

shepherdess had when the outer daub was removed.

I climbed up on the mantel piece, cut the cord, and down came the picture with a smash. Goldsmidt and McColl came in on the bounce, and, before I could fully explain, caught my meaning, and began on the picture like wild. It was not long before a considerable part of the paint was removed, and we were able to make out what was underneath. Writing of some kind, and in Italian too.

I am a poor Italian scholar, and I had a big job ahead of me. The writing seemed a sort of autobiography and it was only near the bottom that any mention was made of the picture that caused the trouble. It seemed that Donatelli had, in a sense, repented of his desire for revenge, and left this confession, adding that he would give the ignorant public, as he called them, a chance to redeem themselves. If, he said, one of the five injured ones could paint a better picture, the visitors to the gallery being the judges, he would release them from his power.

This was our chance. McColl, Goldsmidt, and I grabbed the Dubois and danced them with sheer delight, much to their surprise and discomfort. And then, remembering that they were still ignorant of the facts, we explained how the matter stood.

It didn't take long to get to work on

the picture. We made all haste for Florence, and there started the paintings. McColl was quite an artist, Goldsmidt was no novice, but the Dubois had to be excused. I was passable.

When the eventful day arrived the original and the three copies, and also the cause of the trouble, were hung up together, and a ballot taken. The news had gone abroad and the place was jammed. However, we five had had enough to know not to tinker with the ballot boxes, so to speak. Some professor or other was made returning officer of this strange election. When the ballots were at last counted and the result announced in favour of McColl's picture by a majority of seven, I felt something snap within me, while the crowd set a shout that made the windows rattle. It was a welcome moment; we fell into each other's arms, and then looked at the picture of the man with the horns.

The man was gone, only a blank canvas remaining! The professor, seeing the cause of our surprise, explained it to those of the audience who were still in the dark, and, at the close of his remarks, said: "Gentlemen, Donatelli's revenge has run out."

We departed amid thundering cheers.

"That, gentlemen, is the way a certain painting affected me. Don't judge the author of the book too severely."

