

the shouts of demons, a full thousand sprang out into the hell fire that swept the valley. It was a perfect race with death: every instant brought its frightful crop of casualties; but, with the eye of Napoleon on them, with the splendour of their reward, who thought of death? With myself it was not courage—it was a phrenzy that took account of nothing but the prize, and of that only as it achieved fortune at a stroke.

“How we got through that unsheltered valley, Heaven only knows, but we did, and plunged into a deep water course which gave some shelter as we climbed like mad-men the height on which the Castle stood. A nearer view proved what we anticipated, that the Castle was more a pleasant residence than a regular fortress. The fosse was quite dry, and the immediate approaches through orange and citron-groves were indifferently guarded. In truth the position seemed so inaccessible that it was on the battery of artillery within the walls the commandant relied wholly to discourage assault, and once at close quarters we found our chances redoubt. Beside, what cold sense of duty could withstand the onslaught of men fired beyond human courage by such a reward as ours?”

“I believe I was half a demon in that terrible onslaught. We dashed into the very jaws of the cannon, tore into the breach, dared death to all extremities. The defenders fought bravely, but as well fight against the elements unless they could annihilate us, every man. They were few in number, too, and though hardly a tithe of our men remained, we were still numerous enough to overbear them like a torrent. In through the breach we swept—into the Castle hall—every eye straining madly for the flag that still waved over the tower. I can tell you no more. I remember confusedly scenes of blood and fury that even yet make my blood run cold. I believe even among our own men bloody struggles marked every inch of our progress. All I can tell is a delirious remembrance of a death-struggle for the flag with the old Austrian commandant, each striving to fling the other from the dizzy top of the battlements. My brain still reels to recall it—I saw the dark body going down with a cry of despair, and I clasped the torn flag in fiendish glee to my breast.”

The priest shuddered, and said a silent prayer.

“War is a terrible thing!” he exclaimed, musingly.

“It is painful for me even to think of those

scenes,” the young man continued, gravely, “and I will spare you my reflections on them! Enough to say that this inhuman exploit (for which, God knows! I seek no credit) at once made me famous. I was saluted Colonel on the spot, and the Castle confirmed to me for ever. But my thoughts were no longer, if they were ever, bent on this barbarous glory. All my pleasure centred in the thought that, my prize once converted into ready money, I could return to Ireland and claim the inheritance of my fathers. On a closer examination, the Castle exceeded all my anticipations. It turned out to be the Castello d’Ugolina, the summer residence of the Austrian Governor of Milan, furnished, as I have said, more for pleasure than for war, surrounded with beautiful gardens and plantations, and crowning one of the richest and mildest of transalpine valleys.

“It was, of course, worth incomparably more than for my purposes I required; but the grand difficulty was now how to abandon the army, for every day would bring fresh battles and fresh deaths, and—I own it—I began to fear, now that I had the object of my life almost assured, some stray bullet might step in to rob me of my triumph. But how was I to cover my abandonment of a career that seemed so inviting? Desertion might end in ignominious death: explanations would be only sneered at as the apologies of a coward.

“I was canvassing this dilemma gloomily in my tent that night, and devising all manner of impossible solutions, when, to my surprise, I was summoned to headquarters by order of the First Consul. I found the General seated before a mass of papers and maps, with a few of his chief lieutenants on either hand.

“He scanned me swiftly with that terrible eye of his, and then said abruptly:

“You are an Irishman?”

“My name is the assurance, General,” I replied.

“You are not an Englishman?” he asked again, with peculiar emphasis, reading me all the while to the very soul, as it seemed to me.

“I understood his meaning and replied:

“The characters are inconsistent, sir!”

“He conversed rapidly for a few moments with one of his generals, and then addressed me again:

“I saw how you fought to-day, and liked it. I am going to entrust you with a mission to Ireland.”

“My heart bounded so with astonishment and delight, I believe I must have betrayed it in my