

Daybreak in Italy

Chapter I

The Contadini Fair

IT was the eve of the Nativity of the Virgin, the 7th of September, 1515, when our story begins. The golden glory of the setting sun lay upon the streets of Florence, making the Arno¹ glitter like burnished gold, as it wound its serpentine length through the proud city.

All along the shop-crowded bridge of the Ponte Vecchio pressed an eager crowd of *contadini*, or peasants, coming from the *castello* or walled village to be present at the fair held in honor of the Madonna. On the crowd poured to the Piazza dell'Anunziata adjoining the church, where the miraculous fresco, said to be painted by angels, was exhibited to the gaping crowd.

As the shades of evening deepened the crowd increased, torches being lighted and held on high

¹ A river in central Italy

MADONNA: *Virgin Mary*

SHADES: *shadows*

over the heads of the swaying multitude, and occasionally thrown down by some mischievous hand. Stone-throwing, a favorite amusement of the Florentine boys, formed a prominent feature on the outskirts of the crowd. Further in might be heard the shrill tones of some angry *contadini*, who had been outwitted in driving a good bargain for the product of her year's labor—the yarn brought and disposed of at this fair. Nearer the church the elbowing and pushing of the crowd, anxious to present their votive offerings before joining in the mirth and fun outside, was occasionally interrupted by a scream, as some poor woman with her mummy-cased *bimbo*, or her carefully carried offering, was squeezed against the doorway, the baby often joining in concert as it felt its closely enveloped limbs pressed more tightly than usual.

The inside of the church presented a singular spectacle. The kneeling *contadini* in their white holiday hoods, murmuring half aloud their Aves and Paternosters, and counting their beads, or with lifted heads and outstretched hands beseeching the mercy of the Santissima Anunziata, now exhibited to them in the miraculous fresco, the devout attention and rapt expression of those seeking help for some present or impending trouble, and the careless, easy pattering over the beads and prayers of some who were anxious to present their offering to the priest and then join in the frolic outside; this, with the constant change

VOTIVE OFFERINGS: *offerings of devotion*

AVES: “Hail” in Latin, the Catholic “Hail Mary” prayer

PATERNOSTERS: “Our Father” in Latin, the Lord’s Prayer

of worshippers, and the confused hubbub near the entrance, would strike a stranger had one been present. Not less so the church itself. The roof and upper parts of the walls were completely lined with the various votive offerings of the devotees in every stage of decay—from that of the few fluttering rags of the first effigy hung here, to that of the last *Gonfaloniere* in his rich robes of state. Here were suspended, in life-like size, generals, courtiers, citizens, flags, waxen arms, and legs, costly dresses—in short, every description of nondescript articles which the means or taste of the devotees induced them to bring.

Leaning against the wall near the door stood a young man gazing at the motley crowd of worshippers, as they passed in and out. He was tall but slight in figure, and could scarcely be called handsome; but the high arched nose, prominent under lip, and thick, clustering, dark hair above the broad, open forehead, told of energy and passion. He stood thus for nearly an hour, apparently lost in a reverie, for his eyes were fixed upon the ground at last, and he seemed to have forgotten where he was. At length he roused himself, and passed his hand—a white, beautiful hand, of almost transparent delicacy—across his brow, and murmured, “This is religion;” and the mild grey eyes, with their long drooping eyelashes, which with the hands bespoke the extreme sensitiveness of his nature, looked with pity upon the eager crowd.

EFFIGY: *statue*

GONFALONIERE: *magistrate*

A REVERIE: *thought*

"And yet why should I pity them?" he said, as he turned to leave the church; "they are satisfied, contented, happy in their belief. Not one amongst all this number knows the unrest I suffer;" and the thoughtful sadness deepened on his countenance as he pushed his way between the crowd and the stalls erected in the *piazza*. A little curiosity was exhibited by the crowd at seeing one of the *popolani grassi*, or commercial nobility, at the *contadini* fair, for it was not often that a black silk *lucco* was seen in such close neighborhood with *contadini* serge and white linen.

He pushed his way through the *piazza*, and entered a quiet, obscure street close by the Duomo and convent of San Marco. An hour later he returned, and walking towards the wealthier part of the city, soon entered a large, heavy, fortress-like mansion, and unwinding his *becchetto* (the long hanging strip of drapery suspended from the cap, and sometimes worn as a scarf), he entered the *salotta*, or saloon.

"Ecco! Caterina *mia*, are you here still?" he exclaimed, approaching a young lady, evidently his sister.

"Yes, Eduardo," answered she, pushing back the clustering golden hair, and lifting her beautiful face from her book. A calm, sweet face it was, but the gentle blue eyes had a yearning, almost hungry look in them, as if in search of something they could never find.

SERGE: *a heavy fabric made of wool*

DUOMO: *cathedral*

"I thought you had gone to spend the evening with your friend Felicita," said her brother, seating himself at the table, and looking over her book—the *History of St. Catherine*. "I met Pietro Martyr Vermigli¹ just now, and told him he would find you with his sister. Are you unhappy, Caterina *mia*?" he asked anxiously, after a few minutes' pause.

"Yes—no—at least, you cannot help me, Eduardo," she added, quickly.

"And why not?" he asked.

She looked up a moment in surprise, and coloring, answered in a low murmur, "Because you do not believe in the Church, and the Holy Father, and the Madonna, and all the saints. You and my father think these things are only for the weak and superstitious, for women and children."

"I have thought so until lately," answered Eduardo, gravely, drawing his chair closer; "but I have been to see our nurse, Monna Lisa, more than once of late."

"What made you go there?" asked his sister, in a tone of surprise; "you who always looked with contempt upon Cosmo and I, because we went to listen to her stories of the saints."

A deep sigh was the only reply to this question for a few minutes. At length, lifting his eyes to hers, and laying his hand upon her arm, he said, "Caterina, I will tell you my secret—you may be able to help me, for I am unhappy. As you know, I have by my father's desire devoted myself to

¹ Peter Martyr

HOLY FATHER: *the Pope*

the study of the ancients. I have read Plato and Socrates and Aristides, and tried to frame my life from the examples of Camillus and Scipio; but it is all of no use; I want, I pant, I hunger for a something I cannot find in any of these. My soul goes out after an unknown goodness, a perfect purity that I know not where to search for, where to find. My father is an upright, noble philosopher; the histories and works of the noble dead satisfy him; why should I not be satisfied too? I have asked myself this question again and again, and have applied myself night and day to the study of the old Greek manuscript accounts of their lives, if haply I might find in them what I am in search of—a something that might have been omitted by these mean, unlearned, pitiful printers, that have begun to multiply our books of late, and render learning common.”

“And you cannot find it?” said his sister.

“No, Caterina,” and he shook his head mournfully; “no, my search has been in vain. At last I thought I might find it in your Church, and I went to Monna Lisa. Did you know it?—has she ever told you she was a *Piagnone*, a follower of Fra Girolamo Savonarola?”

“Yes, I have heard her say something about it,” answered Caterina.

“I wish I had lived twenty, or even fifteen years ago, and could have heard the *frate* preach in our magnificent Duomo; I would have dared my

HAPLY: *perhaps*

MEAN: *lowly*

HERETIC: *someone who rejects Christian doctrines*

father’s anger even to have heard his eloquent, heart-stirring words, for I feel sure he could have told me where to get this deep longing of my soul satisfied.”

“He would have told you it could only be found in the Church,” said Caterina, “in becoming a monk, perhaps,” she added.

“You think so, Caterina *mia*. Monna Lisa told me something like it.”

“Oh, you must not believe all Monna Lisa says; she has some very strange notions, which I have no doubt arises from her following the teaching of Fra Girolamo, for he was a heretic, you know—my confessor, Battista, told me so. He refused to obey the commands of the Holy Father, and said many things against the priests and cardinals, even against the Pope himself, which at last led to his suffering the death of a malefactor.”

“Yes, I know all that,” answered Eduardo, “but still I should like to have heard him, heretic as he was. But now, Caterina, I have told you my secret, can you not let me know what is troubling you? I met Fabrizio in the Via di Bardi, and told him he would find you with Felicita Vermigli. Indeed, it is unaccountable that a *damigella* should hide herself so much at home, when friends are anxious to have her company.”

“I felt too sad this evening to go out, even to meet Fabrizio,” answered Caterina, sighing; “and yet I know not how to tell you what is troubling me.”

CONFESSOR: *a priest who listens to the confession of sins committed and then grants forgiveness*

MALEFACTOR: *criminal*

"Is it any doubt of Fabrizio's truth and faithfulness?" asked her brother, in a whisper.

"Oh no! It is something quite different. I know that the longing you have been telling me of can only be satisfied in the Church. My mother told me before she died, that that was the only ark of safety, and that was why she took such pains to instruct me in all the lives of the saints and martyrs, and taught me to reverence deeply their holy relics which have been spared to us. I think she wished that I should have a vocation, and become a holy nun, that I might spend my life in good works, and thus help you and my father and Cosmo to reach heaven. But, as you know, our father was opposed to it, and before our mother died she made me promise that I would never leave him to go into a convent. But for that promise, Eduardo, I think I should go now."

"What! and leave Fabrizio?"

She bowed her head, while the tears fell from her eyes, and for a few moments she could not answer. "Do not think I should not feel leaving him and my father and you," she said at length; "but oh! the pain of a broken heart would be preferable to this uncertainty, if we were quite sure we were right in breaking it."

"*Ecco!* Caterina, but I do not understand. What is this uncertainty you speak of?" said Eduardo, alarmed at the earnestness with which his sister spoke.

HOLY RELICS: *holy objects*

VOCATION: *calling from God to the life of a nun*

"Well, I scarcely know how to tell you what I mean. I am not wise and learned like you and my father, but it is something like this. If we could be quite sure we had done good works enough, and performed penances enough, and heard the right number of masses, how much happier it would make everybody! But now it is all so uncertain. The holy Madonna, sweet Mother of God, is very merciful, and has promised to intercede with her Son for us, if we are careful to confess all our sins, and perform all the penances. But then it is so easy to forget some of these. Every time I go to confession I forget something I ought to have told the *frate*, and of course if it is forgotten it is not pardoned, for God does not forget. Sometimes I think He must be glad that He has all these things against us, that He may remind us of them sometimes, and keep us from being too happy. When I think of all this, and all the penances I have not performed aright, and that God, the great and terrible Judge, has His eye constantly upon me, marking them all, and only waiting that the number may be increased to increase my punishment, I feel quite miserable, and should not dare even to kneel down and say my prayers at night but for the intercession of the Holy Madonna, and the dear St. Catherine, who was chosen to be my patron saint."

"And this is your trouble, Caterina *mia*," said Eduardo, thoughtfully. "Then you have not found

PENANCES: *voluntary punishments, assigned by a confessor, for sins committed*

MASSSES: *Roman Catholic church services*

anything to satisfy you even in the Church? And yet where, oh, where is it to be found?"

"In the Holy Church, I am sure, Eduardo *mio*," answered Caterina, anxiously; "of course it must be there, for is not the Holy Father, the Lord Pope, nearer heaven than anyone else in the world, and is he not the head of the Church?"

"I don't know so much about his being nearer heaven—I know he does—"

"Oh, hush, Eduardo," interrupted Caterina; "I cannot bear to hear you speak of the Lord Pope in that way. Is he not God's vicar upon earth? and so it must be right, whatever he does. I know what you would say, he is proud and haughty. I dare say he seems so, for of course he could not allow anybody—any ordinary person, I mean—to approach him, any more than God would allow us to approach Him, without the intercession of the saints. It seems to me that the cardinals are to the Holy Father what the saints and the sweet Mother of Mercy are to God."

"It seems all a dim, dark mystery to me," sighed Eduardo, "I cannot understand it at all. This evening I went into the church of the Anunziata, and saw the *contadini* gazing at that miserably painted fresco, which, if the angels did paint it, would have been much better if left to Michael Angelo Bouonarroti, for those I have seen of his are much better than this; this worship of saints and relics is a mystery to me, I cannot understand it."

"Of course not. God did not mean that we should understand these things; but of course seeing and worshipping them must do us good in some way, because the Holy Father and the priests say it is so."

But Eduardo was by no means convinced.

"I remember my father telling me one day that while he was in Rome two or three years ago he met with a German monk, Fra Martin Luther. They became very intimate, for they studied Hebrew together occasionally,¹ and sometimes my father accompanied him to the ruins of the Coliseum, and other places of like interest, but it was rarely the learned barbarian indulged in visits of this kind. Most of the time not spent in study was passed in visiting the various shrines of the saints, and other acts of devotion. But from all my father has told me of the conversations that passed between them, I should think he would be able to guide me in my search."

"And this learned monk—this Fra Martin Luther, where is he now?" asked Caterina.

"Gone back to his own barbarous Germany. He came to Rome upon some business connected with the Order of St. Augustine, to which he belonged, and when it was completed, he returned. I wish he had come to preach in our Duomo instead, I might have gained from him the knowledge I am in search of—"

The conversation was here interrupted by the

¹ *Life of Luther*

entrance of their brother Cosmo, accompanied by Pietro Martyre Vermigli, a thoughtful, gentle, dignified youth of fifteen. Although several years younger, he was Eduardo's particular friend and companion. They had attended the instruction of the same master, Marcelli Vergilio, who was Secretary of the Republic as well as physician and schoolmaster. Of similar tastes, in that they loved the quiet pursuit of literature rather than the more noisy and less innocent amusements of many of their companions, they would probably ere long be united by the ties of relationship, for a betrothal was talked of as being likely to take place between Felicita and Eduardo.

The families of Vermigli and Bardi were both of honorable descent, and could boast of more than one of their ancestors having filled the office of *Gonfaloniere*—the highest post of honor to which a citizen could rise in the Florentine republic. Under Lorenzo the Magnificent the families had become intimate; Bardi, being a man of deep learning, and literature, then pursued with almost passionate enthusiasm by all classes, owing to the encouragement given to it by Lorenzo, became the point of attraction—a bond of union to many—to these two families among the number. Of late, however, this intimacy had considerably cooled between the elders—the fathers, for they were both widowers—owing to the political changes that had followed the death of Lorenzo. Bardi had

continued his strong attachment to the Medici family, and hated with a blind, unreasoning hatred all the followers of Savonarola, who had obtained a temporary power after the expulsion of Pietro di Medici, the son and successor of Lorenzo.

Vermigli, on the other hand, had been a constant hearer of the learned and eloquent Dominican prior, the deep piety and earnest enthusiasm of whom had made too great an impression upon his heart for him not to follow and uphold the *frate* in his honest efforts for reform; and although he was among the number of those who welcomed the return of the Medici family, he still deeply revered the memory of the martyred Savonarola, and loved to tell his son of the words of burning zeal and eloquence he had heard from his lips in the Duomo. Thus he was still often spoken of as a *Piagnone*—a term of reproach given to the followers of Savonarola, on account of their unobtrusive dress, and their laying aside many of the expensive luxuries common at that time. Bardi was one of the last likely to forget this, and sometimes the young people feared it might prove an obstacle in the way of their betrothal, and owing to this, Eduardo was careful to hear as little as possible of one so intensely hated by his father.

Vermigli had walked home with Cosmo to inquire the reason of Eduardo and Caterina's non-appearance at the gathering of friends that had taken place at their house that evening.

“Felicita was greatly disappointed, Eduardo,” he said, “and not without some alarm, for Fabrizio Cecci told her he had seen you near the Piazza dell Anunziata. What did you want at the *contadini* fair?”

“I will tell you another time, *amico mio*. Excuse me to Felicita, and tell her I will not fail to be early tomorrow.”

“*Ecco!* it will not be good for you if you are not, and it is my birthday,” said Pietro, laughing. “*Addio*, I will tell the *damigella* you are in safety,” and he hurried back immediately.