

beloved brother, she is an artful minx, designing and heartless."

"Thou meanest well, brother," was the haughty reply, "but thou dost misjudge her. Thou shalt yet own my Adelaide is worthy, and can love as the best of Margaritas. I wish thee joy, dear Hugo, in thy choice, and I can gladly say thou hast selected wisely, and art deserving of all felicity."

"Have the conversation ended, and Giraldo sought his lady love, who was in no little consternation to find him in a state of determination that precluded all possibility of evasion, or postponement, of the decision he demanded. To his reiterated that he would then and there be either accepted or refused, she answered,—

"But have I not said I love thee? and is not that enough?"

"Thou hast not said thou wilt marry me," was the blunt reply.

"We are both so young," sighed Adelaide (she was his elder by a year or two); "why press the matter now, my dearest one? Let us be happy in the present. Thou hast yet thy fame and fortune to make."

"To greater advantage shall I wield the sword, once assured that thy hand is to be my guardian," boldly declared Giraldo.

"Whereas, if thou wilt not be mine, say the word, and thou shalt never look on my face more."

"Rash boy!" cried Adelaide, in alarm, lest in offending the son she should fall in the esteem of the parents, "wouldst thou quit thy home?"

"Thou art headstrong, I fear, and still I cannot help but love thee. So have thy way,—in time I will be thine, but mark the condition I impose—let our love be a secret till I give thee leave to make it known to others. Nay, turn not away, dear, good Giraldo, but give ear to mine Adelaide. What! must I already plead with thee to hearken to me?"

Adelaide's manoeuvres carried the day, as usual. Her suppliant tones and coaxing words, and, above all, her pretty glances of entreaty, had an effect on her auditor, and he acceded to her desire for secrecy, which he believed was but another of her innumerable caprices.

At an auspicious moment of the festivities following the day, Hugo led Margarita to his parents, and, kneeling with her at their feet, besought their blessing upon his choice of a wife. If either the lord or lady of the castle felt a pang of disappointment at this unexpected proceeding, they dissimulated successfully, and promptly and cordially accepted the charming and dowdless Margarita for their daughter.

Contented and dismayed, and fearing to betray her mortification at the loss of the matrimonial prize on which she had reckoned, Adelaide prevailed on her mother to take her, that same evening, to visit for an indefinite period at a domain some distance from the scene of her defeat.

Giraldo was vexed and distressed at Adelaide's abrupt departure, and the facility of his remonstrances to prevent it. Her vows of love and constancy partly consoled him, but the shrewd young woman, under pretext of testing his oft-averred desire to please her at whatever cost to himself, forbade him to seek her until she should summon him, under pain of her breaking off as he was to this, she yet extorted from him a reluctant promise of compliance.

The marriage of Hugo and Margarita was soon effected, and the beautiful bride indeed proved herself a sister to Giraldo. He, poor boy, torn with doubt and jealousy, poured out to her his grievances, to which she listened sympathetically, even while deploring his bestowal of his heart on one so incapable of appreciating the boon as Adelaide. On one occasion, irritated by her attempts to reconcile him to the deprivation of Adelaide's society, he hurled all manner of invectives at his fate, and stalked away in high dudgeon.

"Our poor Giraldo!" she said later to Hugo. "That wretched Adelaide hath wrought a great change in him. He is no longer the sunny tempered boy he was a short time ago."

"True," said Hugo, "our brother is not as was his wont; but rest assured that when he discovers Adelaide's perfidious nature, the force of the blow will rouse him to his better self,—'twill make a man of him."

"Ay, perhaps a saint," assented Margarita, thoughtfully.

But Giraldo showed no symptoms of approaching saintliness; on the contrary, he grew more surly and morose from day to day. Quick to take offence at trifles, reproach and rebuke were unbearable to him, and when at last his mother felt called upon to chide him for his inexplicable conduct, the frown that marred his handsome face grew heavier, and, though he durst not reply with untoward words, he flung himself passionately out of her presence, and calling for his horse, galloped off to the house where Adelaide was visiting. One idea was uppermost in the vortex of passions that consumed him,—he would compel Adelaide's consent to open acknowledgment of their troth.

As he neared the house he bethought him of her threat to reject his suit if he presented himself before her unsummoned. Undecided as to what course to pursue, he reined in his horse at the entrance, and to the lodge-keeper's inquiries as to his identity and bidding, he gave his name and inquired for Adelaide.

"As gay a young lady as is to be found in Aragon," volunteered the man, with the loquacity of an old and

avored retainer, "and soon, they say, she will wed the fine stranger, he who is coming down the steps yonder, and is about to mount, for he doth leave these parts to day."

Blinded with rage Giraldo sprang to the ground, and hastened to the house, which he would have entered unannounced, had not the stranger barred his way.

"How now, young sir, would you enter thus informally a house where to my certain knowledge you are no frequent guest?"

"Traitor! scoundrel! thief!" said Giraldo. "I'll teach you to have none of my Adelaide."

"I think she would have none of you," was the scornful retort. "A truly boy! go back to your nurse, and venture not again into the world until you can account for your actions. And take this for your impudence, and with a swift stinging cut of his riding whip across Giraldo's face, he was gone."

At the sound of his horse's hoofs receding, his adversary's gibing laugh floated back to the hapless ensign whose wrath and humiliation left him rooted to the spot. When he found speech it was but to mutter the words:—

"Dishonored! whipped like a dog! and by a wretch who hath flown, leaving me no chance of redress! Dishonored! Dishonored!" These were the words that came tumultuously through Giraldo's lips, as, with brain on fire, he slung himself into the saddle and rode madly away, heedless of the direction he took, reckless even of death, if he could but encounter again the man who had inflicted the blenheim on his honor. He rode onward in a frenzy of desperation; and when at last his horse slackened his pace through sheer fatigue, day was drawing to a close and he had seen naught of his instigator.

For the first time Giraldo saw took note of the surrounding country. It was entirely unfamiliar to him, and before him loomed the massive walls of a Benedictine monastery. With sudden resolve, he knocked impudently at the portal with the stock of his whip. The lay brother who swung back the ponderous iron gate, learning that the young cavalier desired an interview with the abbot, informed him that the reverend father was not accessible at that hour.

"But exception must be made in my case," insisted Giraldo, "for it is of vast importance to me that I should see him now."

The lay brother motioned him to enter the courtyard, and Giraldo dismounted, and followed the other to the lectory.

When the abbot entered, greeting his guest courteously, and solicitous to know his errand, Giraldo impudently narrated his misfortunes: the abbot contemplating him keenly the while.

"Now," concluded Giraldo, "my one wish is to slay the sight of men."

"If in Aragon," suggested the abbot dispassionately, "you cannot raise your head before your fellows, why not go to Castile and there win a new name and renown among strangers."

"I can serve no king but my own. Even were that possible, I, myself, should be conscious of bearing the brand of an unavenged affront, though others were ignorant of my shame. Nay, let those who loved me mourn me as dead, not as disgraced. I will bury myself from the world—I immerse myself in these sacred precincts; and favored by Heaven shall I be, indeed, if my maledictions avail to provoke his wrath upon my enemy!"

"Silence!"

The abbot's deep voice reverberated through the vaulted lectory like the roll of distant thunder. "This blessed shade is not a refuge for frustrated hopes, blighted passions, or vain schemes of vengeance. Those who enter here must come with chastened spirits, and hearts imbued with brotherly love and forbearance, with a yearning for higher and better things, with self-abnegation and humility, and a voluntary consecration to Heaven of earth's loftiest ambitions!"

"Kneel and pray!" he commanded; and, standing, he prayed aloud, while Giraldo, kneeling at his feet, made the responses.

The softening influence of prayer made itself felt on both. The abbot's features relaxed their severity, and at the Amen he looked down with a smile of ineffable compassion on Giraldo, whose face, upraised to his, was wet with tears.

"Father!" Giraldo's tremulous cry was fraught with mingled remorse and pleading.

"My son!" and the holy man raised him and folded him to his heart, "thou shalt rest with us and share our ways and duties for one year, and if, at the expiration of that time, thou dost still crave to be one of us, thou shalt enter on thy novitiate. Meanwhile, thou shalt wear the gown of our order, but thy hair may not be shorn until the end of thy year's probation; and he touched caressingly the abundant locks that fell loose on Giraldo's shoulders, according to the fashion of the times.

In mute and grateful reply, Giraldo reverently kissed the generous hand that had reached out to rescue him from a world of sin, and save him from his worst enemy—himself.

PART II.—THE WARNING.

The months passed uneventfully at the ancient monastery, where Giraldo dwelt among the Benedictine brethren, striving to model his life after theirs. Time and again his thoughts strayed recreantly to the world outside, and he

was filled with tempestuous yearnings for its sin and strife. But, little by little, the firm though kindly restraint of monastic rule, the inflexible line of duty that enforced, tempered by the great commandment of brotherly love, lulled the restless heart to a sense of security and repose, and gently and surely drew the fiery spirit toward the goal of religious ardor.

The abbot watched the development of Giraldo's inclinations to the religious life with the love of a father, and under his wise surveillance the young man's nature lost much of its former impetuosity.

The year of probation came to an end, and with faith and fervor Giraldo entered on his novitiate. After the solemn service that attended this step, he knelt in the solitude of his cell, his gaze fastened on the one object that relieved the bareness of the whitewashed walls,—the cross, with its burden of undying love and eternal sacrifice.

The abbot, entering, looked tenderly on the kneeling figure, absorbed in devout aspiration, and drawing near laid his hand paternally on the novice's shoulder.

"My son, so, through renunciation of all that is worldly, shall thy footsteps tend onward and upward to His best presence!"

"My father," and the fair young head leaned back lightly against the abbot's arm, "I have not renounced all things? Can I yet give more? Gladly would I give more to Him," the dark eyes turned again on the image of the Crucified, "but I know of naught that I have not already given."

"Take heed that thou persevere in giving even that which thou hast already given, lest, by giving not, thou shouldst take back that which thou hast already bestowed," was the wise reply.

But Giraldo's novitiate was not what he had looked forward to. His health failed, and his strength waned so perceptibly that he was in great part exempt from arduous duties, and often, by orders of the abbot, he spent whole hours in the air and sunshine of the garden. There, seated on his favorite bench, he followed the movements of birds and insects, or pored over some carefully treasured spiritual book.

Here, one day, the abbot found him. The book lay open in Giraldo's hands, but he was not reading, nor occupied in anything around him. The young face wore an expression of deep thought, and the eyes had the intense strained and puzzled look of one who would fain penetrate the veil of the future.

"What troubles thee, my son?"

"What an affair of grief Giraldo turned to the abbot,—

"My father, I am glad you are come. Tell me, I pray you, is it true, as his said, that Saint Benedict, with three blows of his staff on the wall, warns his followers of the approach of death, that they may duly prepare themselves?"

"So runneth the legend, my son; but though tradition openeth to us the door of credence at our option, its mysteries are not sufficiently reliable to give it place in our full belief. Much that is unfathomable may be believed, however, even as much that is plausible may be gainsaid. But, now, my son, hearken to what I have come to say to thee. It will give thee joy."

"To begin with, thou art stronger,—is it not so?" Though he spoke thus encouragingly, the abbot's heart failed him as he marked the lassitude of the figure before him, and the unnatural brilliancy of Giraldo's eyes. "And we would give thee every incentive to grow strong. Therefore, as it is thy great wish to become one of us, we have resolved not to prolong thy novitiate, for thy year of probation stood thee in good stead. So be it; to-morrow thou shalt enter on a fortnight's retirement from contact or communication with others, to meditate upon the life thou art about to embrace in earnest, and to fortify thyself for it with prayer and resolutions. As thou knowest, to make the final vows of religious consecration, in, as it were, to receive a second baptism, in which the soul is left pure and undefiled, and exempt from responsibility of its past. In that moment one were as fit to enter the Kingdom of God as the babe at the font."

With a low cry of rapture, Giraldo threw himself at the abbot's feet and kissed the hem of his garment, but was instantly lifted and clasped in the arms of the venerable man of God.

"Verily, my beloved son, mayst thou prove worthy of this boon that heaven accordeth thee, for from those to whom such signal favor is extended, great things are expected." At this point of the colloquy, the abbot was summoned to the lectory, where a stranger sought speech with him.

Never had Giraldo's heart harbored hotter counsels than that night, when, unable, at the hour of retiring, to compose himself in his state of exaltation, he determined to pour forth his soul in prayer at the foot of the altar. As he went down the dimly-lighted corridor leading from his cell, a stranger passed him and entered the chapel. It was he whose arrival had summoned the abbot from Giraldo's side that afternoon, and in the dim light the novice saw that his face was the hated face of the man who, months before, had dealt him the cruel blow, the unavenged insult, remembrance of which still rankled unsuspected in his bosom.

So are the tools of the tempter laid to ensnare our feet when we think ourselves most secure in grace.

At sight of his enemy, a complete metamorphosis occurred in Giraldo. Gasping for breath, he fell back against the wall, his bosom heaved, his

features contracted, his hands twitched convulsively, a malignant purpose glittered in his eyes. In a mad impulse of returned hate he entered his cell and wrested from its place the iron bar that served to fasten the slutters of his casement. On into the chapel, without pause or restraint, he glided like an evil spirit. The demon of revenge possessed him, and there was no room in his excited mind for any thought but that he was to wreak vengeance on his adversary.

In the gray gloom the stranger knelt in prayer. Giraldo stole near. A moment more, and his purpose would be accomplished. As the iron bar was about to descend upon the head of the unsuspecting victim, a heavy blow on the wall at Giraldo's side chilled the would-be assassin's blood in his veins. He stood as one petrified, his weapon poised in mid air. Another mysterious blow on the wall, and yet another. With a loud cry, Giraldo loosed his hold, and the bar fell with a clang that brought the startled monks to the scene, just as the guilty novice, with an agonizing cry, dropped unconscious on the floor.

When Giraldo recovered his senses he lay on the rude couch of his cell. At his feet sat the abbot, silent and rigid, taking no notice as Giraldo moved. When the blankness of his stupor gave way to returning remembrance, the memory of his terrible deed rushed upon him overpoweringly.

"Father!" but his weak voice broke on the silence unanswered.

"Father! I am not a murderer! in mercy tell me I am not a murderer!" wailed the anguish-stricken youth.

The abbot turned toward him, his austerity unyielding, his accents cold and forbidding.

"By divine intervention your hand was delayed, but though your flesh be unscathed, in me the death of the sin lieth upon your soul."

The abbot resumed his stern attitude, and Giraldo, striving in vain to crawl from his couch to the abbot's feet, sank back on his pillow, moaning,—

"Father, I was mad,—I knew not what I was doing. My brain was turned, I was beside myself. I was crazed; oh, believe me,—

"Even so; but though your murderous attempt was the fevered impulse of the moment, your sin was grievous. Though heaven in its infinite mercy stayed your hand, great and terrible should be your repentance. He whose life you would have taken is a Castilian like myself. He is my nephew, whom I have not seen for years. When, yesterday eve, he narrated to me his life, and told of his love for a woman who had beguiled the fancy of a boy, and how he had chastised the boy-lover for an unseemly and childish outbreak of rage, then, and not until then, did I recognize in him your enemy. He is now wedded to a noble dame of Castile, for he scorned the woman you had loved, when he learned of her intriguing disposition. I did not enlighten him by betraying knowledge of you, but I pointed out to him to what extremes the hot-headedness of youth may lead, and he was filled with concern as to the fate of him he had struck for the sake of a woman who merited the love of neither. He went to the chapel to pray that he might not have been instrumental in ruining both your life and your soul, and, as he prayed for you, you crept upon him with dastardly intent!"

"Father, oh my father! I am no more worthy to be called thy son. Cast me not forth from your heart, my father! Let me work out my expiation. Turn not from me, my father. Look not on me thus! Nay, speak but one word to raise me from the dust where I have fallen!"

At this appeal the abbot's eyes grew moist, and, going to the side of the patient, he took in his burning hands of the sick novice, whose distracted mind grew calm and clear at the words,—

"My son, wilt thou tell me all thy rash doings?"

Holding fast to the strong hands, Giraldo made full confession of his insane desire for vengeance; but the abbot listened incredulously to the account of the blows that had arrested Giraldo in his attempt against the stranger's life.

"Father, Saint Benedict gave those blows! I feel it, I know it."

"My son," the abbot replied doubtfully, "to thy disordered brain the blows might well seem upon the chapel wall, when in reality 'twas but thy conscience called thee, for none heard them but thyself."

"Father, I am confident 'twas Saint Benedict did it, whether on the wall or on my conscience, for I both heard and felt the blows. And, father,—"

"It is said that Saint Benedict only announced himself to those who are near death. I know that this is my punishment,—I die without making the final vows. This just! God's will be done!"

His voice grew faint, and the abbot hastily pronounced the absolution over him, and hurried away, with anxiety depicted on his countenance. He returned immediately with the leech of the monastery, and investigation confirmed the fear that Giraldo was sinking rapidly. A brief consultation was held among the monks, and at once an altar was extemporized in the patron's cell, and a large painting of the patron of the order was placed on the wall at the foot of the bed.

The abbot gently aroused the half-conscious Giraldo.

"My son, before thou gnest from our midst it is our wish to make thee one of us. So shall the great sin thou dost so repent of be washed away with all others thou hast committed in thy

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earthly existence, and, clad in spotless raiment, mayst thou enter on eternal life!"

Giraldo's eyes grew bright with expectation, and, when the monks, who had supported him at the altar-foot, laid him, robed in the full dress of the order again on his bed, the blessed light of eternity already shone in the countenance that turned yet once more to the superior's in loving gratitude.

"Father, forgive—I am so happy—Saint Benedict! Jesus! Mary!"

The chant of the monks was broken with weeping, and, with a mighty sob, the abbot bent over the newly professed, kissed the marble forehead, and closed the eyes from which the lustre had died out.

The ancient monastery is no longer tenanted by a holy order, but the *castellan* shows to day to visitors the portrait of Saint Benedict, the scorned canvass of which is said to have been rent ages ago by three appalling blows, that sounded on the wall behind it, when the young monk, Giraldo, expired.

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