

THE JEALOUSY OF MITRIDANES.

FROM BOCCACCIO'S DECAMERON.

In the country of Cathay, if we may give faith to the relation of certain Genoese mariners, and other persons who have visited those parts, there once lived a man of the name of Nathan, of noble extraction, and rich beyond belief.

Having his residence near to a great road, all people who travelled from the West to the East, or departed from the East to the West, were of necessity obliged to pass his abode, and possessing a noble and liberal mind, and desirous that his name should be famous for hospitality, with the assistance of some of the first architects of the country, he built in a short space of time one of the most magnificent palaces ever beheld, and furnished it in a most sumptuous manner with everything becoming a man of his high rank. Having moreover a numerous and beautiful family, his house became the seat of mirth and festivity, all persons both on their arrival and on their departure being treated with singular honor and respect, as though they were royal personages.

He persevered so long in this laudable course of conduct that his name was deservedly spread through the West as well as the East, and being now full of years, but nothing abated in his noble style of living, it happened that the fame of his hospitality reached the ears of a young man called Mitridanes, living in a country not very distant from his own.

This young man finding himself not less rich than Nathan, and becoming envious of his fame, resolved within himself, by his superior hospitality, to eclipse the liberality of Nathan. Having therefore erected a palace similar to that of Nathan, he opened his gates with the most unbounded hospitality to all comers, and in a short time became justly renowned for his generosity.

It happened one day as Mitridanes sat all alone in the court of his palace, that a poor woman entering at one of the gates, asked alms from him and received them, and returning by the second gate, again asked and again received, and so on successively to the twelfth gate; but returning for the thirteenth time, Mitridanes accosting her, said, "Good woman, methinks you are extremely urgent in your request," at the same time, however, bestowing his alms as before.

When the old woman heard these words, she exclaimed, "Oh, boundless charity of Nathan! I entered at the two-and-thirty gates of his palace, asking alms, and was never recognized by him, but received at each of them, and I am here arrived only at the thirteenth, and I am recognized and reproved." Thus speaking, without again returning to accept of Mitridanes' hospitality, she departed.

Mitridanes, when he had reflected on the words of the old woman, which added to the fame of Nathan and so much diminished his own, was seized with a sudden passion, and exclaimed, "Alas! when shall I only attain to the liberality of Nathan, for to surpass him I have no hope, when I am so far behind him in such trifling matters? Truly all my endeavors will be vain unless he be removed, which if his great age, or the coming of disease, does not speedily effect, I must perform with my own hands."

Then rising in this frame of mind, without communicating his intentions to anyone, he departed with a few attendants, on horseback, and on the third day, arriving in the neighborhood of Nathan's palace, he desired his attendants not to make him known, and to procure themselves food and lodgings, and wait for his return.

The evening now drawing on, he proceeded forward alone, and happened to meet Nathan himself near his own palace, who, in a plain dress, was indulging in a solitary walk for his recreation. Mitridanes, not knowing him, asked him if he could direct him to the residence of Nathan.

Nathan cheerfully answered, "My son there is no one in this

country who can instruct you better on that head than myself, and if it be agreeable to you, I will show you the way."

Mitridanes replied that he would in that case do him a great kindness, but that he wished, above all things, neither to be known nor seen of Nathan.

To this Nathan answered, "Your request in this respect shall be observed, since such is your wish."

Mitridanes then dismounting from his horse, and entering into agreeable conversation with Nathan, they proceeded together toward the palace. They were no sooner arrived there, than Nathan made signs to one of his servants to take the young man's horse, and, whispering at the same time in his ear, directed that neither he nor any of his household should discover him to the young man.

As soon as they entered the palace, he placed Mitridanes in a sumptuous chamber, where none saw him except the servants who were appointed to wait on him, and paying him the greatest possible respect and deference, he himself remained to keep him company.

Mitridanes being thus left alone with Nathan, although he held him in great reverence for his age, at length turned to him and asked him who he was.

To this Nathan replied, "I am, as you see, but a poor servant of Nathan, who have grown up with him from infancy, and am now like him well stricken in years; yet had he never bestowed any other advancement upon me than what you see, in which respect, how much soever other men may commend him, yet I have no cause to do it."

These words afforded some hope so Mitridanes that he might be enabled, by a proper degree of caution, to put in execution his wicked determination. Nathan now in a courteous manner asked him in return who he was, and the business which led him to the palace, offering his advice and assistance to the utmost of his power.

Mitridanes for some time debated with himself what to reply, but resolving at last to confide his intentions, with great circumspection he entreated his secrecy, and after that his counsel and aid, and then informed him who he was and the object of his visit, and communicated, without any pretense or reserve, his whole design to him.

When Nathan had heard this explanation, and saw the evil intentions of Mitridanes, he was sensibly moved, but with great presence of mind and an unaltered countenance replied:

"Young father, Mitridanes, was an honorable man, and I perceive that you are determined not to degenerate from him, having adopted so noble a system of hospitality, and I very much commend you for the envy you bear to the virtues of Nathan, for if there were sufficient of such noble deeds, the world, which is now most miserable, would soon become good and happy. The proposition which you have made known to me shall assuredly be kept secret, in which, though I cannot give you any great aid, I will yet communicate a piece of intelligence that may be of service to you. You must know, then, that about half a mile distant from hence there is a small wood, in which Nathan is accustomed to walk alone almost every morning, making it his recreation for a considerable space of time. It will then be an easy matter for you to find him there and accomplish your object. If you should succeed in slaying him, you may then return home without interruption, not indeed by the way you came, but by another road which you will find as you leave the wood, on your left hand, and though somewhat wild and overgrown with underwood, it will be a more and safer way to your house."

Mitridanes, when he had received this information, and Nathan had left him, secretly rejoined his attendants, and told them wheret wait for him on the following day.

Early next morning, Nathan in conformity with the counsel he gave to Mitridanes, departed alone to the wood, the place appointed for his death. Mitridanes having risen, and taken up his bow and his sword, and mounting his horse, proceeded to the wood, where he saw Nathan walking at some distance all alone, taking his usual