

CARDINAL MEPHISTO.



CÆSAR BORGIA.

THE mediæval history of Italy is attractive from its strangeness and puzzling from its contradiction. It is unique, withal, and remarkably vivid with the glow of achievement and the picturesqueness of cultivated crime. The leading characters of the age are without parallel, and beyond comprehension by ordinary logic. They had not only good manners and bad morals—a co-existence common enough in all times—but refined taste and ruffianly disposition, love of art and love of assassination, worship of beauty tempered by a passion for poisoning.

The singular era was more fully exemplified by Cæsar Borgia than by any man of the fifteenth century. A prelate without piety, a prince without legitimacy, he was a soldier of genius and a paragon of evil. In a most criminal age, not one of his contemporaries equaled him in crime. Adoring himself, he detested his race. Impelled by

selfishness alone, he was the ravisher of the rich and the corypheus of murderers. To have possessions was to excite his envy, and to excite his envy was to be destroyed.

Though Cæsar Borgia has had some defenders, he is one of the few magnificent villains whose villainies have not been ingeniously explained away and even converted to virtues. We are steadily losing our once illustrious scoundrels. By-and-by Domitian shall be lacquered into loveliness and Marshal Tilly into tenderness. Having ceased to believe in depravity, we seem resolved to discard from history even its partial existence. Our chronicles shall soon be deprived of distinguished rascals. Let us look at the sanguinary Italian before he be disguised in robes of saintliness. In such an epoch of steadily declining corruption, we need a splendid scoundrel, and, lo! the Borgia answers to the need.

Who his parents were is somewhat doubt-

ful; but there is ample reason for believing they were Rodrigo Lenzulo and Rosa Vanozza, the daughter of the dead mistress of the future Pope. He took priestly orders, though in no wise fitted for them, because he could the better conduct his nefarious schemes. The Church, in that day a sanctifier of sin, acted as a safeguard to the doers of evil. Prelacy was a decoration of profligacy. Aided by his father, and having in his veins the Borgia blood, which Queen Victoria and many of the royal families of the Continent must own, Cæsar was soon appointed to the bishopric of Pampeluna. Promoted in his thirty-sixth year (1493) to the rank of cardinal, he grew infamous as Cardinal Valentino, so styled from the diocese of Valencia, of which he had been archbishop, and his father before him. Rodrigo Lenzulo was then Pope Alexander VI., and his son persuaded him to wage extirpatory war upon all the petty princes of the Papal States. The young Borgia more than seconded the elder in the bloody battle. He was the instrument of the destructive persecution. In a little while he had driven off or slain the helpless feudatories, and seized their rich possessions in the name of the pontificate.

Soon after the plunder had been secured, Zizim, brother of Bajazet II., sought an asylum in Rome, his unnatural kinsman, after the Turkish custom, having resolved upon his extermination. The Sultan offered Alexander 400,000 silver ducats (\$400,000) for the fugitive, dead or alive. Charles VIII., King of France, then in Italy at the head of a powerful army, and in condition to make demands, ordered the Pope to send Zizim to the royal camp, well knowing the Borgias would not refute Bajazet's precious argument. The king could pity, but the cardinal was not human. Incensed at the prospect of losing the blood-money, Cæsar contrived to earn it by strategy. He counseled his father to obey the behest, adding, significantly, "Leave the details to me." The cardinal, pretending to commiserate Zizim, invited him to a banquet, after telling him he should be assigned to a generous protector. While the poor fellow was feasting and happy, the perfidious priest handed him a goblet of poisoned wine—the slow poison his family had the art of making—and drank to his fairer future. Cæsar accompanied him as a hostage, delivered him to the king, and returned to Rome with the kisses of gratitude on his hands. Zizim, still buoyant from his deliverance, sickened and died, and then it was remembered he had drunk of the Borgia wine.

The son of Rodrigo, apprised of the news, smiled complacently, and claimed the reward.

A most skillful poisoner was the pious prelate, as he should have been from his experiments and experience. Much of his

leisure he devoted to the preparation of deadly drugs, and he is said to have imparted to his sister, Lucrezia Borgia, some of the most invaluable of his fatal secrets.

Giovanni Ferrata was one of the wealthiest gentlemen connected with the papal court, and had so wide influence that his eternal exit became desirable to Cæsar, who baited him with venom and caught his life. The dead dignitary's riches flowed into the cardinal's coffers, which, in spite of continual feeding, were never full. A virtuoso in murder, he had yet refrained from shedding consanguineous blood. Ashamed of his weakness, he employed bravoës to lie in wait for Giovanni Borgia, the Duke of Gandia, and the next morning his brother's corpse was drawn from the Tiber pierced with a dozen daggers.

A purely ecclesiastical life proved inconvenient for the Borgias, and the cardinal threw off his scarlet hat that he might have a larger license to stab and steal. The Pope tried to force or entrap his son, from motives of ambition, into a marriage with Charlotte, daughter of Frederick of Aragon, then seated on the throne of Naples. Cæsar was a villain so magnificent as to enslave the imagination and heart of Charlotte, who seems to have been a very womanly woman. She loved him, and he did not love her, although if he had loved her, that would have been the best reason, he said, for not becoming her husband. The son outwitted the father, and was so angry at the attempt to get him a wife that he swore he would have killed Alexander had he not had a certain regard for the papal office. He assumed to loathe matrimony as he actually loathed virtue, and he would not be appeased until he had poisoned a cardinal who had taken part in the intrigue, and secured his estate. There was a fine practicality in all his assassinations. He scorned to kill a man who had not property, and he almost always chose his victims from the highest ranks—a democratic discrimination which would have rendered him a leader among the French *sans culottes*, and which should embalm his memory with the *decamisados* of Spain.

Cæsar had rather exceeded the ecclesiastical privilege of crime even in the Rome of the fifteenth century. There would have been little objection to his murders if he had not committed so many of them within the Church. He cherished such fondness for slaying cardinals that, had he remained in the Infernal City, the Sacred College would have been depleted. The Pope therefore thought that a change of scene might improve his amiable offspring's mind, and could not by any chance deteriorate his morals. It was not decided where he should go, nor what country was wicked enough to receive him. But when the Roman priests (as the Calvinists say) want fire, Satan sends

flax. Louis XII. of France was at this time clamoring for a divorce (it is not regal to abstain from a plurality of wives), which Alexander had conscientious scruples against granting, until the king consented to create Cæsar Duke of Valentinois and give him a command in the French army.

The new duke was pleased with his title and position, and eager to display the military ability which he undeniably possessed in an eminent degree, having inherited it from his ancestors on the paternal side. He liked France so well, and believed so much in its power, that he surrendered his antimatrimonial scruples to ally himself by marriage with one of its royal families. Another Charlotte (the name was his fate), sister of Jean d'Albret, King of Navarre, represented as a very interesting woman, he wedded in cold blood for political reasons, confident that the union would further his ambitious schemes. He was right. He rose rapidly in the royal estimation, and was placed by Louis at the head of the army in Italy—the place he had coveted for years. Commanding a French army in his own country, he had the largest scope for the exercise of rapine and the malignity he had always harbored toward the petty sovereigns of the much-divided land. He hated them and loved their estates, and death was the surest and most congenial method to him of divorcing the two. His fatal agents, material and personal, were innumerable. They were ever at his order. When he looked upon a man with envy or with malice, there soon followed a mysterious funeral. It was his secret boast that any human creature who stood in the path of a Borgia was near the edge of his grave. The boast was not empty, and the grave was tenanted.

The rapacious duke had not been long in Italy before he had captured the island of Elba, Cesena, Forlì, Faenza, Camerino, Imola, Piombino, Rimini, with other cities, and disposed of their rulers so effectually that they could never oppose him further. One of his maxims was, "They who sleep under the earth can never again disturb the lords of the earth;" another, "A dagger in the heart is a cure for ambition;" and a third, "The man who would mount to power must not hesitate to step on the corpses of his friends."

Increase of power expanded his ambition. He had made up his mind to do in Italy what he and his father had done in the Papal States—exterminate or expel all the subordinate sovereigns, seize Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, and after uniting these, to proclaim himself king of the country. Such course would have tallied with the patriotism of many of the Guelf leaders, because it would have weeded the nation, as they thought, of the foreign intervention which had become so odious to their party. Louis XII.,

as may be inferred, did not feel so. Knowing Borgia's ability and ambition, he decided to fetter one and check the other. He limited the duke's range, and restored to their original owners many of the stolen estates, thus incurring the wrath of Cæsar, who for once dared not wreak his meditated revenge. Unfortunately the baleful Borgia was not bereft of his ability to harm. A master of cunning and monster of ferocity, his plundering and murdering went on without material abatement. He appears to have been a predestined phlebotomist, and he was certainly a pleased one. More terrible in peace than in war, he reveled in secret assassination even more than in open slaughter.

The siege of Sinigaglia, saturnalia of savagery, must almost have surfeited his voracity for violence. At the head of an army of Swiss mercenaries, he stormed the town, and, after carrying it, put every body, save the few who escaped, to the unrelenting sword. Promises, supplications, prayers, were of no avail. While Sinigaglia ran with gore, the incarnate devil looked on only to applaud the rapidity and dexterity of the dreadful carnage. Macchiavelli, who describes the appalling scene, can not be thought biased, unless in favor of the very worst of the Borgias, and the best of his friends.

One of the duke's poisoning parties did not terminate as he had anticipated, notwithstanding his careful provision. In conjunction with Alexander he had arranged for a sumptuous entertainment in a villa near Rome. The special and most honored guests were four cardinals, whom it was designed to delude to death. No wonder the country in which the Borgias lived obtained the name of drug-damned Italy! The cardinals came, were welcomed with the kiss of peace and friendship, were seated at the right hand of the Pope and his anointed son. They were pledged in golden flagons of the richest Canary, and as they quaffed, the paternal and filial villains touched hands beneath the luxurious board, and inwardly rejoiced that four more illustrious murders had been added to their crimson list.

Some good genius changed the cups. The wine that was poisoned passed to Alexander and Cæsar's lips instead of those for whom it was prepared. The Pope expired within a week, as was said, of a tertian ague. The duke (the devil protects his own) had drunk so little—he was always temperate—and that little with water, that he escaped with a few days' illness.

No sooner was Alexander dead than Cæsar took possession of the treasures of the Vatican and of the city of Rome, designing with his host of hirelings to make himself master of the Papal States, and appoint his fa-

ther's successor. The petty princes whom he had reduced to subjection in Central Italy rose in rebellion, and regained what he had robbed them of. His own mercenaries abandoned him, and he was arrested by Pope Julius II., who expelled the daring outlaw from the pontifical dominions. He had placed every thing on his cast, and he had lost. The star he had prospered under was waning before the coming day of adversity. Flying to Naples (to have gone north would have been madness), he placed himself under the protection of the commander Gonzalez de Cordova, and Gonzalez de Cordova consigned him to Spain. Arrived there, Ferdinand of Aragon cast him into prison, and there he might have rotted had he not found his way out, as is said, by the assistance of a woman of rank, who had become greatly interested in him after learning what a transcendent villain he was.

When a man has no friends, he goes to the mildest of his enemies—his brother-in-law. Thus did Cæsar Borgia; and Jean d'Albret furnished him an asylum. The duke was growing grizzled with what he had undergone, albeit he was but nine-and-forty, superb of health, sound of constitution, unconquerable of will. The sole thing he feared was inactivity; he could endure any thing but that, he said, and begged for a command. The King of Navarre gave him one; he entered the field against Ferdinand the Catholic, and distinguished himself, as he always had done, in the profession which was distinctively his. While besieging the castle of Viana, and leading a desperate assault, he was struck by a stray shot, and the duke, the cardinal, the archbishop, the bishop, the brilliant captain, the treacherous assassin, the polite scholar, the handsome gallant, the crafty politician, the remorseless poisoner, all shrank into a bleeding corpse. Steeped to the lips in crime, he had the unmerited good fortune to die—as he had desired—a soldier's death. And he was a soldier, every inch of him, and a villain to his smallest fibre.

Almost absolutely bad as Cæsar Borgia seems to have been, he was one of the most graceful, cultured, and attractive men of his time. His manners were perfection, his voice so sweet, his face so handsome, his ways so winning, that he captivated men's wills and women's affections.

A cardinal of the papal court who had been his bitterest foe granted him an interview at his urgent solicitation. At the end thereof the prelate admitted his prejudice, and that Cæsar was one of the purest and noblest gentlemen in Rome. The next evening he went to sup at the Borgia palace, and the persuasive prince pressed an envenomed ring into his hand as he bade good-night. It was scarce an abrasion of the skin, but, a month after, the cardinal

was laid in the crypt of the ancient cathedral, and the host was as suave—and as pure—as ever.

A patron of science and letters not less than a poisoner and assassin, he quoted the "Divina Commedia" and lived the "Decamerone;" explained the "Vita Nuova" in the morning and poniarded his friends in the afternoon; discussed Plato to-day and imitated Aretino on the morrow. He is Macchiavelli's "Prince," the pattern despot, whom the misunderstood author intended should serve as much for warning as for example. Brave as he after whom he was named, graceful as Augustus, cruel as Caligula, false as Nero, pitiless as Commodus, serene as Antoninus, scholarly as Mæcenas, he was such a bundle of opposites that he appears to have been a character extracted from the Volume of the Impossible.

MARTYRS.

My child, whose soul is like a flame
Within a crystal altar lamp,
Bends o'er an ancient book, its name
Obscured by mildew damp;

And, tracing down the yellow leaves,
Where quaint and crooked letters stand,
Her breath comes quick, her bosom heaves,
Hard shuts the eager hand.

"Mamma"—I meet the lifted eyes
That, softened, shine through gathering tears—
"God surely gives them in the skies,
For all those dreadful years,

"Some sweeter thing than others have,
To comfort after so much pain;
But, tell me, could we be as brave
Through fire and rack and chain?"

"I'm glad there are no martyrs now."
Blithe rings the voice, and positive.
"Ah, love," my own heart answers low,
"The martyrs ever live.

"A royal line, in silk and lace,
Or robed in serge and hodden-gray,
With fearless step and steadfast face
They tread the common way.

"Than dungeon bolt or folding blaze
Their cross unseen may heavier press,
And none suspect, through smiling days,
Their utmost bitterness."

"Some sweet thing surely God must keep
To comfort," said my little one;
"They thank Him now if tender sleep
Comes when the day is done."

God's angel Sleep, with manifold
Soft touches, smoothing brows of care,
Dwells not beyond the gates of gold,
Because no night is there.