

THE CRISIS OF A LIFE.

It was a chilly evening in the early spring and the streets of Florence were almost deserted. A stranger wandering along the lonely thoroughfares would hardly have been able to realize how fair and beautiful the city could appear under other and more general aspects.

Scarcely a soul was stirring, for the hour was late, and the times were dangerous—for this is a story of years ago—when the dagger of the midnight assassin was seldom sheathed in those days. But wind and weather are but trifles when the dear interests of those whom we love are at stake.

Slowly tracking their way along one of the broadest streets of the city might be seen an old man leaning upon the shoulder of a youth of noble bearing. Their condition in life could not well have been told from their personal appearance, for they were both enveloped in long cloaks after the Italian fashion, but the half dozen well-armed serving men who followed closely at their heels showed that they were of aristocratic rank. The old man was very old—his beard was matted with the snows of many winters, and he was bowed down with the infirmities of years, although much remained to show what he once had been. The youth was tall and upright, and the assistance which he rendered to his aged friend added a grace to his every action.

They walked on in silence, as if engaged on some errand of importance, and not even a word passed between them. Soon they arrived at the palace of the grand duke, and after some parley at the entrance, their little party was admitted.

Let us now ascend the broad flight of marble steps before them, and enter the great council chamber where the chief magistrate of Florence is wont to deliberate with his nobles upon grave affairs of State. On each side of a long table covered with velvet cloth, upon which is worked the ducal arms are seated the grave senators upon whose decision now hangs the life or death of one of their own order.

Judgment had not yet been recorded, for the culprit had many friends, and although the grand duke had undoubtedly absolute power of life and death over all his subjects, and though he was well known to be strongly biased in this particular case, there were reasons why he wished his own decision to be confirmed by the voice of the patriots whom he had summoned that night to his assistance.

In those days men were tried and sentenced after a very different fashion from that which now prevails in all civilized countries. The will of the sovereign, in fact, was alone sufficient to pardon or condemn without even the formality of a trial or examination. In this case it is not to be wondered at that the inclinations of the grand duke should be prejudiced, for he himself was personally implicated. He was in the first flush of manly vigor, not having very long assumed the reins of government, but had already become proficient in "the vices of kings."

Old Orsini, a patrician of wealth and ancient family, had a fair and lovely daughter. The grand duke had seen her, and had fallen desperately in love with her, although he was formally betrothed to the daughter of a neighboring potentate, and knew that the maiden herself was promised in marriage to a young noble of his own court. In a moment of ungoverned impulse he had offered an insult to the young girl, such as could never be forgiven. Unfortunately for himself, at that moment her brother, young Orsini, entered. Overmastered by imprudent but natural indignation at the grievous affront offered to his sister, and his Italian blood boiling in his veins, he drew his poniard and rushed upon the prince.

Quick as thought a young nobleman, who was present, interposed his own person between the duke and the enraged brother, and himself received the blow, which, however, did not eventually prove fatal.

Young Orsini, who had no resistance, was arrested on the spot and conveyed to a prison, where he was kept under close guard, to a dungeon. He would no doubt have been ordered to immediate execution but that the grand duke being himself personally implicated in the matter, desired to show his impartiality by at least the form of a trial.

Already for more than an hour and a half the solemn council had deliberated, and had at last, although with great reluctance, arrived at a decision which they knew was in accordance with the will of the duke. Yet many of the nobles present, putting themselves in the place of young Orsini, and considering the great provocation which he had received, had suggested the various extenuating circumstances which presented themselves to their minds. This, however, they did in a cautious, careful way, for they knew the strong passions of the duke and his ungovernable rage when thwarted, and they were well aware that however he might try to conceal his feelings, he was watching every look, noting every word, and would never forget or forgive what might chance to be said. Appeals for mercy would have been useless for the offender was prejudiced. They knew this too well, and no voice was heard in opposition as the duke, after briefly alluding to what had transpired, stated that the young count must of necessity suffer for high treason.

At this moment a page entered and announced that the old Count Orsini, the father of the accused, and Count Felice were in waiting, and begged to be admitted. This was expected, for from the day when his dearest friend had been incarcerated up to the present hour, Count Felice had been indefatigable in his efforts to obtain his pardon. The grand duke knew well the object of the visitors, but his purpose was unchanging. The councilors,

too, had expected this visit, and many of them rejoiced that the old man had come to plead for his son at the last hour, and inwardly prayed for his success.

A word from the grand duke and the supplicants were admitted. Every one present was painfully struck with the aspect of the old man, for a few short days had aged him considerably, and the anxiety of the young count for the safety of his friend was depicted on his countenance.

They advanced together toward the place where the ducal chair was placed upon a platform but slightly raised above the floor. The aged noble leaned upon the shoulder of his young companion, as they advanced, a striking contrast might be observed between the cruel features of the duke, resolved in his purpose, and yet half fearing to execute it, and anxious, pleading looks of the two before him awaiting his decree. Yet the aged noble, whose tenure of life was evidently so short, would have scorned to present a petition on his own behalf, and the young Felice was well known to be rash and daring to a fault in all things which pertained to himself. But now they came not to plead for themselves, but for one whom each loved dearer and better than his own existence.

The grand duke frowned upon them sullenly as they advanced, but at the same time made a stiff and formal show of graciousness. They bowed profoundly to him. The old man was speechless, but the eloquence of the younger gushed forth in an earnest appeal for the life of his friend, and as he knelt, and in his anxiety grasped the velvet mantle of the duke, the eyes of the spectators were suffused in tears. The grand duke alone was unmoved. With eyes averted from the supplicant, he said, in stern, harsh tones:

"No, count, it is useless to plead. We have listened to all that could be said in favor of young Orsini, but it is all in vain. He has long been a turbulent and daring subject, notwithstanding our special favor shown toward him; but few thought that he would ever have the audacity to attempt the life of his sovereign because of an imaginary insult which he fancied his sister had received. He intended to commit treason, and in doing so he nearly committed murder."

"The reverend senators have all agreed with me that he deserves to die, and our sentence is that he be beheaded to-morrow at noon."

The young count saw that it was in vain for him to plead, even though it was for the brother of her he loved, and he arose from his knees with an expression upon his face which boded no good for the duke. But the aged Orsini, with a father's love, wailed forth one last appeal for grace.

"Let him live, my lord duke! He has offended, I know, but Christ, in His mercy, forgive sinners, and can your grace refuse me when on my knees I ask the pardon of my only son? Confiscate all my property, or let me suffer in his stead, or banish my son forever, but only let him live!"

As the old man uttered these words it seemed as if his heart were wrung to its innermost core.

It was, however, all useless, for the old man to plead with the tyrant, who, with a gesture of impatience, waved him to be silent, and with a broken heart and quivering voice he turned to Count Felice and faltered:

"Let us go, my son, let us go!"

The following morning dawned with all the glory of spring. The chilly night had given place to a day more fitting to the season, and nature seemed to be in one of her fickle moods, to have clad herself in her gayest robes. On such a day it seemed almost cruel to take the life of the vilest criminal, and even the vulgar horde which gathered at the place of execution pitied the young noble who was to expiate with his life his too ready zeal in preserving the innocence of his sister. But the bell of the dungeon chapel tolled solemnly as for a departing soul, and monks and priests were gathering within, in order that when all was over they might chant the requiem for the dead. The prisoner alone appeared calm, as if sustained by some hidden power to meet his undeserved fate.

In his palace the grand duke could hear the solemn bell, and as he listened, the echoes of its voice seemed to agitate him greatly. Nor can we wonder at this, for doubtless he felt himself how unrighteous was the sentence which he had passed, and very probably he called to mind the pleasant by-gone hours when young Orsini had been his bosom friend.

He watched the hands of a large and curiously constructed clock as they approached the hour of noon. Suddenly the clock struck twelve, and the sound of the prison bell ceased.

"What have I done? What have I done?" muttered the duke. "Surely it cannot be!"

Another and another clock boomed out the hour, and then all was still. "All is over now—all over!" exclaimed the duke; and then, as if with a desire to drown unpleasant thoughts, he called for wine.

The page, who was used to the summons, entered with the wine, and at the same time announced that the Count Felice desired immediate audience.

"Let him enter," said the duke, sternly, as he raised the goblet to his lips. The count entered, but a close observer might have noticed something strange in the expression of his eye. Little to wonder at for he was now risking all. After accustomed greetings, he said, respectfully:

"Your grace saw fit to reject my last petition, but I have now come to beg one favor, which I pray you will not deny. My dearest friend has just paid the penalty of his crime, and his poor old father lies at the point of death. I have come to your grace to crave the body of young Orsini, that we may bury it in the family grave."

The grand duke, flushed with the wine and relieved at learning what the petition really was, said, after a moment's pause:

"He is dead now. I see no reason for refusing."

"But," said the count, "will your grace give me an order for the body immediately, for it already has been removed from the chapel, and it pains me that my unfortunate friend should be exposed to the vulgar gaze. I would wish to convey it at once to the palace of the Orsini."

"He is dead now," repeated the duke; "I see no reason to refuse."

He spoke mechanically, and Felice saw that conscience was at work.

"May it please your grace," added he, "to direct that the body of Orsini be delivered to me as it is, and without

questioning, for Villani, the governor of the prison, owes hate to me, and I fear he may dispute my order."

"He dare not dispute mine," answered the grand duke, imperiously, as he sat down to the table and called for his chaplain.

The chaplain entered, and the duke dictated:

"To the Comte de Villani, etc.—Deliver to our well-beloved, the Comte Felice, the body of Comte Orsini. Do this without question, and immediately."

This order was not in the usual form, but the duke was not in the humor to attend to forms and customs. He handed the paper, after signing it, to Felice, who bowed profoundly, and then, placing it in his bosom, left the palace.

Not a moment was to be lost. Quickly as he could, without giving occasion for suspicion, he hastened to the entrance of the palace, where a dozen of his own followers, well mounted, awaited him, when, silently mounting his horse, he gave the signal, and they all rode off in speed toward the prison.

Well for them that they delayed not a moment, for the hour of death had come. The condemned man was kneeling at the block, while the headman awaited the signal for the fatal blow.

Rushing up the steps of the scaffold, all breathless, Felice presented his order to the captain of the guard—Villani. The executioner paused.

Villani scanned the paper, and seemed as if he would have argued some objection, although the grand ducal signature was too well known to him to admit of a moment's doubt as to the genuineness of the document.

"This is strange!" he said. "The execution was ordered for noon. It lacks but a few moments to the time, and I fear—"

"Fear anything you please," said Felice, "but disobey the grand duke's command at the peril of your life. My order states that you are to give me the body of Orsini, and whether dead or alive, you are bound to deliver that body to me."

Villani could say nothing. To refuse might cost him his head. Sullenly he directed the "body" of the Count Orsini to be delivered to his friend. He then went to the ducal palace to report what he had done.

Meanwhile the young Count Orsini, who was thus, as it were, snatched from the very jaws of death, was mounted on a horse led by one of his friend's attendants. They made toward the coast, and in a few hours were far away at sea, and before Villani had obtained an interview with the grand duke, they were far beyond the pursuit of his vengeance.

The Orisis of a Life

How all this was done was soon very clearly explained. The clocks of the city had been made to tell a false tale, while the prison clock alone told truly. While in the prison there yet remained fifteen minutes until the time appointed for the execution, the other clocks proclaimed that the execution was past.

When the duke gave the order for the delivery of the body, although he used, to some extent, ordinary terms, he meant the dead "body," for his own clock deceiving him, he supposed that by that time young Orsini was beheaded.

His anger may well be imagined when he learned that by means of enormous bribes the Count Felice had contrived to get all the chief clocks of the city, except the prison clock, set fifteen minutes faster. In the time thus gained he had seen the duke, and had, by a fortunate concurrence of circumstances, obtained the release of his friend. The duke gave the order incautiously, and Villani was misled by it, and thus the prisoner escaped.

A month from the fatal day passed by, and there were sounds of joy in the grand old city of Venice. Thither the condemned noble and his friend had fled, and thither in vain had the grand duke sent to demand them from the doge.

Old Orsini, although hoary now with years and sorrow, had in some measure recovered his former strength, and his son, who had been so wonderfully preserved from a degrading death, was as gay as ever, but a wiser and a better man.

But happier far, perchance, than either was young Felice and the lovely sister of his dear friend, whom by his quick-witted scheme, he had rescued at the peril of his own life.

—REV. Alfred Mills.

GENTLENESS.

Gentleness is love in society. It is love holding intercourse with those around it. It is that cordiality of aspect and that soul of speech which assures what kind and earnest hearts may still be met with here below. It is that quiet influence which, like the scented flame of an alabaster lamp, fills many a home with light and warmth and fragrance altogether. It is the carpet, soft and deep, which, while it diffuses a look of ample comfort, deadens many a creaking sound. It is the curtain which, from many a beloved form, wards off at once the summer's glow and the winter's wind. It is the pillow on which sickness lays its head and forgets half its misery, and to which death comes in a balmy dream. It is consideration. It is tenderness of feeling. It is warmth of affection. It is promptitude of sympathy. It is love in all its depths and all its delicacy. It is everything included in that matchless grace, the gentleness of Christ.

CARPETS.

Carpets were first used hundreds of years ago, by the inhabitants of Eastern countries, such as Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Persia. In the countries named they form the chief article of furniture found in all ordinary dwelling houses. The manufacture of carpets is said to have been introduced into Europe by the French in 1589, during the reign of Henry IV. In England it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that carpets were made to any great extent. The first carpet manufactory in America was established in 1791 at Philadelphia, Pa. A Boston gentleman named E. B. Bigelow invented the first power loom for weaving ingrain carpets; the date of its introduction into practical use was 1839. At the present day carpet making is an important industry of the United States.

PEAT AND MOSS LITTER.

NEW AND IMPORTANT INDUSTRY IN ONTARIO.

Valuable Nature of the Deposit in Welland—Ingenious Process for Saving Labor—Uses to Which the Products Can be Put.

The Ontario Peat Fuel Company, in Welland was incorporated by letters patent (Ontario), with a capital of \$1,000,000, but at the last session of the Dominion Parliament it was reincorporated as the Canadian Peat Fuel Company, with a capital of \$1,500,000. The company's property at Welland consists of about 5,000 acres, estimated to contain about 20,000,000 tons of peat. This property is held by the company in perpetuity, subject to a ground rent, and is exempted from all municipal taxes for ten years. The whole of this area of peat is overlaid with peat moss, a depth averaging from three to five feet. This moss is commercially known as moss litter and is extensively used in Europe and the United States for bedding horses and cattle. The value of this deposit of moss will be appreciated when it is known that about three or four years ago the Griendtveen Moss Litter Company was organized in London and Amsterdam, and that for a smaller acreage in Holland, situated, not in one block but in various localities, and with the right to cut for short terms varying from five to ten years, and subject to considerable payments to the communes, the company paid \$1,750,000, upon which capital it made the first year, according to its first annual report, 18 per cent. The magnitude of the trade may be judged from the fact that the supply to London alone amounts to 900 tons daily. It is not at all unlikely that before long they will be compelled to import it from Canada. Competent experts in the trade who have examined both properties declare that the Welland moss is, in color and as an absorbent, superior to the Holland moss.

The Welland Company has already made a five-year contract with a strong firm, by which it agrees to deliver at the works an average of 22,000 tons per annum. The Holland moss is dried in the open air, and is packed by hand, or, rather, by foot labor, in large bundles, and requires for sea carriage to be wrapped in burlap—a coarse cloth made of hemp. The Welland moss is handled, dried and packed by machinery, and presumably at a much smaller cost. Moreover, the cost of rail carriage to the seaboard, the cost of burlap, of transportation by sea and of storage at the port of landing will, it is assumed, make competition on this continent with the Canadian company impossible.

AN INTERESTING PROCESS.

The moss at the Welland works is first cut with long knives into sixteen inches squares or cubes and is carried on trams and tracks from the field to long sheds contiguous to the works, where it is stored and partially dried. From the sheds it is afterwards carried on trams to a powerful picker which tears it apart and delivers it automatically into the mouth of the drier—a square table, 100 feet long and 8 feet in diameter, filled with moving carriers ingeniously arranged one above the other, which carry it through the drier against a strong blast of hot air blown adversely through it. When the moss emerges from the other end of the drier it is carried automatically to the packer, which is a very ingenious and beautiful device invented by Mr. Dickson, the President of the company, an ordinary hay press being first tried, but found unsuitable and practically useless. Mr. Dickson's press consists of four carriages or presses on wheels, all of similar construction, strongly made of heavy oak and iron, and which run around a circular railway fourteen feet in diameter. These cars, being in fact one solid structure, move together and all stop for a few moments and at the same time at each quarter section of the circle.

No. 1 is filled with moss from the drier, which pours into a hopper situated on an upper floor, where a trained workman handles and works a powerful iron rod or piston, which packs the moss into the mould. The carriage then moves on, in obedience to a lever movement, to the next quarter section and stops as before for an adjustment of slats which are required for the wiring of the bales. It then moves on to another quarter section and stops for the wiring, and then to the last quarter section, where the bales, weighing about 225 pounds each, are taken out ready for shipment. All the work at each stopping place is, of course, done simultaneously, so that every moment of time is economized. These are the only works of the kind in the world.

The shipping facilities of the company are remarkably good, the Canada Southern Company having built a siding three miles long from its main line to the works. This includes a steel drawbridge over the Welland feeder. Inasmuch as the Canada Southern has built this siding jointly with the company, it is very good evidence of the opinion of that company as to the traffic prospects of the business. The company is now engaged in putting up extensive sheds both for the raw and manufactured moss, and when this is done the works will be fully completed.

VALUE OF THE PROPERTY.

The properties of moss litter are well known amongst horse and cattle men. It costs less per ton than straw and will, if properly taken care of, last four or five times as long. It absorbs all the moisture and makes the stall and stable quite odorless, and when the litter becomes unfit for bedding it becomes a most valuable manure. It has also remarkable antiseptic qualities, and it is said that foot and mouth diseases of horses are unknown where it

is used. The dust of this moss is now largely used in Holland for sanitary purposes, and is now, in fact, being substituted for water closets under municipal regulations. There is every reason to believe that this branch of the company's business will be very profitable.

The peat fuel branch of the business has been delayed until the success of the moss litter branch has been practically established and may then be proceeded with—probably next spring or summer. The process of preparing the crude peat for fuel is also Mr. Dickson's invention and has already been fairly and satisfactorily tested. The crude peat is torn apart and partially pulverized by being passed through a picker and is deposited automatically in a hopper which feeds a steel tube about two inches in diameter and twelve or fifteen inches long. The pulverized peat is rammed through this tube by a driving rod, and after the tube is full each descent of the rod drives out a smooth, polished, compressed piece of peat about three inches long and weighing about half a pound. The friction of the drive through the tube is so enormous that the peat is compressed to the density of anthracite coal.

The writer had the privilege of seeing a certificate of Mr. Abells of Toronto, showing, by actual test in his works lasting six hours, that the steam-producing power of this fuel is equal to that of the same weight of anthracite.

The company has a separate building for the peat fuel branch of the business, and as this is already supplied with its own engine, shafting, etc., and as the peat machine is on the ground, further practical tests can be made in the presence of experts at small expense. This the company proposes to do when the proper time arrives, and the further prosecution of this branch will of course depend upon the result, but the experiment already made seems to have very little to prove except, perhaps, the cost of manufacture. The moss litter and peat disposes of two strata of this remarkable property, but under the peat lies a bed of clay which will probably be turned to good account by-and-by. This clay seems to be of the finest quality and is absolutely devoid of grit, having several colors besides pure white. As the company has convenient facilities for shipping by water via the Welland Canal to Toronto and Buffalo this industry may become important. There are one or two other very important industries spoken of in connection with this wonderful property, the details of which will be published in due time. The shareholders of the company are not very numerous, but the share list is almost entirely composed of prominent business men in Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto.

NEW BRITISH CRUISERS.

Improvements on the Niobe and Talbot Types Now Being Built.

The Diadem, whose launch has been briefly noted in the cable despatches, is one of four vessels commonly known as the Niobe or Andromeda type, from which Great Britain hopes for good results. They are protected cruisers of 11,000 tons.

But the Admiralty has recently ordered a second quartet of improved Niobes, namely, the Argonaut, of J. & G. Thomson, Clydebank; the Ariadne, of the Fairfield Company, Glasgow; the Amphitrite, of the Naval Construction and Armaments Company, Harrow-in-Furness; the Spartiate, to be built at some Government dockyard, with Maudslay Sons & Field's engines. They are to have a length of 435 feet, a beam of 69, and a moulded depth of 39 3/4, with a displacement of 11,000 tons at 25 1/4 feet draught.

These ships are to have a forecastle and a boat deck, but no poop. They will carry sixteen 6-inch rapid-fire guns, twelve heavy 12-pounders, and two lighter ones, three 3-pounders, eight Maxims, and three torpedo tubes, of which the one at the stern is above water. The entire armament, it will be observed, consists of rapid-fire guns. The protective deck is four inches thick at the maximum, and has a rise of ten feet.

The chief difference between the Diadem, just launched, and the four new vessels, appears to be in the machinery. The latter are to have two sets of four-cylinder, triple-expansion engines, two of the cylinder-diameter being 34 inches and 55 1/2 inches and two 64 inches each, with a common 48-inch stroke. In order to economize space, instead of having the high-pressure cylinder forward, the intermediate next, and the two low-pressure aft, it is proposed to put a low-pressure cylinder at each end. The engines will run at 120 revolutions instead of 110, as in the Diadem, and 18,000 indicated horse-power will be produced, instead of 16,500, although the speed is only expected to be increased from 20 1/4 to 20 3/4 knots. The Belleville boilers will also be modified a little, with a view to improved circulation and to economy in use.

With so many rapid-fire guns the weight of metal which the new British cruisers can throw within a given time is undoubtedly great, yet the armament contains no guns above the 6-inch calibre.

It may be added that three new cruisers of what is known as the improved Talbot type are, according to a recent decision of the Admiralty, to be built at Portsmouth, Devonport, and Chatham. They are to be 360 feet long, or 10 feet longer than the Talbot, 54 feet in breadth, and of about 6,000 tons in displacement. The aim will be to give them greater speed, a better battery, and larger coal carrying capacity than the Talbot has. They will have the Belleville boilers, and are to develop 10,000 horse power, with 20 knots speed. The new vessels are, however, according to the present programme, to have a wood and copper sheathing, which will enable them to go without docking.

WHAT HIS FATHER SAID.

Willie—Well, now that you've come, I suppose I'll have to go for the doctor. Father says—Why, Willie? Father says you always make him sick!