

the silence and the noon; the gurgle of the river, and the marble Psyche, just exactly as he had seen them before he slept. But there was one thing which had not been there, and which he now became sensible of, for the first time—namely, a thin roll of parchment which appeared to have been thrust into his hand, and which he felt that he was grasping firmly. He felt a dawn of hope, mingled with strange wonder, in his mind. They had been placed there since he slumbered; for no such scroll had formerly been in his possession. He eagerly unfolded it, and read, traced in a fine Roman hand, the identical words which had been sung in his dream. He never could have forgotten them, indelibly impressed as they were on his mind, and his heart. He folded the scroll carefully away in the lining of his doublet, and made many an unsuccessful attempt to divine the mystery. But he trusted to time, only feeling as we sometimes do, when on the threshold of some pathway of destiny, that this adventure was about to introduce him into some important era in the history of his heart, and of his life.

Within about two hours of sunset, Milton arrived at the scene of festival. Passing an enormous and quaintly carved granite gateway, he descended on the wide green area, where the palazzo was situated, and saw the *fiesta* in full flow. It was a radiant scene of beauty and pleasure. Bright groups were scattered here and there under the trees. Laughter and sweet voices and music rose upon the air. He passed here a group, witnessing the fantastic tricks of some Venetian Fantaccini. Again, in the shadow of a huge oak, a few dancers in their fluttering and radiant coloured scarfs, were footing the graceful measures of the Florentine saraband. Here and there, a smaller number of gallants and maidens, or it might be only an occasional pair, engaged in conversation, sweeter than the most abandoning strains of revelry; but he passed them all in hastening towards *la divina Marchessa*, who received her guests in the vast portico of the mansion, as an appropriate hall of reception for this open air festival. The marchioness lacked in nothing of the stateliness common to the period, but was extremely kind to the *Poeta Inglese*, and even condescended to regret his delay.

"I feared you were about to play truant to our revels; but I hope you come not yet too late, for our enjoyment and your own!"

"A splendid scene, fairest Marchessa! I am indeed mine own foe, to have been absent so long. I was delighted as I approached, and bethink me that if the cold fruits of wisdom ripen under our

northern suns, the flowers and the beauty of existence find their native gardens under Italian skies."

"Ah! you confess it—yet have we not our wisdom too! or are blossom and fruitage inconsistent with each other; or because we are addicted to the picturesque and the pleasure-giving, think you our national heart beats not to graver themes? Have we not our Dantes and our Petrarchs, uttering profoundest wisdom under the gay glare of the sunny lyric muse, with flowers of poetry strewn over wells of truth? All is not gold that glitters; but genuine gold glittereth too. Ah! figid Inglese,—for I know in my heart that you are contemptuous of us still—think not that all truth and earnestness are confined to sad features, stiff demeanour and shorn locks; and believe that the same hand can gather, as the same heart can relish, the fruits of existence as well as its flowers."

"The roses be my choice to-night," said Milton; "can you, fairest marchessa, direct me to some favoured spot?"

"Ah! let me revolve!" said the marchessa, meditating a moment; "you have not been in the laurel garden yet, I know. *La Principessa Francesca Colonna* is there from Rome, holding a 'golden violet.' This has been the grand scene of attraction since noon; and the flower of our guests are collected round her."

Milton had heard of the *Principessa Colonna*, as who had not? Young; and with a rank next to regal—and with wealth scarcely inferior—a beauty and an improvisatrice, in the list of whom, in these palmy days of minstrelsy, the greatest and the lowliest of Italy accounted it highest honor to be numbered. On a visit to Florence, she had been invited to grace the *fiesta* of the marchessa; and was now holding a court in the laurel garden, in which the candidates for the prize of poetry came forward and recited, ordinarily to the accompaniment of music, but sometimes without, and received the golden violet—the holder of the court always an eminent judge in such matters—usually awarded.

Milton departed in the direction of the laurel garden, under the direction of one of her ladyship's pages, thinking of nothing but his dream, which had seized such a hold of his imagination, that he could feel interested in nought, excepting as it referred to it. He had some vague expectation that *La Principessa* would be found to have some connection therewith; and he felt his heart throb with the hope of seeing a form which he fondly fancied might prove to be the figure of his dream,—for that it was something more than the phantasmagoria of his imaginings, the scroll and the