ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

ZICCI — VOLUME 02

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон
Zicci — Volume 02

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Zicci: A Tale — Volume 02:

Содержание

Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton Zicci: A Tale — Volume 02

BOOK 2

CHAPTER X

Merton and the Italians arrived in safety at the spot where they had left the mules; and not till they had recovered their own alarm and breath did they think of Glyndon. But then, as the minutes passed and he appeared not, Merton—whose heart was as good, at least, as human hearts are in general—grew seriously alarmed. He insisted on returning to search for his friend, and by dint of prodigal promises prevailed at last on the guide to accompany him. The lower part of the mountain lay calm and white in the starlight; and the guide's practised eye could discern all objects on the surface, at a considerable distance. They had not, however, gone very far before they perceived two forms slowly approaching towards them.

As they came near, Merton recognized the form of his friend. "Thank Heaven, he is safe!" he cried, turning to the guide.

"Holy angels befriend us!" said the Italian, trembling; "behold the very being that crossed me last Sabbath night. It is he, but

his face is human now!"

"Signor Inglese," said the voice of Zicci as Glyndon, pale, wan, and silent, returned passively the joyous greeting of Merton, —" Signor Inglese, I told your friend we should meet to-night; you see you have not foiled my prediction."

"But how, but where?" stammered Merton, in great confusion and surprise.

"I found your friend stretched on the ground, overpowered by the mephitic exhalation of the crater. I bore him to a purer atmosphere; and as I know the mountain well, I have conducted him safely to you. This is all our history. You see, sir, that were it not for that prophecy which you desired to frustrate, your friend would, ere this time, have been a corpse; one minute more, and the vapor had done its work. Adieu! good night and pleasant dreams."

"But, my preserver, you will not leave us," said Glyndon, anxiously, and speaking for the first time. "Will you not return with us?"

Zicci paused, and drew Glyndon aside. "Young man," said he, gravely, "it is necessary that we should again meet to-night. It is necessary that you should, ere the first hour of morning, decide on your fate. Will you marry Isabel di Pisani, or lose her forever? Consult not your friend; he is sensible and wise, but not now is his wisdom needed. There are times in life when from the imagination, and not the reason, should wisdom come,—this for you is one of them. I ask not your answer now. Collect your

thoughts, recover your jaded and scattered spirits. It wants two hours of midnight: at midnight I will be with you!"

"Incomprehensible being," replied the Englishman, "I would leave the life you have preserved in your own hands. But since I have known you, my whole nature has changed. A fiercer desire than that of love burns in my veins,—the desire, not to resemble, but to surpass my kind; the desire to penetrate and to share the secret of your own existence; the desire of a preternatural knowledge and unearthly power. Instruct me, school me, make me thine; and I surrender to thee at once, and without a murmur, the woman that, till I saw thee, I would have defied a world to obtain."

"I ask not the sacrifice, Glyndon," replied Zicci, coldly, yet mildly, "yet—shall I own it to thee?—I am touched by the devotion I have inspired. I sicken for human companionship, sympathy, and friendship; yet I dread to share them, for bold must be the man who can partake my existence and enjoy my confidence. Once more I say to thee, in compassion and in warning, the choice of life is in thy hands,—to- morrow it will be too late. On the one hand, Isabel, a tranquil home, a happy and serene life; on the other hand all is darkness, darkness that even this eye cannot penetrate."

"But thou hast told me that if I wed Isabel I must be contented to be obscure; and if I refuse, that knowledge and power may be mine."

"Vain man! knowledge and power are not happiness."

"But they are better than happiness. Say, if I marry Isabel, wilt thou be my master, my guide? Say this, and I am resolved."

"Never! It is only the lonely at heart, the restless, the desperate, that may be my pupils."

"Then I renounce her! I renounce love, I renounce happiness. Welcome solitude, welcome despair, if they are the entrances to thy dark and sublime secret."

"I will not take thy answer now; at midnight thou shalt give it in one word,—ay, or no! Farewell till then!"

The mystic waved his hand, and descending rapidly, was seen no more.

Glyndon rejoined his impatient and wondering friend; but Merton, gazing on his face, saw that a great change had passed there. The flexile and dubious expression of youth was forever gone; the features were locked, rigid, and stern; and so faded was the natural bloom that an hour seemed to have done the work of years.

CHAPTER, XI

On returning from Vesuvius or Pompeii you enter Naples through its most animated, its most Neapolitan quarter, through that quarter in which Modern life most closely resembles the Ancient, and in which, when, on a fair day, the thoroughfare swarms alike with Indolence and Trade, you are impressed at once with the recollection of that restless, lively race from which the population of Naples derives its origin; so that in one day you may see at Pompeii the habitations of a remote age, and on the Mole at Naples you may imagine you behold the very beings with which those habitations had been peopled. The language of words is dead, but the language of gestures remains little impaired. A fisherman,— peasant, of Naples will explain to you the motions, the attitudes, the gestures of the figures painted on the antique vases better than the most learned antiquary of Gottingen or Leipsic.

But now, as the Englishmen rode slowly through the deserted streets, lighted but by the lamps of heaven, all the gayety of the day was hushed and breathless. Here and there, stretched under a portico or a dingy booth, were sleeping groups of houseless lazzaroni,—a tribe now happily merging this indolent individuality amidst an energetic and active population.

The Englishmen rode on in silence, for Glyndon neither appeared to heed or hear the questions and comments of Merton,

and Merton himself was almost as weary as the jaded animal he bestrode.

Suddenly the silence of earth and ocean was broken by the sound of a distant clock, that proclaimed the last hour of night. Glyndon started from his revery, and looked anxiously around. As the final stroke died, the noise of hoofs rang on the broad stones of the pavement, and from a narrow street to the right emerged the form of a solitary horseman. He neared the Englishmen, and Glyndon recognized the features and mien of Zicci.

"What! do we meet again, signor?" said Merton, in a vexed but drowsy tone.

"Your friend and I have business together," replied Zicci, as he wheeled his powerful and fiery steed to the side of Glyndon; "but it will be soon transacted. Perhaps you, sir, will ride on to your hotel."

"Alone?"

"There is no danger," returned Zicci, with a slight expression of disdain in his voice.

"None to me, but to Glyndon?"

"Danger from me? Ah! perhaps you are right."

"Go on, my dear Merton," said Glyndon. "I will join you before you reach the hotel."

Merton nodded, whistled, and pushed his horse into a kind of amble.

"Now your answer,—quick."

"I have decided: the love of Isabel has vanished from my heart. The pursuit is over."

"You have decided?"

"I have."

"Adieu! join your friend."

Zicci gave the rein to his horse; it sprang forward with a bound; the sparks flew from its hoofs, and horse and rider disappeared amidst the shadows of the street whence they had emerged.

Merton was surprised to see his friend by his side, a minute after they had parted.

"What business can you have with Zicci? Will you not confide in me?"

"Merton, do not ask me to-night; I am in a dream."

"I do not wonder at it, for even I am in a sleep. Let us push on."

In the retirement of his chamber, Glyndon sought to recollect his thoughts. He sat down on the foot of his bed and pressed his hands tightly to his throbbing temples. The events of the last few hours, the apparition of the gigantic and shadowy Companion of the Mystic amidst the fires and clouds of Vesuvius, the strange encounter with Zicci himself on a spot in which he could never have calculated on finding Glyndon, filled his mind with emotions, in which terror and awe the least prevailed. A fire, the train of which had long been laid, was lighted at his heart,—the asbestos fire that, once lit, is never to be quenched. All his early aspiration, his young ambition, his longings for the laurel,

were mingled in one passionate yearning to overpass the bounds of the common knowledge of man, and reach that solemn spot, between two worlds, on which the mysterious stranger appeared to have fixed his home.

Far from recalling with renewed affright the remembrance of the apparition that had so appalled him, the recollection only served to kindle and concentrate his curiosity into a burning focus. He had said aright,—love had vanished from his heart; there was no longer a serene space amidst its disordered elements for human affection to move and breathe. The enthusiast was rapt from this earth; and he would have surrendered all that beauty ever promised, that mortal hope ever whispered, for one hour with Zicci beyond the portals of the visible world.

He rose, oppressed and fevered with the new thoughts that raged within him, and threw open his casement for air. The ocean lay suffused in the starry light, and the stillness of the heavens never more eloquently preached the morality of repose to the madness of earthly passions. But such was Glyndon's mood that their very hush only served to deepen the wild desires that preyed upon his soul. And the solemn stars, that are mysteries in themselves, seemed by a kindred sympathy to agitate the wings of the spirit no longer contented with its cage. As he gazed, a star shot from its brethren and vanished from the depth of space!

CHAPTER XII

The sleep of Glyndon that night was unusually profound, and the sun streamed full upon his eyes as he opened them to the day. He rose refreshed, and with a strange sentiment of calmness, that seemed more the result of resolution than exhaustion. The incidents and emotions of the past night had settled into distinct and clear impressions. He thought of them but slightly,—he thought rather of the future. He was as one of the Initiated in the old Egyptian Mysteries, who have crossed the Gate only to look more ardently for the Penetralia.

He dressed himself, and was relieved to find that Merton had joined a party of his countrymen on an excursion to Ischia. He spent the heat of noon in thoughtful solitude, and gradually the image of Isabel returned to his heart. It was a holy—for it was a human—image; he had resigned her, and he repented. The light of day served, if not to dissipate, at least to sober, the turbulence and fervor of the preceding night. But was it indeed too late to retract his resolve? "Too late!" terrible words! Of what do we not repent, when the Ghost of the Deed returns to us to say, "Thou hast no recall?"

He started impatiently from his seat, seized his hat and sword, and strode with rapid steps to the humble abode of the actress.

The distance was considerable, and the air oppressive. Glyndon arrived at the door breathless and heated. he knocked,

no answer came; he lifted the latch and entered. No sound, no sight of life, met his ear and eye. In the front chamber, on a table, lay the guitar of the actress and some manuscript parts in plays. He paused, and summoning courage, tapped at the door which seemed to lead into the inner apartment. The door was ajar; and hearing no sound within, he pushed it open. It was the sleeping chamber of the young actress,—that holiest ground to a lover. And well did the place become the presiding deity: none of the tawdry finery of the Profession was visible on the one hand, none of the slovenly disorder common to the humbler classes of the South on the other. All was pure and simple; even the ornaments were those of an innocent refinement,—a few books placed carefully on shelves, a few half-faded flowers in an earthen vase which was modelled and painted in the Etruscan fashion. The sunlight streamed over the snowy draperies of the bed, and a few articles of clothing, neatly folded, on the chair beside it. Isabel was not there; and Glyndon, as he gazed around, observed that the casement which opened to the ground was wrenched and broken, and several fragments of the shattered glass lay below. The light flashed at once upon Glyndon's mind, —the ravisher had borne away his prize. The ominous words of Zicci were fulfilled: it was too late! Wretch that he was, perhaps he might have saved her! But the nurse,— was she gone also? He made the house resound with the name of Gionetta, but there was not even an echo to reply. He resolved to repair at once to the abode of Zicci. On arriving at the palace of the Corsican,

he was informed that the signor was gone to the banquet of the Prince di —, and would not return until late. He turned in dismay from the door, and perceived the heavy carriage of the Count Cetoxa rolling along the narrow street. Cetoxa recognized him and stopped the carriage.

"Ah my dear Signor Glyndon," said he, leaning out of the window, "and how goes your health? You heard the news?"

"What news?" asked Glyndon, mechanically.

"Why, the beautiful actress,—the wonder of Naples! I always thought she would have good luck."

"Well, well, what of her?"

"The Prince di— has taken a prodigious fancy to her, and has carried her to his own palace. The Court is a little scandalized."

"The villain! by force?"

"Force! Ha! ha! my dear signor, what need of force to persuade an actress to accept the splendid protection of one of the wealthiest noblemen in Italy? Oh, no! you may be sure she went willingly enough. I only just heard the news: the prince himself proclaimed his triumph this morning, and the accommodating Mascari has been permitted to circulate it. I hope the connection will not last long, or we shall lose our best singer. Addio!"

Glyndon stood mute and motionless. He knew not what to think, to believe, or how to act. Even Merton was not at hand to advise him. His conscience smote him bitterly; and half in despair, half in the courageous wrath of jealousy, he resolved to

repair to the palace of the prince himself, and demand his captive in the face of his assembled guests.

CHAPTER XIII

We must go back to the preceding night. The actress and her nurse had returned from the theatre; and Isabel, fatigued and exhausted, had thrown herself on a sofa, while Gionetta busied herself with the long tresses which, released from the fillet that bound them, half concealed the form of the actress, like a veil of threads of gold; and while she smoothed the luxuriant locks, the old nurse ran gossiping on about the little events of the night,—the scandal and politics of the scenes and the tire-room.

The clock sounded the hour of midnight, and still Isabel detained the nurse; for a vague and foreboding fear, she could not account for, made her seek to protract the time of solitude and rest.

At length Gionetta's voice was swallowed up in successive yawns. She took her lamp and departed to her own room, which was placed in the upper story of the house. Isabel was alone. The half-hour after midnight sounded dull and distant, all was still, and she was about to enter her sleeping-room, when she heard the hoofs of a horse at full speed. The sound ceased; there was a knock at the door. Her heart beat violently; but fear gave way to another sentiment when she heard a voice, too well known, calling on her name. She went to the door.

"Open, Isabel,—it is Zicci," said the voice again.

And why did the actress feel fear no more, and why did that

virgin hand unbar the door to admit, without a scruple or, a doubt, at that late hour, the visit of the fairest cavalier of Naples? I know not; but Zicci had become her destiny, and she obeyed the voice of her preserver as if it were the command of Fate.

Zicci entered with a light and hasty step. His horseman's cloak fitted tightly to his noble form, and the raven plumes of his broad hat threw a gloomy shade over his commanding features.

The girl followed him into the room, trembling and blushing deeply, and stood before him with the lamp she held shining upward on her cheek, and the long hair that fell like a shower of light over the bare shoulders and heaving bust.

"Isabel," said Zicci, in a voice that spoke deep emotion, "I am by thy side once more to save thee. Not a moment is to be lost. Thou must fly with me, or remain the victim of the Prince di —. I would have made the charge I now undertake another's,—thou knowest I would, thou knowest it; but he is not worthy of thee, the cold Englishman! I throw myself at thy feet; have trust in me, and fly."

He grasped her hand passionately as he dropped on his knee, and looked up into her face with his bright, beseeching eyes.

"Fly with thee!" said Isabel, tenderly.

"Thou knowest the penalty,—name, fame, honor, all will be sacrificed if thou dost not."

"Then, then," said the wild girl, falteringly, and turning aside her face, "then I am not indifferent to thee. Thou wouldest not give me to another; thou lovest me?"

Zicci was silent; but his breast heaved, his cheeks flushed, his eyes darted dark but impassioned fire.

"Speak!" exclaimed Isabel, in jealous suspicion of his silence. "Speak, if thou lovest me."

"I dare not tell thee so; I will not yet say I love thee."

"Then what matter my fate?" said Isabel, turning pale and shrinking from his side. "Leave me; I fear no danger. My life, and therefore my honor, is in mine own hands."

"Be not so mad!" said Zicci. "Hark! do you hear the neigh of my steed? It is an alarm that warns us of the approaching peril. Haste, or you are lost."

"Why do you care for me?" said the girl, bitterly. "Thou hast read my heart; thou knowest that I would fly with thee to the end of the world, if I were but sure of thy love; that all sacrifice of womanhood's repute were sweet to me, if regarded as the proof and seal of affection. But to be bound beneath the weight of a cold obligation; to be the beggar on the eyes of Indifference; to throw myself on one who loves me not,—that were indeed the vilest sin of my sex. Ah! Zicci, rather let me die."

She had thrown back her clustering hair from her face as she spoke; and as she now stood, with her arms drooping mournfully, and her hands clasped together with the proud bitterness of her wayward spirit, giving new zest and charm to her singular beauty, it was impossible to conceive a sight more irresistible to the senses and the heart.

"Tempt me not to thine own danger, perhaps destruction,"

exclaimed Zicci, in faltering accents; "thou canst not dream of what thou wouldest demand. Come," and, advancing, he wound his arm round her waist, "come, Isabel! Believe at least in my friendship, my protection—"

"And not thy love," said the Italian, turning on him her hurried and reproachful eyes. Those eyes met his, and he could not withdraw from the charm of their gaze. He felt her heart throbbing beneath his own; her breath came warm upon his cheek. He trembled,—he, the lofty, the mysterious Zicci,—who seemed to stand aloof from his race. With a deep and burning sigh he murmured, "Isabel, I love thee!" That beautiful face, bathed in blushes, drooped upon his bosom; and. as he bent down, his lips sought the rosy mouth,—a long and burning kiss. Danger, life, the world were forgotten! Suddenly Zicci tore himself from her.

"Oh! what have I said? It is gone,—my power to preserve thee, to guard thee, to foresee the storm in thy skies, is gone forever. No matter! Haste, haste; and may love supply the loss of prophecy and power!"

Isabel hesitated no more. She threw her mantle over her shoulders and gathered up her dishevelled hair; a moment, and she was prepared,—when a sudden crash was heard in the inner room.

"Too late!—fool that I was—too late!" cried Zicci, in a sharp tone of agony as he hurried to the outer door. He opened it, only to be borne back by the press of armed men.

Behind, before, escape was cut off. The room literally swarmed with the followers of the ravisher, masked, mailed, armed to the teeth.

Isabel was already in the grasp of two of the myrmidons; her shriek smote the ear of Zicci. He sprang forward, and Isabel heard his wild cry in a foreign tongue,—the gleam, the clash of swords. She lost her senses; and when she recovered, she found herself gagged, and in a carriage that was driven rapidly, by the side of a masked and motionless figure. The carriage stopped at the portals of a gloomy mansion. The gates opened noiselessly, a broad flight of steps, brilliantly illumined, was before her,—she was in the palace of the Prince di —.

CHAPTER XIV

The young actress was led to and left alone in a chamber adorned with all the luxurious and half-Eastern taste that at one time characterized the palaces of the great seigneurs of Italy. Her first thought was for Zicci,—was he yet living? Had he escaped unscathed the blades of the foe,—her new treasure, the new light of her life, her lord, at last her lover?

She had short time for reflection. She heard steps approaching the chamber; she drew back. She placed her hand on the dagger that at all hours she wore concealed in her bosom. Living or dead, she would be faithful still to Zicci There was a new motive to the preservation of honor. The door opened, and the Prince entered, in a dress that sparkled with jewels.

"Fair and cruel one," said he, advancing, with a half-sneer upon his lip, "thou wilt not too harshly blame the violence of love." He attempted to take her hand as he spoke.

"Nay," said he, as she recoiled, "reflect that thou art now in the power of one that never faltered in the pursuit of an object less dear to him than thou art. Thy lover, presumptuous though he be, is not by to save thee. Mine thou art; but instead of thy master, suffer me to be thy slave."

"My lord," said Isabel, with a stern gravity which perhaps the Stage had conspired with Nature, to bestow upon her, "your boast is in vain. Your power,—I am not in your power! Life and

death are in my own hands. I will not defy, but I do not fear you. I feel—and in some feelings," added Isabel, with a, solemnity almost thrilling, "there is all the strength and all the divinity of knowledge—I feel that I am safe even here; but you, you, Prince di —, have brought danger to your home and hearth!"

The Neapolitan seemed startled by an earnestness and a boldness he was but little prepared for. He was not, however, a man easily intimidated or deterred from any purpose he had formed; and approaching Isabel, he was about to reply with much warmth, real or affected, when a, knock was heard at the door of the chamber. The sound was repeated, and the Prince, chafed at the interruption, opened the door and demanded impatiently who had ventured to disobey his orders and invade his leisure. Mascari presented himself, pale and agitated. "My lord," said he, in a whisper, "pardon me, but a stranger is below who insists on seeing you; and from some words he let fall, I judged it advisable even to infringe your commands."

"A stranger, and at this hour! What business can he pretend? Why was he even admitted?"

"He asserts that your life is in imminent danger. The source whence it proceeds he will relate to your Excellency alone."

The Prince frowned, but his color changed. He mused a moment, and then, re-entering the chamber and advancing towards Isabel, he said,—

"Believe me, fair creature, I have no wish to take advantage of my power. I would fain trust alone to the gentler authorities of

affection. Hold yourself queen within these walls more absolutely than you have ever enacted that part on the stage. To-night, farewell! May your sleep becalm, and your dreams propitious to my hopes!"

With these words he retired, and in a few moments Isabel was surrounded by officious attendants, whom she at length, with some difficulty, dismissed; and refusing to retire to rest, she spent the night in examining the chamber, which she found was secured, and in thoughts of Zicci, in whose power she felt an almost preternatural confidence.

Meanwhile the Prince descended the stairs, and sought the room into which the stranger had been shown.

He found him wrapped from head to foot in a long robe, —half gown, half mantle,—such as was sometimes worn by ecclesiastics. The face of this stranger was remarkable; so sunburnt and swarthy were his hues that he must, apparently, have derived his origin amongst the races of the farthest East. His —forehead was lofty, and his eyes so penetrating, yet so calm, in their gaze that the Prince shrank from them as we shrink from a questioner who is drawing forth the guiltiest secrets of our hearts.

"What would you with me?" asked the Prince, motioning his visitor to a seat.

"Prince di —," said the stranger, in a voice deep and sweet, but foreign in its accent, "son of the most energetic and masculine race that ever applied godlike genius to the service of the Human Will, with its winding wickedness and its stubborn grandeur;

descendant of the great Visconti, in whose chronicles lies the History of Italy in her palmy day, and in whose rise was the development of the mightiest intellect ripened by the most relentless ambition,—I come to gaze upon the last star in a darkening firmament. By this hour to-morrow space shall know it not. Man, thy days are cumbered!"

"What means this jargon?" said the Prince, in visible astonishment and secret awe. "Comest thou to menace me in my own halls, or wouldest thou warn me of a danger? Art thou some itinerant mountebank, or some unguessed of friend? Speak out, and plainly. What danger threatens me?"

"Zicci!" replied the stranger.

"Ha! ha!" said the Prince, laughing scornfully; "I half suspected thee from the first. Thou art, then, the accomplice or the tool of that most dexterous, but, at present, defeated charlatan. And I suppose thou wilt tell me that if I were to release a certain captive I have made, the danger would vanish and the hand of the dial would be put back?"

"Judge of me as thou wilt, Prince di —. I confess my knowledge of Zicci,—a knowledge shared but by a few, who— But this touches thee not. I would save, therefore I warn thee. Dost thou ask me why? I will tell thee. Canst thou remember to have heard wild tales of thy grandsire,— of his desire for a knowledge that passes that of the schools and cloisters; of a strange man from the East, who was his familiar and master in lore, against which the Vatican has from age to age launched

its mimic thunder? Dost thou call to mind the fortunes of thy ancestor,—how he succeeded in youth to little but a name; how, after a career wild and dissolute as thine, he disappeared from Milan, a pauper and a self-exile; how, after years spent none knew in what climes or in what pursuits, he again revisited the city where his progenitors had reigned; how with him came this wise man of the East, the mystic Mejnour; how they who beheld him, beheld with amaze and fear that time had ploughed no furrow on his brow,—that youth seemed fixed as by a spell upon his face and form? Dost thou know that from that hour his fortunes rose? Kinsmen the most remote died, estate upon estate fell into the hands of the ruined noble. He allied himself with the royalty of Austria, he became the guide of princes, the first magnate of Italy. He founded anew the house of which thou art the last lineal upholder, and transferred its splendor from Milan to the Sicilian realms. Visions of high ambition were then present with him nightly and daily. Had he lived, Italy would have known a new dynasty, and the Visconti would have reigned over Magna Graecia. He was a man such as the world rarely sees; he was worthy to be of us, worthy to be the pupil of Mejnour,—whom you now see before you."

The Prince, who had listened with deep and breathless attention to the words of his singular guest, started from his seat at his last words. "Impostor!" he cried, "can you dare thus to play with my credulity? Sixty years have passed since my grandsire died; and you, a man younger apparently than myself, have the

assurance to pretend to have been his contemporary! But you have imperfectly learned your tale. You know not, it seems, that my grandsire—wise and illustrious, indeed, in all save his faith in a charlatan—was found dead in his bed in the very hour when his colossal plans were ripe for execution, and that Mejnour was guilty of his murder?"

"Alas!" answered the stranger, in a voice of great sadness, had he but listened to Mejnour, had he delayed the last and most perilous ordeal of daring wisdom until the requisite training and initiation had been completed, your ancestor would have stood with me upon an eminence which the waters of Death itself wash everlastingly, but cannot overflow. Your grandsire resisted my fervent prayers, disobeyed my most absolute commands, and in the sublime rashness of a soul that panted for the last secrets, perished,—the victim of his own frenzy."

"He was poisoned, and Mejnour fled."

"Mejnour fled not," answered the stranger, quickly and proudly.

"Mejnour could not fly from danger, for to him danger is a thing long left behind. It was the day before the duke took the fatal draught which he believed was to confer on the mortal the immortal boon that, finding my power over him was gone, I abandoned him to his doom.

"On the night on which your grandsire breathed his last, I was standing alone at moonlight on the ruins of Persepolis,—for my wanderings, space hath no obstacle. But a truce with this: I loved

your grandsire; I would save the last of his race. Oppose not thyself to Zicci. Oppose not thyself to thine evil passions. Draw back from the precipice while there is yet time. In thy front and in thine eyes I detect some of that diviner glory which belonged to thy race. Thou hast in thee some germs of their hereditary genius, but they are choked up by worse than thy hereditary vices. Recollect, by genius thy house rose,— by vice it ever failed to perpetuate its power. In the laws which regulate the Universe it is decreed that nothing wicked can long endure. Be wise, and let history warn thee. Thou standest on the verge of two worlds,— the Past and the Future; and voices from either shriek omen in thy ear. I have done. I bid thee farewell."

"Not so; thou shalt not quit these walls. I will make experiment of thy boasted power. What ho there! ho!" The Prince shouted; the room was filled with his minions. "Seize that man!" he cried, pointing to the spot which had been filled by the form of Mejnour. To his inconceivable amaze and horror, the spot was vacant. The mysterious stranger had vanished like a dream.

CHAPTER XV

It was the first faint and gradual break of the summer dawn; and two men stood in a balcony overhanging a garden fragrant with the scents of the awakening flowers. The stars had not left the sky, the birds were yet silent on the boughs; all was still, hushed, and tranquil. But how different the tranquillity of reviving day from the solemn repose of night.

In the music of silence there are a thousand variations. These men, who alone seemed awake in Naples, were Zicci and the mysterious stranger, who had but an hour or two ago startled the Prince di — in his voluptuous palace.

"No," said the latter, "hadst thou delayed the acceptance of the Arch Gift until thou hadst attained to the years and passed through all the desolate bereavements that chilled and scared myself ere my researches had made it mine, thou wouldest have escaped the curse of which thou complainest now. Thou wouldest not have mourned over the brevity of human affection as compared to the duration of thine own existence, for thou wouldest have survived the very desire and dream of the love of woman. Brightest, and but for that error perhaps the loftiest, of the secret and solemn race that fills up the interval in creation between mankind and the demons, age after age wilt thou rue the splendid folly which made thee ask to carry the beauty and the passions of youth into the dreary grandeur of earthly

immortality."

"I do not repent, nor shall I," answered Zicci, coldly. "The transport and the sorrow, so wildly blended, which diversify my doom, are better than the calm and bloodless tenor of thy solitary way. Thou, who lovest nothing, hatest nothing,—feelest nothing, and walkest the world with the noiseless and joyless footsteps of a dream!"

You mistake," replied he who had owned the name of Mejnour; "though I care not for love, and am dead to every passion that agitates the sons of clay, I am not dead to their more serene enjoyments. I have still left to me the sublime pleasures of wisdom and of friendship. I carry down the Stream of the countless years, not the turbulent desires of youth, but the calm and spiritual delights of age. Wisely and deliberately I abandoned youth forever when I separated my lot from men. Let us not envy or reproach each other. I would have saved this Neapolitan, Zicci (since so it now pleases thee to be called), partly because his grandsire was but divided by the last airy barrier from our own brotherhood, partly because I know that in the man himself lurk the elements of ancestral courage and power, which in earlier life would have fitted him for one of us. Earth holds but few to whom nature has given the qualities that can bear the ordeal! But time and excess, that have thickened the grosser senses, have blunted the imagination. I relinquish him to his doom."

"And still then, Mejnour, you cherish the desire to increase our scanty and scattered host by new converts and allies; Surely,

surely, thy experience might have taught thee that scarcely once in a thousand years is born the being who can pass through the horrible gates that lead into the worlds without. Is not thy path already strewed with thy victims? Do not their ghastly faces of agony and fear,—the blood-stained suicide, the raving maniac,—rise before thee and warn what is yet left to thee of human sympathy from thy insane ambition?"

"Nay," answered Mejnour, "have I not had success to counterbalance failure? And can I forego this lofty and august hope, worthy alone of our high condition,—the hope to form a mighty and numerous race, with a force and power sufficient to permit them to acknowledge to mankind their majestic conquests and dominion; to become the true lords of this planet, invaders perchance of others, masters of the inimical and malignant tribes by which at this moment we are surrounded,—a race that may proceed, in their deathless destinies, from stage to stage of celestial glory, and rank at last among the nearest ministrants and agents gathered round the Throne of Thrones? What matter a thousand victims for one convert to our band? And you, Zicci," continued Mejnour, after a pause, "you, even you, should this affection for a mortal beauty that you have dared, despite yourself, to cherish, be more than a passing fancy; should it, once admitted into your inmost nature, partake of its bright and enduring essence,—even you may brave all things to raise the beloved one into your equal. Nay, interrupt me not. Can you see sickness menace her, danger hover around, years creep on, the

eyes grow dim, the beauty fade, while the heart, youthful still, clings and fastens round your own,—can you see this, and know it is yours to—"

"Cease," cried Zicci, fiercely. "What is all other fate as compared to the death of terror? What! when the coldest sage, the most heated enthusiast, the hardiest warrior, with his nerves of iron, have been found dead in their beds, with straining eyeballs and horrent hair, at the first step of the Dread Progress, thinkest thou that this weak woman—from whose cheek a sound at the window, the screech of the night- owl, the sight of a drop of blood on a man's sword, would start the color—could brave one glance of—Away! the very thought of such sights for her makes even myself a coward!"

"When you told her you loved her, when you clasped her to your breast, you renounced all power to prophesy her future lot or protect her from harm. Henceforth to her you are human, and human only. How know you, then, to what you may be tempted? How know you what her curiosity may learn and her courage brave? But enough of this,—you are bent on your pursuit?"

"The fiat has gone forth."

"And to-morrow?"

"To-morrow at this hour our bark will be bounding over yonder ocean, and the weight of ages will have fallen from my heart! Fool, thou hast given up thy youth!"

CHAPTER XVI

The Prince di — was not a man whom Naples could suppose to be addicted to superstitious fancies, neither was the age one in which the belief of sorcery was prevalent. Still, in the South of Italy there was then, and there still lingers, a certain spirit of credulity, which may, ever and anon, be visible amidst the boldest dogmas of their philosophers and sceptics. In his childhood the Prince had learned strange tales of the ambition, the genius, and the career of his grandsire; and secretly, perhaps influenced by ancestral example, in earlier youth he himself had followed alchemy, not only through her legitimate course, but her antiquated and erratic windings. I have, indeed, been shown in Naples a little volume blazoned with the arms of the Visconti, and ascribed to the nobleman I refer to, which treats of alchemy in a spirit half mocking and half reverential.

Pleasure soon distracted him from such speculations, and his talents, which were unquestionably great, were wholly perverted to extravagant intrigues or to the embellishment of a gorgeous ostentation with something of classic grace. His immense wealth, his imperious pride, his unscrupulous and daring character, made him an object of no inconsiderable fear to a feeble and timid court; and the ministers of the indolent government willingly connived at excesses—, which allured him at least from ambition. The strange visit and yet more strange departure of

Mejnour filled the breast of the Neapolitan with awe and wonder, against which all the haughty arrogance and learned scepticism of his maturer manhood combated in vain. The apparition of —Mejnour served, indeed, to invest Zicci with a character in which the Prince had not hitherto regarded him. He felt a strange alarm at the rival he had braved, at the foe he had provoked. His night was sleepless, and the next morning he came to the resolution of leaving Isabel in peace until after the banquet of that day, to which he had invited Zicci. He felt as if the death of the mysterious Corsican were necessary for the preservation of his own life; and if at an earlier period of their rivalry he had determined on the fate of Zicci, the warnings of—Mejnour only served to confirm his resolve.

"We will try if his magic can invent an antidote to the bane," said he, half aloud and with a gloomy smile, as he summoned Mascari to his presence. The poison which the Prince, with his own hands, mixed into the wine intended for his guest was compounded from materials the secret of which had been one of the proudest heir-looms of that able and evil race which gave to Italy her wisest and fellest tyrants. Its operation was quick, not sudden; it produced no pain, it left on the form no grim convulsion, on the skin no purpling spot, to arouse suspicion; you might have cut and carved every membrane and fibre of the corpse, but the sharpest eyes of the leech would not have detected the presence of the subtle life-queller. For twelve hours the victim felt nothing, save a joyous and elated exhilaration of

the blood; a delicious languor followed,—the sure forerunner of apoplexy. No lancet then could save! Apoplexy had run much in the families of the enemies of the Visconti!

The hour of the feast arrived, the guests assembled. There were the flower of the Neapolitan seigneurie,—the descendants of the Norman, the Teuton, the Goth; for Naples had then a nobility, but derived it from the North, which has indeed been the Nutrix Leonum, the nurse of the lion-hearted chivalry of the world.

Last of the guests came Zicci, and the crowd gave way as the dazzling foreigner moved along to the lord of the palace. The Prince greeted him with a meaning smile, to which Zicci answered by a whisper: "He who plays with loaded dice does not always win."

The Prince bit his lip; and Zicci, passing on, seemed deep in conversation with the fawning Mascari.

"Who is the Prince's heir?" asked the Corsican.

"A distant relation on the mother's side; with his Excellency dies the male line."

"Is the heir present at our host's banquet?"

"No; they are not friends."

"No matter; he will be here to-morrow!"

Mascari stared in surprise; but the signal for the banquet was given, and the guests were marshalled to the board. As was the custom, the feast took place at midday. It was a long oval hall, the whole of one side opening by a marble colonnade upon a court

or garden, in which the eye rested gratefully upon cool fountains and statues of whitest marble, half sheltered by orange-trees. Every art that luxury could invent to give freshness and coolness to the languid and breezeless heat of the day without (a day on which the breath of the sirocco was abroad) had been called into existence. Artificial currents of air through invisible tubes, silken blinds waving to and fro as if to cheat the senses into the belief of an April wind, and miniature jets d'eau in each corner of the apartment gave to the Italians the same sense of exhilaration and comfort (if I may use the word) which the well-drawn curtains and the blazing hearth afford to the children of colder climes.

The conversation was somewhat more lively and intellectual than is common among the languid pleasure-hunters of the South; for the Prince, himself accomplished, sought his acquaintance not only amongst the beaux esprits of his own country, but amongst the gay foreigners who adorned and relieved the monotony of the Neapolitan circles. There were present two or three of the brilliant Frenchmen of the old regime, and their peculiar turn of thought and wit was well calculated for the meridian of a society that made the dolce far niente at once its philosophy and its faith. The Prince, however, was more silent than usual, and when he sought to rouse himself, his spirits were forced and exaggerated. To the, manners of his host, those of Zicci afforded a striking contrast. The bearing of this singular person was at all times characterized by a calm and polished ease which was attributed by the courtiers to the

long habit of society. He could scarcely be called gay, yet few persons more tended to animate the general spirits of a convivial circle. He seemed, by a kind of intuition, to elicit from each companion the qualities in which he most excelled; and a certain tone of latent mockery that characterized his remarks upon the topics on which the conversation fell, seemed to men who took nothing in earnest to be the language both of wit and wisdom. To the Frenchmen in particular there was something startling in his intimate knowledge of the minutest events in their own capital and country, and his profound penetration (evinced but in epigrams and sarcasms) into the eminent characters who were then playing a part upon the great stage of Continental intrigue. It was while this conversation grew animated, and the feast was at its height, that Glyndon (who, as the reader will recollect, had resolved, on learning from Cetoxa the capture of the actress, to seek the Prince himself) arrived at the palace. The porter, perceiving by his dress that he was not one of the invited guests, told him that his Excellency was engaged, and on no account could be disturbed; and Glyndon then, for the first time, became aware of how strange and embarrassing was the duty he had taken on himself. To force an entrance into the banquet-hall of a great and powerful noble surrounded by the rank of Naples, and to arraign him for what to his boon companions would appear but an act of gallantry, was an exploit that could not fail to be at once ludicrous and impotent. He mused a moment; and remembering that Zicci was among the guests, determined to apply himself to

the Corsican. He therefore, slipping a few crowns into the porter's hand, said that he was commissioned to seek the Signor Zicci upon an errand of life and death, and easily won his way across the court and into the interior building. He passed up the broad staircase, and the voices and merriment of the revellers smote his ear at a distance. At the entrance of the reception-rooms he found a page, whom he despatched with a message to Zicci. The page did the errand; and the Corsican, on hearing the whispered name of Glyndon, turned to his host.

"Pardon me, my lord, an English friend of mine, the Signor Glyndon (not unknown by name to your Excellency), waits without. The business must indeed be urgent on which he has sought me in such an hour. You will forgive my momentary absence."

"Nay, signor," answered the Prince, courteously, but with a sinister smile on his countenance, "would it not be better for your friend to join us? An Englishman is welcome everywhere; and even were he a Dutchman, your friendship would invest his presence with attraction. Pray his attendance,—we would not spare you even for a moment."

Zicci bowed. The page was despatched with all flattering messages to Glyndon, a seat next to Zicci was placed for him, and the young Englishman entered.

"You are most welcome, sir. I trust your business to our illustrious guest is of good omen and pleasant import. If you bring evil news, defer it, I pray you."

Glyndon's brow was sullen, and he was about to startle the guests by his reply, when Zicci, touching his arm significantly, whispered in English, "I know why you have sought me. Be silent, and witness what ensues."

"You know, then, that Isabel, whom you boasted you had the power to save from danger—"

"Is in this house? Yes. I know also that Murder sits at the right hand of our host. Be still, and learn the fate that awaits the foes of Zicci."

"My lord," said the Corsican, speaking aloud, "the Signor Glyndon has indeed brought me tidings which, though not unexpected, are unwelcome. I learn that which will oblige me to leave Naples to-morrow, though I trust but for a short time. I have now a new motive to make the most of the present hour."

"And what, if I may venture to ask, may be the cause which brings such affliction on the fair dames of Naples?"

"It is the approaching death of one who honored me with most loyal friendship," replied Zicci, gravely. "Let us not speak of it, —Grief cannot put back the dial. As we supply by new flowers those that fade in our vases, so it is the secret of worldly wisdom to replace by fresh friendships those that fade from our path."

"True philosophy," exclaimed the Prince. "'Not to admire' was the Roman's maxim; never to mourn is mine. There is nothing in life to grieve for,—save, indeed, Signor Zicci, when some beauty on whom we have set our heart slips from our grasp. In such a moment we have need of all our wisdom not to succumb to

despair and shake hands with death. What say you, signor? You smile. Such never could be your lot. Pledge me in a sentiment: 'Long life; to the fortunate lover; a quick release to the baffled suitor!'"

"I pledge you," said Zicci. And as the fatal wine was poured into his glass, he repeated, fixing his eyes on the Prince, "I pledge you even in this wine!"

He lifted the glass to his lips. The Prince seemed ghastly pale, while the gaze of the Corsican bent upon him with an intent and stern brightness that the conscience-stricken host cowered and quailed beneath. Not till he had drained the draught and replaced the glass upon the board did Zicci turn his eyes from the Prince; and he then said, "Your wine has been kept too long,—it has lost its virtues. It might disagree with many; but do not fear, it will not harm me, Prince. Signor Mascari, you are a judge of the grape, will you favor us with your opinion?"

"Nay," answered Mascari, with well-affected composure, "I like not the wines of Cyprus, they are heating. Perhaps Signor Glyndon may not have the same distaste. The English are said to love their potations warm and pungent."

"Do you wish my friend also to taste the wine, Prince?" said Zicci.

"Recollect all cannot drink it with the same impunity as myself."

"No," said the Prince, hastily; "if you do not recommend the wine, Heaven forbid that we should constrain our guests! My

Lord Duke," turning to one of the Frenchmen, "yours is the true soil of Bacchus.

What think you of this cask from Burgundy,—has it borne the journey?"

"Ah!" said Zicci, "let us change both the wine and the theme." With that the Corsican grew more animated and brilliant. Never did wit more sparkling, airy, exhilarating, flash from the lips of reveller. His spirits fascinated all present, even the Prince himself, even Glyndon, with a strange and wild contagion. The former, indeed, whom the words and gaze of Zicci, when he drained the poison, had filled with fearful misgivings, now hailed in the brilliant eloquence of his wit a certain sign of the operation of the bane. The wine circulated fast, but none seemed conscious of its effects. One by one the rest of the party fell into a charmed and spell-bound silence as Zicci continued to pour forth sally upon sally, tale upon tale. They hung on his words, they almost held their breath to listen. Yet how bitter was his mirth; how full of contempt for all things; how deeply steeped in the coldness of the derision that makes sport of life itself!

Night came on; the room grew dim, and the feast had lasted several hours longer than was the customary duration of similar entertainments at that day. Still the guests stirred not, and still Zicci continued, with glittering eye and mocking lip, to lavish his stores of intellect and anecdote, when suddenly the moon rose, and shed its rays over the flowers and fountains in the court without, leaving the room itself half in shadow and half tinged

by a quiet and ghostly light.

It was then that Zicci rose. "Well, gentlemen," said he, "we have not yet wearied our host, I hope, and his garden offers a new temptation to protract our stay. Have you no musicians among your train, Prince, that might regale our ears while we inhale the fragrance of your orange- trees?"

"An excellent thought," said the Prince. "Mascari, see to the music."

The party rose simultaneously to adjourn to the garden; and then, for the first time, the effect of the wine they had drunk seemed to make itself felt.

With flushed cheeks and unsteady steps they came into the open air, which tended yet more to stimulate that glowing fever of the grape. As if to make up for the silence with which the guests had hitherto listened to Zicci, every tongue was now loosened; every man talked, no man listened. In the serene beauty of the night and scene there was something wild and fearful in the contrast of the hubbub and Babel of these disorderly roysterers. One of the Frenchmen in especial, the young Due de R—,—a nobleman of the highest rank, and of all the quick, vivacious, and irascible temperament of his countrymen,—was particularly noisy and excited. And as circumstances, the remembrance of which is still preserved among certain circles of Naples, rendered it afterwards necessary that the Due should himself give evidence of what occurred, I will here translate the short account he drew up, and which was kindly submitted to me some few years ago

by my accomplished and lively friend, il Cavaliere di B—.

> I never remember [writes the Due] to have felt my spirits so excited as on that evening; we were like so many boys released from school, jostling each other as we reeled or ran down the flight of seven or eight stairs that led from the colonnade into the garden, —some laughing, some whooping, some scolding, some babbling. The wine had brought out, as it were, each man's inmost character. Some were loud and quarrelsome, others sentimental and whining; some, whom we had hitherto thought dull, most mirthful; some, whom we had ever regarded as discreet and taciturn, most garrulous and uproarious. I remember that in the midst of our most clamorous gayety my eye fell upon the foreign cavalier, Signor Zicci, whose conversation had so enchanted us all, and I felt a certain chill come over me to perceive that he bore the same calm and unsympathizing smile upon his countenance which had characterized it in his singular and curious stories of the court of Louis XV. I felt, indeed, half inclined to seek a quarrel with one whose composure was almost an insult to our disorder. Nor was such an effect of this irritating and mocking tranquillity confined to myself alone. Several of the party have told me since that on looking at Zicci they felt their blood rise and their hands wander to their sword-hilts. There seemed in the icy smile a very charm to wound vanity and provoke rage. It was at this moment that the Prince came up to me, and, passing his arm into mine, led me a little apart from the rest. he had certainly indulged in the same excess as ourselves, but it did not produce the same effect of noisy excitement.

There was, on the contrary a certain cold arrogance and supercilious scorn in his bearing and language, which, even while affecting so much caressing courtesy towards me, roused my self-love against him. He seemed as if Zicci had infected him, and that in imitating the manner of his guest he surpassed the original, he rallied me on some court gossip which had honored my name by associating it with a certain beautiful and distinguished Sicilian lady, and affected to treat with contempt that which, had it been true, I should have regarded as a boast. He spoke, indeed, as if he himself had gathered all the flowers of Naples, and left us foreigners only the gleanings he had scorned; at this my natural and national gallantry was piqued, and I retorted by some sarcasms that I should certainly have spared had my blood been cooler. He laughed heartily, and left me in a strange fit of resentment and anger. Perhaps (I must own the truth) the wine had produced in me a wild disposition to take offence and provoke quarrel. As the Prince left me, I turned, and saw Zicci at my side.

"The Prince is a braggart," said he, with the same smile that displeased me before. "He would monopolize all fortune and all love. Let us take our revenge."

"And how?"

"He has at this moment in his house the most enchanting singer in Naples,—the celebrated Isabel di Pisani. She is here, it is true, not by her own choice,—he carried her hither by force; but he will pretend to swear that she adores him. Let us insist. on his producing the secret treasure; and when

she enters, the Duc de Lt— can have no doubt that his flatteries and attentions will charm the lady and provoke all the jealous fears of our host. It would be a fair revenge upon his imperious self conceit."

This suggestion delighted me. I hastened to the Prince. At that instant the musicians had just commenced. I waved my hand, ordered the music to stop, and addressing the Prince, who was standing in the centre of one of the gayest groups, complained of his want of hospitality in affording to us such poor proficients in the art while he reserved for his own solace the lute and voice of the first performer in Naples. I demanded, half laughingly, half seriously, that he should produce the Pisani. My demand was received with shouts of applause by the rest. We drowned the replies of our host with uproar, and would hear no denial. "Gentlemen," at last said the Prince, when he could obtain an audience, "even were I to assent to your proposal, I could not induce the signora to present herself before an assemblage as riotous as they are noble. You have too much chivalry to use compulsion with her, though the Due de R — forgets himself sufficiently to administer it to inc."

I was stung by this taunt, however well deserved. "Prince," said I, "I have for the indelicacy of compulsion so illustrious an example that I cannot hesitate to pursue the path honored by your own footsteps. All Naples knows that the Pisani despises at once your gold and your love; that force alone could have brought her under your roof; and that you refuse to produce her because you fear her complaints, and know enough of the chivalry your vanity sneers at to feel

assured that the gentlemen of France are not more disposed to worship beauty than to defend it from wrong."

"You speak well, sir," said Zicci, gravely;—"the Prince dare not produce his prize."

The Prince remained speechless for a few moments, as if with indignation. At last he broke out into expressions the most injurious and insulting against Signor Zicci and myself. Zicci replied not; I was more hot and hasty. The guests appeared to delight in our dispute. None except Mascari, whom we pushed aside and disdained to hear, strove to conciliate; some took one side, some another. The issue may be well foreseen. Swords were drawn. I had left mine in the ante room; Zicci offered me his own, —I seized it eagerly. There might be some six or eight persons engaged in a strange and confused kind of melee, but the Prince and myself only sought each other. The noise around us, the confusion of the guests, the cries of the musicians, the clash of our own swords, only served to stimulate our unhappy fury. We feared to be interrupted by the attendants and fought like madmen, without skill or method. I thrust and parried mechanically, blind and frantic as if a demon had entered into me, till I saw the Prince stretched at my feet, bathed in his blood, and Zicci bending over him and whispering in his ear. The sight cooled us all; the strife ceased. We gathered in shame, remorse, and horror round our ill-fated host; but it was too late, his eyes rolled fearfully in his head, and still he struggled to release himself from Zicci's arms, who continued to whisper (I trust divine comfort) in his ear. I have seen men die, but, never

one who wore such horror on his countenance. At last all was over; Zicci rose from the corpse, and taking, with great composure, his sword from my hand,—"Ye are witnesses, gentlemen," said he, calmly, "that the Prince brought his fate upon himself. The last of that illustrious house has perished in a brawl."

I saw no more of Zicci. I hastened to the French ambassador to narrate the event and abide the issue. I am grateful to the Neapolitan government and to the illustrious heir of the unfortunate nobleman for the lenient and generous, yet just, interpretation put upon a misfortune the memory of which will afflict me to the last hour of my life. (Signed) Louis Victor, Duc de R.

In the above memorial the reader will find the most exact and minute account yet given of an event which created the most lively sensation at Naples in that day, and the narration of which first induced me to collect the materials of this history, which the reader will perceive, as it advances, is altogether different in its nature, its agencies, and its aims from those tales of external terror, whether derived from ingenious imposture or supernatural mystery, that have given life to French melodrama or German romance.

CHAPTER XVII

Glyndon had taken no part in the affray, neither had he participated largely in the excesses of the revel. For his exemption from both he was perhaps indebted to the whispered exhortations of Zicci. When the last rose from the corpse and withdrew from that scene of confusion, Glyndon remarked that in passing the crowd he touched Mascari on the shoulder, and said something which the Englishman did not overhear. Glyndon followed Zicci into the banquet-room, which, save where the moonlight slept on the marble floor, was wrapped in the sad and gloomy shadows of the advancing night.

"How could you foretell this fearful event? He fell not by your arm," said Glyndon, in a tremulous and hollow tone.

"The general who calculates on the victory does not fight in person," answered Zicci. "But enough of this. Meet me at midnight by the seashore, half a mile to the left of your hotel,—you will know the spot by a rude pillar, the only one near—, to which a broken chain is attached. There and then will be the crisis of your fate; go. I have business here yet,—remember, Isabel is still in the house of the dead man."

As Glyndon yet hesitated, strange thoughts, doubts, and fears that longed for speech crowding within him, Mascari approached; and Zicci, turning to the Italian and waving his hand to Glyndon, drew the former aside. Glyndon slowly departed.

"Mascari," said Zicci, "your patron is no more. Your services will be valueless to his heir,—a sober man, whom poverty has preserved from vice. For yourself, thank me that I do not give you up to the executioner,—recollect the wine of Cyprus. Well, never tremble, man, it could not act on me, though it might re-act on others,—in that it is a common type of crime. I forgive you; and if the wine should kill me, I promise you that my ghost shall not haunt so worshipful a penitent. Enough of this. Conduct me to the chamber of Isabel di Pisani; you have no further need of her. The death of the jailer opens the cell of the captive. Be quick, —I would be gone." Mascari muttered some inaudible words, bowed low, and led the way to the chamber in which Isabel was confined.

CHAPTER XVIII

It wanted several minutes of midnight, and Glyndon repaired to the appointed spot. The mysterious empire which Zicci had acquired over him was still more solemnly confirmed by the events of the last few hours; the sudden fate of the Prince, so deliberately foreshadowed, and yet so seemingly accidental—brought out by causes the most commonplace, and yet associated with words the most prophetic,—impressed him with the deepest sentiments of admiration and awe. It was as if this dark and wondrous being would convert the most ordinary events and the meanest instruments into the agencies of his inscrutable will; yet, if so, why have permitted the capture of Isabel? Why not have prevented the crime rather than punished the criminal? And did Zicci really feel love for Isabel? Love, and yet offer to resign her to himself,—to a rival whom his arts could not fail to baffle? He no longer reverted to the belief that Zicci or Isabel had sought to dupe him into marriage. His fear and reverence for the former now forbade the notion of so poor an imposture. Did he any longer love Isabel himself? No. When, that morning, he heard of her danger, he had, it is true, returned to the sympathies and the fears of affection; but with the death of the Prince her image faded again from his heart, and he felt no jealous pang at the thought that she had been saved by Zicci,—that at that moment she was perhaps beneath his roof. Whoever has, in the course

of his life, indulged the absorbing passion of the gamester, will remember bow all other pursuits and objects vanished from his mind, how solely he was wrapped in the one wild delusion; with what a sceptre of magic power the despot demon ruled every feeling and every thought. Far more intense than the passion of the gamester was the frantic yet sublime desire that mastered the breast of Glyndon. He would be the rival of Zicci, not in human and perishable affections, but in preternatural and eternal lore. He would have laid down life with content, nay, rapture, as the price of learning those solemn secrets which separated the stranger from mankind.. Such fools are we when we aspire to be over-wise! To be enamoured too madly of the goddess of goddesses is only to embrace a cloud, and to forfeit alike heaven and earth.

The night was most lovely and serene, and the waves scarcely rippled at his feet as the Englishman glided on by the cool and starry beach. At length he arrived at the spot, and there, leaning against the broken pillar, he beheld a man wrapped in a long mantle and in an attitude of profound repose. He approached, and uttered the name of Zicci. The figure turned, and he saw the face of a stranger,—a face not stamped by the glorious beauty of the Corsican, but equally majestic in its aspect, and perhaps still more impressive from the mature age and the passionless depth of thought that characterized the expanded forehead and deep-set but piercing eyes.

"You seek Zicci," said the stranger,—"he will be here anon;

but perhaps he whom you see before you is more connected with your destiny, and more disposed to realize your dreams."

"Hath the earth then another Zicci?"

"If not," replied the stranger, "why do you cherish the hope and the wild faith to be yourself a Zicci? Think you that none others have burned with the same godlike dream? Who, indeed, in his first youth;— youth, when the soul is nearer to the heaven from which it sprang, and its divine and primal longings are not all effaced by the sordid passions and petty cares that are begot in time?—who is there in youth that has not nourished the belief that the universe has secrets not known to the common herd, and panted, as the hart for the water-springs, for the fountains that he hid and far away amidst the broad wilderness of trackless science? The music of the fountain is heard in the soul within till the steps, deceived and erring, rove away from its waters, and the wanderer dies in the mighty desert. Think you that none who have cherished the hope have found the truth, or that the yearning after the Ineffable Knowledge was given to us utterly in vain? No. Every desire in human hearts is but a glimpse of things that exist, alike distant and divine. No! in the world there have been, from age to age, some brighter and happier spirits who have won to the air in which the beings above mankind move and breathe. Zicci, great though he be, stands not alone; he has his predecessors, his contemporary rivals, and long lines of successors are yet to come!"

"And will you tell me," said Glyndon, "that in yourself

I behold one of that mighty few over whom Zicci has no superiority in power and wisdom?"

"In me," answered the stranger, "you see one from whom Zicci himself learned many of his loftiest secrets. Before his birth my wisdom was! On these shores, on this spot, have I stood in ages that your chronicles but feebly reach. The Phoenician, the Greek, the Oscan, the Roman, the Lombard,—I have seen them all! —leaves gay and glittering on the trunk of the universal life— scattered in due season and again renewed; till, indeed, the same race that gave its glory to the ancient world bestowed a second youth on the new. For the pure Greeks—the Hellenes, whose origin has bewildered your dreaming scholars—were of the same great family as the Norman tribe, born to be the lords of the universe, and in no land on earth destined to be the hewers of wood. Even the dim traditions of the learned that bring the sons of Hellas from the vast and undetermined territories of Northern Thrace, to be the victors of the pastoral Pelasgi, and the founders of the line of demi-gods, might serve you to trace back their primeval settlements to the same region whence, in later times, the Norman warriors broke on the dull and savage hordes of the Celt, and became the Greeks of the Christian world. But this interests you not, and you are wise in your indifference. Not in the knowledge of things without, but in the perfection of the soul within, lies the empire of man aspiring to be more than men."

"And what books contain that science; from what laboratory is it wrought?"

"Nature supplies the materials: they are around you in your daily walks; in the herbs that the beast devours and the chemist disdains to cull; in the elements, from which matter in its meanest and its mightiest shapes is deduced; in the wide bosom of the air; in the black abysses of the earth,—everywhere are given to mortals the resources and libraries of immortal lore. But as the simplest problems in the simplest of all studies are obscure to one who braces not his mind to their comprehension; as the rower in yonder vessel cannot tell you why two circles can touch each other only in one point,—so, though all earth were carved over and inscribed with the letters of diviner knowledge, the characters would be valueless to him who does not pause to inquire the language and meditate the truth. Young man, if thy imagination is vivid; if thy heart is daring, if thy curiosity is insatiate, I will accept thee as my pupil. But the first lessons are stern and dread."

"If thou hast mastered them, why not I?" answered Glyndon, boldly. "I have felt from my boyhood that strange mysteries were reserved for my career, and from the proudest ends of ordinary ambition I have carried my gaze into the cloud and darkness that stretch beyond. The instant I beheld Zicci, I felt as if I had discovered the guide and the tutor for which my youth had idly languished and vainly burned."

"And to me his duty can be transferred," replied the stranger. "Yonder lies, anchored in the bay, the vessel in which Zicci seeks a fairer home; a little while and the breeze will rise, the

sail will swell, and the stranger will have passed like a wind away. Still, like the wind, he leaves in thy heart the seeds that may bear the blossom and the fruit. Zicci hath performed his task—he is wanted no more; the perfecter of his work is at thy side. He comes—I hear the dash of the oar. You will have your choice submitted to you. According as you decide, we shall meet again." With these words the stranger moved slowly away, and disappeared beneath the shadow of the cliffs. A boat glided rapidly across the waters; it touched land, a man leapt on shore, and Glyndon recognized Zicci.

"I give thee, Glyndon, I give thee no more the option of happy love and serene enjoyment. That hour is past, and fate has linked the hand that might have been thine own to mine. But I have ample gifts to bestow upon thee if thou wilt abandon the hope that gnaws thy heart, and the realization of which even I have not the power to foresee. Be thine ambition human, and I can gratify it to the full. Men desire four things in life,—love, wealth, fame, power. The first I cannot give thee,—no matter why; the rest are at my disposal. Select which of them thou wilt, and let us part in peace."

"Such are not the gifts I covet: I choose knowledge, which indeed, as the schoolman said, is power, and the loftiest; that knowledge must be thine own. For this, and for this alone, I surrendered the love of Isabel; this, and this alone, must be any recompense."

"I cannot gainsay thee, though I can warn. The desire to learn

does not always contain the faculty to acquire. I can give thee, it is true, the teacher; the rest must depend on thee. Be wise in time, and take that which I can assure to thee."

"Answer me but these questions, and according to your answer I will decide. Is it in the power of man to attain intercourse with the beings of other worlds? Is it in the power of man to read the past and the future, and to insure life against the sword and against disease?"

"All this may be possible," answered Zicci evasively, "to the few. But for one who attains such secrets, millions may perish in the attempt."

"One question more. Thou—"

"Beware! Of myself, as I have said before, I render no account."

"Well, then, the stranger I have met this night—are his boasts to be believed? Is he in truth one of the chosen seers whom you allow to have mastered the mysteries I yearn to fathom?"

"Rash man," said Zicci, in a tone of compassion, "thy crisis is past, and thy choice made. I can only bid thee be bold and prosper. Yes, I resign thee to a master who has the power and the will to open to thee the gates of the awful world. Thy weal or woe are as nought in the eyes of his relentless wisdom. I would bid him spare thee, but he will heed me not. Mejnour, receive thy pupil!" Glyndon turned, and his heart beat when he perceived that the stranger, whose footsteps he had not heard on the pebbles, whose approach he had not beheld in the moonlight, was once more by

his side.

Glyndon's eyes followed the receding form of the mysterious Corsican. He saw him enter the boat, and he then for the first time noticed that besides the rowers there was a female, who stood up as Zicci gained the boat. Even at this distance he recognized the once-adored form of Isabel. She waved her hand to him, and across the still and shining air came her voice, mournfully and sweetly in her native tongue, "Farewell, Clarence —farewell, farewell."

He strove to answer, but the voice touched a chord at his heart, and the words failed him. Isabel was then lost forever,—gone with this dread stranger,—darkness was round her lot. And he himself had decided her fate and his own! The boat bounded on, the soft waves flashed and sparkled beneath the oars, and it was along one sapphire track of moonlight that the frail vessel bore away the lovers. Farther and farther from his gaze sped the boat, till at last the speck, scarcely visible, touched the side of the ship that lay lifeless in the glorious bay. At that instant, as if by magic, up sprang with a glad murmur the playful and refreshing wind. And Glyndon turned to Mejnour, and broke the silence.

"Tell me,—if thou canst read the future,—tell me that her lot will be fair, and that her choice at least is wise."

"My pupil," answered Mejnour, in a voice the calmness of which well accorded with the chilling words, "thy first task must be to withdraw all thought, feeling, sympathy from others. The elementary stage of knowledge is to make self, and self alone, thy

study and thy world. Thou hast decided thine own career; thou hast renounced love; thou hast rejected wealth, fame, and the vulgar pomps of power. What, then, are all mankind to thee? To perfect thy faculties and concentrate thy emotions is henceforth thy only aim."

"And will happiness be the end?"

"If happiness exist," answered Mejnour, "it must be centred in A Self to which all passion is unknown. But happiness is the last state of being, and as yet thou art on the threshold of the first!"

As Mejnour spoke, the distant vessel spread its sails to the wind, and moved slowly along the deep. Glyndon sighed, and the pupil and the master retraced their steps towards the city.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

It was about a month after the date of Zicci's departure and Glyndon's introduction to Mejnour, when two Englishmen were walking arm-in-arm through the Toledo.

"I tell you," said one (who spoke warmly), "that if you have a particle of common-sense left in you, you will accompany me to England. This Mejnour is an impostor more dangerous—because more in earnest—than Zicci. After all, what do his promises amount to? You allow that nothing can be more equivocal. You say that he has left Naples, that he has selected a retreat more genial than the crowded thoroughfares of men to the studies in which he is to initiate you; and this retreat is among the haunts of the fiercest bandits of Italy,—haunts which Justice itself dare not penetrate; fitting hermitage for a sage! I tremble for you. What if this stranger, of whom nothing is known, be leagued with the robbers; and these lures for your credulity bait but the traps for your property,—perhaps your life? You might come off cheaply by a ransom of half your fortune; you smile indignantly well! put common- sense out of the question; take your own view of the matter. You are to undergo an ordeal which Mejnour himself does not profess to describe as a very tempting one. It may, or

it may not, succeed; if it does not, you are menaced with the darkest evils; and if it does, you cannot be better off than the dull and joyless mystic whom you have taken for a master. Away with this folly! Enjoy youth while it is left to you. Return with me to England; forget these dreams. Enter your proper career; form affections more respectable than those which lured you a while to an Italian adventuress, and become a happy and distinguished man. This is the advice of sober friendship; yet the promises I hold out to you are fairer than those of Mejnour."

"Merton," said Glyndon, doggedly, "I cannot, if I would, yield to your wishes. A power that is above me urges me on; I cannot resist its fascination. I will proceed to the last in the strange career I have commenced. Think of me no more. Follow yourself the advice you give to me, and be happy."

"This is madness," said Merton, passionately, but with a tear in his eye; "your health is already failing; you are so changed I should scarcely know you: come, I have already had your name entered in my passport; in another hour I shall be gone, and you, boy that you are, will be left without a friend to the deceits of your own fancy and the machinations of this relentless mountebank."

"Enough," said Glyndon, coldly; "you cease to be an effective counsellor when you suffer your prejudices to be thus evident. I have already had ample proof," added the Englishman, and his pale cheek grew more pale, "of the power of this man,—if man he be, which I sometimes doubt; and, come life, come death, I will not shrink from the paths that allure me. Farewell, Merton:

if we never meet again; if you hear amidst our old and cheerful haunts that Clarence Glyndon sleeps the last sleep by the shores of Naples, or amidst the Calabrian hills,—say to the friends of our youth, 'He died worthily, as thousands of martyr-students have died before him, in the pursuit of knowledge.'"

He wrung Merton's hand as he spoke, darted from his side, and disappeared amidst the crowd.

That day Merton left Naples; the next morning Glyndon also quitted the City of Delight, alone and on horseback. He bent his way into those picturesque but dangerous parts of the country which at that time were infested by banditti, and which few travellers dared to pass, even in broad daylight, without a strong escort. A road more lonely cannot well be conceived than that on which the hoofs of his steed, striking upon the fragments of rock that encumbered the neglected way, woke a dull and melancholy echo. Large tracts of waste land, varied by the rank and profuse foliage of the South, lay before him; occasionally a wild goat peeped down from some rocky crag, or the discordant cry of a bird of prey, startled in its sombre haunt, was heard above the hills. These were the only signs of life; not a human being was met, not a hut was visible. Wrapped in his own ardent and solemn thoughts, the young man continued his way, till the sun had spent its noonday heat, and a breeze that announced the approach of eve sprung up from the unseen ocean that lay far distant to his sight. It was then that a turn in the road brought before him one of those long, desolate, gloomy villages which are found in the

interior of the Neapolitan dominions; and now he came upon a small chapel on one side of the road, with a gaudily painted image of the Virgin in the open shrine. Around this spot, which in the heart of a Christian land retained the vestige of the old idolatry (for just such were the chapels that in the Pagan age were dedicated to the demon-saints of mythology), gathered six or seven miserable and squalid wretches, whom the Curse of the Leper had cut off from mankind. They set up a shrill cry as they turned their ghastly visages towards the horseman; and, without stirring from the spot, stretched out their gaunt arms, and implored charity in the name of the Merciful Mother. Glyndon hastily threw them some small coins, and, turning away his face, clapped spurs to his horse, and relaxed not his speed till he entered the village. On either side the narrow and miry street, fierce and haggard forms—some leaning against the ruined walls of blackened huts, some seated at the threshold, some lying at full length in the mud—presented groups that at once invoked pity and aroused alarm; pity for their squalor,—alarm for the ferocity imprinted on their savage aspects. They gazed at him, grim and sullen, as he rode slowly up the rugged street; sometimes whispering significantly to each other, but without attempting to stop his way. Even the children hushed their babble, and ragged urchins, devouring him with sparkling eyes, muttered to their mothers, "We shall feast well to-morrow!" It was, indeed, one of those hamlets in which Law sets not its sober step, in which Violence and Murder house secure,—hamlets common then in

the wilder parts of Italy, in which the peasant was but the gentler name for the robber.

Glyndon's heart somewhat failed him as he looked around, and the question he desired to ask died upon his lips. At length, from one of the dismal cabins emerged a form superior to the rest. Instead of the patched and ragged overall which made the only garment of the men he had hitherto seen, the dress of this person was characterized by all the trappings of Calabrian bravery. Upon his raven hair, the glossy curls of which made a notable contrast to the matted and elfin locks of the savages around, was placed a cloth cap with a gold tassel that hung down to his shoulder; his mustaches were trimmed with care, and a silk kerchief of gay lines was twisted round a well-shaped but sinewy throat; a short jacket of rough cloth was decorated with several rows of gilt filagree buttons; his nether garments fitted tight to his limbs, and were curiously braided; while in a broad, party-colored sash were placed four silver-hilted pistols; and the sheathed knife, usually worn by Italians of the lower order, was mounted in ivory elaborately carved. A small carbine of handsome workmanship was slung across his shoulder, and completed his costume. The man himself was of middle size, athletic, yet slender; with straight and regular features,—sunburnt, but not swarthy; and an expression of countenance which, though reckless and bold, had in it frankness rather than ferocity, and, if defying, was not altogether unprepossessing.

Glyndon, after eyeing this figure for some moments with great attention, checked his rein, and asked in the provincial patois, with which he was tolerably familiar, the way to the "Castle of the Mountain."

The man lifted his cap as he heard the question, and, approaching Glyndon, laid his hand upon the neck of the horse, and said in a low voice, "Then you are the cavalier whom our patron the signor expected. He bade me wait for you here, and lead you to the castle. And indeed, signor, it might have been unfortunate if I had neglected to obey the command." The man then, drawing a little aside, called out to the bystanders in a loud voice, "Ho, ho, my friends, pay henceforth and forever all respect to this worshipful cavalier. He is the accepted guest of our blessed patron of the Castle of the Mountain. Long life to him! May he, like his host, be safe by day and by night, in the hill and on the waste, against the dagger and the bullet, in limb and in life! Cursed be he who touches a hair of his head, or a baioccho in his pouch. Now and forever we will protect and honor him; for the law or against the law; with the faith, and to the death. Amen. Amen!"

"Amen!" responded in wild chorus a hundred voices, and the scattered and straggling groups pressed up the street, nearer and nearer to the horseman.

"And that he may be known," continued the Englishman's strange protector, "to the eye and to the ear, I place around him the white sash, and I give him the sacred watchword,—'Peace

to the Brave.' Signor, when you wear this sash, the proudest in these parts will bare the head and bend the knee. Signor, when you utter this watchword, the bravest hearts will be bound to your bidding. Desire you safety, or ask you revenge; to gain a beauty, or to lose a foe, speak but the word, and we are yours, we are yours! Is it not so, comrades? "And again the hoarse voices shouted, "Amen, amen!"

"Now, signor," whispered the bravo, in good Italian, "if you have a few coins to spare, scatter them amongst the crowd, and let us be gone."

Glyndon, not displeased at the concluding sentence, emptied his purse in the street; and while, with mingled oaths, blessings, shrieks, and yells, men, women, and children scrambled for the money, the bravo, taking the rein of the horse, led it a few paces through the village at a brisk trot, and then turning up a narrow lane to the left, in a few minutes neither houses nor men were visible, and the mountains closed their path on either side. It was then that, releasing the bridle and slackening his pace, the guide turned his dark eyes on Glyndon with an arch expression, and said,—

"Your Excellency was not, perhaps, prepared for the hearty welcome we have given you."

"Why, in truth, I ought to have been prepared for it, since my friend, to whose house I am bound, did not disguise from me the character of the neighborhood. And your name, my friend, if I may call you so?"

"Oh, no ceremonies with me, Excellency. In the village I am generally called Maestro Paulo. I had a surname once, though a very equivocal one; and I have forgotten that since I retired from the world."

"And was it from disgust, from poverty, or from some some ebullition of passion which entailed punishment, that you betook yourself to the mountains?"

"Why, signor," said the bravo, with a gay laugh, "hermits of my class seldom love the confessional. However, I have no secrets while my step is in these defiles, my whistle in my pouch, and my carbine at my back." With that the robber, as if he loved permission to talk at his will, hemmed thrice, and began with much humor; though, as his tale proceeded, the memories it roused seemed to carry him further than he at first intended, and reckless and light-hearted ease gave way to that fierce and varied play of countenance and passion of gesture which characterize the emotions of his countrymen.

"I was born at Terracina,—a fair spot, is it not? My father was a learned monk, of high birth; my mother—Heaven rest her!—an innkeeper's pretty daughter. Of course there was no marriage in the case; and when I was born, the monk gravely declared my appearance to be miraculous. I was dedicated from my cradle to the altar; and my head was universally declared to be the orthodox shape for a cowl. As I grew up, the monk took great pains with my education, and I learned Latin and psalmody as soon as less miraculous infants learn crowing. Nor did the holy

man's care stint itself to my interior accomplishments. Although vowed to poverty, he always contrived that my mother should have her pockets full; and between her pockets and mine there was soon established a clandestine communication; accordingly, at fourteen, I wore my cap on one side, stuck pistols in my belt, and assumed the swagger of a cavalier and a gallant. At that age my poor mother died; and about the same period, my father, having written a 'History of the Pontifical Bulls,' in forty volumes, and being, as I said, of high birth, obtained a cardinal's hat. From that time he thought fit to disown your humble servant. He bound me over to an honest notary at Naples, and gave me two hundred crowns by way of provision. Well, signor, I saw enough of the law to convince me that I should never be rogue enough to shine in the profession. So instead of spoiling parchment, I made love to the notary's daughter. My master discovered our innocent amusement, and turned me out of doors,—that was disagreeable. But my Ninetta loved me, and took care that I should not lie out in the streets with the lazzaroni. Little jade, I think I see her now, with her bare feet, and her finger to her lips, opening the door in the summer nights, and bidding me creep softly into the kitchen, where—praised be the saints!- -a flask and a manchet always awaited the hungry amoroso. At last, however, Ninetta grew cold. It is the way of the sex, signor. Her father found her an excellent marriage in the person of a withered picture-dealer. She took the spouse, and very properly clapped the door in the face of the lover. I was not disheartened, Excellency; no,

not I. Women are plentiful while we are young. So, without a ducat in my pocket, or a crust for my teeth, I set out to seek my fortune on board of a Spanish merchantman. That was duller work than I expected: but luckily we were attacked by a pirate; half the crew were butchered, the rest captured. I was one of the last,—always in luck, you see, signor, monks' sons have a knack that way! The captain of the pirate took a fancy to me. 'Serve with us,' said he. 'Too happy,' said I. Behold me then a pirate. Oh jolly life! how I blest the old notary for turning me out of doors! What feasting! what fighting! what wooing! what quarreling! Sometimes we ran ashore and enjoyed ourselves like princes; sometimes we lay in a calm for days together, on the loveliest sea that man ever traversed. And then, if the breeze rose, and a sail came in sight, who so merry as we? I passed three years in that charming profession, and then, signor, I grew ambitious. I caballed against the captain; I wanted his post. One still night we struck the blow. The ship was like a log in the sea,—no land to be seen from the mast-head, the waves like glass, and the moon at its full. Up we rose,—thirty of us and more. Up we rose with a shout; we poured into the captain's cabin,—I at the head. The brave old boy had caught the alarm, and there he stood at the doorway, a pistol in each hand; and his one eye (he had only one) worse to meet than the pistols were.

"'Yield,' cried I, 'your life shall be safe.'

"'Take that,' said he, and whiz went the pistol; but the saints took care of their own, and the ball passed by my cheek, and shot

the boatswain behind me. I closed with the captain, and the other pistol went off without mischief in the struggle; such a fellow he was, six feet four without his shoes! Over we went, rolling each on the other. Santa Maria!—no time to get hold of one's knife. Meanwhile, all the crew were up, some for the captain, some for me; clashing and firing, and swearing and groaning, and now and then a heavy splash in the sea! Fine supper for the sharks that night! At last old Bilboa got uppermost: out flashed his knife; down it came, but not in my heart. No! I gave my left arm as a shield, and the blade went through and through up to the hilt, with the blood spirting up like the rain from a whale's nostril. With the weight of the blow the stout fellow came down, so that his face touched mine; with my right hand I caught him by the throat, turned him over like a lamb, signor, and faith it was soon all up with him; the boatswain's brother, a fat Dutchman, ran him through with a pike.

"'Old fellow,' said I, as he turned up his terrible eye to me, 'I bear you no malice, but we must try to get on in the world, you know.' The captain grinned and gave up the ghost. I went upon deck; what a sight! Twenty bold fellows stark and cold, and the moon sparkling on the puddles of blood as calmly as if it were water. Well, signor, the victory was ours, and the ship mine; I ruled merrily enough for six months. We then attacked a French ship twice our size; what sport it was! And we had not had a good fight so long we were quite like virgins at it! We got the best of it, and won ship and cargo. They wanted to pistol

the captain: but that was against my laws; so we gagged him, for he scolded as loud as if we were married to him; left him and the rest of his crew on board our own vessel, which was terribly battered: clapped our black flag on the Frenchman's, and set off merrily, with a brisk wind in our favor. But luck deserted us on forsaking our own dear old ship. A storm came on; a plank struck; several of us escaped in the boats; we had lots of gold with us, but no water. For two days and two nights we suffered horribly: but at last we ran ashore near a French seaport; our sorry plight moved compassion, and as we had money we were not suspected; people only suspect the poor. Here we soon recovered our fatigues, rigged ourselves out gayly, and your humble servant was considered as noble a captain as ever walked deck. But now, alas, my fate would have it that I should fall in love with a silk-mercer's daughter. Ah! how I loved her,—the pretty Clara! Yes, I loved her so well, that I was seized with horror at my past life; I resolved to repent, to marry her, and settle down into an honest man. Accordingly, I summoned my messmates, told them my resolution, resigned my command, and persuaded them to depart. They were good fellows; engaged with a Dutchman, against whom I heard afterwards they made a successful mutiny, but I never saw them more. I had two thousand crowns still left; with this sum I obtained the consent of the silk-mercer, and it was agreed that I should become a partner in the firm. I need not say that no one suspected I had been so great a man, and I passed for a Neapolitan goldsmith's son instead of a cardinal's. I

was very happy then, signor, very,—I could not have harmed a fly. Had I married Clara I had been as gentle a mercer as ever handled a measure."

The bravo paused a moment, and it was easy to see that he felt more than his words and tone betokened. "Well, well, we must not look back at the Past too earnestly,—the sun light upon it makes one's eyes water. The day was fixed for our wedding, it approached; on the evening before the appointed day, Clara, her mother, her little sister, and myself were walking by the port, and as we looked on the sea I was telling them old gossip tales of mermaids and sea-serpents,—when a red-faced bottle-nosed Frenchman clapped himself right before me, and placing his spectacles very deliberately astride his proboscis, echoed out, 'Sacre, mille tonnerres! This is the damned pirate that boarded the "Niobe"!'

"None of your jests,' said I, mildly. 'Ho, ho,' said he. 'I can't be mistaken. Help there,' and he gripped me by the collar. I replied, as you may suppose, by laying him in the kennel; but it would not do. The French captain had a French lieutenant at his back, whose memory was as good as his master's. A crowd assembled; other sailors came up; the odds were against me. I slept that night in prison; and, in a few weeks afterwards, I was sent to the galleys. They had spared my life because the old Frenchman politely averred that I had made my crew spare his. You may believe that the oar and the chain were not to my taste. I, and two others, escaped; they took to the road, and have, no doubt, been

long since broken on the wheel. I, soft soul, would not commit another crime to gain my bread, for Clara was still at my heart with her soft eyes; so, limiting my rogueries to the theft of a beggar's rags, which I compensated him by leaving my galley attire instead, I begged my way to the town where I left Clara. It was a clear winter's day when I approached the outskirts of the town. I had no fear of detection, for my beard and hair were as good as a mask. Oh, Mother of Mercy! there came across my way a funeral procession! There, now, you know it. I can tell you no more. She had died, perhaps of love, more likely of shame. Do you know how I spent that night? I will tell you; I stole a pickaxe from a mason's shed, and, all alone and unseen, under the frosty heavens I dug the fresh mould from the grave; I lifted the coffin; I wrenched the lid, I saw her again—again. Decay had not touched her. She was always pale in her life! I could have sworn she lived! It was a blessed thing to see her once more,—and all alone too! But then at dawn, to give her back to the earth,—to close the lid, to throw down the mould, to hear the pebbles rattle on the coffin,—that was dreadful! Signor, I never knew before, and I don't wish to think now, how valuable a thing human life is. At sunrise I was again a wanderer; but now that Clara was gone my scruples vanished, and again I was at war with my betters. I contrived, at last, at O—, to get taken on board a vessel bound to Leghorn, working out my passage. From Leghorn I went to Rome, and stationed myself at the door of the cardinal's palace. Out he came,—his gilded coach at the gate. "'Ho, father,' said I,

'don't you know me?'

"'Who are you?'

"'Your son,' said I, in a whisper.

"The cardinal drew back, looked at me earnestly, and mused a moment. 'All men are my sons,' quoth he then, very mildly; 'there is gold for thee. To him who begs once, alms are due; to him who begs twice, jails are open. Take the hint and molest me no more. Heaven bless thee!' With that he got into his coach and drove off to the Vatican. His purse, which he had left behind, was well supplied. I was grateful and contented, and took my way to Terracina. I had not long passed the marshes, when I saw two horsemen approach at a canter.

"'You look poor, friend,' said one of them, halting; 'yet you are strong.'

"'Poor men and strong are both serviceable and dangerous, Signor Cavalier.'

"'Well said! follow us.'

"I obeyed and became a bandit. I rose by degrees; and as I have always been mild in my calling, and have taken purses without cutting throats, bear an excellent character, and can eat my macaroni at Naples without any danger to life and limbs. For the last two years I have settled in these parts, where I hold sway, and where I have purchased land. I am called a farmer, signor; and I myself now only rob for amusement, and to keep my hand in. I trust I have satisfied your curiosity. We are within a hundred yards of the castle."

"And how," asked the Englishman, whose interest had been much excited by his companion's narrative, "and how came you acquainted with my host? and by what means has he so well conciliated the goodwill of yourself and your friends?"

Maestro Paulo turned his black eyes gravely towards his questioner. "Why, signor," said he, "you must surely know more of the foreign cavalier with the hard name than I do. All I can say is, that about a fortnight ago I chanced to be standing by a booth in the Toledo at Naples, when a sober-looking gentleman touched me by the arm, and said, 'Maestro Paulo, I want to make your acquaintance; do me the favor to come into yonder tavern.' When we were seated, my new acquaintance thus accosted me: 'The Count d' O— has offered to let me hire his old castle near B—. You know the spot?'

"'Extremely well; no one has inhabited it for a century at least; it is half in ruins, signor. A queer place to hire; I hope the rent is not heavy.'

"'Maestro Paulo,' said he, 'I am a philosopher, and don't care for luxuries. I want a quiet retreat for some scientific experiments. The castle will suit me very well, provided you will accept me as a neighbor, and place me and my friends under your special protection. I am rich; but I shall take nothing to the castle worth robbing. I will pay one rent to the count, and another to you.'

"With that we soon came to terms, and as the strange signor doubled the sum I myself proposed, he is in high favor with all

his neighbors. We would guard the old castle against an army. And now, signor, that I have been thus frank, be frank with me. Who is this singular cavalier?"

"Who?—he himself told you, a philosopher."

"Hem! Searching for the philosopher's stone, eh? A bit of a magician; afraid of the priests?"

"Precisely. You have hit it."

"I thought so; and you are his pupil?"

"I am."

"I wish you well through it," said the robber, seriously, and crossing himself with much devotion; "I am not much better than other people, but one's soul is one's soul. I do not mind a little honest robbery, or knocking a man on the head if need be,—but to make a bargain with the devil!—Ah! take care, young gentleman, take care."

"You need not fear," said Glyndon, smiling; "my preceptor is too wise and too good for such a compact. But here we are, I suppose. A noble ruin! A glorious prospect!"

Glyndon paused delightedly, and surveyed the scene before and below with the eye of a poet and a painter. Insensibly, while listening to the bandit, he had wound up a considerable ascent, and now he was upon a broad ledge of rock covered with mosses and dwarf shrubs. Between this eminence and another of equal height, upon which the castle was built, there was a deep but narrow fissure, overgrown with the most profuse foliage, so that the eye could not penetrate many yards below the rugged surface

of the abyss; but the profoundness might well be conjectured by the hoarse, low, monotonous sound of waters unseen that rolled below, and the subsequent course of which was visible at a distance in a perturbed and rapid stream that intersected the waste and desolate valleys. To the left, the prospect seemed almost boundless; the extreme clearness of the purple air serving to render distinct the features of a range of country that a conqueror of old might have deemed in itself a kingdom. Lonely and desolate as the road which Glyndon had passed that day had appeared, the landscape now seemed studded with castles, spires, and villages. Afar off, Naples gleamed whitely in the last rays of the sun, and the rose-tints of the horizon melted into the azure of her glorious bay. Yet more remote, and in another part of the prospect, might be caught, dim and shadowy, and backed by the darkest foliage, the ruined village of the ancient Possidonia. There, in the midst of his blackened and sterile realms, rose the dismal Mount of Fire; while, on the other hand, winding through variegated plains, to which distance lent all its magic, glittered many a stream, by which Etruscan and Sybarite, Roman and Saracen and Norman, had, at intervals of ages, pitched the invading tent. All the visions of the past the stormy and dazzling histories of Southern Italy—rushed over the artist's mind as he gazed below. And then, slowly turning to look behind, he saw the gray and mouldering walls of the castle in which he sought the secrets that were to give to hope in the Future a mightier empire than memory owns in the Past. It was one of those baronial

fortresses with which Italy was studded in the earlier middle ages, having but little of the Gothic grace of grandeur which belongs to the ecclesiastical architecture of the same time; but rude, vast, and menacing even in decay. A wooden bridge was thrown over the chasm, wide enough to admit two horsemen abreast; and the planks trembled and gave back a hollow sound as Glyndon urged his jaded steed across.

A road that had once been broad, and paved with rough flags, but which now was half obliterated by long grass and rank weeds, conducted to the outer court of the castle hard by; the gates were open, and half the building in this part was dismantled, the ruins partially hid by ivy that was the growth of centuries. But on entering the inner court, Glyndon was not sorry to notice that there was less appearance of neglect and decay: some wild roses gave a smile to the gray walls; and in the centre there was a fountain, in which the waters still trickled coolly, and with a pleasing murmur, from the jaws of a gigantic triton. Here he was met by Mejnour with a smile.

"Welcome, my friend and pupil," said he; "he who seeks for Truth can find in these solitudes an immortal Academe."

CHAPTER. II

The attendants which Mejnour had engaged for his strange abode were such as might suit a philosopher of few wants. An old Armenian, whom Glyndon recognized as in the mystic's service at Naples; a tall, hard-featured woman from the village, recommended by Maestro Paulo; and two long-haired, smooth-spoken, but fierce-visaged youths, from the same place, and honored by the same sponsorship,—constituted the establishment. The rooms used by the sage were commodious and weather-proof, with some remains of ancient splendor in the faded arras that clothed the walls and the huge tables of costly marble and elaborate carving. Glyndon's sleeping apartment communicated with a kind of belvidere or terrace that commanded prospects of unrivalled beauty and extent, and was separated, on the other side, by a long gallery and a flight of ten or a dozen stairs, from the private chambers of the mystic. There was about the whole place a sombre, and yet not displeasing, depth of repose. It suited well with the studies to which it was now to be appropriated.

For several days Mejnour refused to confer with Glyndon on the subjects nearest to his heart.

"All without," said he, "is prepared, but not all within. Your own soul must grow accustomed to the spot, and filled with the surrounding Nature; for Nature is the source of all inspiration."

With these words, which savored a little of jargon, Mejnour turned to lighter topics. He made the Englishman accompany him in long rambles through the wild scenes around, and he smiled approvingly when the young artist gave way to the enthusiasm which their fearful beauty could not have failed to rouse in a duller breast; and then Mejnour poured forth to his wondering pupil the stores of a knowledge that seemed inexhaustible and boundless. He gave accounts the most curious, graphic, and minute, of the various races—their characters, habits, creeds, and manners—by which that fair land had been successively overrun. It is true that his descriptions could not be found in books, and were unsupported by learned authorities; but he possessed the true charm of the tale-teller, and spoke of all with the animated confidence of a personal witness. Sometimes, too, he would converse upon the more durable and the loftier mysteries of Nature with an eloquence and a research which invested them with all the colors rather of poetry than science. Insensibly the young artist found himself elevated and soothed by the lore of his companion; the fever of his wild desires was slaked. His mind became more and more lulled into the divine tranquillity of contemplation; he felt himself a nobler being; and in the silence of his senses he imagined that he heard the voice of his soul.

It was to this state that Mejnour sought to bring the Neophyte, and in this elementary initiation the mystic was like every more ordinary sage. For he who seeks to discover must first reduce

himself into a kind of abstract idealism, and be rendered up; in solemn and sweet bondage, to the faculties which contemplate and imagine.

Glyndon noticed that, in their rambles, Mejnour often paused where the foliage was rifest, to gather some herb or flower; and this reminded him that he had seen Zicci similarly occupied. "Can these humble children of Nature," said he one day to Mejnour, "things that bloom and wither in a day, be serviceable to the science of the higher secrets? Is there a pharmacy for the soul as well as the body, and do the nurslings of the summer minister not only to human health but spiritual immortality?"

"If," answered Mejnour, "before one property of herbalism was known to them, a stranger had visited a wandering tribe,—if he had told the savages that the herbs, which every day they trampled underfoot, were endowed with the most potent virtues; that one would restore to health a brother on the verge of death; that another would paralyze into idiocy their wisest sage; that a third would strike lifeless to the dust their most stalwart champion; that tears and laughter, vigor and disease, madness and reason, wakefulness and sleep, existence and dissolution, were coiled up in those unregarded leaves,—would they not have held him a sorcerer or a liar? To half the virtues of the vegetable world mankind are yet in the darkness of the savages I have supposed. There are faculties within us with which certain herbs have affinity, and over which they have power. The moly of the ancients was not all a fable."

One evening, Glyndon had lingered alone and late upon the ramparts,— watching the stars as, one by one, they broke upon the twilight. Never had he felt so sensibly the mighty power of the heavens and the earth upon man! how much the springs of our intellectual being are moved and acted upon by the solemn influences of Nature! As a patient on whom, slowly and by degrees, the agencies of mesmerism are brought to bear, he acknowledged to his heart the growing force of that vast and universal magnetism which is the life of creation, and binds the atom to the whole. A strange and ineffable consciousness of power, of the something great within the perishable clay, appealed to feelings at once dim and glorious,—rather faintly recognized than all unknown. An impulse that he could not resist led him to seek the mystic. He would demand, that hour, his initiation into the worlds beyond our world; he was prepared to breathe a diviner air. He entered the castle, and strode through the shadowy and star-lit gallery which conducted to Mejnour's apartment.

THE END.[1]

[1] [So far as Zicci was ever finished.]