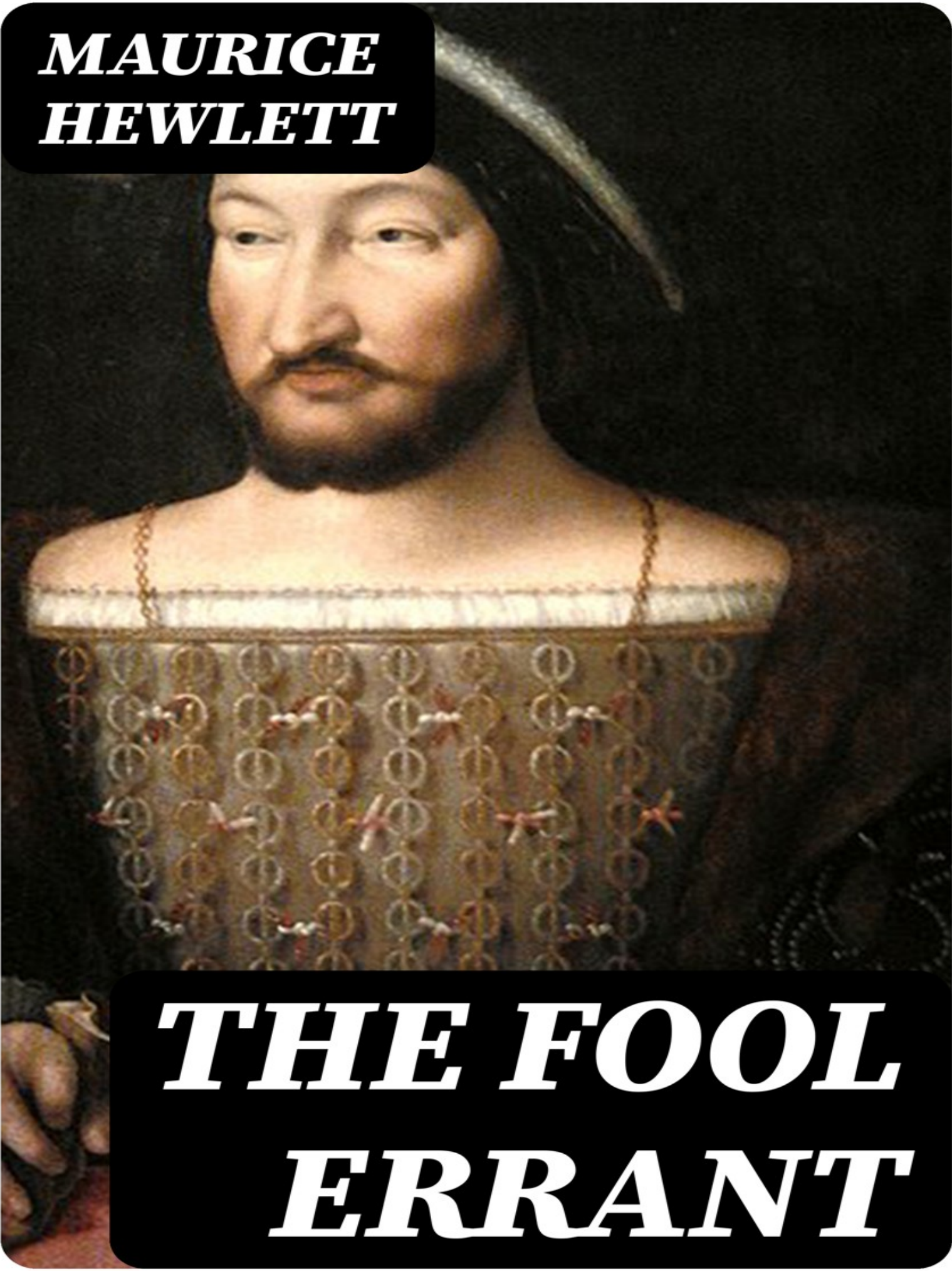


***MAURICE
HEWLETT***

A portrait of a man with a beard and a hat, wearing a chainmail tunic. A hand is visible in the bottom left corner.

***THE FOOL
ERRANT***

Maurice Hewlett

The Fool Errant

**Being the Memoirs of Francis-Anthony Strelley, Esq.,
Citizen of Lucca**

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INTRODUCTION

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The top-heavy, four-horsed, yellow old coach from Vicenza, which arrived at Padua every night of the year, brought with it in particular on the night of October 13, 1721, a tall, personable young man, an Englishman, in a dark blue cloak, who swang briskly down from the coupe and asked in stilted Italian for "La sapienza del Signer Dottor' Lanfranchi." From out of a cloud of steam—for the weather was wet and the speaker violently hot—a husky voice replied, "Eccomi—eccomi, a servirla." The young man took off his hat and bowed.

"Have I the honour to salute so much learning?" he asked courteously.

"Let me present myself to my preceptor as Mr. Francis Strelley of Upcote."

"His servant," said the voice from the cloud, "and servant of his illustrious father. Don Francis, be accommodated; let your mind be at ease. Your baggage? These fellows are here for it. Your valise? I carry it. Your hand? I take it. Follow me."

These words were accompanied by action of the most swift and singular kind. Mr. Strelley saw two porters scramble after his portmanteaux, had his valise reft from his hand, and that hand firmly grasped before he could frame

his reply. The vehemence of this large perspiring sage caused the struggle between pride and civility to be short; such faint protests as he had at command passed unheeded in the bustle and could not be seen in the dark.

Vehement, indeed, in all that he did was Dr. Porfirio Lanfranchi, Professor of Civil Law: it was astonishing that a bulk so large and loosely packed could be propelled by the human will at so headlong a speed. Yet, spurred by that impetus alone, he pounded and splashed through the puddled, half-lit street of Padua at such a rate that Mr. Strelley, though longer in the leg, fully of his height, and one quarter his weight, found himself trotting beside his conductor like any schoolboy. The position was humiliating, but it did not seem possible to escape it. The doctor took everything for granted; and besides, he so groaned and grunted at his labours, his goaded flesh protested so loudly, the pitfalls were so many, and the pace so severe, that nothing in the world seemed of moment beyond preserving foothold. Along the winding way—between the half-discerned arcades, palace gateways, black entries, church portals—down the very middle of the street flew master and pupil without word spoken. They reached the Pra, skirted its right-hand boundary for some hundreds of yards, and came to the door of a tall, narrow, white house. Upon this door the doctor kicked furiously until it was opened; then, with a malediction upon the oaf who snored behind it, up he blundered, three stairs at a time, Strelley after him whether or no; and stayed not in his rush towards the stars until he had reached the fourth-floor landing, where again he kicked at a door; and then, releasing his victim's hand, took off hat

and wig together and mopped his dripping pate, as he murmured, "Chaste Madonna, what a ramble! What a stroll for the evening, powerful Mother of us all!" Such a stroll had never yet been taken by Mr. Francis Strelley of Upcote in his one-and-twenty years' experience of legs; nor did he ever forget this manner of being haled into Italy, nor lose his feeling of extremely helpless youth in the presence of the doctor, his tutor and guardian. But to suppose the business done by calculation of that remarkable man is to misapprehend him altogether. Dr. Lanfranchi's head worked, as his body did, by flashes. He calculated nothing, but hit at everything; hit or miss, it might be—but "Let's to it and have done" was his battle-cry.

The lamp over the door of his apartment revealed him for the disorderly genius he was—a huge, blotch-faced, tumble-bellied man, bullet-headed, bull-necked, and with flashing eyes. Inordinate alike in appetite, mind and action, he was always suffering for his furies, and always making a fine recovery. Just now he was at the last gasp for a breath, or so you would have said to look at him. But not so; his exertions were really his stimulant. Presently he would eat and drink consumedly, drench himself with snuff, and then spend half the night with his books, preparing for to-morrow's lecture. Of this sort was Dr. Porfirio Lanfranchi, who had more authority over the wild students of Padua than the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Senate put together.

The same lamp played upon the comely and ingenuous face, upon the striking presence of Mr. Strelley, and showed him a good-looking, good-tempered, sanguine young man of an appearance something less than his age. He was tall

and supple, wore his own fair hair tied with a ribbon, was blue-eyed and bright-lipped, and had a notable chin—firm, square at the jaw, and coming sharply to a point. He looked you straight in the face—such was his habit—but by no means arrogantly or with defiance; seriously rather, gravely and courteously, as if to ask, "Do I take your precise meaning to be—?" Such a look was too earnest for mere good manners; he was serious; there was no laughter in him, though he was not of a melancholy sort. He pondered the world and its vagaries and examined them, as they presented themselves in each case, UPON THE MERITS. This, which was, I think, his strongest characteristic, should show that he lacked the humorous sense; and he did. He had no time to laugh; wondering engaged him. The life of the world on its round showed him miracles daily; he looked for them very often, but more frequently they thrust themselves upon him. Sunrise now—what an extraordinary thing! He never ceased to be amazed at that. The economy of the moon, too, so exquisitely adapted to the needs of mankind! Nations, tongues (hardly to be explained by the sublime folly of a Babel), the reverence paid to elders, to women; the sense of law and justice in our kind: in the leafy shades of Upcote in Oxfordshire, he had pondered these things during his lonely years of youth and adolescence—had pondered, and in some cases already decided them UPON THE MERITS. This was remarkably so in the matter of Betty Coy, as he will tell you for himself before long. Meantime, lest I keep Dr. Lanfranchi too long upon the threshold of his own house, all I shall add to my picture of his pupil now is that he was the eldest son and third child of

Squire Antony Strelley of Upcote, a Catholic, non-juring, recusant, stout old gentleman of Oxfordshire, and of Dame Mary, born Arundell, his wife; and that he was come to study the moral and civil law at this famous University of Padua, like many an Englishman of his condition before him. He was twenty-one years of age, had as much money as was good for him and much more poetry than enough in his valise—to say nothing of the germ of those notes from which he afterwards (long afterwards) compiled the ensuing memoirs.

Dr. Lanfranchi had not said "Accidente!" more than twice, nor kicked his door more than half a dozen times, before it was opened by a young and pretty lady, who held a lamp above her head. She was, apparently, a very young and very pretty, rather little, lady, and was dressed with some care—but not more than her person deserved—in black and white. Her dark hair, which was high upon her head, was crowned with a large tortoiseshell comb. She held the lamp, as I say, above her as she curtseyed, smiling, in the way. "Be very welcome, sir," she said, "and be pleased to enter our house." It was charming to see how deftly she dipped without spilling the lamp-oil, charming to see her little white teeth as she smiled, her lustrous eyes shining in the light like large stars. It was charming to see her there at all, for she was charming altogether—in figure, in face and poise, in expression, which was that of a graceful child playing housewife; lastly, in the benevolence, curiosity and discretion which sat enthroned upon her smooth brow, like a bench of Lords Justices, or of Bishops, if you prefer it. This was none other than Dr. Porfirio's wife, as he then and there

declared by grunts. "Mia moglie—a servirla," he was understood to say; and pushed his way into his house without ceremony, while Mr. Strelley, with much, kissed the hand of his hostess. The salute, received with composure, was rendered with a blush; for this, to be truthful, was the very first hand ever saluted by the young gentleman. The fact says much for his inexperience and right instinct at once.

Quite at her ease, as if she were the mistress of a well-kissed hand, was Signora Aurelia Lanfranchi, for that was her name, and had been so for rather more than two years—quite at her ease and most anxious to put Strelley there. Relieving him of his cloak and hat, of his sword, pistols and other travelling gear, in spite of all protestations on his part, she talked freely and on end about anything and nothing in a soft voice which rose and died down like a summer wind, and betrayed in its muffled tones—as if it came to him through silk—that she was not of the north, but of some mellow, more sun-ripened land. She was in fact of Siena, a Gualandi by birth, and extremely proud of it. Strelley was so informed before he had been four-and-twenty hours in her company. But now, having spoiled him of his defences, she invited him into the salone, wooed him thither, indeed, with that sidelong head and sort of sleek smile with which you coax a cat to come to your knee. Mr. Francis would have followed her singing to the bonfire on such terms.

At the table, which was liberal, was the learned doctor seated already, napkin to chin. Mr. Strelley was shown his place, and expected to take it while the fair housewife waited upon the two; and when he seemed timid, she raised

a wail of pretty protest and dragged him by the arm towards the chair. It was absurd, it was preposterous, he was robbing her of her pride. She had eaten long ago—besides, it was the woman's place, and Nonna was in the kitchen, ashamed to appear in the state she was in. Signor Francesco must please her in this—she would be vexed— and surely he would not vex his hostess. To this wilful chant the doctor contributed his burden of "Che! che! S'accomodi!" and rapped with his knife-handle upon the table. Old Nonna, toothless, bearded and scared, popped her head beyond the kitchen door; to be short, insistence went to a point where good manners could not follow. Mr. Francis sat himself down, and Donna Aurelia, clapping her little hands, cried aloud that victory was hers. "Quick, quick, Nonna, these signori are at table!" She stormed into the kitchen, and speedily returned with a steaming and savoury dish. She dispensed the messes, she poured the wine, she hovered here and there—salt? pepper? cheese? yet a little bread? Madonna purissima, she had forgotten the mustard! No! it was here—it was here! There must have been more rejoicings over the recovery of the mustard than were made for the victory of Lepanto. Betweenwhiles she talked gaily or pathetically or intimately of things of which the guest had known nothing, but immediately felt that he now knew all; the moral lapses of this professor or that, the unparalleled slight offered to Signora Pappagallo by Donna Susanna Tron, the storm of rain and thunder on Tuesday week—no, it must have been Monday week; a scandal in the Senate, a duel in the Pra, how the Avvocato Minghini was picked up dead in Pedrocchi's—a meat-fly in his chocolate! Sparkling eyes, a

delicate flush, quick breath, a shape at once pliant and audacious, flashing hands with which half her spells were woven—all these, and that wailing, dragging, comico-tragic voice, that fatal appeal of the child, trained by the wisdom of the wife, completed the rout of our youth. Before supper was over he was her loyal slave.

She insisted upon showing him his quarters. They were not, it seemed, upon this floor, nor the next below—no, but on the next below that. Signor Francesco must follow her as, lamp in hand, she went downstairs, her high heels clattering like Spanish castanets. She opened his door with a key which she then handed over to him: she showed him his bedroom, his saloon. "Your citadel, Don Francis," she said, "your refuge from my heedless tongue. Your chocolate shall be brought to you here, but we hope you will give yourself the trouble to dine with us. Generally my husband sups too late for your convenience. He is always at the cafe till nine o'clock. He sits there with his friends and hears the news, which he knows beforehand as well as they do. And when they have done, he tells it all over again to them. This is the way with men; and I sit at home and make my clothes. This also is the way with women, it seems. There is no other." She stayed a few more minutes, chattering, laughing and blushing; then with a sudden access of shyness wished him "felicissima notte," and held him out her hand. Mr. Francis stooped over it, and saluted it once more with profound respect.

He was long in going to bed. He wrote furiously in his diary after a space of restless contemplation, when he roamed across and across the room. But now I must leave

his raptures and himself to his own pen, having got him inmate of a household where by ordinary he might have lived a blameless three years. If, however, he had done that, I don't suppose the singular memoirs which follow would ever have been written.

CHAPTER I

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MY EXORDIUM: A JUSTIFICATORY PIECE

If we soberly reflect upon the part which the trappings and mantlings of men have played in their affairs, we shall not hesitate, I believe, to put into that category many things which have hitherto been considered far less occasional. What is honour but a garment? What money but a walking-stick? What are fine manners but a wig? If I professed, instead of abhorring, the Cynic school of philosophy, I might go on to ask what were love but an ointment, or religion but a tinted glass. I can thank my Redeemer, as I sit here in my green haven, with the stormy sea of my troubles afar off, beating in vain against the walls of contentment, that through all my vicissitudes I was never tempted to stray into such blasphemous imaginations. Fool as I have been, and fool as I have declared myself upon the forefront of this very book, I have never said in my heart, THERE IS NO GOD; but much and loudly have maintained the affirmative. And although I have been sadly, wickedly, detestably errant from His way, there is one divine precept which I have never failed to keep, and that is, LOVE ONE ANOTHER. All other

affections, additions, accidents, accessories of men, however, from the lowest, which is Money, to the highest, which is Polite Education, I have been able to discard without concern or loss of self-respect. This fact alone should furnish good reason for my Memoirs, and commend them to the philosopher, the poet, the divine, and the man of feeling. For true it is that I have been bare to the shirt and yet proved my manhood, beaten like a thief and yet maintained myself honest, scorned by men and women and yet been ready to serve my fellows, held atheist by the godly and yet clung to my Saviour's cross. In situations calculated to excite the contemptuous ridicule of the meanest upon earth I have been satisfied that I was neither contemptible nor reasonably ridiculous, and that while I might herd with ruffians, and find in their society my most comfortable conversation, I was the richer, partly for that I had lost in choosing to consort with them, and partly for what I had gained. As having nothing, yet possessing all things; as poor, yet making many rich—the boast of St. Paul, the hope of St. Francis of Assisi! in those pithy antitheses is the summa of my experience.

Eldest son, but third child, of my parents, I was born upon the 4th of October, in the year 1700; and for that reason and another (to which I shall shortly allude) was named Francis, after the great Champion of our faith commemorated upon my birthday. The other reason was that, oddly enough, my mother, before my birth, had dreamed of him so persistently and with particulars so unvaried that she gave my father no option but to change the settled habits of our family and bestow upon me the

name, which he despised, of a patriarch whom he underrated. Her dream, repeated, she told me, with exact fidelity and at regularly recurring periods, was that she could see St. Francis standing on a wide sea-shore between sand-dunes and the flood of waters—standing alone there with an apple in his hand, which he held lightly, as if weighing it. By and by, said my mother, she saw three women come slowly over the sandhills from different points, one from the south, one from the north, and one from the west; but they converged as they drew near to St. Francis, joined hands, and came directly to him. The midmost of the three was like a young queen; she on the side nearest the sea was bold and meagre; the third was lovely, but disfigured by a scar. When they were come before St. Francis, after reverences, they knelt down on his right hand and his left, and the queenly woman in front of him. To her, courteously, he first offered the apple, but she laughingly refused it. She of the scar, when it was held before her, covered her face with her hands and shrank away; but the hardy woman craned her head forward and bit into the apple while it was yet in the saint's hand. Then the young queen would have had it if she might, but was prevented by the biter, and the two clamoured for it, silently, by gestures of the hands and eyes, but with haste and passion. At this point, said my mother, her dream always ended, and she never knew who had the apple. She fretted greatly because of it, and was hardly recovered after I was born.

My father, who disliked all women except my mother, and, Catholic as he was, had scant respect for the mendicant orders, hated this dream, hated to be reminded

of it, hated the name which he had been persuaded into giving me, and, as a consequence, I believe, never loved me. For unnumbered generations of our family we had been Antonys, Gerards, Ralphs, Martins; the name of Francis was unknown to the tree; he never ceased to inveigh against it, and foretold the time when it would stand out like a parasite upon its topmost shoot. "Your Italian ecstatic," he told my mother, "began life by running away from his father and only came back for the purpose of robbing him. He taught more people to live by singing hymns than ever were taught before, and preached the virtues of poverty, by which he intended the comfort it was for the blessed poor to be kept snugly idle by the accursed rich. It never occurred to him to reflect that, if everybody had been of his opinion, everybody would have starved, the world would have stood still, and neither St. Ferdinand of Spain, nor St. Edward the Confessor, nor Don John of Austria could have become famous. As for your women and apples, the conjunction is detestable. Cain was the result of one woman's desire for an apple, and the siege of Troy that of another's. I don't wish this boy to grow up either murderer or pretty Paris."

The like of this speech, often repeated—indeed, never omitted when so I happened to fall into some childish disgrace—may be imagined. It made an outcast of me, an exile from my nursery days. I grew up lonely, sullen, moody. I could not meet my father with any comfort to either of us; and though I loved my mother, and she me, that cold shadow of his prejudice seemed to be over my intercourse with her, to chill and check those emotions which should glow naturally when a son stands in the presence of his

mother. To be brief, I was an unhappy, solitary lad, with sisters much older and brothers much younger than himself; cut off, too, by reason of religion, from the society of neighbours, from school and college. Such companions as I could have were far below me in station, and either so servile as to foster pride, or so insolent as to inflame it. There was Father Danvers, it's true, that excellent Jesuit and our chaplain; and there were books. I was by nature a strong, healthy, active boy, but was driven by sheer solitariness to be studious. If it had not turned out so, I know not what might have become of me, at what untimely age I might have been driven to violence, crime, God knows what. That there was danger of some such disaster Father Danvers was well aware. My faults, as he did not fail to remind me week by week, were obstinacy and pride of intellect; my weaknesses, lack of proportion and what he was pleased to call perversity, by which I suppose he meant a disposition to accept the consequences of my own acts. I freely admit a personal trait which will be obvious as I proceed. Trivial as it may seem, and does, at this time of writing, I must record an instance of it, the last I was to exhibit in England. Never vicious, I may sincerely say convinced, rather, that women are as far above our spiritual as they are fatally within our material reach, it was by my conduct to a woman that I fell into a way of life which nobody could have anticipated. In my twentieth year, in a moment of youthful ardour, I kissed Betty Coy, our dairymaid, over the cheese-press, and was as immediately and as utterly confounded as she was. I remember the moment, I remember her, a buxom, fresh-coloured young

woman, rosy red, her sleeves above her elbows, her "La, Mr. Francis, what next?"—I remember all, even to my want of breath, suddenly cooled passion, perplexity and flight. It is a moot point whether that last was the act of a coward, but I can never allow it to be said that in what followed I showed a want of courage. I devoted a day and night to solitary meditation; no knight errant of old, watching his arms under the moon, prayed more earnestly than I; and when I had fully made up my mind to embrace what honour demanded of me, I sought out the girl, who was again in the dairy, and in solemn form, upon my knees, offered her my hand. Father Danvers, walking the terrace, was an accidental witness of my declaration, and very properly told my father. Betty Coy, unfortunate girl, was dismissed that evening; next day my father sent for me. [Footnote: I need only say further of Betty that she, shortly afterwards, married James Bunce, our second coachman at Upcote, and bore him a numerous progeny, of whose progress and settlement in the world I was able to assure the worthy parents.]

It would be idle to rehearse the interview between an angry father and an obdurate son. The more I said the angrier he got: the discrepancy between us made a reasonable conclusion hopeless from the first. When he cried, Did I mean to disgrace my name? and I replied, No, but on the contrary I had been wishful to redeem it—"How, you fool," said he, "by marrying a dairymaid?" "Sir," I answered, "by showing to the world that when a gentleman salutes a virtuous female it is not his intention to insult her." I was too old for the rod or I should have had it. As it was, I received all the disgrace he could put me to—dismissed

from his presence, confined to my room, forbidden any society but that of Father Danvers and my own thoughts. My infatuation, however, persisted, and threatened to take the dangerous form of FRAUD. I could not for the life of me see what else I could do to recover the girl's fair fame, hopelessly compromised by me, than exhibit to the world at large the only conceivable motive of my salute. I knew, immediately I had done it, that I could not love Betty Coy, but I believed that I could prove the tender husband.

Correspondence to this effect—all on my side—with her parents decided mine to hasten my removal abroad. It had always been intended that I should study in Padua, rather than in Paris or Salamanca, if for no better reason than that that had been Father Danvers' University, and that he knew many of the professors there—among others, Dr. Porfirio Lanfranchi, who became my host and guardian, and had been class-mate and room-mate of our chaplain's. These things matter very little: I was not consulted in them, and had no objections, as I had no inclinations, for any particular residence in the world. Before my twenty-first birthday— I forget the exact date—the hour arrived when I received on my knees my mother's tearful blessing, embraced my brothers and sisters, kissed my father's hand, and departed for Oxford, where I caught the London mail; and, after a short sojourn in the capital, left England for ever.

I conceive that few further prolegomena are necessary to the understanding of the pages which follow. Before I touched the Italian soil I was, in the eyes of our law, a grown man, sufficiently robust and moderately well-read. I was able to converse adequately in French, tolerably in Italian,

had a fair acquaintance with the literatures of those countries, some Latin, a poor stock of Greek. I believe that I looked younger than my age, stronger than my forces, better than my virtues warranted. Women have praised me for good looks, which never did me any good that I know of; I may say without vanity that I had the carriage and person of a gentleman. I was then, as I have ever been, truly religious, though I have sometimes found myself at variance with the professional exponents of it. In later years I became, I believe, something of a mystic, apt to find the face of God under veils whose quality did not always commend itself to persons of less curious research. On the other hand, I do not pretend to have kept the Decalogue of Moses in its integrity, but admit that I have varied it as my occasions seemed to demand. I have slain my fellow-man more than once, but never without deliberate intention so to do. If I have trespassed with King David of Israel, I feel sure that the circumstances of my particular offence are not discreditable to me; and it is possible that he had the same conviction. For the rest, I have purposely discarded many things which the world is agreed to think highly necessary to a gentleman, but which I have proved to be of no value at all. I will only add this one observation more. For my unparalleled misfortunes in every kind of character and dangerous circumstance I am willing to admit that I have nobody to thank but myself. And yet—but the reader must be judge—I do not see how, in any single case, I could have acted otherwise than as I did. What, then! we carry our fates with us from the cradle to the grave, even as the Spinning Women themselves wind that which was appointed them to

wind, and ply the shears and make fruitless their toil when they must; and all that we acquire upon our journey does but make that burden more certainly ours. What was I but a predestined wanderer—and fool if you will—burdened with my inheritance of honourable blood, of religion, of candour, and of unprejudiced enquiry? How under the sun could I—? But let the reader be judge.

I left England early in September, made a good passage to Genoa, and from thence proceeded by easy stages to Padua. Arriving there by the coach on the night of October 13, I was met by my host and tutor, Dr. Porfirio Lanfranchi, and by him taken to his lodgings on the Pra della Valle and introduced to the charitable ministrations of his young and beautiful wife—the fair, the too-fair Donna Aurelia, with whom, I shall not disguise from the reader, I fell romantically and ardently in love.

CHAPTER II

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AURELIA AND THE DOCTOR

It was, I know very well, the aim and desire of this beautiful lady to approve herself mother to the exile thus cast upon her hands, and it was so as much by reason of her innate charity as of her pride in her husband's credit. To blame an ambition so laudable would be impossible, nor is blame intended to lie in recording the fact that she was a year my junior, though two years a wife. Such was the case, however, and it did not fit her for the position she wished to occupy. Nor indeed did her beauties of person and mind, unless a childish air and sprightly manner, cloudy-dark hair, a lovely mouth and bosom of snow, a caressing voice, and candour most surprising because most innocent, can be said to adapt a young lady to be mother to a young man. Be these things as they may—inflaming arrows full of danger, shafts of charity, pious artillery, as you will—they were turned full play upon me. From the first moment of my seeing her she set herself to put me at ease, to make me an intimate of her house, to make herself, I may say in no wrong sense, an inmate of my heart—and God knoweth, God knoweth how she succeeded.

Aurelia! Impossibly fair, inexpressibly tender and wise, with that untaught wisdom of the child; daughter of pure religion, as I saw thee at first and can see thee still, can that my first vision of thee ever be effaced? Nay, but it is scored too deeply in my heart, is too surely my glory and my shame. Still I can see that sweet stoop of thy humility, still thy hands crossed upon thy lovely bosom, still fall under the spell of thy shyly welcoming eyes, and be refreshed, while I am stung, by the gracious greeting of thy lips. "Sia il ben venuto, Signer Francesco," saidst thou? Alas, what did I prove to thee, unhappy one, but il mal venuto, the herald of an evil hour? What did I offer thee in exchange for thy bounty but shame and salt tears? What could be my portion but fruitless reproach and footsore pilgrimage from woe to woe? But I forget myself. I am not yet to disinter these unhappy days.

It is not to be supposed from this apostrophe that when I fell at once to love my master's wife I saw in her more than my lamp and my saint, the gracious presence which should "imparadise," in Dante's phrase, my mind. I was an honest lad, very serious and very simple. Perhaps I was a fool, but I was a pure fool: and he had been a very monster of depravity who could have cast unwholesome regard upon a welcome so generous and modest as hers. I declare that she was never anything to me but a holy emanation, not to be approached but on the knees, not to be looked upon but through a veil. So from this page until near the end of my long history she will appear to the reader. I never had an unworthy thought of her, never an unworthy desire. I never credited her with more than charity towards myself; and if I

gloried in the fact that I was privileged to love so wondrous a being, the thought humiliated me at the same time. I was conscious of my nothingness before her worthiness, and desperate to fit myself for her high society. A noble rage for excellence possessed me; like any champion or knight of old I strove to approve my manhood, only that I might lay the spoils of it at her sacred feet.

By origin Aurelia was a Sienese, the daughter of the ancient, noble but reduced family of Gualandi, and had, without knowing it, caught the fancy of Dr. Lanfranchi when he was in her native city upon some political question or another. At the age of eighteen she had been made the subject of a marriage treaty between her mother and this learned man of fifty—a treaty conducted by correspondence and without any by-or- with-your-leave of hers. It may be doubted whether she had done much more than see and quiz her husband until she was brought to his house, to be mistress of that and slave of its master. Doing violence to the imaginations of a lover, I can look back upon her now with calmness, and yet see no flaw upon her extraordinary perfections. I can still see her lovely in every part, a bright, glancing, various creature, equally compounded of simplicity and common sense. Her greatest charm was precisely what we call charm—a sweetly willing, pliant disposition, an air of gay seriousness, such as a child has, and a mood which could run swiftly, at the touch on some secret spring, from the ripple of laughter to the urgency of tears. She was very devout, but not at all in our way, who must set our God very far off if we are to consider His awful nature; she carried her gaiety with her into church, and

would laugh in the face of the Blessed Virgin or our Saviour just as freely as in that of the greatest sinner of us all. Her carriage and conversation with Heaven were, indeed, exactly those which she held towards the world, and were such that it was impossible not to love her, and yet, for an honest man who desired to remain one, equally impossible to do it. For although she was made in shape, line and feature to be a man's torment and delight, she carried her beauties so easily, valued them so staidly, and considered them so unaffectedly her husband's property, that he would have been a highway thief who had dared anything against her.

Here, indeed, was to be reckoned with that quality of strong common sense, without which she had been no Tuscan girl. She had it in a remarkable degree, as you may judge when I say that it reconciled her to her position of wife to a vast, disorderly, tyrannical man nearly old enough to be her grandfather. It enabled her to weigh the dignity, ease and comfort of the Casa Lanfranchi against any romantic picture which a more youthful lover could paint before her eyes. I am convinced—the conviction was, it will be seen, forced upon me—that not only was she a loyal, obedient and cheerful, but also a loving wife to this huge and blustering person, of whom nevertheless she was a good deal afraid. For if he fondled her more than was becoming, he stormed at her also in a way not tolerable.

When Dr. Lanfranchi met me on my arrival, I remember that he took my hand in his own and never let go of it until he had me in his house. This made me feel like a schoolboy, and I never lost the feeling of extreme youth in his eyes. I

believe now that his terrific silence, his explosive rages, mock ceremoniousness, and startling alternations were all parts of his method towards his pupils, for my experiences of them were not peculiar. I have seen him cow a whole class by a lift of his great square head, and most certainly, whatever scandalous acts may have disgraced the university in my time, they never occurred where Dr. Lanfranchi was engaged. Burly, bulky, blotched as he was, dirty in his person, and in his dress careless to the point of scandal, he had the respect of every student of the Bo. He was prodigiously learned and a great eater. The amount of liquid he could absorb would pass belief: it used to be said among us that he drank most comfortably, like a horse, out of a bucket. His lectures were extraordinary, crammed with erudition, which proceeded from him by gasps, jerks, and throttled cries for mercy on his failing breath, and illustrated by personalities of the most shocking description—he spared no deformity or defect of any one of us if it happened to engage his eye. Sometimes a whole hour's lecture would be consumed in a scandalous tale of Rome or Naples, sometimes indeed it would be a reminiscence of his own youthful days, which policy, if not propriety, should have counselled him to omit. Yet, as I say, he never lost the respect of the class, but was feared, served, and punctually obeyed.

It was much the same at home—that is, his methods and their efficacy were the same. In private life he was an easy, rough, facetious companion, excessively free in his talk, excessively candid in the expression of his desires, and with a reserve of stinging repartee which must have been more

blessed to give than to receive. Terrible storms of rage possessed him at times, under which the house seemed to rock and roll, which sent his sweet wife cowering into a corner. But, though she feared him, she respected and loved the man—and I was to find that out to my cost before my first year was out.

Meantime that year of new experience, uplifting love and growth by inches must ever remain wonderful to me—with Aurelia's music in my ears and Love's wild music in my heart. Happy, happy days of my youth!

"Dichosa edad y siglos dichosos aquellos, a quien los antiguos pusieron nombre de dorados!" cried the knight of La Mancha; and I may call that Paduan year my age of song. It ran its course to the sound of flutes, harps, and all sweet music. I never knew, until I knew Aurelia, that such exulting tides of melody could pour from human throat.

When Aurelia rose in the morning and threw open her green shutters, if the sunlight was broad upon the Pra, flecked upon the trees, striking the domes and pinnacles of the Santo with fire, she sang full diapason with that careless fling of the voice, that happy rapture, that bravura which makes the listener's heart go near to burst with her joy. If rain made the leaves to droop, or scudded in sheets along the causeways, she sang plaintively, the wounded, aggrieved, hurt notes of the nightingale. Her song then would be some old-remembered sorrow of her land—of Ginevra degli Almieri, the wandering wife; of the Donna Lombarda, who poisoned her lover; or of the Countess Costanza's violated vow. So she shared confidences with the weather, and so unbosomed herself to nature and to God.

Meantime she was as busy as a nesting-bird. She made her doctor's chocolate, and took it in to him with the gazette or the news-sheet; she would darn a hole in my stocking, on my leg, without pricking me at all, look me over, brush me, re-tie my hair, pat me into order with a critical eye, and send me off to my classes or study with a sage counsel to mind my books, and a friendly nod over her shoulder as we each went our ways. She would go to mass at the Santo, to market in the Piazza; she would cheapen a dress-length, chat with a priest, admonish old Nonna, the woman of the house—all before seven o'clock in the morning; and not before then would she so much as sip a glass of coffee or nibble a crust of bread. On Sundays and Festas she took her husband's arm and went to church as befitted, wearing her glazed gown of silver grey, her black lace zendado. She took a fan as well as a service-book— and happy was I to carry them for her; she had lace mittens on her hands and a fine three-cornered hat on her head. She looked then what she truly was, the thrifty young housewife, who, if she was as lovely as the summer's dawn, was so only by the way. And thrifty she proved herself. For when she had kneeled and crossed herself twice towards the altar, she pulled up the shining silk gown all about her middle and sat down upon her petticoat.

Exquisite, fragrant, piteous Aurelia! Is it wonderful that I loved her? And who was I—O heaven! What sort of lover was I to disturb her sweetly ordered life? To that I must next address myself, cost me what it may.

CHAPTER III

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MY DANGEROUS PROGRESS

I was fairly diligent during my year of study at Padua, fairly punctual in attendance at my classes and lectures, fairly regular in my letter- writing home. I acquired no vices, though there were plenty to be got, was not a wine-bibber, a spendthrift, nor a rake. I was too snug in the Casa Lanfranchi to be tempted astray, and any truantry of mine from the round of my tasks led me back to Aurelia and love. To beat up the low quarters of the town, to ruffle in the taverns and chocolate houses with sham gentlemen, half frocked abbes and rips; to brawl and haggle with vile persons and their bullies, set cocks a-fighting or rattle the dice- box in the small hours—what were these pleasures to me, who had Aurelia to be with? From the first she had taken her duties to heart, to mother me, to keep me out of harm's way, to maintain her husband's credit by making sure of mine. These things she set herself to do with a generous zest which proved her undoing. Slowly, and from the purest of motives, her influence upon me, her intercourse with me grew and spread. Slowly the hours I spent with her extended—unperceived by her, exquisitely perceived by me—until, at the date to which I am now