ANTONIO DI CARARA

A PADUAN TALE

The Count's turn to remonstrate was now come. But his friend's zeal was resistless. He pointed out so many advantages to the final success of the attempt, his knowledge of the road, his facilities of approach to the Emperor, his personal habits of court business, that, on the ground of justice to his family, the Count found it impossible to refuse his assistance. Within the half hour they had passed through the city, the gates, and the suburbs, had left behind them the lazy nobles, the dozing doctors, the insolent governor, and the yawning population—seen the grey peaks of the Veronese Alps turning into gold and silver, the clouds showering roses as rich as ever Homer and Aurora together showered on the camp by the Scamander; and with firm steps, whatever might be the heaviness of their hearts were vigorously advancing on the highroad to the Tyrol.

The Hungarian's winter predictions had not yet been realised. Even the valley which leads to Botzen from the south, and which is proverbially the nest of the storm, exhibited no deeper vestiges of the coming season, than a few streams turned to solid crystal as they trickled down the precipices, or, from time to time, a larch rooted out from the cliffs by the gale, and strewed its leafy glories at full length across the narrow road. Carara felt the mountain breeze breathing vigour into his frame—his travel was already giving elasticity to his limbs— his handsome countenance was rapidly losing the pallid hue which was essential to Italian elegance, and was exchanging it for the better gift of the manly and florid healthfulness of open air and active exercise. With his cloak flung over his shoulder, his Alpine staff in his hand, and his vivid eye darting around the immense horizon, catching every color of the autumnal forest, every passing cloud, every floating eagle that poised itself on its pinions above the covers of the chamois and deer, along the Talfer, he might be taken for a prince of the mountaineers. But as they rested for their mid-day meal at the foot of the Ritter pyramids, and the Count's newly-awakened curiosity was listening to his fellow-traveller's account of this singular phenomenon, and indulging his fancy in discovering, as so many wanderers had done before, temples and palaces, pavilions and fountains, in their fretted and excavated masses, a sudden gust of the most piercing cold rushed down from the hills, carrying before it a whole atmosphere of sleet, withered leaves, and dried up branches of trees. "The trumpet of the winter is blowing, Count," said the Hungarian, "and we must prepare for the speedy commencement of the campaign."

Carara prepared for the encounter simply by girding his hunter's coat tighter round him, fastening his broad Alpine hat on his head by the clasp usual among the peasantry, and loosening the folds of his cloak. The Hungarian, conversant in the language of the storm, looked to the various points of the compass for those currents of the clouds which so strikingly mark the direction from which the force of the tempest comes in the higher Alps. Large masses of rolling clouds heavily burst up from the whole range of the vast crescent of hills, which form the central barrier of the Tyrol, and each sent forth its gust; but in the north-east lay a solid leaden-coloured pyramid of vapour, reaching from the earth to the heavens, on which the Hungarian gazed with evident anxiety. "The weight of the tempest," said he, "is beyond Mittenwald; but it is, I fear, by this time, coming up through the Pusterthal, and the pass will, in that case, be altogether blocked up before night."

"Then," said Carara, with a smile which was far from an expression of his feelings, "we must attempt it by daylight. The ghosts of the Brenner will not stand sunshine, if they are like our Italian ghosts. For Mittenwald, then—onward."

His companion, answered only by following his stride, and they fought their way together manfully up the side of the mountain. Fierce gusts, that seemed to burst less from the clouds than from the earth, frequently caught them in their middle way, and forced them to cling to the shrubs and branches of dwarf oak that sheeted the glen. The valley, which had been broad and nearly level from Brixen now began to contract, and the gigantic pines, that hung and rooted upon the huge blocks of granite, split by time or thunder ages ago, gave a deeper shade to the road. By this pass few travellers ever attempted to enter the mountains but in summer, and the Count and his companion, scarcely disturbed the falcons and wild-goats that through one half of the year, possessed the unquestioned lordship of the soil. They gazed on the struggling travellers as if they were of their own species, and seldom moved foot or waved wing, till they had passed.

The evening fell, and through the centre of the valley, which was now narrowed to a ravine, was still sheltered, it was evident that the storm was making wild work above. At length an abrupt ascent led to the summit of the road, and the whole range of the wild scene opened on them at a view. Nothing could be more magnificent or more fearful. As far as the eye reached, the whole horizon was filled with snow, assuming every fantastic form of the mountain tops, and shaping them into strange beauty. Carara's imagination dormant in his days of prosperity, had been gradually awaking since his first step in these wild regions. But now all his eyes were opened at once. Every trait, hue, and feature of the scenery, formed to him an indispensable portion of the most glorious landscape that he had ever gazed upon. "Look there," he exclaimed, pointing to a boundless pile of snow-white clouds that touched a distant mountain so closely, as to seem a continued mountain ascending into the heights of heaven,—"There is Pelion upon Ossa, and both in silver!" Another enormous hill, whose covering of snow was partially darkened by a thunder-storm lay to the right. "There is an Etna, but ten times its bulk, pouring out immeasurable volumes of smoke, and broken into a thousand chasms of flame." The range of pinnacles that shot up round the horizon, sheeted with the snow, were fairy palaces, turreted castles of ivory, bowers of amaranth, magic palaces of steel. A last gleam of the sun, as he plunged down behind the Middle Alps, shot through a chasm of hills, and swept round the whole range. It was like the outpouring of a stream of solid gold. It transmuted the whole landscape instantly; the effect on the scene was indescribable. Wherever the stream fell, it turned the spot into all the glorious hues of sky, flower, and metal. Boundless sheets of purple and rose seemed to have been suddenly flung over the enormous sides of the hills. Cataracts of gold burst down their sides, long stripes of the most vivid green, like valleys of emerald, lay between ridges of chrysolite and silver. All was splendid, prismatic, magical, As the sun descended, every feature of this landscape of a hundred leagues assumed a new and lovelier variety; azure followed by rose, and purple, richer than the Tyrian loom, mingled with azure. Until a moment before he set, the whole range became a succession of volcanoes; the base of every mountain buried in solemn grey, the sides still tinged with the fainter light, but the summit a spire of living flame. He sank at last, but there was one spectacle left, as lovely, and almost as brilliant, as the richest effects of the sunshine. The dusk, which now gathered round the mountains, rapidly contracted their horizon—the enormous crescent appeared to round itself into a circle, in the centre of which stood the admiring travellers. Of that circle, the only portion visible was soon the upper ride, and even that was pale; but from it stood up the summits of the pinnacles, now divested of all colour, but still sparkling with light, the diamond cusps of a mighty crown.

Carara stood entranced with this sight of unearthly beauty, when he was startled from his vision by a sound as if of remote thunder; he looked to the clouds that still lowered on the Brenner, but it was as laden and solid as ever. No flash broke from its mighty womb. If the thunder lay there, it was still to be born. The whole hemisphere lay in the same quietude. The gusts had fallen, and the tempest seemed to have gone to rest with the sun. Again the sound rose, but it was now not the low growl of distant thunder, but the roar and dash of ocean, heavy, hoarse, and continuous. He turned to the Hungarian for an explanation of the cause. "Probably some new fall of snow among the hills," said he; "but at all events, let us not stop where we are. The road descends a few hundred yards forward, and anywhere we shall be less exposed than here." He started with the words from the summit of the ridge, and hastened down the steep. Carara followed; but when he found himself in the spot thus selected for safety, he could not conceal his surprise at the selection. "I altogether give way to your knowledge in these matters," said he, as the Hungarian turned to watch the progress of the storm; "but this spot strikes me as exposing us to be either buried in the first snowfall, or to find our road totally closed up." The Hungarian fixed on him a look which, even in the twilight, he could discover to be singularly different from his usual calmness of philosophy. It was a smile, but whether it wore more of contempt or fear, more of resentment at being thus questioned, or of that embarrassment which the sight of overwhelming danger sometimes produces in the haughtier minds, was difficult to define in the shade; but the impression was there, and his respect for the philosopher's firmness suffered no slight diminution for the time.

But the time for these things was short. The darkness had suddenly become complete, as if a cloud had brooded on the little valley. The sound which before arrested the ear, had now returned, but louder; the storm rapidly grew wilder, and more appaling still. It began with a broken and unusual report, like the roar of a signal-gun; it swelled in a few minutes to the roar of battle; it was now the peal of a hundred cannon, of thousands together, of millions. The atmosphere shook; the earth heaved; Carara instinctively sprang to a rock which projected over the side of the valley, and as he sprang, seized his fellow-traveller's arm to drag him to the place of safety; but, to his utter surprise and dismay, the Hungarian was immovable. The grasp which he gave was even returned by a more stubborn grasp. "Do you want to die here?" exclaimed the count, still attempting to shake him from his strange insensibility—"Or do you want me to die along with you?" The Hungarian made no answer; but, as if paralysed by fear, still firmly clung to the arm that he held, and his countenance exhibited the same strange smile. A crash of the trees, a scream of the eagles and falcons, an universal commotion of the air, announced that some extraordinary devastation was at hand. "It is an avalanche," shouted Carara, labouring at once to rush forward and rouse his frozen friend. But he was evidently devoted to ruin—he grasped his hand—only the more violently. "It is an avalanche," he repeated, with a low, internal voice, and with a laugh which could be attributed to scarcely less than sudden idiotism or insanity.

But now all struggle was useless, for now came this terrible instrument of destruction. From the side of the mountain, some thousand feet above, came a dim and mighty mass, itself like a loosened mountain, rolling, bounding, crashing, and at every bound increasing in speed and size. The largest trees snapped before it like willow-wands; the solid crags, which had resisted the torrents and the thunder of winters innumerable, were torn from their ancient fixtures like feathers, and whirled down into the ravine. The light of the snow, or the rapidity of its course, threw a strange and melancholy gleam around, and rendered it drearily visible as it rushed along. The air was filled with the roar, crashing and incessant; the valleys sent it back; every surrounding mountain returned it, like the echo of a thunderburst. At length an immense cloud of mingled dust, stones, snow and wrecks of all kinds, rushed into the valley, heralding its way. Carara, in blindness, and utterly bewildered by the snow, still felt himself grasped with what he thought the convulsive hold of death, by his companion; but he felt, at the same instant, the ground quiver and heave under his feet; he in vain attempted to cling to the rock; he was caught by the whirlwind, and flung forward, where he knew not. A hollow roar still sounded in his ears; he still felt himself tossed and flung like a weed upon a wave; at length a blow, a sensation of intolerable chill, and a sudden plunge as he thought, ten thousand fathoms deep, extinguished all sounds and sensations together.

How long he lay in this state of insensibility, he could judge only by the scene that presented itself to him when he again opened his eyes. All was silent, the storm had passed away, or left its only traces in some scattered clouds that lay on the remote sky like remnants of a routed army. The avalanche had run its fearful course, a course which was still to be traced in the stripping of the mountain side of every sign of vegetation, and ploughing it into immense rents and chasms. It lay with all its devastation quiet in the valley, at an almost sightless depth below. Not a sound disturbed the expanse, all was virgin white, a world of snow. The moon in her meridian was pouring down floods of glorious light upon the scene, from a heaven as blue and solid as a vault of lapis lazuli. Carara's feelings were suspended in awe of this majesty of night and nature. The sense of his own extraordinary preservation too came upon his heart with an influence which surprised himself. If he had known in what words to pray, he would almost have prayed; his original habits had not taught him more than the rest of his class, and superstition, which he was inclined to comply with the ceremonial of the land, or philosophy, as the beaux esprits called it, when he was inclined to think that ceremonial troublesome, had made up the sum of his perceptions on the subject. But he was now, as any man might be, at once appalled and grateful—at once shaken by the consciousness that there was something more than this worldly creed had told him concerned in the government of things; and awakened by the feeling that he had been, however, unaccountably, the object of its care. He had obviously been saved by what, at another time, he would have pronounced a most singular accident.

The whirlwind raised by the avalanche had swept him down some fathoms of the mountain side; and when he was on the point of being flung into the valley, where he must have been dashed to pieces, the rough root of a broken oak had checked his descent;

Antonio di Carara.

and the violence of the shock, which rendered him insensible at the moment, had tossed him like gossamer under a huge projecting crag, which fortunately lay a few paces beyond the direct descent of the snowfall. The ground close to the spot where he lay had been torn up; as if a hundred thunderbolts had rifted it; fragments of the crag had been evidently splintered off by the concussion; the whole surface of the mountain above had been hurled into the ravine. If he had been flung but a few paces nearer, he must have been by this time in eternity.

When his recollection had completely returned, the state in which his friend had been seen for the last time recurred to him. What must have become of a man who had been palpably deprived of all power to help himself, even if he had not stood directly in the road of a devastation that might have torn down a pyramid or buried a city? Carara looked round in vain, he was nowhere to be seen; he shouted his name till the precipices re-echoed it on every side; it was equally in vain, no voice of man answered; he even tried his way along the shivered and falling masses left clinging on the face of the precipice, to the spot where they had last stood together; but all search was in vain. The whole aspect of the hill was altered, a power beyond man had been there; and what was man, in such contact, but the dust of the balance? Carara, almost subdued, gave a final look to the spot which must be considered as the grave of his eccentric, yet zealous and sincere friend, and dejectedly took his way up the little mountain road.

The caserne of Mittenwald, a post-house and place of rest for travellers, had been visible for some hours before the fall of the avalanche, and it was to this spot that the Count now directed his steps.

The caserne had its occupants even in that rough season; and three or four stout peasants from the Hertzer valley, and a nondescript figure, who, on his own authority had the courage of an Alexander, and every virtue under the sun besides, but whose short Ferrarese sword, rusty pistols, and weather-beaten visage, strongly marked him for either the contrabandist or the highwayman, or both as the occasion might serve, had taken up their quarters with the old soldier and his wife who were stationed in this winter-buffeted dwelling. Carara's first proposal was, that they should go back with him to look for his friend, alive or dead. But the peasants declared this to be totally impossible, the veteran acknowledged it to be next to hopeless, and the contrabandist pledged him by all the ghosts of the mountains to be beyond the power of man or fiend, if the avalanche had but touched a hair of his unfortunate associate. The project was on all hands pronounced utterly impracticable, and the Count had no resource but to wait until daylight should enable him to continue his search by himself.

Daylight came, but the attempt was more hopeless than ever. The clouds, which had lingered so long on the northern range, had during the night moved forward over the whole extent of the hills, and flooded them with snow. The caserne was covered almost to the roof, and all the rest, as far as the keen eye of the mountaineers could reach, was an ocean of white surges. Another day passed in this lofty dungeon. Still the tempest was unabated. A week passed; and Carara's impatience could suffer this confinement no longer. He determined to attempt the pass at all hazards. The peasants declined his largest offer for their services as guides; and he prepared desperately to set out alone. He felt that his anxiety was wearing away his strength; that the Emperor might be gone from Innspruck; that his enemy might anticipate his appeal; that chance, or barbarity, or subtlety, might be exposing his family to the last miseries, while he was lazily wasting his days in the wretchedness of a mountain hovel.

PRIVATION IN NEWFOUNDLAND.

Several Deaths from Starvation Along the French Shore and Conditions Are Growing Worse.

Heartrending reports of suffering and starvation are reaching St. John, N.F., from French shore settlements. Seven persons, it is said, have died of hunger, in St. Anthony, where the poor are living on dry codfish doled out by the residents. If a steamer does not reach there soon with food it is feared scores will perish.

From Quirpon to Cape Norman there is not a barrel of flour. In a small cove at the bottom of White Bay six families are reduced to half a barrel of flour. Five men walked across the bay looking for a trade schooner. When they found it they were like living skeletons and nearly dead. They informed the captain, who gave them provisions, that if they failed to get back within a week all their families would be starved to death

Another case is reported where a family had been existing on a loaf of bread for six days. The Rev. John Lynch, a Catholic priest residing in Conche, despatched a message to Tilt Cove with a telegram couched in these appalling words:—"Send on provisions at once; if not, boards to make coffins."

Destitution is also reported in Salmon Cove, Perry Cove and other places in the Bay de Verde district. The weather is bad and trade is unusually depressed.

DOGS IN GERMAN ARMY.

For 10 years every military company in Germany has included its pack of dogs, which are in charge of a petty officer, who is excused from all duties in the afternoon that he may train the animals for their work. The short-haired German pointer, poodle and shepherd dogs are employed, and they are taught to carry messages or ammunition, hunt up the dead and give signals.

On the Farm.

CLOVER FOR FOWLS.

Clover is not only more suitable for summer food for poultry, owing to its bulky nature, compared with corn, but it is also more nutritious, as it contains a greater quantity of the substances required for the production of eggs. The line for the shells is produced when in a soluble form in the food, as it must pass through all the stages and processes of digestion, and the more soluable the mineral elements the easier and more completely they serve the purposes of the hens. Clover hay contains over 30 times more lime than does corn or wheat, and the green clover, though containing more water, is comparatively as rich in lime as the hay. Clover is also a nitrogenous food, and supplies the elements necessary for the albumen of the egg. When the hens have access to clover they will eat a large quantity during the day, and if insects are numerous their wants will be fully supplied.

DIRT CAMPAIGN IN THE DAIRY.

The chief end of the bulk of dairy work is to keep things clean in the cowshed and in the dairy-room. In the stable it is the cow that needs most looking after; in the dairy it is the milk and its products, cream and butter—pure air, clean water, clean food and clean stalls for the cow; clean and sweet vessels, pure air and the proper temperature in the dairy.

These essentials are within the reach of the one-cow dairy as completely as of the fancy dairy of the millionaire, though they may cost some more rubbing and scrubbing—a more vigilant campaign against dirt.

TO MAKE FENCE POSTS DURABLE.

The following is given as a good plan to make fence posts last longer than they generally do. In the first place the timber should be cut in midwinter, split and allowed to season under cover. Now burn the lower end of the post so that it will have a coal showing from the lower end to six inches above the ground when set. Then saturate the burned part with hot coal tar. The posts are ready then to be set. If not wanted immediately let them stand under shelter with the black end down. It is claimed that posts fixed in this way will last twenty times as long as those of the same timber cut and set green and without being burned. The extra cost of fixing them will not be 2 cents a post.

WHEN TO PICK FRUIT.

All ripe fruit should be picked clean as pickers go down the row. Pick carefully with thumb and forefinger, placing fruits in the basket, not a sack, one at a time, to avoid bruising them. Most fruits should be picked with the stems on, as they keep better, and if to be sold fresh should always be gathered in baskets. To keep well fruit must be picked at the proper time when mature but not fully ripe. Fruit is mature and should be gathered when the stem separates readily at its joint with the branch. Never leave it on the tree too long, the flesh becoming so soft that it is easily bruised and its keeping qualities injured by slight jars in handling.

In large orchards picking should begin as soon as fruit in sunniest portion changes color, then as work proceeds other fruit is maturing and there will be less from overripe fruit. The nearer the market the riper the fruit should be when picked. Never pick green, decayed or soiled fruit. Immature fruit, unless for a distant market, should be permitted to ripen, and all diseased or rotting fruit removed and destroyed to prevent the spread of fungous diseases. Never pick fruit when wet with rain or dew, as this impairs the flavor and appearance. Fruit picked in the heat of the day is apt to look wilted and does not sell well. To prevent this and partially restore the fresh appearance when wilted, place crates as soon as filled in a cool, moist, well ventilated place until sent to market. The flavor of cherries and some small fruits depends on the time of picking, being best when they are gathered just after the dew is off in the morning.

INDUCEMENTS OF DAIRYING.

To the young man who is just starting out for himself upon a farm, no branch of agriculture at the present time offers such inducements as dairying, according to a correspondent. Dairy farmers as a rule are more prosperous and complain less of hard times and low prices than any other class. Their butter always brings cash, the by-products furnish nourishing food for young stock, pigs, calves, etc., the fertility of the soil is constantly increased, and being in operation the year around, it brings into the farmer's purse at all seasons the ever ready and ever useful coin.

The first requisite for a successful dairyman is that he have a natural liking for the work. This may be acquired, yet where one has inborn fondness for cattle, for the cow and the work of caring for her in the best manner it is certainly one important factor toward the successful carrying out of the enterprise. This will inspire a certain enthusiasm for the work without which no labor is intelligently performed.