liver, intestines, and kidneys; a degeneration which was attributed to the continual excesses, and especially the abuse of alcohol, to which the Grand Ducal pair had been addicted; as indeed was no secret. In Bianca's case the report referred at such length to certain intimate details that it seemed as though the writers wished to deprive the dead woman of the only boast that no one would have denied her. Her beauty was only the shell of a ruined body; if fever had not intervened the internal degeneration caused by vices of every sort would soon have brought her to the tomb. In these pages Ferdinando

inflicted on his "most wicked" sister-in-law a final insult, and, for a woman, the most humiliating of all.

It may be that there was only one person who shed a few tears over Bianca: her daughter Pellegrina; but even her grief was not likely to be excessive or protracted. The scene by the bedside of the dying woman, a scene half macabre and half absurd, when the document was read by which Pellegrina and Don Antonio, but more especially Pellegrina, were to inherit her mother's property, does not permit us to be much impressed by her anguish in the death-chamber, nor by her despair at her mother's death.

She was, after all, her mother's daughter, and before long it was apparent that she was also her father's child. Her husband, the Conte Bentivoglio of Bologna, had her strangled one day for betraying him once too often.

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