

THE FLORENTINE LOVERS.*

At the time when Florence was divided into the two fierce parties of Guelfs and Ghibelines,¹ there was great hostility between two families of the name of Bardi and Buondelmonti.² It was seldom that love took place between individuals of houses so divided; but, when it did, it was proportionately vehement, either because the individuals themselves were vehement in all their passions, or because love, falling upon two gentle hearts, made them the more pity and love one another, to find themselves in so unnatural a situation.

Of this latter kind was an affection that took place between a young lady of the family of the Bardi, called Dianora d'Amerigo, and a youth of the other family, whose name was Ippolito.³ The girl was about fifteen, and in the full flower of her beauty and sweetness. Ippolito was about three years older, and looked two or three more, on account of a certain gravity and deep regard in the upper part of his face. You might know by his lips that he could love well, and by his eyes that he could keep the secret. There was a likeness, as sometimes happens, between the two lovers; and perhaps this was no mean help to their passion; for as we find painters often giving their own faces to their heroes, so the more ex-

* The groundwork of this story is in a late Italian publication called the Florentine Observer⁴, descriptive of the old buildings and other circumstances of local interest in the capital of Tuscany.

cusable vanity of lovers delights to find that resemblance in one another, which Plato⁵ said was only the divorced half of the original human being rushing into communion with the other.

Be this as it may (and lovers in those times were not ignorant of such speculations) it needed but one sight of Dianora d'Amerigo to make Ippolito fall violently in love with her. It was in church on a great holiday. In the South the church has ever been the place where people fall in love. It is there that the young of both sexes oftenest find themselves in each other's company. There the voluptuous that cannot fix their thoughts upon heaven find congenial objects, more earthly, to win their attention; and there, the most innocent and devotional spirits, voluptuous also without being aware of it, and not knowing how to vent the grateful pleasure of their hearts, discover their tendency to repose on beings that can shew themselves visibly sensible to their joy. The paintings, the perfumes, the music, the kind crucifix, the mixture of aspiration and earthly ceremony, the draperies, the white vestments of young and old, the boys' voices, the giant candles, typical of the seraphic ministrants about God's altar, the meeting of all ages and classes, the echoings of the aisles, the lights and shades of the pillars and vaulted roofs, the very struggle of day-light at the lofty windows, as if earth were at once present and not present,—all have a tendency to confuse the boundaries of this world and the next, and to set the heart floating in that delicious mixture of elevation and humility, which is ready to sympathize with whatever can preserve to it something like its sensations, and save it from the hardness and definite folly of ordinary life. It was in a church that Boccaccio,⁶ not merely the voluptuous Boccaccio, who is but half-known by the half-witted, but Boccaccio, the future painter of the Falcon

and the Pot of Basil,⁷ first saw the beautiful face of his Fiammetta.⁸ In a church, Petrarch⁹ felt the sweet shadow fall on him that darkened his life for twenty years after. And the fond gratitude of the local historian for a tale of true love, has left it on record, that it was in the church of St. Giovanni at Florence, and on the great day of Pardon,¹⁰ which falls on the 13th of January, that Ippolito de' Buondelmonte became enamoured of Dianora d'Amerigo. [How delicious it is to repeat these beautiful Italian names, when they are not merely names. We find ourselves almost unconsciously writing them in a better hand than the rest; not merely for the sake of the printer, but for the pleasure of lingering upon the sound.]

When the people were about to leave church, Ippolito, in turning to speak to an acquaintance, lost sight of his unknown beauty. He made haste to plant himself at the door, telling his companion that he should like to see the ladies come out; for he had not the courage to say which lady. When he saw Dianora appear, he changed colour, and saw nothing else. Yet though he beheld, and beheld her distinctly, so as to carry away every feature in his heart, it seemed to him afterwards that he had seen her only as in a dream. She glided by him like a thing of heaven, drawing her veil over her head. As he had not had the courage to speak of her, he had still less the courage to ask her name; but he was saved the trouble. "God and St. John¹¹ bless her beautiful face!" cried a beggar at the door; "she always gives double of any "one else."—"Curse her!" muttered Ippolito's acquaintance; "she is one of the Bardi." The ear of the lover heard both these exclamations, and they made an indelible impression. Being a lover of books and poetry, and intimate with the most liberal of the two parties, such as Dante Alighieri (afterwards so famous) and Guido Cavalcanti,¹² Ippolito,

though a warm partisan himself, and implicated in a fierce encounter that had lately taken place between some persons on horseback, had been saved from the worst feelings attendant on political hostility; and they now appeared to him odious. He had no thought, it is true, of forgiving one of the old Bardi, who had cut his father down from his horse; but he would now have sentenced the whole party to a milder banishment than before; and to curse a female belonging to it, and that female Dianora!—he differed with the stupid fellow that had done it whenever they met afterwards.

It was a heavy reflection to Ippolito to think that he could not see his mistress in her own house. She had a father and mother living as well as himself, and was surrounded with relations. It was a heavier still that he knew not how to make her sensible of his passion; and the heaviest of all, that being so lovely, she would certainly be carried off by another husband. What was he to do? He had no excuse for writing to her; and as to serenading her under her window, unless he meant to call all the neighbours to witness his temerity and lose his life at once in that brawling age, it was not to be thought of. He was obliged to content himself with watching, as well as he could, the windows of her abode, following her about whenever he saw her leave it, and with pardonable vanity trying to catch her attention by some little action that should give her a good thought of the stranger; such as anticipating her in giving alms to a beggar. We must even record, that on one occasion he contrived to stumble against a dog and tread on his toes, in order that he might ostentatiously help the poor beast out of the way. But his day of delight was church-day. Not a fast, not a feast did he miss; not a Sunday, nor a saints'-day. "The devotion of that young gentleman," said an old widow-lady, her aunt, who was in the habit of accompanying Dianora, "is indeed edifying;

“and yet he is a mighty pretty youth, and might waste his “time in sins and vanities with the gayest of them.” And the old widow lady sighed, doubtless out of a tender pity for the gay. Her recommendation of Ippolito to her niece’s notice would have been little applauded by her family; but, to say the truth, she was not responsible. His manœuvres and constant presence had already gained Dianora’s attention; and, with all the unaffected instinct of an Italian, she was not long in suspecting who it was that attracted his devotions, and in wishing very heartily that they might continue. She longed to learn who he was, but felt the same want of courage as he himself had experienced. “Did you “observe,” said the aunt, one day after leaving church, “how the poor boy blushed, because he did but catch my “eye? Truly, such modesty is very rare.” “Dear aunt,” replied Dianora, with a mixture of real and affected archness, of pleasure and of gratitude, “I thought you never wished “me to notice the faces of young men.” “Not of young men, “niece,” returned the aunt, gravely; “not of persons of “twenty-eight, or thirty or so, nor indeed of youths in “general, however young; but then this youth is very dif- “ferent; and the most innocent of us may look, once in a “way or so, at so very modest and respectful a young gen- “tleman. I say respectful, because when I gave him a slight “curtesy of acknowledgment, or so, for making way for me “in the aisle, he bowed to me with so solemn and thankful “an air as if the favour had come from me, which was ex- “tremely polite; and if he is very handsome, poor boy, how “can he help that? Saints have been handsome in their “days, aye, and young, or their pictures are not at all like, “which is impossible; and I am sure St. Dominic¹³ himself “in the wax-work, God forgive me! hardly looks sweeter and “humbler at the Madonna and Child,¹⁴ than he did at me and

“you, as we went by.” “Dear aunt,” rejoined Dianora, “I did not mean to reproach you, I’m sure; but, sweet aunt, we do not know him, you know; and you know—” “Know,” cried the old lady, “I’m sure I know him as well as if he were my own aunt’s son, which might not be impossible, though she is a little younger than myself; and if he were my own, I should not be ashamed.” “And who then,” inquired Dianora, scarcely articulating her words, “who then is he?” “Who?” said the aunt; “why the most edifying young gentleman in all Florence, that’s who he is; and it does not signify what he is else, manifestly being a gentleman as he is, and one of the noblest, I warrant; and I wish you may have no worse husband, child, when you come to marry, though there is time enough to think of that. Young ladies, now-a-days, are always for knowing who every body is, who he is, and what he is, and whether he is this person or that person, and is of the Grand Prior’s¹⁵ side, or the Archbishop’s¹⁶ side, and what not; and all this before they will allow him to be even handsome, which, I am sure, was not so in my youngest days. It is all right and proper, if matrimony is concerned, or they are in danger of marrying below their condition, or a profane person, or one that’s hideous, or a heretic; but to admire an evident young saint, and one that never misses church, Sunday or saints-day, or any day for aught that I see, is a thing that, if any thing, shews we may hope for the company of young saints hereafter; and if so very edifying a young gentleman is also respectful to the ladies, was not the blessed St. Francis¹⁷ himself of his opinion in that matter? And did not the seraphical St. Teresa¹⁸ admire him the more for it? And does not St. Paul,¹⁹ in his very epistles,²⁰ send his best respects to the ladies Tryphoena and Tryphosa?²¹ And was there ever woman in the New

“Testament (with reverence be it spoken, if we may say “women of such blessed females) was there ever woman, I “say, in the New Testament, not even excepting Madonna “Magdalen²² who had been possessed with seven devils²³ (which “is not so many by half as some ladies I could mention) nor “Madonna, the other poor lady, whom the unforgiving “hypocrites wanted to stone²⁴” (and here the good old lady wept, out of a mixture of devotion and gratitude) “was “there one of all these women, or any other, whom our “Blessed Lord himself” (and here the tears came into the gentle eyes of Dianora) “did not treat with all that sweet- “ness, and kindness, and tenderness, and brotherly love, “which like all his other actions, and as the seraphical Fa- “ther Antonio said the other day in the pulpit, proved him “to be not only from heaven, but the truest of all nobles on “earth, and a natural gentleman born?”

We know not how many more reasons the good old lady would have given, why all the feelings of poor Dianora’s heart, not excepting her very religion, which was truly one of them, should induce her to encourage her affection for Ippolito. By the end of this sentence they had arrived at their home, and the poor youth returned to his. We say “poor” of both the lovers, for by this time they had both become sufficiently enamoured to render their cheeks the paler for discovering their respective families, which Dianora had now done as well as Ippolito.

A circumstance on the Sunday following had nearly discovered them, not only to one another, but to all the world. Dianora had latterly never dared to steal a look at Ippolito, for fear of seeing his eyes upon her; and Ippolito, who was less certain of her regard for him than herself, imagined that he had somehow offended her. A few Sundays before she had sent him home bounding for joy. There had been two

places empty where he was kneeling, one near him, and the other a little farther off. The aunt and the niece, who came in after him, and found themselves at the spot where he was, were perplexed which of the two places to chuse;²⁵ when it seemed to Ippolito, that by a little movement of her arm, Dianora decided for the one nearest him. He had also another delight. The old lady, in the course of the service, turned to her niece, and asked her why she did not sing as usual. Dianora bowed her head, and in a minute or two afterwards, Ippolito heard the sweetest voice in the world, low indeed, almost to a whisper, but audible to him. He thought it trembled; and he trembled also. It seemed to thrill within his spirit, in the same manner that the organ thrills through the body. No such symptom of preference occurred afterwards. The ladies did not come so near him, whatever pains he took to occupy so much room before they came in, and then make room when they appeared. However, he was self-satisfied as well as ingenious enough in his reasonings on the subject, not to lay much stress upon this behaviour, till it lasted week after week, and till he never again found Dianora looking even towards the quarter in which he sat: for it is our duty to confess, that if the lovers were two of the devoutest of the congregation, which is certain, they were apt also, at intervals, to be the least attentive; and, furthermore, that they would each pretend to look towards places at a little distance from the desired object, in order that they might take in, with the sidelong power of the eye, the presence and look of one another. But for some time Dianora had ceased even to do this; and though Ippolito gazed on her the more steadfastly, and saw that she was paler than before, he began to persuade himself that it was not on his account. At length, a sort of desperation urged him to get nearer to her, if she would not condescend to

come near himself; and, on the Sunday in question, scarcely knowing what he did, or how he saw, felt, or breathed, he knelt right down beside her. There was a pillar next him, which luckily kept him somewhat in the shade; and, for a moment, he leaned his forehead against the cold marble, which revived him. Dianora did not know he was by her. She did not sing; nor did the aunt ask her. She kept one unaltered posture, looking upon her mass-book, and he thought she did this on purpose. Ippolito, who had become weak with his late struggles of mind, felt almost suffocated with his sensations. He was kneeling side by side with her; her idea, her presence, her very drapery, which was all that he dared to feel himself in contact with, the consciousness of kneeling with her in the presence of him whom tender hearts implore for pity on their infirmities, all rendered him intensely sensible of his situation. By a strong effort, he endeavoured to turn his self-pity into a feeling entirely religious; but when he put his hands together, he felt the tears ready to gush away so irrepressibly, that he did not dare it. At last the aunt, who had in fact looked about for him, recognized him with some surprise, and more pleasure. She had begun to suspect his secret; and though she knew who he was, and that the two families were at variance, yet a great deal of good nature, a sympathy with pleasures of which no woman had tasted more, and some considerable disputes she had lately with another old lady, her kinswoman, on the subject of politics, determined her upon at least giving the two lovers that sort of encouragement, which arises not so much from any decided object we have in view, as from a certain vague sense of benevolence, mixed with a lurking wish to have our own way. Accordingly, the well-meaning old widow-lady, without much consideration, and loud enough for Ippolito to hear, whispered her niece to

“let the gentleman next her read in her book, as he seemed “to have forgotten to bring his own.” Dianora, without lifting her eyes, and never suspecting who it was, moved her book sideways, with a courteous inclination of the head, for the gentleman to take it. He did so. He held it with her. He could not hinder his hand from shaking; but Dianora’s reflections were so occupied upon one whom she little thought so near her, that she did not perceive it. At length the book tottered so in his hand, that she could not but notice it. She turned to see if the gentleman was ill; and instantly looked back again. She felt that she herself was too weak to look at him, and whispering to her aunt, “I am very unwell,” the ladies rose and made their way out of the church. As soon as she felt the fresh air she fainted, and was carried home; and it happened, at the same moment, that Ippolito, unable to keep his feelings to himself, leaned upon the marble pillar at which he was kneeling, and groaned aloud. He fancied she had left him in disdain. Luckily for him, a circumstance of this kind was not unknown in a place where penitents would sometimes be overpowered by a sense of their crimes; and though Ippolito was recognized by some, they concluded he had not been the innocent person they supposed. They made up their minds in future that his retired and bookish habits, and his late evident suffering, were alike the result of some dark offence; and among these persons, the acquaintance who had cursed Dianora when he first beheld her, was glad to be one; for without knowing his passion for her, much less her return of it, which was more than the poor youth knew himself, he envied him for his accomplishments and popularity.

Ippolito dragged himself home, and after endeavouring to move about for a day or two, and to get as far as Dianora’s abode,—an attempt he gave up for fear of being unable to

come away again,—was fairly obliged to take to his bed. What a mixture of delight, with sorrow, would he have felt, had he known that his mistress was almost in as bad a state! The poor aunt, who soon discovered her niece's secret, now found herself in a dreadful dilemma; and the worst of it was, that being on the female side of the love, and told by Dianora that it would be the death of her if she disclosed it to "*him*," or any body connected with him, or, indeed, any body at all, she did not know what steps to take. However, as she believed that at least death might possibly ensue if the dear young people were not assured of each other's love, and certainly did not believe in any such mortality as her niece spoke of, she was about to make her first election out of two or three measures which she was resolved upon taking, when, luckily for the salvation of Dianora's feelings, she was surprised by a visit from the person, whom of all persons in the world she wished to see,—Ippolito's mother.

The two ladies soon came to a mutual understanding, and separated with comfort for their respective patients. We need not wait to describe how a mother came to the knowledge of her son's wishes; nor will it be necessary to relate how delighted the two lovers were to hear of one another, and to be assured of each other's love. But Ippolito's illness now put on a new aspect; for the certainty of his being welcome to Dianora, and the easiness with which he saw his mother give way to his inclinations, made him impatient for an interview. Dianora was afraid of encountering him as usual in public; and he never ceased urging his mother, till she consented to advise with Dianora's aunt upon what was to be done. Indeed, with the usual weakness of those, who take any steps, however likely to produce future trouble, rather than continue a present uneasiness, she herself thought it high time to do something for the poor boy; for the house began to remark

on his strange conduct. All his actions were either too quick, or too slow. At one time he would start up to perform the most trivial office of politeness, as if he were going to stop a conflagration; at another, the whole world might move before him without his noticing. He would now leap on his horse, as if the enemy were at the city-gates; and next day, when going to mount it, stop on a sudden, with the reins in his hands, and fall a musing. "What is the matter with the "boy?" said his father, who was impatient at seeing him so little his own master; "has he stolen a box of jewels?" for somebody had spread a report that he gambled, and it was observed that he never had any money in his pocket. The truth is, he gave it all away to the objects of Dianora's bounty, particularly to the man who blessed her at the church door. One day his father, who loved a bitter joke, made a young lady, who sat next him at dinner, lay her hand before him instead of the plate; and upon being asked why he did not eat, he was very near taking a piece of it for a mouthful. "Oh, the gallant youth!" cried the father, and Ippolito blushed up to the eyes; which was taken as a proof that the irony was well-founded. But Ippolito thought of Dianora's hand, how it held the book with him when he knelt by her side; and, after a little pause, he turned and took up that of the young lady, and begged her pardon with the best grace in the world. "He has the air of a prince," thought his father, "if he would but behave himself like other young "men." The young lady thought he had the air of a lover; and as soon as the meal was over, his mother put on her veil, and went to seek a distant relation called Signora Veronica.

Signora Veronica was in a singular position with regard to the two families of Bardi and Buondelmonti. She happened to be related at nearly equal distances to them both; and she hardly knew whether to be prouder of the double relationship,

or more annoyed with the evil countenances they shewed her, if she did not pay great attention to one of them, and no attention to the other. The pride remained uppermost, as it is apt to do; and she hazarded all consequences for the pleasure of inviting now some of the young de' Bardi, and now some of the young de' Buondelmonti; hinting to them when they went away, that it would be as well for them not to say that they had heard any thing of the other family's visiting her. The young people were not sorry to keep the matter as secret as possible, because their visits to Gossip Veronica were always restrained for a long time, if anything of the sort transpired; and thus a spirit of concealment and intrigue was sown in their young minds, which might have turned out worse for Ippolito and Dianora, if their hearts had not been so good.

But here was a situation for Gossip Veronica! Dianora's aunt had been with her some days, hinting that something extraordinary, but as she hoped not unpleasant, would be proposed to the good Gossip, which for her part had her grave sanction; and now came the very mother of the young Buondelmonte to explain to her what this intimation was, and to give her an opportunity of having one of each family in her house at the same time! There was a great falling off in the beatitude, when she understood that Ippolito's presence was to be kept a secret from all her visitors that day, except Dianora; but she was reconciled on receiving an intimation that in future the two ladies would have no objection to her inviting whom she pleased to her house, and upon receiving a jewel from each of them as a pledge of their esteem. As to keeping the main secret, it was necessary for all parties.

Gossip Veronica, for a person in her rank of life, was rich, and had a pleasant villa at Monticelli, about half a mile from the city. Thither, on a holiday in September, which was

kept with great hilarity by the peasants, came Dianora d'Amerigo de' Bardi, attended by her aunt Madonna²⁶ Lucrezia, to see, as her mother observed, that no "improper persons" were there;—and thither, before daylight, let in by Signora²⁷ Veronica herself, at the hazard of her reputation and of the furious jealousy of a young vine-dresser²⁸ in the neighbourhood, who loved her good things better than any thing in the world except her waiting-maid, came the young Ippolito Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti, looking, as she said, like the morning star.

The morning-star hugged and was hugged with great good will by the kind Gossip, and then twinkled with impatience from a corner of her chamber window till he saw Dianora. How his heart beat when he beheld her coming up through the avenue! Veronica met her near the garden-gate, and pointed towards the window, as they walked along. Ippolito fancied she spoke of him, but did not know what to think of it, for Dianora did not change countenance, nor do any thing but smile good-naturedly on her companion, and ask her apparently some common question. The truth was, she had no suspicion he was there; though the Gossip, with much smirking and mystery, said she had a little present there for her, and such as her lady-mother approved. Dianora, whom, with all imaginable respect for her, the Gossip had hitherto treated, from long habit, like a child, thought it was some trifle or other, and forgot it next moment. Every step which Ippolito heard on the stair-case he fancied was her's,²⁹ till it passed the door, and never did morning appear to him at once so delicious and so tiresome. To be in the same house with her, what joy! But to be in the same house with her, and not to be able to tell her his love directly, and ask her for her's, and fold her into his very soul, what impatience and misery! Two or three times there was a knock of some one

to be let in; but it was only the Gossip, come to inform him that he must be patient, and that she did not know when Madonna Lucrezia would please to bring Dianora, but most likely after dinner, when the visitors retired to sleep a little. Of all impertinent things, dinner appeared to him the most tiresome and unfit. He wondered how any thinking beings, who might take a cake or a cup of wine by the way, and then proceed to love one another, could sit round a great wooden table, patiently eating of this and that nicety; and, above all, how they could sit still afterwards for a moment, and not do any thing else in preference,—stand on their heads, or toss the dishes out of window. Then the Festival! God only knew how happy the peasantry might chuse to be, and how long they might detain Dianora with their compliments, dances, and songs. Doubtless, there must be many lovers among them; and how they could bear to go jigging about in this gregarious manner, when they must all wish to be walking two by two in the green lanes, was to him inexplicable. However, Ippolito was very sincere in his gratitude to Gossip Veronica, and even did his best to behave handsomely to her cake and wine; and after dinner his virtue was rewarded.

It is unnecessary to tell the reader, that he must not judge of other times and countries by his own. The real fault of those times, as of most others, lay, not in people's loves, but their hostilities; and if both were managed in a way somewhat different from our own, perhaps neither the loves were less innocent, nor the hostilities more ridiculous. After dinner, when the other visitors had separated here and there to sleep, Dianora, accompanied by her aunt and Veronica, found herself, to her great astonishment, in the same room with Ippolito; and in a few minutes after their introduction to each other, and after one had looked this way, and the other that,

and one taken up a book and laid it down again, and both looked out of the window, and each blushed, and either turned pale, and the gentleman adjusted his collar, and the lady her sleeve, and the elder ladies had whispered one another in a corner, Dianora, less to her astonishment than before, was left in the room with him alone. She made a movement as if to follow them, but Ippolito said something she knew not what, and she remained. She went to the window, looking very serious and pale, and not daring to glance towards him. He intended instantly to go to her, and wondered what had become of his fierce impatience; but the very delay had now something delicious in it. Oh, the happiness of those moments! oh, the sweet morning-time of those feelings! the doubt which is not doubt, and the hope which is but the coming of certainty! Oh, recollections enough to fill faded eyes with tears of renovation, and to make us forget we are no longer young, the next young and innocent beauty we behold! Why do not such hours make us as immortal as they are divine? Why are we not carried away, literally, into some place where they can last for ever, leaving those who miss us to say, "they were capable of loving, and they are gone to heaven!"

Reader. But, sir, in taking these heavenly flights of yours, you have left your two lovers.

Author. Surely, madam, I need not inform you that lovers are fond of being left—at least to themselves.

Reader. But, sir, they are Italians; and I did not think Italian lovers were of this bashful description. I imagined that the moment your two Florentines beheld one another, they would spring into each others arms, sending up cries of joy, and—and—

Author. Tumbling over the two old women by the way. It is a very pretty imagination, madam; but Italians partake

of all the feelings common to human nature; and modesty is really not confined to the English, even though they are always saying it is.

Reader. But I was not speaking of modesty, sir, I was only alluding to a sort of,—what shall I say—a kind of irrepressible energy, that which in the Italian character is called violence.

Author. I meant nothing personal, madam, believe me, in using the word modesty. You are too charitable, and have too great a regard for my lovers. I was not speaking myself of modesty in any particular sense, but of modesty in general; and all nations, not excepting our beloved and somewhat dictatorial countrymen, have their modesties and immodesties too, from which perhaps their example might instruct one another. With regard to the violence you speak of, and which is energy sometimes, and the weakest of weaknesses at others, according to the character which exhibits it, and the occasion that calls it forth, the Italians, who live in an ardent climate, have undoubtedly shewn more of it than most people; but it is only where their individual character is most irregular, and education and laws at their worst. In general it is nothing but pure self-will, and belongs to the two extremes of the community—the most powerful whose passions have been indulged, and the poorest whose passions have never been instructed. True energy manifests itself, not in violence, but in strength and intensity; and intensity is by its nature discerning, and not to be surpassed in quietness, where quietness is becoming. Besides, in the age we are writing of,³⁰ there was as much refinement in love matters with some, as there was outrage and brutality with others. All the faculties of humanity, bad and good, may be said to have been making their way at that period, and trying for the mastery; and if on the one hand we are

presented with horrible spectacles of lust, tyranny, and revenge, on the other we find philosophy and even divinity refining upon the passion of love, and emulating the most beautiful subtleties of Plato in rendering it a thing angelical.

Reader. You have convinced me, sir; pray let us proceed.

Author. Your *us*, madam, is flattering; I fancy we are beholding the two lovers in company. We are like Don Cleofas and his ghostly friend, in the *Devil on Two Sticks*,³¹ when they saw into the people's houses; I, of course, the devil; and you the young student, only feminine—Donna Cleofasia, studying humanity.

Reader. Well, sir, as you please; only let us proceed.

Author. Madam, your sentiments are engaging to the last degree; so I proceed with pleasure.

We left our two lovers, madam, standing in Signora Veronica's bed-chamber, one at the window, the other at a little distance. They remained in this situation about the same space of time in which we have been talking. Oh! how impossible it is to present to ourselves two grave and happy lovers trembling with the approach of their mutual confessions, and not feel a graver and happier sensation than levity resume its place in one's thoughts!

Ippolito went up to Dianora. She was still looking out of the window, her eyes fixed upon the blue mountains in the distance, but conscious of nothing outside the room. She had a light green and gold net on her head, which enclosed her luxuriant hair without violence, and seemed as if it took it up that he might admire the white neck underneath. She felt his breath upon it; and beginning to expect that his lips would follow, raised her hands to her head, as if the net required adjusting. This movement, while it disconcerted him, presented her waist in a point of view so impossible not to touch, that taking it gently in both his hands, he pressed one

at the same time upon her heart, and said, "It will forgive me, even for doing this." He had reason to say so, for he felt it beat against his fingers, as if it leaped. Dianora, blushing and confused, though feeling abundantly happy, made another movement with her hands as if to remove his own, but he only detained them on either side. "Messer Ippolito," said Dianora, in a tone as if to remonstrate, though suffering herself to remain a prisoner, "I fear you must think me"—"No, no," interrupted Ippolito, "you can fear nothing that I think, or that I do. It is I that have to fear your lovely and fearful beauty, which has been ever at the side of my sick bed, and I thought looked angrily upon me—upon me alone of the whole world." "They told me you had been ill," said Dianora in a very gentle tone, "and my aunt perhaps knew that I—thought that I—Have you been very ill?" And without thinking, she drew her left hand from under his, and placed it upon it. "Very," answered Ippolito; "do not I look so?" and saying this, he raised his other hand, and venturing to put it round to the left side of her little dimpled chin, turned her face towards him. Dianora did not think he appeared so ill, by a good deal, as he did in the church; but there was enough in his face, ill or well, to make her eyesight swim as she looked at him; and the next moment her head was upon his shoulder, and his lips descended, welcome, upon hers.

There was a practice in those times, generated, like other involuntary struggles against wrong, by the absurdities in authority, of resorting to marriages, or rather plightings of troth³², made in secret, and in the eye of heaven. It was a custom liable to great abuse, as all secrecies are; but the harm of it, as usual, fell chiefly on the poor, or where the condition of the parties was unequal. Where the families were powerful and on an equality, the hazard of violating the

engagement was, for obvious reasons, very great, and seldom encountered; the lovers either foregoing their claims on each other upon better acquaintance, or adhering to their engagement the closer for the same reason, or keeping it at the expense of one or the other's repentance for fear of the consequences. The troth of Ippolito and Dianora was indeed a troth. They plighted it on their knees, before a picture of the Virgin and Child, in Veronica's bed-room, and over a mass-book which lay open upon a chair. Ippolito then, for the pleasure of revenging himself of the pangs he suffered when Dianora knelt with him before, took up the mass-book and held it before her, as she had held it before him, and looked her entreatingly in the face; and Dianora took and held it with him as before, trembling as then, but with a perfect pleasure; and Ippolito kissed her twice and thrice out of a sweet revenge.—[We find we are in the habit of using a great number of *ands* on these occasions. We do not affect it, though we are conscious of it. It is partly, we believe, owing to our recollections of the good faith and simplicity in the old romances, and partly to a certain sense of luxury and continuance which these *ands* help to link together. It is the fault of "the accursed critical spirit"³³, which is the bane of these times, that we are obliged to be conscious of the matter at all. But we cannot help not having been born six hundred years ago, and are obliged to be base and *reviewatory*³⁴ like the rest. To affect not to be conscious of the critical in these times, would itself be a departure from what is natural; but we notice the necessity only to express our hatred of it, and hereby present the critics (ourselves included, as far as we belong to them) with our hearty discommendations.]

The thoughtless old ladies, Donna Lucrezia and the other (for old age is not always the most considerate thing in the

world, especially the old age of one's aunts and gossips) had now returned into the room where they left the two lovers; but not before Dianora had consented to receive her bridegroom in her own apartment at home, that same night, by means of that other old good-natured go-between, yclept³⁵ a ladder of ropes. The rest of the afternoon was spent, according to laudable custom, in joining in the diversions of the peasantry. They sung, they danced, they eat the grapes that hung over their heads, they gave and took jokes and flowers, they flaunted with all their colours in the sun, they feasted with all their might under the trees. You could not say which looked the ripest and merriest, the fruit or their brown faces. In Tuscany they have had from time immemorial little rustic songs or stanzas that turn upon flowers. One of these, innocently addressed to Dianora by way of farewell, put her much out of countenance—"Voi siete un bel fione,"³⁶ sung a peasant girl, after kissing her hand:—

You are a lovely flower. What flower? The flower
That shuts with the dark hour:—
Would that to keep you awake were in my power!

Ippolito went singing it all the way home, and ran up against a hundred people.

Ippolito had noticed a ladder of ropes which was used in his father's house for some domestic purposes. To say the truth, it was an old servant, and had formerly been much in request for the purpose to which it was now about to be turned by the old gentleman himself. He was indeed a person of a truly orthodox description, having been much given to intrigue in his younger days, being consigned over to avarice in his older, and exhibiting great submission to every thing established, always. Accordingly, he was considered as a personage equally respectable for his virtues, as

important from his rank and connexions; and if hundreds of ladders could have risen up in judgment against him, they would only have been considered as what are called in England "wild oats,"³⁷—wild ladders, which it was natural for every gentleman to plant.

Ippolito's character, however, being more principled, his privileges were not the same; and on every account he was obliged to take great care. He waited with impatience till midnight, and then letting himself out of his window, and taking the ropes under his cloak, made the best of his way to a little dark lane which bordered the house of the Bardi. One of the windows of Dianora's chamber looked into the lane, the others into the garden. The house stood in a remote part of the city. Ippolito listened to the diminishing sound of the guitars and revellers in the distance, and was proceeding to inform Dianora of his arrival by throwing up some pebbles, when he heard a noise coming. It was some young men taking a circuit of the more solitary streets, to purify them, as they said, from sobriety. Ippolito slunk into a corner. He was afraid, as the sound opened upon his ears, that they would turn down the lane; but the hubbub passed on. He stepped forth from his corner, and again retreated. Two young men, loiterers behind the rest, disputed whether they should go down the lane. One, who seemed intoxicated, swore he would serenade "the little foe," as he called her, if it was only to vex the old one, and "bring him out with his cursed long sword." "And a lecture twice as long," said the other. "Ah, there you have me," quoth the musician; "his sword is—a sword; but his lecture's the devil: reaches the other side of the river—never stops till it strikes one sleepy. But I must serenade." "No, no," returned his friend; "remember what the Grand Prior said, and don't let us commit ourselves in a petty brawl. We'll have it out of

their hearts some day." Ippolito shuddered to hear such words, even from one of his own party. "Don't tell me," said the pertinacious drunken man; "I remember what the Grand Prior said. He said, I must serenade; no, he didn't say I must serenade—but *I* say it; the Grand Prior said, says he,—I remember it as if it was yesterday—he said—gentlemen, said he, there are three good things in the world, love, music, and fighting; and then he said a cursed number of other things by no means good; and all to prove, philosophically, you rogue, that love was good, and music was good, and fighting was good, philosophically, and in a cursed number of paragraphs. So I must serenade." "False logic, Vanni," cried the other; "so come along, or we shall have the enemy upon us in a heap, for I hear another party coming, and I am sure they are none of ours." "Good again," said the musician, "love and fighting, my boy, and music; so I'll have my song before they come up." And the fellow began roaring out one of the most indecent songs he could think of, which made our lover ready to start forth and dash the guitar in his face; but he repressed himself. In a minute he heard the other party come up. A clashing of swords ensued, and to his great relief the drunkard and his companion were driven on. In a minute or two all was silent. Ippolito gave the signal—it was acknowledged; the rope was fixed; and the lover was about to ascend, when he was startled with a strange diminutive face, smiling at him over a light. His next sensation was to smile at the state of his own nerves; for it was but a few minutes before, that he was regretting he could not put out a lantern that stood burning under a little image of the Virgin. He crossed himself, offered up a prayer for the success of his true love, and again proceeded to mount the ladder. Just as his hand reached the window, he thought he heard other steps. He

looked down towards the street. Two figures evidently stood at the corner of the lane. He would have concluded them to be the two men returned, but for their profound silence. At last one of them said out loud, "I am certain I saw a shadow of somebody by the lantern, and now you find we have not come back for nothing. Who's there?" added he, coming at the same time down the lane with his companion. Ippolito descended rapidly, intending to hide his face as much as possible in his hood and escape by dint of fighting, but his foot slipped in the ropes, and he was at the same instant seized by the strangers. The instinct of a lover, who above all things in the world cared for his mistress's reputation, supplied our hero with an artifice as quick as lightning. "They are all safe," said he, affecting to tremble with a cowardly terror, "I have not touched one of them." "One of what?" said the others; "what are all safe?" "The jewels," replied Ippolito; "let me go for the love of God, and it shall be my last offence, as it was my first. Besides, I meant to restore them." "Restore them!" cried the first spokesman; "a pretty jest truly. This must be some gentleman gambler by his fine would-be conscience; and by this light we will see who he is, if it is only for your sake, Filippo, eh?" For his companion was a pretty notorious gambler himself, and Ippolito had kept cringing in the dark. "Curse it," said Filippo, "never mind the fellow; he is not worth our while in these stirring times, though I warrant he has cheated me often enough." To say the truth, Messer Filippo was not a little afraid the thief would turn out to be some inexperienced desperado, whom he had cheated himself, and perhaps driven to this very crime; but his companion was resolute, and Ippolito finding it impossible to avoid his fate, came forward into the light. "By all the saints in the calendar," exclaimed the enemy, "a Buondelmonte! and

no less a Buondelmonte than the worthy and very magnificent Messer Ippolito Buondelmonte! Messer Ippolito, I kiss your hands; I am very much your humble servant and thief-taker. By my faith, this will be fine news for to-morrow.”

To-morrow was indeed a heavy day to all the Buondelmonti, and as merry a one to all the Bardi, except poor Dianora. She knew not what had prevented Ippolito from finishing his ascent up the ladder; some interruption it must have been; but of what nature she could not determine, nor why he had not resumed his endeavours. It could have been nothing common. Was he known? Was *she* known? Was it all known? And the poor girl tormented herself with a thousand fears. Madonna Lucrezia hastened to her the first thing in the morning, with a full, true, and particular account. Ippolito de' Buondelmonti had been seized, in coming down a rope-ladder from one of the front windows of the house, with a great drawn sword in one hand and a box of jewels in the other. Dianora saw the whole truth in a moment, and from excess of sorrow, gratitude, and love, fainted away. Madonna Lucrezia guessed the truth too, but was almost afraid to confess it to her own mind, much more to speak of it aloud; and had not the news, and the bustle, and her niece's fainting, furnished her with something to do, she could have fainted herself very heartily, out of pure consternation. Gossip Veronica was in a worse condition when the news reached her; and Ippolito's mother, who guessed but too truly as well as the others, was seized with an illness, which joining with the natural weakness of her constitution, threw her into a stupor, and prevented her from attending to any thing. The next step of Madonna Lucrezia, after seeing Dianora out of her fainting fit, and giving the household to understand that the story of the robber had alarmed her, was to go to Gossip Veronica and concert measures of

concealment. The two women wept very sincerely for the poor youth, and admired his heroism in saving his mistress's honour; but with all their good-nature, they agreed that he was quite in the right, and that it would be but just to his magnanimity, and to their poor dear Dianora, to keep the secret as closely. Madonna Lucrezia then returned home, to be near Dianora, and help to baffle enquiry; while Gossip Veronica kept close in doors, too ill to see visitors, and alternately praying to the saint her namesake, and taking reasonable draughts of Montepulciano.³⁸

In those days there were too many wild young men of desperate fortunes to render Ippolito's confession improbable. Besides, he had been observed of late to be always without money; reports of his being addicted to gambling had arisen; and his father was avaricious. Lastly, his groaning in the church was remembered, under pretence of pity; and the magistrate (who was of the hostile party) concluded, with much sorrow, that he must have more sins to answer for than they knew of, which in so young a man was deplorable. The old gentleman had too much reason to know, that in elder persons it would have been nothing remarkable.

Ippolito, with a grief of heart which only served to confirm the bye-standers in their sense of his guilt, waited in expectation of his sentence. He thought it would be banishment, and was casting in his mind how he could hope some day or other to get a sight of his mistress, when the word Death fell on him like a thunderbolt. The origin of a sentence so severe was but too plain to every body; but the Bardi were uppermost that day; and the city, exhausted by some late party excesses, had but too much need of repose. Still it was thought a dangerous trial of the public pulse. The pity felt for the tender age of Ippolito was increased by the anguish which he found himself unable to repress. "Good

“God!” cried he, “must I die so young? And must I never see—must I never see the light again, and Florence, and my dear friends?” And he fell into almost abject intreaties³⁹ to be spared; for he thought of Dianora. But the bystanders fancied that he was merely afraid of death; and by the help of suggestions from the Bardi partisans, their pity almost turned into contempt. He prostrated himself at the magistrate’s feet; he kissed his knees; he disgusted his own father; till finding every thing against him, and smitten at once with a sense of his cowardly appearance and the necessity of keeping his mistress’s honour inviolable, he declared his readiness to die like a man, and at the same time stood wringing his hands, and weeping like an infant. He was sentenced to die next day.

The day came. The hour came. The Standard of Justice⁴⁰ was hoisted before the door of the tribunal, and the trumpet blew through the city, announcing the death of a criminal. Dianora, to whom the news had been gradually broken, heard it in her chamber, and would have burst forth and proclaimed the secret but for Madonna Lucrezia, who spoke of her father, and mother, and all the Bardi, and the inutility of attempting to save one of the opposite faction, and the dreadful consequences to *every* body if the secret were betrayed. Dianora heard little about every body; but the habit of respecting her father and mother, and dreading their reproaches, kept her, moment after moment, from doing anything but listen and look pale; and, in the meantime, the procession began moving towards the scaffold.

Ippolito issued forth from the prison, looking more like a young martyr than a criminal. He was now perfectly quiet, and a sort of unnatural glow had risen into his cheeks, the result of the enthusiasm and conscious self-sacrifice into which he had worked himself during the night. He had only

prayed, as a last favour, that he might be taken through the street in which the house of the Bardi stood; for he had lived, he said, as every body knew, in great hostility with that family, and he now felt none any longer, and wished to bless the house as he passed it. The magistrate, for more reasons than one, had no objection; the old confessor, with tears in his eyes, said that the dear boy would still be an honour to his family, as surely as he would be a saint in heaven; and the procession moved on. The main feeling of the crowd, as usual, was that of curiosity, but there were few, indeed, in whom it was not mixed with pity; and many females found the sight so intolerable, that they were seen coming away down the streets, weeping bitterly, and unable to answer the questions of those they met.

The procession now began to pass the house of the Bardi. Ippolito's face, for an instant, turned of a chalky whiteness, and then resumed its colour. His lips trembled, his eyes filled with tears; and thinking his mistress might possibly be at the window, taking a last look of the lover that died for her, he bowed his head gently, at the same time forcing a smile, which glittered through his watery eyes. At that instant the trumpet blew its dreary blast for the second time. Dianora had already risen on her couch, listening, and asking what noise it was that approached. Her aunt endeavoured to quiet her with her excuses; but this last noise aroused her beyond controul;⁴¹ and the good old lady, forgetting herself in the condition of the two lovers, no longer attempted to stop her. "Go," said she, "in God's name, my child, and Heaven be with you."

Dianora, her hair streaming, her eye without a tear, her cheek on fire, burst, to the astonishment of her kindred, into the room where they were all standing. She tore them aside from one of the windows with a preternatural strength, and,

stretching forth her head and hands, like one inspired, cried out, "Stop! stop! it is my Ippolito! my husband!" And, so saying, she actually made a movement as if she would have stepped to him out of the window; for every thing but his image faded from her eyes. A movement of confusion took place among the multitude. Ippolito stood rapt on the sudden, trembling, weeping, and stretching his hands towards the window, as if praying to his guardian angel. The kinsmen would have prevented her from doing any thing further; but, as if all the gentleness of her character was gone, she broke from them with violence and contempt, and rushing down stairs into the street, exclaimed, in a frantic manner, "People! Dear God! Countrymen! I am a Bardi; he is a Buondelmonte; he loved me; and that is the whole crime!" and, at these last words, they were locked in each other's arms.

The populace now broke through all restraint. They stopped the procession; they bore Ippolito back again to the seat of the magistracy, carrying Dianora with him; they described in a peremptory manner the mistake; they sent for the heads of the two houses; they made them swear a treaty of peace, amity, and unity;⁴² and in half an hour after the lover had been on the road to his death, he set out upon it again, the acknowledged bridegroom of the beautiful creature by his side.

Never was such a sudden revulsion of feeling given to a whole city. The women who had retreated in anguish, came back the gayest of the gay. Every body plucked all the myrtles⁴³ they could find, to put into the hands of those who made the former procession, and who now formed a singular one for a bridal; but all the young women fell in with their white veils; and instead of the funeral dirge, a song of thanksgiving was chaunted. The very excess of their sensations enabled

the two lovers to hold up. Ippolito's cheeks, which seemed to have fallen away in one night, appeared to have plumped out again faster; and if he was now pale instead of high coloured, the paleness of Dianora had given way to radiant blushes which made up for it. He looked, as he ought,—like the person saved; she, like the angelic saviour.

Thus the two lovers passed on, as if in a dream tumultuous but delightful. Neither of them looked on the other; they gazed hither and thither on the crowd, as if in answer to the blessings that poured upon them; but their hands were locked fast; and they went like one soul in a divided body.

EDITORIAL NOTES

¹ Guelphs and Ghibellines, two rival political factions in medieval Italy. The Guelfs supported the papacy, whereas the Ghibellines aligned with the Holy Roman Emperor.

² The House of the Bardi and the House of the Buondelmonti were two influential rival Florentine families: the former were Guelphs, the latter Ghibellines.

³ Dianora de' Bardi and Ippolito Buondelmonti feature in Leon Battista Alberti's novella *Istorieta amorosa fra Leonora de' Bardi e Ippolito Buondelmonti* (1471), a star-crossed love story between two young Florentines from rival families.

⁴ See Marco Lastri, *L'osservatore fiorentino sugli edifizii della sua patria per servire alla storia della medesima*, 6 vols (1776-78), second edition in 8 vols (1797).

⁵ Plato (427-348 BCE), ancient Greek philosopher.

⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), Italian writer and poet.

⁷ Two novellas in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349-53), respectively about Federigo degli Alberighi (day V, tale 9) and Lisabetta da Messina (day IV, tale 5).

⁸ Fiammetta, a female literary character who appears in several of Boccaccio's works. Allegedly, she was Boccaccio's muse and lover and is traditionally associated with the Neapolitan noblewoman Maria D'Aquino (dates of birth and death unknown).

⁹ Francesco Petrarca (1304-74), Italian scholar, poet, and humanist.

¹⁰ A Catholic festival, Pardon Day is a day dedicated to forgiveness and reconciliation.

¹¹ In Leon Battista Alberti's *Istorieta amorosa fra Leonora de' Bardi e Ippolito Buondelmonti*, Ippolito and Dianora's first meeting happens on the Feast of St John, the patron of Florence.

¹² Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and Guido Cavalcanti (c. 1250-1300), Italian poets. Both Alighieri and Cavalcanti were Guelphs, like the Buondelmonti family.

¹³ Saint Dominic (1170-1221), Castilian Catholic priest and founder of the Dominican order.

¹⁴ Reference to *Madonna and Child with St Dominic and St Thomas Aquinas* (1438), a fresco fragment by the Italian Renaissance painter Fra Angelico (1395-1455).

¹⁵ In medieval Italy, the Grand Prior was the leader of a religious order within a specific region, such as Florence.

¹⁶ In medieval Florence, the Archbishop was the leading church authority in the city.

¹⁷ Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), Italian mystic, poet, and friar.

¹⁸ Saint Teresa (1515-82), Spanish Carmelite nun and religious reformer.

¹⁹ Saint Paul (5-65), Christian Apostle.

²⁰ Reference to the Pauline Epistles, also known as Epistles of Paul or Letters of Paul, the thirteen books of the New Testament attributed to the Apostle Paul.

²¹ Tryphoena and Tryphosa, Christian women mentioned by the Apostle Paul (*Romans*, 16:12) as "workers of the Lord".

²² Mary Magdalen, one of Jesus' disciples.

²³ Biblical reference (*Luke* 8:2 and *Mark* 16:9). Mary Magdalene was possessed by seven demons before Jesus healed her.

²⁴ Biblical reference. In *John* 8:7, the Pharisees sought to stone an adulterous woman, but, instead of condemning her, Jesus responded with compassion: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her".

²⁵ (Archaic) To choose.

²⁶ In medieval and Renaissance Italy, "Madonna" was a common way to address noblewomen or women of high status.

²⁷ In medieval Italy, the term "Signora" was used to address or refer to a noblewoman, a lady of rank, or the wife of a "Signore" (Lord), who often held significant political and territorial power.

²⁸ A person who grows and prunes vines.

²⁹ Misprint for *hers*.

³⁰ The story is set in fourteenth-century Florence.

³¹ Alain-René Lesage, *Le Diable boiteux* (1707), translated into English as *The Devil on Two Sticks* (1708).

³² (Archaic) To plight one's troth to someone: to bind oneself to someone in marriage.

EDITORIAL NOTES

- ³³ Untraced quotation.
- ³⁴ (Obsolete) “Being critical, reflective, or evaluative”. Neologism coined by Leigh Hunt in this text.
- ³⁵ (Archaic) Called, named.
- ³⁶ Misprint of *fiore* (“flower” in Italian). The sentence can be translated as: “You are a beautiful flower”.
- ³⁷ *Wild oats* originates from the idiom “sowing one’s wild oats”, which refers to the unrestrained actions of youth, also of a sexual nature.
- ³⁸ A medieval hilltop town in the Tuscan province of Siena.
- ³⁹ (Archaic) Entreaty.
- ⁴⁰ A physical flag or banner symbolizing the official authority of the court or the ruling government. In this passage, the blowing of the trumpet and the hoisting of the Standard of Justice before the door of the tribunal were solemn public announcements that the convicted individual would soon be executed.
- ⁴¹ Obsolete spelling of “control”.
- ⁴² In 1342, the Baldi family made peace with the Buondelmonti in front of a notary.
- ⁴³ Metaphorically, “plucking all the myrtles” indicates the preparation of a joyful event, turning what might have been a moment of grief into one of renewal, love, and celebration.