

THE BOW STRING.

From the Norwegian of Sebastian Cammermeyer
Welhaven.

BY NEIL P. MAH.

The archer, bold Thorar,
To battle must away;
He thought to come back, bearing
Bright trophies of his daring
Home, where the bearakin lay.

But first he well bethought him
To seek the bower, where
Love in the spring had sought him
And 'mid the song-birds caught him
In Freja's hidden snare.

Here the earl's daughter found him
To bid a fond farewell.
While flickering shades surrounded him,
And merry elves around him
Dance in the moonlit dell.

Rose beds and heads of clover
She in her bedchamber bore;
Quote he, "Give these your lover
To wear his true heart over
When he dips his sword in gore."

"Nay," quoth she, "Strife's an element
Spring's gifts may not endure.
To figure fortune's fair intent
Choose rather war's accompaniment.
A bow string strong and sure."

Then with sharp shears she raided
Her sweet brow, for his sake,
Of locks with gold sheen shaded
Which to his bow she braided
And cried, "It will not break."

"And though the air be cloven
By myriad arrows' flight,
The string that I have woven
Shall grow stronger as 'tis proven
As heart's true love grows bright."

Forth marched—his quiver slung—
Thorar, archer bold.
Pleased, as his shafts went winging
Forward, to hear the singing
Of his lover's string of gold.

BEPPO.

I.

In the early summer of 1879 I was working hard to make up for the time spent during the merry winter in dancing, riding, charade-playing, sight-seeing, and all the thousand-and-one distractions which make it so difficult for an artist, not absolutely compelled to keep the wolf from the door by the use of his pencil, to "buckle-to" in Rome. I had orders also from obliging friends for two or three paintings in the style I have adopted for my own—small pictures of priests, bishops, cardinals, and other ecclesiastics in their habits as they live.

I was almost alone in Rome; for in June, artists of all nationalities were off to country-sketching; and visitors had departed to the mountains, or to England, months ago. I, however, stayed bravely on, in my somewhat shabby rooms, on the fourth piano of a large house in the Via Margutta, working at a picture I intended to call "Meditation"—a Monsignore in a violet robe, with the red piping and buttons which make those garments so effective. I was trying to catch the attitude of Monsignore, just between meditation and slumber, and had placed him on a *loggia*, with a hazy summer view between the pillars of the balustrade before him, with his breviary sliding from between the fingers of one hand, while the other was outstretched on the arm of his chair. It was tiresome; the day was hot, and I could do nothing satisfactorily; so I laid aside my brushes, and thought I would write some letters. Going to fetch my desk from the little den of a bedroom which adjoined my studio, my eye fell on a novel I had thrown down while going to bed the night before. I thought I would finish it; and flinging myself on the bed I plunged into the woes and ways of the hero and heroine, which soothed me so completely that I fell into a delicious slumber.

I was awakened by the opening of the door which led from the passage into my bedroom, and raising myself, beheld the head of my *padrona* peering cautiously in. On seeing me, she stepped quickly into the room, and said she had come to see if my ewer wanted water. I told her "no," and she departed. I sat up, and wondered at this unwonted attention on the part of my landlady, who as often as not left my bedroom for days unattended, unless brought to a sense of her neglect by my remonstrances; and also I felt surprised at the look of anxiety which I had certainly seen on her face when she put her head round the doorpost before seeing me. I knew her to be honest as the day, and I believed that she really liked her lodger. She was a widow, with two sons, Beppo and Paolo. Paolo was the one about whom she most frequently discoursed. "A good lad," she said, "and servant to a gentleman in Lombardy." The other, Beppo, she generally mentioned with a sigh and a shake of the head, usually calling him *poverino*, and once or twice she had seemed on the point of telling me more about him. I only knew, however, that he had at one time been a "model" at the Life Academy in Rome, where he was much esteemed for his handsome face, and specially for the glory of soft, curly, dark-brown hair which surrounded his head. On inquiring if he could sit for me, I was told that he had now gone to Naples; but what his occupation was, I knew not.

I went back to my studio, and speedily forgot my *padrona*, in another attempt at the Cardinal's

drapery, which gave me trouble, great trouble; for owing to an accident it had sustained, I had been obliged to send the body, one arm, and the legs of my lay-figure, to be mended. I had called many times at old Grefio's, to ask for my wooden beauty; and each time had been put off with excuses, promises, and "*parizanzas*" without end; so it was no easy work to dress up a Cardinal with only the head and one arm of my figure; and all my efforts with rugs, bolster, umbrellas and sticks, were unavailing.

Two days passed, in which I worked a little, dawdled a great deal, read, wrote, and went out of doors as usual. Yet I could not help noticing that Chiara, my landlady, wore a look of care, and that she was very much more constant in her visits to my rooms. She found, it seemed to me, endless errands calling her thither. I asked her one day, when she was restlessly dusting, or pretending to dust my furniture, if anything had disturbed her peace, or if she had any trouble. She disclaimed the idea with much vehemence, and rushed in a stream of talk about "Paolo," which made me quickly dismiss her, tired of her son's praises.

The nights were hot, dreadfully hot, and I was worried by sounds behind my bed, for which I could not account. I thought of rats; only the noises were not the usual "skurry-scuffles" of those animals, but sounded like some heavy creature trying to move softly. I said one morning to my landlady: "What is behind the head of my tent-bed? Is it the wall of the house, or another room, or what?"

She looked alarmed, and replied: "Signor, I know not. Perhaps a cupboard in the next house comes by the wall there. If the Signor looks at his own room, he will see a cupboard on the other side of the stove; perhaps they have one like it next door."

"Oh, well," said I, "I do wish they would not move things about in it at night."

Either I slept better, or the noises ceased, for during the next two nights I was undisturbed. On the third day I was working in my studio, when Chiara rushed in with a telegram in her hand, and a face of great distress. Her Paolo, her boy, had been thrown from his master's carriage and hurt—seriously, she fears; and the telegram summoned her at once to Milan. Poor Chiara! her distress was pitiful. She wept, she invoked all the saints to behold her misfortune; and she seemed so bewildered and distracted that it required some time and much patience before I could persuade her that it she meant to go to Milan, she must lose no time in starting, as the slow morning train would leave in little more than an hour. To my surprise, she said she intended going by the quick train, leaving at one o'clock; by which she hoped to return on the next day but one, at about the same time, so as to be at home again after an absence of forty-eight hours only. This puzzled me, as not only are Italians so thrifty by nature, that to pay at all for travelling is a trial to them; but to go by an express train instead of a slow one, would seem to the ordinary Roman mind little less than a sin, as, there being no third-class, the difference in price would be something like twelve francs on the two journeys. I could not account either for her determination to return so soon, and hinted that Paolo might be too ill for her to leave him, which suggestion made her look positively agonized.

However, she departed, to her packing as I supposed, and though I heard her for some time afterwards fussing about a good deal in my bedroom, I only saw her again for a minute when she came to say "good-bye." I asked her if I could do anything for her; for the poor soul's distress touched me; and for a moment she looked on the point of making a request, but changed her mind, and went away.

This was Thursday. On Saturday by mid-day, she hoped to be back; till that time I should be left to attend on myself. I worked hard till dinner-time, and was only at the café an hour, as I had important letters to write. My correspondence took me till nearly midnight, when I turned in, hoping for slumber, but in vain. I passed a wretched night, and did not fall asleep till after five o'clock. Friday passed as usual, except that I was more in the studio. I had given up the Monsignore for the present, and was finishing a sketch of a flower-girl, to send to England to a cousin of mine, whose husband, Jack Goddard, would leave Rome for London in a day or two, and take with him his young sister, who had been spending many months in Italy, and whom he had come to fetch. The evening I spent at the open-air theatre in Trastevere, so I did not reach my lodging till late; in fact, it was two o'clock before I could make up my mind to leaving the lovely night and betake myself to my tent-bed.

Again the noises close to me began, and I could distinctly hear cautious sounds of groping and moving, and once, something that sounded like a groan. I could endure it no more. Jumping out of bed, I pulled up the heavy blind to let in the daylight, and dragged my flimsy couch away from the wall. Apparently, there was nothing to reward my search. The wall-paper, shabby enough, was in an unbroken piece from a kind of dado mark about five feet up, above which the walls were distempered. I knocked, however, and presently pressing my ear against the wall, asked: "Is any one there?" I listened, and certainly heard a kind of stifled groan. Then I said: "There is some one in hiding. I shall make a hole in the wall, if I get no answer;" and to emphasize my speech, I began to batter with a stout stick. This brought a hoarse but very distinct whisper which seemed to come from about the level of my knee, entreating me

"to be silent, and imploring for a single drop of water, for the love of the Holy Virgin."

Here was a worry! I, a peaceable Englishman, was to be mixed up in some abominable manner with these confounded Italians and their skulking ways. The fellow behind my bed, whatever sort of a desperado he was, whether political, social, financial, or natural, would throw himself on my mercy. I should have to conceal and befriend him, and the like. However, reflection would not serve my turn; the poor wretch was there, and in piteous accents he continued to demand, in the name of all the saints in the calendar, for "but one drop of water."

"Who are you?" said I; "and how am I to get you out?"

The weak voice replied: "I am Beppo, Chiara's son. If you put your finger under the right-hand corner of the paper here, nearest the stove, and raise the wood, you will touch a little spring, and the door will move."

I obeyed the directions; and after some raising, pressing, and pulling, the side of the wall up to the dado-line turned outwards, nearly knocking me over; but so quietly, that it was evident the hinges must have been well oiled and the joints considerably used of late. This revealed a quantity of rude lath and plaster-work immediately under the dado-line; and down at the bottom, not more than three feet high, was a little cupboard; and there, like a beast in a lair, crouched a figure, with hair of the wildest, and face of the most pinched, pathetic, and despairing expression I had ever seen; and with such eyes! Large, widely-distended, with dark rims and long lashes, they looked unnatural; but a glance showed me how striking a feature they would be in their normal state, and I recognized, even in this plight, the handsome model from the Academy of whom I had been told.

"Why, Beppo," said I, "how came you here?"

"Ah, Signor," he groaned out in reply, "I am of all men the most wretched, the most miserable. But I die, so it matters not." As I dragged him out of his hole, the poor fellow fainted, and for some time I thought his words were literally true, and that he was dead. But I lifted him from the floor, and replacing the false wall, which was only like a rude screen, but fastened with careful clasps and hinges, I pushed back my little bed, placed him upon it, and used every means I could think of to revive him. After about an hour, my efforts were rewarded by seeing him able to sit up and slowly drink some mild Chianti wine mixed with a quantity of water, and able also to swallow a few morsels of bread soaked in the same.

I became wonderfully interested in my patient during this time; his obedience, gentleness, and a kind of shrinking humility which betrayed itself in every word and gesture, together with an unmistakable look of extreme terror at any, even the slightest sound for which he did not see a cause, filled my soul with pity. He soon entreated me to let him go back to his den; but this I could not do; and while I made some coffee, I succeeded in soothing his fears sufficiently to allow me to go into the neighbouring street for rolls and butter for breakfast, he the while imploring that I should only bring enough food for one person, or his presence would certainly be discovered. I determined that the "one" should have a first-rate appetite; and I never remember enjoying any meal more than I did the coffee, cherries, and bread-and-butter I shared with the terror-stricken lad, whose grief for some cause unknown to me, and gratitude at the trifles I had done for him, by turns almost choked him.

Breakfast over, and Beppo somewhat calmer, I succeeded in persuading him to tell me what had brought him into such straits. His tale was certainly a curious and interesting one, told as he told it, in flowery soft Italian, spoken with singular refinement and purity, and with the rapid expressive articulation of the Neapolitans he had lately been amongst. He had had a tolerable education; and being very handsome, having a "picture-face," as he put it—he found many friends, and was specially liked amongst the best class of artists in Rome, getting well paid as a model at several good studios, and having besides a regular evening engagement at the Life Academy. Unfortunately, the facility with which he made acquaintances was not equalled by the discretion with which he chose them; and some two or three years before our meeting, he had formed a close alliance with a youth who appeared to him extremely fascinating, but who was a prominent member of one of those miserable secret societies which are the chief bane of Italy; and this one appeared to be more than usually of the "death and destruction" sort. Beppo had been drawn on and on, till he was appointed one of the officers or chiefs of this society, and had to execute the decrees of the "Supreme Three," whom he mentioned with extreme awe.

One of these decrees having recently enacted that he should assassinate an old general in Naples, whose only sins appeared to be that he was strongly conservative and a great martinet, he had gone thither for the purpose of obeying his instructions. His intentions, however, had been frustrated by the prayers and entreaties of a girl to whom he was passionately attached, whose suspicions had been roused by seeing him in Naples. She was a daughter of the landress to the General's family, and a flower-seller on the Chiaja; and having a strong affection for the General and all his family, on account of his and his wife's great kindness to her little brother and sister at a time when there was fever in the

house and starvation at the door, she had watched over them with an Italian's devotion, and knowing how much the General was disliked, had feared he might fall a victim to a stab in the dark.

The unwonted presence of Beppo in Naples, the knowledge that he was connected with one of the secret societies, and his gloomy and pre-occupied behaviour, had alarmed her. She spent hours in exhorting and entreating him not to have this sin on his soul; declaring that she would denounce him, if the life of the General were attempted either now or later, and finally refusing to see or speak with him for a week. This last had overcome Beppo. To be in the same city, to breathe the same air, but to have no sign of the presence of his innamorata was intolerable. He wrote to tell her that for one hour of her society he would forfeit his soul, his life, and would give up his project. They met, and in spite of his despairing gloom, Nonina refused to believe any harm would happen to him, declared death did not always follow disobedience to the "Supreme Three," and insisted on his fleeing to Rome on the very night on which the assassination was to have taken place, assuring him that she would speedily follow, and they would leave Italy in safety together.

II.

After hearing Beppo's tale my sorrow for the poor, terror-haunted, weak-minded lad was only equalled by my extreme bewilderment as to what was to be done with him. There he could not stay. He said he knew, and I believed, that the wonderful "Three" would certainly make search after their recalcitrant disciple, and a terrible result might follow. Meanwhile, I could think of nothing better than putting him back in his den; and going myself into the studio, to have a turn at my picture for Jack Goddard, I lazily finished up the head of the flower-girl, and placed it on a shelf to dry, when my eyes fell on the unhappy figure I had been attempting to rig up the day before with the bits of my wooden beauty, and the rugs, &c. A happy thought struck me. Why shouldn't Beppo sit to me? I could dress him up as the Cardinal, and no one would dream of interfering with my model. No sooner thought than done! I placed him in my chair of state, where he quickly made himself up in the cleverest way possible. Declaring that he durst not pose as a man, he struck a perfectly wooden attitude; and I was surprised and pleased with the ingenuity with which he made a great display of the one hand and head belonging to my wooden model, and the angularity he threw into his own limbs. Tiring as his position was, he found it, he said, preferable to that in the cupboard; and his long practice as model served to make it less intolerable to him. I sat and painted, trying to devise all manner of expedients for the safety of the poor lad, and wondering what Chiara would say and do when she found he was discovered.

Beppo told me that communications were rather slow in his Society, which did not seem to be a very powerful or notable one, and he thought he might exist in Italy for one week after the date of the day on which he ought, as he phrased it, "to have executed the decree," but by that time he felt sure he would be hunted down and assassinated. He seemed to take it quite for granted that there was no resisting the wonderful "Three." I, however, did not see it in the same light, and I used my best endeavors to put more pluck and spirit into the poor lad. I painted on till one o'clock, and was about to put up my brushes and take a siesta, when I was interrupted by the entrance of Chiara, looking much heated, and, to my delight, not recognizing anything strange in my model.

"How goes it with Paolo?" said I; for Chiara, after a brief greeting, was making for my bedroom door.

"Oh, well! excellently, Signor," replied she, not pausing in her walk.

I let her go, and waited for the exclamations I knew would follow. In two minutes she came back, her face as white as her apron, and trembling so that she could hardly speak. I could not let her endure the suspense, so I said, laughing: "Ah, Chiara, your bird has flown."

She clasped her hands, exclaiming: "Signor, tell me! How did you discover him? Where is he?"

"Beppo, tell your mother," said I; and, to the good woman's astonishment, my model began his tale. The exclamations and the embraces that followed will be readily imagined, and when the pair were calmer, I persuaded Chiara to consider what should be done with her foolish boy. I asked: "Will he go to England?"

"Certainly," replied his mother for him, "if there he will be safe."

I then assured her that if he could get a situation in a family, he would be quite safe in our beloved Isle. And the happy thought occurred to me of asking Jack Goddard to take him in for a time. He was a thoroughly good-natured fellow. His wife, I knew, had a predilection for foreigners, and a dash of romance in her composition, which would not make it displeasing to her to receive and hide a runaway of this sort. She might perhaps find a place for him amongst some of her numerous friends and acquaintances. I expected Jack in the afternoon to fetch his picture, as he was to leave on Monday, and I determined to appeal to him. This settled, Chiara left us; and I painted on till three o'clock, when I sent Beppo to his den, and took my delayed siesta.