

fancy, as I endeavored to show by killing one gentleman who called me by it, disabling three more, and giving two others such a lesson in sword-play as they will not forget. But come—no doubt you are of a merry turn of mind; I would not be too hard upon you; and then, you are kin to the Prince. Take a warning from me that I do not greatly love jests like this, and the matter shall end here.”

My tone infuriated him, as I knew it would. He turned crimson, puffed out his cheeks with rage, and squared his shoulders in fierce determination to crush me. Those about him scowled on me darkly and muttered curses on my insolence. “I believe,” Del Mayno said scornfully, “that you are the English condottiere who fights the Prince’s battles for hire. That is all I know concerning you. As for your name, it may be John Hawkwood or Giovanni della Guglia—do you think I have no better use for my thoughts than the remembering of how you style yourself? What are you doing here before me, pray? Did you think, because you heard me speak your name, that I called you? Not I. Begone, then, and if you must have company, talk to my lackeys yonder—they are nearer your rank than I am.”

“Now the Virgin pity you, me poor fool, and aid ye too—for it’s yourself will soon be needing aid most urgent,” I heard my irrepressible Irishman mutter behind me; and a sigh of rapturous anticipation ran about among my mercenaries. Del Mayno heard it too, and with rage.