

ITALIAN NOVELETTES

No. VI.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF LAZZARO.

BY ANTON-FRANCESCO GRAZZINI.

Maestro Bosilie da Milane, a successful physician of Pisa, having acquired great wealth by the practice of his profession, married a young lady of good family who afterwards presented him with three sons and a daughter. As the children grew up they were a source of pride to their parents excepting the second son, who was of an extremely dull and obstinate disposition with a great aversion for learning and every species of improvement; morose, abstracted and unamiable, when his negative was once pronounced it was as unalterable as his own nature. The doctor at last finding he could mould him into nothing, to get rid of him, sent him into the country, where he had purchased at least half a dozen different estates, and where he was fondly retiring to escape the continued noise and turbulence of the city.

About ten years after he had despatched his son Lazzaro—for this was the fool's name—into this retreat, there arose a dreadful malady in Pisa, which carried off numbers of people in a violent fever, which subsiding into a deep lethargy, they awakened no more, and it was moreover as infectious as the plague. The doctor, desirous of showing his skill, and taking the lead of the other physicians on this occasion, exposed himself so fearlessly for his fees that he took the infection, which soon set at defiance every application of his most esteemed syrups and recipes, and in a few hours he retired from the profession forever. Nor was this all, for he communicated the disease to his family, and one after another they all died, until there was only an old nurse left alive in the house.

It was now that Lazzaro succeeded to all the property left by his deceased relations, though he merely added a domestic to the reduced establishment of his father, consisting only of the old servant. His farms and the receipt of the rents were left in the care of an agent, as he bestowed no attention on business.

Many families, notwithstanding, appeared very anxious for the honor of his alliance by marriage without making the slightest objection to his rusticity and folly; but the only answer he uniformly returned to these proposals was, that he had made up his mind to wait at least for four years, and that he afterwards might perhaps be induced to think of it. As he was known never to change his mind, no one ever importuned him further on the subject. Though he was fond of amusements in his own way, he admitted no one into his confidence and started on beholding a card of invitation like a guilty spirit at the sign of the cross.

Opposite to his house there resided a man of the name of Gabriello with his wife and two children, a boy about five years and a little girl, who he supported as well as he was able by his skill in bird-catching and fishing. Though his abode was humble, his nets and cages were of the very best construction, and he managed them so judiciously, that with the assistance of his wife Santa, who had the reputation of an excellent sempstress, he made a very pretty livelihood.

It happened that Gabriello was an exact counterpart in voice, countenance and appearance of our foolish friend Lazzaro; their very complexion and their beards were of the same cut and quality. If they were not twin brothers they ought to have been so, for they were not only of the same age and stature, but in their tastes and manners they greatly resembled each other. It would have been impossible even for the fisherman's wife to have recognized Lazzaro disguised in the dress of her husband; the only distinction that could be made was that one was dressed as a laborer and the other like a gentleman. Pleased with the happy resemblance which he could not help but acknowledge between himself and the fisherman, and fancying it laid him under a sort of obligation for which he felt grateful, he began to solicit his acquaintance. This he did in the pleasantest manner possible, frequently sending him good things from his table and a bottle of old wine. The fisherman's gratitude was so pleasing that he soon also sent for him to dine and sup with