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**THEOBALD;
OR, THE TRIUMPH OF CHARITY.**
(Written by Madame la Comtesse de la Rochette, and
published under the auspices of the
Archbishop of Tours.)

INTRODUCTION.
THE LADIES OF CHARITY.
(Continued.)

CHAPTER II.—THE CORSICANS.

The following morning, I went early to the baroness; the infant was on her lap, and she was giving it some drops of milk.

'I thank you sincerely for your kind and ready assistance,' said she. 'Do you know of a good nurse at this time? This child requires one immediately.'

'I know just the person to suit you, a very poor but honest young woman, who has just lost her own infant, and whose husband, a sailor, is absent on a long voyage, and will not return home for a year or two.'

'That is fortunate, and will suit us exactly; tell me where she is to be found, and I will immediately send to engage her. Last night, the Abbe Durand baptised this poor little creature, who is very weak; the doctor assures me she was born prematurely.'

'And Theobald, how is he to-day?'
'My maid sat up with him; he is in a high fever and delirious all night, but is better now. Would you like to see him?'

I accepted her offer willingly, for the poor orphan interested me much. We went to the room where he was in bed.

'Do you know me?' said I, approaching him. He made an affirmative sign, but said nothing—his forehead was burning, and his large black eyes gleamed with fever.

'In his present state we cannot ask him any questions,' said the baroness; 'and yet it would be very desirable to know the name of his family and the village they inhabit, as well as the place where their father was murdered, so as to be able to put justice on the track of the guilty parties.'

'His sister can perhaps give us those details,' I suggested.
'You are right,' said Madame D—, 'let us go to my dressing-room, where I have had a bed placed for her. She has the ague, but fortunately no wanderings; the doctor has prescribed quinine for her.'

The little girl told us she was named Clarita Loncini. She was born at Piovola, where her great-grandmother and aunt resided; but she could not enlighten us, as to the exact place where her father was murdered. She only remembered it was in the middle of the day, in a maquis (thicket or shrubbery) where they were all reposing, and waiting for the extreme heat to pass, in order to continue their route. Clarita was asleep, when she was suddenly roused by the piercing cries of her mother, and beheld a dreadful sight; her father was extended on the grass, bathed in blood, her mother was calling loudly to him, and imploring him to answer her; but, alas! he was dead. The sound of horses' feet and a second report of fire-arms was heard.

Madame Loncini rushed from the fatal spot, dragging her children with her; they lost themselves in the wood, and walked the whole night, until they found the stable, where they rested, worn out with fatigue. Clarita shuddered while relating this terrible adventure; we caressed her affectionately, and wept with her. She was a pretty little girl notwithstanding her sickly appearance.

The nurse arrived, and after making our arrangements, we gave the infant into her charge. The baroness then wrote to the maire of Piovola, requesting him to inform the family of their double loss. A detachment of Corsican volunteers was sent from Bastia to search for the body of Antonio, and to arrest the murderer, if it was possible to find him. The story of the little girl made us imagine that it was a little above Furiani that the crime had been committed. We then gave the directions about the funeral of the poor mother, and the Abbe Durand was kind enough to undertake the management and to officiate. Next morning, after having attended the service, I quickly returned to the hotel of the baroness; she was in the garden, where I joined her.

'Theobald is much better,' cried she, on perceiving me; 'he took a little soup last evening, and passed a very good night, sleeping calmly.'

'But have the volunteers made any discovery?'
'They found a spot in the wood, saturated with blood, about four leagues from Bastia;—and have brought a horse and a valise, that Clarita has identified as having belonged to her father. As to the body, it has not been found.'

'Perhaps Antonio may not be dead after all,' cried I; 'what happiness for his children, if their father still lived.'

The baroness shook her head. 'We must not expect such good fortune,' said she mournfully. 'At all events, not a word must be said

to Theobald, for fear of giving him a false hope.'

The weather was magnificent; we took a few turns round the large garden, entirely surrounded by a hedge of aloes, with long thorns. The air was balmy with the perfume of orange and citron trees, then in full flower. We stood on the terrace and looked at the sea, then so tranquil and transparent; on the calm surface the fishermen's boats were gliding homeward. Nine o'clock now struck on the town clock, and at the same moment a steamboat shot rapidly before us, leaving a long track of foam on the waves, and a column of smoke in the air, both of which soon disappeared.

'Behold the image of happiness in this life,' said Madame D—, to me.

'Or rather the image of its glories,' I replied. At this moment we heard a stifled sigh close to us, and on turning, found it proceeded from Theobald, who had joined us.

'What is the matter, my dear child?' asked the baroness in her kindest manner.

'Ah! madame, is not that the steamboat that goes each week to France?'

'Yes, my child, does it interest you?'
'It was on that we had engaged our berths,' said the poor boy; 'and if misfortune had not fallen upon us, we should, at this moment, have been all on board. And my poor mother, who so longed for the day of departure! He fell on his knees, and burst into tears; they were the first he had shed since the terrible catastrophe. We allowed them to flow, for we felt they would relieve him.'

'My poor child,' at length said Madame D—, 'imitate your good mother's example, her courage, and resignation. Pray to God fervently. He never abandons us when we invoke His aid with faith.'

'And to think that three days later we should have been safe from their vengeance,' pursued Theobald, following the train of his thoughts.

'Did your father know he ran any danger?' we asked, making him sit on a garden bench.

'No,' replied the youth. 'We thought we had nothing more to fear, as the Fabianos had left the island for the last seven years, and we had not heard they were likely to return.'

'Who are the Fabianos?' I asked.
'The enemies of our family for more than a century. There is much blood between us;—they have killed more than ten of our relations, but we have not been behind with them,' added he, with fierce pride. 'I was but six years old when they besieged our house, and remember it as well as if it had been yesterday. I carried the cartouches to my father; my poor mother had fainted; but Annunziata fired the guns like a man. Ah! my aunt Annunziata is a woman of courage. Our house is well fortified with bars of iron everywhere; however, when our shepherds came to our assistance, it was indeed time, for we were beginning to want ammunition.'

'What customs! My God, what customs!' exclaimed the baroness.

Theobald looked at her in astonishment.
'You speak like my poor mother,' said he;—'she always blamed our habits, which she called barbarous. My aunt Annunziata insisted that her sister-in-law had no more courage than a kid; but my dear mother was so gentle and good, every one loved her.'

'Do all in your power to resemble her, Theobald; but what were you going to do on the Continent?'

'To pursue my studies, madame; my father was to have placed me at college, after we had visited my aunt Folmont, the only living relation on my mother's side. We did not intend to undertake the voyage until next spring; but my aunt wrote to say she was very ill, and my mother determined to set off at once.'

Divine service being at this moment announced by the church bell, the baroness advised Theobald to attend.

'My footman shall conduct you,' said she;—'pray the Almighty for your father and mother; it is now all you can do for them.'

'No, not at all,' replied the youth, moving away.

'Did you hear that?' said I, to my friend.

'Alas, I did,' she replied; 'a vague desire of vengeance already fills that young heart. I particularly observed him all day yesterday, and am convinced that the only hope for him lies in a truly Christian education; otherwise, one day or other, his hands will be stained with blood. He is proud, violent, and vindictive like all his race; he also possesses all the great qualities of the national character—courage, honor, the love of family and of his country, and knowledge of his own dignity. Ah, he is, indeed, a true Corsican.'

'Yes, the Corsican of the mountains,' said the Dr. Saludo, who at this moment joined us. We turned at his voice.

'Do not all Corsicans resemble each other?' said I, somewhat mischievously; 'for he was of Bastia, and I liked to tease him.'

No, a thousand times no, madame, their customs and manners are as different as the territory they inhabit. The people of Bastia, for example, and the inhabitants of all the larger towns—I may also add the country people of Balagne, of Nebbio, or of Cape Corso, in fact, that portion of the island which is most laborious and most civilized, do they resemble, think you, the mountaineers of Sartene, of Ajaccio, or Corte? It must be borne in mind that the Phœnicians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Aragonese, the Pisans, the Genoese, the English, and the French, have all in turn possessed Corsica, and each nation impressed the mark of its passage on the natives.'

'But,' said I, 'how is it that on so small a surface all these different customs and manners have not melted little by little, as has already happened in France, in England, and many other countries?'

'Oh, madame, that is easily explained. Corsica is little more than a chain of mountains extending the whole length of the island from Cape Corso to that of Bonifacio; these mountains are crossed by the wild and savage gorges and narrow valleys, and up to this day there is very little communication possible. The rivers are not navigable; there are no roads; those from Bastia to Ajaccio and to St. Florent are the only roads where travelling in a carriage is practicable, and those have not yet existed fifty years; everywhere else we must proceed on horseback, across rocks, and through thickets, and at the risk of breaking the traveller's neck. These difficulties, joined to the natural indifference of the Corsican for all that does not concern him personally, cause the inhabitants of places separated only by a hill to remain utter strangers to each other. Many of the people on the mountains rarely descend to the plain; and hundreds of country people die without ever having put foot in one of our towns.'

'Can you in any way explain that love of vengeance common to all Corsicans, and which is the distinctive mark of their character? During the short time I have been at Bastia, the most civilized town on the island, three murders have been committed in the vicinity I inhabit. Is not this a deplorable state of things?'

'I lament it with you, madame, and with all good and enlightened Corsicans, and they, I am happy to say, are very numerous; but let us hope the rising generation, educated on the continent, will sooner or later lose their naturally fierce inclinations. The Corsican soldiers serving in your army, where they invariably distinguish themselves by their bravery, and other brilliant and sterling qualities, will there imbibe the spirit of real honor, and bring home to their hearths those lights and principles that must modify the present customs, and, in time, regenerate the whole population. However, we must admit the amelioration will be slow, for the spirit of hatred and vengeance in the heart of a Corsican will long survive the march of improvement. The power of prejudice is such, that its triumphs over the repugnance of the most learned and enlightened men; while the fear of scorn and contempt, which is the portion of those who refuse to revere themselves (that human respect which unfortunately is stronger than the voice of conscience) has, I regret to say, often induced men to commit murder who were naturally disposed to be good and virtuous.'

'Great Britain! I exclaimed, 'to make murder a point of honor. To erect it into a virtue. This is dreadful, your countrymen must be very bad.'

'You know they are not,' said the doctor with warmth; 'for while admitting the baneful effects of "La Vendetta," the good man would not listen to a word against the national honor. "The Corsican is full of good qualities; he is courageous, hospitable, and faithful to his word and engagements. Fraud and rapine are unknown to him. You may leave your house open day and night, and travel charged with gold, without fearing the abstraction of the smallest coin robbery, and all crimes suggested by low or sordid passions, are considered a stain, and inspire the most profound contempt in public opinion. La Vendetta never would have taken such a root with us, if the principle did not proceed from a feeling of honor, and from an exaggerated sense of justice.'

'What, La Vendetta a sense of justice?' I exclaimed, interrupting the doctor; 'you will have some difficulty of persuading me of this?'

'Because you are not yet sufficiently acquainted with our history,' replied he, immediately.—'You do not know that the Corsican, oppressed and groaning under the domination of the Genoese, finding no justice or protection, either in the laws or with the magistrate, was compelled to seek it himself in the blade of his stiletto. When the culprit could purchase the pardon of his crime by paying a sum of money it was necessary that the courage of the injured party should serve as counterpoise to the iniquity of the judge.'

'La Vendetta might then have been less odious,' said I, 'but not less criminal, for in my eyes nothing can justify murder.'

'La Vendetta, in reality, is no murder,' replied the doctor; 'it is almost always an open and declared war; it has laws which are always respected. Generally before commencing hostilities, an emissary of the offended party presents himself before the enemy, and warns him by saying, "War is declared between us; I give you eight days to apprise your relations and friends, but before the expiration of that time, beware." There is no example that this time of armistice has ever been violated by either party. In all this, madame, there is nothing low or even unjust.'

'Do not take so much trouble to defend a bad cause,' said I, laughing at the doctor's warmth of manner. 'I do not reproach you with base or low motives, for I well know you are all but too susceptible on the point of honor.'

'Alas!' said the baroness, who till now had listened in silence, 'when will the spirit of clarity reign on earth? When will men, who recognize God as their common Father, look on each other as brothers? I hear continued discussions on the best means of civilizing Corsica. Some pretend it is only necessary to make practicable roads in order that the lights of the times and the march of improvement may circulate freely; others assert that the institution of a jury has given a mortal blow to the barbarous prejudice of the "vendetta," from which it can never rise, there are some, also, who seriously declare that in destroying the goats, they would do away with the most frequent subject of disputes and subsequent vengeance; others would burn all the maquis, or thickets, and cultivate the untilled land. It appears to me that as secondary causes, all this might contribute towards the great work of civilization; but I firmly believe that the foundation of Corsican regeneration must lie in Christian education, which alone can ameliorate a whole people, as it improves individuals.'

'Now do not contradict me doctor,' added she, seeing Mr. Saludo about to interrupt her; 'I know beforehand all you would say. The Corsican is religious without doubt, and would sacrifice his life if necessary to prove his faith in our blessed Redeemer; but his devotion is not sufficiently enlightened, he knows the outward practices of religion, but very little of its moral tendencies, which are the essence, very little, in short of that practical charity and love which Christ's religion enjoins all. If priests, imbued with this evangelic spirit were sent everywhere, and the means of gratuitous education increased for poor boys and girls, which has already done so much good amongst other people, this, with the establishment of good boarding-schools for the Christian education of young ladies—for women, in whatever state of subordination they may be held in this country, nevertheless, exercise an immense influence on public opinion—if, I say, this plan were carried out you would very soon see wonderful results spring from this Christian teaching.'

'You are right,' said the doctor, in a grave tone. 'Yes, you are certainly right; how is it that this has never been thought of before?'

'I know not,' said the baroness, 'but let us go, if you please and visit your little patient, whom I long to see cured of her fever.'

I accompanied them to see Clarita, and perceiving that she was already much better, took my leave, and returned home.

CHAPTER III.—A MEETING IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF BASTIA.

On leaving church after vespers, in the afternoon of the same day, my husband informed me he could not accompany me in our usual walk, being engaged in an affair connected with his post. Annoyed at this disappointment, I took our children and their nurse, directed my steps to the mountain, and, disdaining the beaten tracks, turned to the right among flowering heaths and tufts of myrtle. We soon found ourselves in a deep and narrow ravine, entirely covered with wild lemon-trees, lentiques, and the rose-laurel, so common in the island. Crossing the little brook that murmured at the bottom, we ascended about half of the hillside, when we reached a kind of platform shaded by oak and olive-trees. Somewhat tired by the deep ascent, I seated myself on a block of granite covered with moss. A forest of strawberry-trees with their red and flexible stalks, their evergreen foliage, and small white flowers, shed their scarlet fruit in every direction; the ground was covered; my children picked up a great quantity with which they filled their straw-hats; they ate part of them and began playing with the remainder. The setting sun illumined the horizon, not a cloud veiled the pure azure of the heavens, the valley lay at our feet with all its luxuriant vegetation, and the sea presented itself to our view, majestic and boundless, like infinity, of which it is an image. The transparency of the atmosphere was such, that the coast of Tuscany, more than twenty leagues distant, was distinctly visible.

'The wild rocks of Monte Christo and Capraja threw their shadows on the sleeping waves; and the white houses of the island of Elba appeared clearly, lighted as they were by the oblique rays which gilded them. I long contemplated this isle, celebrated as it is by the remembrance of the great man whose birth-place was Corsica, and who, after having subjugated nearly the whole of Europe, found himself reduced to the possession of this poor little kingdom, where his great soul could not exist. I sighed when I thought of this great reverse of fortune, and looking around, thought myself so happy and fortunate in my middle station, under this pure sky, in the midst of this magnificent vegetation—this perfect solitude—that my heart softened, my eyes filled with tears of gratitude, and, falling on my knees, I gave thanks to the Almighty for showering upon me so many favors. When I recovered from this kind of ecstasy, the sun had disappeared beneath the waves. It was more than time to return home. I called my children, and they ran before me. We hastened on, following the windings of the hill. We soon reached a wood of chestnut-trees, whose yellow leaves strewed the ground, for it was autumn.—Multitudes of little birds were singing in the higher branches. Thus, with the murmur of a limpid brook falling in mimic cascades over fragments of rock, formed a real, though quite a different scene of enchantment. "Oh God!" said I in my inmost heart, "how generous art Thou thus to diversify Thy gifts, in order to multiply our pleasures." And, walking on slowly, plunged in a sweet reverie, I was startled by an almost imperceptible rustle. I stopped to listen; it was like the footfall of a man on the dead leaves which cracked under his weight.'

'To meet a human being in the neighborhood of a town containing a population of 13,000 souls, may appear a very natural occurrence, but it was so late, and the place so retired and solitary, that I trembled involuntarily. The sound at each instant became more distinct. I tried to raise my courage by thinking it was some vagabond returning home, and endeavored to laugh at my fears, although my heart continued to beat far more quickly than usual. It approached nearer and more near, then suddenly ceased; I turned round and perceived at the distance of ten steps, a very tall man, between two chestnut-trees, who contemplated us with eyes that in the darkness appeared like those of a lynx. The lower part of his face was hidden by a long and bristling beard, which reached to his chest; the pelone (or mantle) of long hair which covered him, gave him the appearance of a wild animal at that hour; his head was concealed by a long-pointed cap. A gun on his shoulder, and a cartouche bag, with a pistol on the left side, completed his accoutrements. He held a small horse by the bridle, which was pawing the earth with impatience. I looked long, in spite of myself, at this strange apparition, which exercised a kind of fascination upon me, for I was transfixed with terror. At length recalling all my energy, I took my children, one in each hand, and began to run as fast as I could on the uneven ground; but all at once I was arrested by the very brook I had so much admired a few minutes before. It was not deep, but much too wide to pass with dry feet; I knew not what to do, for I dared not go back. At this moment I heard a voice crying in the Corsican idiom—'Let me assist you; and before I knew what plan to pursue, I felt myself raised by two strong nervous arms and safely placed on the other side. I uttered a cry, at which the man with the long beard smiled; he took over the children and nurse in the same manner, and said, as he walked by my side—

'You are not a native of this place, signora?'

'No, sir,' I replied in a somewhat trembling voice.

'But you live at Bastia?'

'For the last six months I have lived in the town.'

'Ah! no doubt your husband has a situation under the French government?'

'Precisely,' I replied, much surprised at the kind of examination I was undergoing, not knowing at that time how curious the Corsican is by nature.

'Has your husband a good place?' continued my questioner.

'I can only assure you we are perfectly satisfied.'

'Well, and how do you pass the time at Bastia?'

'You should know that better than I, for no doubt you are a native.'

'I a native of Bastia?' cried he, in a tone of contempt. 'Oh, no, signora, thank you; I am from beyond the mountains; there is, do you see, as much difference between a Corsican of my country and a Bastianco, as there is between the blade of my stiletto and a dinner-knife.'

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