

"No, no," said the count, proud of his knowledge of the law of the ordeal; "that is the privilege solely of nobles, clergy, and religious communities. Limonta must find one of her own children to do battle for her, or her cause is lost."

"O, that my Lupo were here," exclaimed Ambrose, "or near enough to hear of our emergency in time. No hindrance should he have from me, and, my word for it, the abbot would not enslave us without a hard fight."

"Tell me," asked Michael, eagerly, "did not your son Lupo enter the service of Ottorino Visconti?"

"He did so five years ago, and has now risen to be his squire. They say the young lord has him in great favour, and moves not a step without him."

This answer seemed to re-energize the old boatman, who, turning to his son, enquired:

"Is the boat in good order for starting again, Arrigozzo?"

"We came on shore in such haste, father, that I left every thing on board; we have only to hoist sail and be off."

"To Como, then, without a moment's delay."

"Saw'st thou Lupo at Como?" interrupted the astonished fisher.

"No; but I saw his master, Ottorino Visconti," replied Michael, "and Lupo could not be far off. You saw him, too," added he, turning to his son, "when we were at Como on Thursday?"

"What; the young cavalier that accosted you as we were about to embark?" answered Arrigozzo.

"The same. My heart warmed to the friend of our poor young master, Lionetto—God rest his soul!—one who came so often to visit him in his last illness."

A shade passed over the brow of the count at the mention of his lost heir, and he said, in a softened voice:

"Hie thee to the buttery, my good Michael, and thou wilt find wherewithal to stay thine appetite, till thou reachest Como. Go with him, Arrigozzo, and thou, too, Ambrose. Tomorrow I trust again to see you, with Lupo in your company."

Scarcely had they made their obeisance and left the apartment, when a sudden thought struck the count, and, hastening to the door, he called after them:

"Michael! Michael! hark ye, Michael! let every thing be done as of your own accord, and let not my name be mentioned in the matter; you understand me?" The boatman made a gesture of assent, and Count Oltrado returned to his arm-chair, muttering: "By St. Barnabas,

but I had well nigh committed myself. What would the abbot have said, had I meddled in the matter? But I was ever thus rash and inconsiderate."

CHAPTER II.

On the following day, which was Sunday, the Chapel of St. Bernard, in Limonta, was opened, and mass said therein by a friar sent thither from Milan; for the priest of the parish had refused to exercise his ministry in time of interdict, and, frightened by the threats of the procurator, Pelagrua, had fled into concealment. Within the chapel there was none but the procurator and his family; while the space in front was filled by a crowd of Limontines, with many from Civenna and Bellagio, standing in scattered groups, and discoursing of the judgment of the previous day—of the barbarity and oppression of Pelagrua—and of the sacrilege, as they deemed it, then going on in the chapel.

Four or five rough-looking men-at-arms had at first gone from group to group, endeavouring, now by threats and now by persuasion, to induce the peasantry to enter the chapel, and take part in the service. Finding their efforts of no avail, they collected around the chapel door, urging those in the vicinity to shew their reverence by at least uncovering their heads; but, as the request was made in rude and insolent terms, so far from being complied with, it only increased the discontent of the crowd, which at last vented itself in hisses, groans, and insulting menaces.

On hearing this clamour, Pelagrua, who was on his knees near the chapel altar, turned round his head, and seeing, through the open door, the commotion outside, began for the first time to consider the possibility of his safety being endangered by his acts of oppression. The officiating priest, too, under various excuses, turned round several times, casting an uneasy glance on the irreverent multitude; nor would the comfort of either have been increased, had they been near enough to hear the opinions interchanged among the crowd. Strengthened and emboldened by mutual support, the name of Pelagrua was now mingled with the threats which they had hitherto lavished only on the men-at-arms, till at last, just as the mass was finished, they broke into cries of—"Set fire to the house—seize on the tyrannous villain—throw him into the lake—run him up to the next tree."

The procurator prudently put a bold face on the matter, and, calling his guard around him, proceeded, through the midst of the assemblage, to the monastery-house, which was situated about a stone's cast from the chapel. The mob pressed