

turn, demanding that thou return her free and unfettered, to her mourning parents, to her husband, betrayed and carried off at the same time as herself. I, her mother, demand it in the name of all. I demand it as an humble suppliant, with a mind shaken and distracted, yet full of the boldness and courage inspired by the confidence that my words are heard in Heaven, and that even the mighty have to die.

"Ah, no, Marco! no, no!--pardon me---'tis not for me to threaten or grow angry. Pardon a poor mother made rash through excess of grief. I ought only to weep and to pray. Oh! if I but knew how best to touch thine heart!

"Have I told thee that she is the wife of Ottorino? Yes! the holy rite has been solemnised, and their hands joined as their hearts have long been. I myself solicited this, and — Ought I to confess it? can I do so without confusion? wilt thou thyself believe me, if I tell thee that compassion for thee had much weight in bringing me to this? I swear to thee, that in this I had thy good at heart, hoping---nay, holding it for certain that 'twas the only mode to separate thee from an unhappy family, whence thou hast received nought but misfortune. Besides, even had I wished to give thee my daughter in espousal, her heart was otherwise disposed of. Marco! methought I knew thee well in former years, and I am persuaded that thou would'st never wish to possess a body without a soul, nor found thine happiness in the affliction of her thou lovest. Now tell me if the mother of Beatrice deceived herself, in judging of thee as once would have judged Ermelinda?

"Rememberest thou that name? 'Tis all that remains of what I once was---years and affliction have consumed the rest. Thou hast gained power and glory---thou art revered by thy friends, feared by thine enemies, the pride and affection of Lombardy. But I---I have only my daughter---my sweet Beatrice, in whom is centered all my consolation, all my hope, all my pride. Ah! by thy former gentleness, by the fame with which the world now honours thee, by the memory of our early years, by the favour I once found in thine eyes, relieve me from this agony, restore me my daughter, restore her at once, ere grief hath for ever closed these eyes now dim with weeping! Oh! could'st thou know the anguish in which my life is spent! Could'st thou experience the tortures of a single hour of my seemingly eternal nights full of phantoms and horrors! Could'st thou but prove the heart of a bereaved mother! — My life, thou knowest it, has had its full share of grief and sorrow, but all is as a dream, a shadow, to the bitter torment, the mortal anguish of this last fatal blow. I deemed not that one could suffer such, and live!

"Alas! tears bedim my vision---the pen almost drops from my trembling hand---my senses begin to fail me,--- Ah Marco! would that I were now in thy presence, to fall at thy feet and expire before thee, imploring with my last breath the grace thou could'st not surely then deny! Have pity---have pity on the unhappy

ERMELINDA."

An anxious and sleepless night succeeded the reading of this letter. Wearily watching for the dawn, Marco paced to and fro in his chamber in a state of mind bordering on frenzy.

Time wore away; the hour appointed for his interview with the Signoria at length arrived, and, being reminded of it by his suite, he presented himself before them. Had it not been for this appointment Marco would have set off at

once for Milan on the previous evening; and as it was, his stay was of little service to him. He appeared with a distracted expression of countenance, with eyes wandering and unsettled, with hair unkempt and disordered: he spoke but little, and what he said was confused and abrupt; irritated by the least opposition, he seemed careless how much he might offend the negotiators. In short, his conduct and deportment was altogether so indiscreet and unguarded, that the minority, who had always opposed the purchase of Lamea, had now little difficulty in bringing the others to their own opinion, persuading them that no dependence could be placed on engagements entered into with such a man.⁹

Marco had retired from the hall during the deliberations of the Signoria, and when their decision, by which the treaty was at once put an end to, was announced to him, he showed neither surprise nor disappointment, at a result so unexpected. He immediately called for horses, and was in half an hour on the road to Lombardy, accompanied by Lupo, and two of his own squires.

Obtaining frequent relays of steeds, they travelled night and day, and in the intervals of his gloomy meditations, Marco gathered from the Limontine all that he knew of the disappearance of Ottorino and Beatrice, and the danger he had himself run. He had been left completely in the dark by Ermelinda, who conceived him already only too well informed, and he listened with eager attention to Lupo's narrative. The last attack upon the squire, by one whom he had recognised as an attendant of Lodrisio, gave the chief the key to the whole. Knowing the inveterate hostility which this last bore towards Ottorino and the intimacy which had lately sprung up between him and Pelagrus, remembering too the offer once made by the castellan to have the young cavalier put out of his way, and the mysterious hints given by one of Pelagrus's couriers, he had little hesitation in ascribing the whole plot to these two villains.

After a quick and hurried journey, he reached Milan, and sending his own attendants to his palace with the horses of the whole party, he proceeded with Lupo on foot to the mansion of the Count del Balzo, resolved at all risks to have an interview with Ermelinda, at once to clear himself from her suspicions, and to learn if further intelligence had transpired of Beatrice and Ottorino. It was already late in the evening when Lupo knocked at the Count's gate, but for farther concealment, Marco lowered the visor of his basinet. All was silent within; the Limontine conducted

⁹ Bonicontrus Morigia; Chronicon Modicense---Cap. XII.