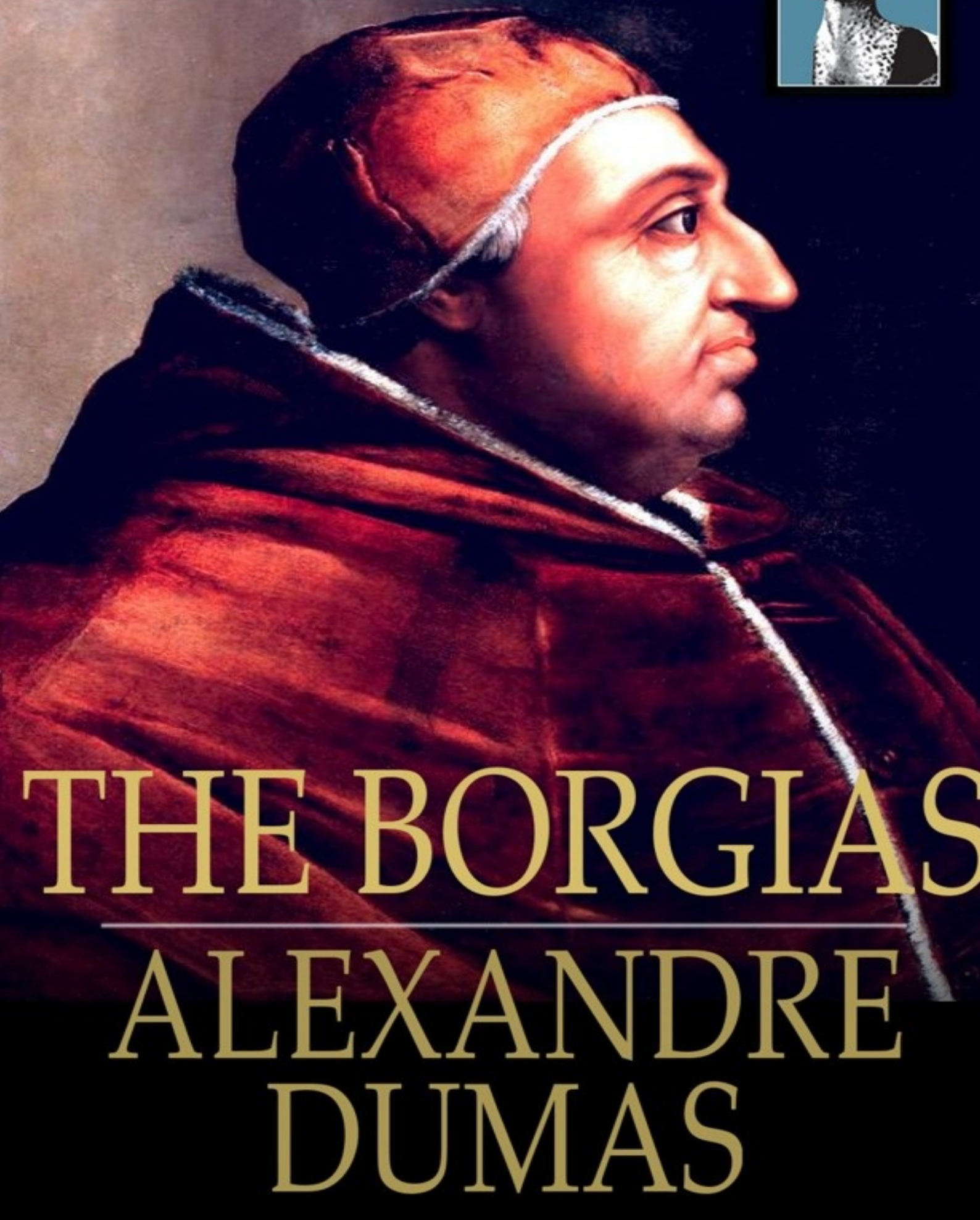


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THE BORGHIAS

ALEXANDRE
DUMAS

THE BORGHIAS

CELEBRATED CRIME

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS



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The Borgias
Celebrated Crime

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Introduction

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The contents of these volumes of 'Celebrated Crimes', as well as the motives which led to the inception, are unique. They are a series of stories based upon historical records, from the pen of Alexandre Dumas, pere, when he was not "the elder," nor yet the author of D'Artagnan or Monte Cristo, but was a rising young dramatist and a lion in the literary set and world of fashion.

Dumas, in fact, wrote his 'Crimes Celebres' just prior to launching upon his wonderful series of historical novels, and they may therefore be considered as source books, whence he was to draw so much of that far-reaching and intimate knowledge of inner history which has perennially astonished his readers. The Crimes were published in Paris, in 1839-40, in eight volumes, comprising eighty titles—all of which now appear in the present carefully translated text. The success of the original work was instantaneous. Dumas laughingly said that he thought he had exhausted the subject of famous crimes, until the work was off the press, when he immediately became deluged with letters from every province in France, supplying him with material upon other deeds of violence! The subjects which he has chosen, however, are of both historic and dramatic importance, and they have the added value of giving the modern reader a clear picture of the state of semi-lawlessness which existed in Europe, during the middle ages. "The Borgias, the Cenci, Urbain Grandier, the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, the Marchioness of Ganges, and the rest—what subjects for the pen of Dumas," exclaims Garnett.

Space does not permit us to consider in detail the material here collected, although each title will be found to present points of special interest. The first volume comprises the annals of the Borgias and the Cenci. The name of the noted and notorious Florentine family has become a synonym for intrigue and violence, and yet the Borgias have not been without staunch defenders in history.

Another famous Italian story is that of the Cenci. The beautiful Beatrice Cenci—celebrated in the painting of Guido, the sixteenth century romance of Guerrazi, and the poetic tragedy of Shelley, not to mention numerous succeeding works inspired by her hapless fate—will always remain a shadowy figure and one of infinite pathos.

The second volume chronicles the sanguinary deeds in the south of France, carried on in the name of religion, but drenching in blood the fair country round about Avignon, for a long period of years.

The third volume is devoted to the story of Mary Queen of Scots, another woman who suffered a violent death, and around whose name an endless controversy has waged. Dumas goes carefully into the dubious episodes of her stormy career, but does not allow these to blind his sympathy for her fate. Mary, it should be remembered, was closely allied to France by education and marriage, and the French never forgave Elizabeth the part she played in the tragedy.

The fourth volume comprises three widely dissimilar tales. One of the strangest stories is that of Urbain Grandier, the innocent victim of a cunning and relentless religious plot. His story was dramatised by Dumas, in 1850. A famous German crime is that of Karl-Ludwig Sand, whose murder

of Kotzebue, Councillor of the Russian Legation, caused an international upheaval which was not subside for many years.

An especially interesting volume is number six, containing, among other material, the famous "Man in the Iron Mask." This unsolved puzzle of history was later incorporated by Dumas in one of the D'Artagnan Romances a section of the Vicomte de Bragelonne, to which it gave its name. But in the later form, the true story of this singular man doomed to wear an iron vizor over his features during his entire lifetime could only be treated episodically. While as a special subject in the Crimes, Dumas indulges his curiosity, and that of his reader, to the full. Hugo's unfinished tragedy, 'Les Jumeaux', on the same subject; as also are others by Fournier, in French, and Zschokke, in German.

Other stories can be given only passing mention. The beautiful poisoner, Marquise de Brinvilliers must have suggested to Dumas his later portrait of Miladi, in the Three Musketeers, the masterpiece of his woman characters. The incredible cruelties of Ali Pacha, the Turkish despot, should not be charged entirely to Dumas, as he is said to have been largely aided in this by one of his "ghosts," Mallefille.

"Not a mere artist"—writes M. de Villemessant, founder of the Figaro,—"he has nevertheless been able to seize on those dramatic effects which have so much distinguished his theatrical career, and to give those sharp and distinct reproductions of character which alone can present to the reader the mirror and spirit of an age. Not a mere historian, he has nevertheless carefully consulted the original sources of information, has weighed testimonies, elicited theories, and... has interpolated the poetry of history with its most thorough prose."

Prologue

*

On the 8th of April, 1492, in a bedroom of the Carneggi Palace, about three miles from Florence, were three men grouped about a bed whereon a fourth lay dying.

The first of these three men, sitting at the foot of the bed, and half hidden, that he might conceal his tears, in the gold-brocaded curtains, was Ermolao Barbaro, author of the treatise 'On Celibacy', and 'Studies in Pliny': the year before, when he was at Rome in the capacity of ambassador of the Florentine Republic, he had been appointed Patriarch of Aquileia by Innocent VIII.

The second, who was kneeling and holding one hand of the dying man between his own, was Angelo Poliziano, the Catullus of the fifteenth century, a classic of the lighter sort, who in his Latin verse might have been mistaken for a poet of the Augustan age.

The third, who was standing up and leaning against one of the twisted columns of the bed-head, following with profound sadness the progress of the malady which he read in the face of his departing friend, was the famous Pico della Mirandola, who at the age of twenty could speak twenty-two languages, and who had offered to reply in each of these languages to any seven hundred questions that might be put to him by the twenty most learned men in the whole world, if they could be assembled at Florence.

The man on the bed was Lorenzo the Magnificent, who at the beginning of the year had been attacked by a severe and deep-seated fever, to which was added the gout, a hereditary ailment in his family. He had found at last that the draughts containing dissolved pearls which the quack doctor, Leonini of Spoleto, prescribed for him (as if he desired to adapt his remedies rather to the riches of his patient than to his necessities) were useless and unavailing, and so he had come to understand that he must part from those gentle-tongued women of his, those sweet-voiced poets, his palaces and their rich hangings; therefore he had summoned to give him absolution for his sins—in a man of less high place they might perhaps have been called crimes—the Dominican, Giralamo Francesco Savonarola.

It was not, however, without an inward fear, against which the praises of his friends availed nothing, that the pleasure-seeker and usurper awaited that severe and gloomy preacher by whose word's a Florence was stirred, and on whose pardon henceforth depended all his hope for another world.

Indeed, Savonarola was one of those men of stone, coming, like the statue of the Commandante, to knock at the door of a Don Giovanni, and in the midst of feast and orgy to announce that it is even now the moment to begin to think of Heaven. He had been born at Ferrara, whither his family, one of the most illustrious of Padua, had been called by Niccolo, Marchese d'Este, and at the age of twenty-three summoned by an irresistible vocation, had fled from his father's house, and had taken the vows in the cloister of Dominican monks at Florence. There, where he was appointed by his superiors to give lessons in philosophy, the young novice had from the first to battle against the defects of a voice that was both harsh and weak, a defective pronunciation, and above all, the depression of his physical powers, exhausted as they were by too severe abstinence.

Savonarola from that time condemned himself to the most absolute seclusion, and disappeared in the depths of his convent, as if the slab of his tomb had already fallen over him. There, kneeling on the flags, praying unceasingly before a wooden crucifix, fevered by vigils and penances, he soon passed out of contemplation into ecstasy, and began to feel in himself that inward prophetic impulse which summoned him to preach the reformation of the Church.

Nevertheless, the reformation of Savonarola, more reverential than Luther's, which followed about five-and-twenty years later, respected the thing while attacking the man, and had as its aim the altering of teaching that was human, not faith that was of God. He did not work, like the German monk, by reasoning, but by enthusiasm. With him logic always gave way before inspiration: he was not a theologian, but a prophet. Yet, although hitherto he had bowed his head before the authority of the Church, he had already raised it against the temporal power. To him religion and liberty appeared as two virgins equally sacred; so that, in his view, Lorenzo in subjugating the one was as culpable as Pope Innocent VIII in dishonouring the other. The result of this was that, so long as Lorenzo lived in riches, happiness, and magnificence, Savonarola had never been willing, whatever entreaties were made, to sanction by his presence a power which he considered illegitimate. But Lorenzo on his deathbed sent for him, and that was another matter. The austere preacher set forth at once, bareheaded and barefoot, hoping to save not only the soul of the dying man but also the liberty of the republic.

Lorenzo, as we have said, was awaiting the arrival of Savonarola with an impatience mixed with uneasiness; so that, when he heard the sound of his steps, his pale face took a yet more deathlike tinge while at the same time he raised himself on his elbow and ordered his three friends to go away. They obeyed at once, and scarcely had they left by one door than the curtain of the other was raised, and the monk, pale, immovable, solemn, appeared on the threshold. When he perceived him, Lorenzo de' Medici, reading in his marble brow the inflexibility of a statue, fell back on his bed, breathing a sigh so profound that one might have supposed it was his last.

The monk glanced round the room as though to assure himself that he was really alone with the dying man; then he advanced with a slow and solemn step towards the bed. Lorenzo watched his approach with terror; then, when he was close beside him, he cried:

"O my father, I have been a very great sinner!"

"The mercy of God is infinite," replied the monk; "and I come into your presence laden with the divine mercy."

"You believe, then, that God will forgive my sins?" cried the dying man, renewing his hope as he heard from the lips of the monk such unexpected words.

"Your sins and also your crimes, God will forgive them all," replied Savonarola. "God will forgive your vanities, your adulterous pleasures, your obscene festivals; so much for your sins. God will forgive you for promising two thousand florins reward to the man who should bring you the head of Dietisalvi, Nerone Nigi, Angelo Antinori, Niccolo Soderini, and twice the money if they were handed over alive; God will forgive you for dooming to the scaffold or the gibbet the son of Papi Orlandino, Francesco di Brisighella, Bernardo Nardi, Jacopo Frescobaldi, Amoretto Baldovinetti, Pietro Balducci, Bernardo di Banding, Francesco Frescobaldi, and more than three hundred others whose names were none the less dear to Florence because they were less renowned; so much for your crimes." And as he pronounced each of these names which Savonarola pronounced slowly, his eyes fixed on the dying man, he replied

with a groan which proved the monk's memory to be only too true. Then at last, when he had finished, Lorenzo asked in a doubtful tone:

"Then do you believe, my father, that God will forgive me everything, both my sins and my crimes?"

"Everything," said Savonarola, "but on three conditions."

"What are they?" asked the dying man.

"The first," said Savonarola, "is that you feel a complete faith in the power and the mercy of God."

"My father," replied Lorenzo eagerly, "I feel this faith in the very depths of my heart."

"The second," said Savonarola, "is that you give back the property of others which you have unjustly confiscated and kept."

"My father, shall I have time?" asked the dying man.

"God will give it to you," replied the monk.

Lorenzo shut his eyes, as though to reflect more at his ease; then, after a moment's silence, he replied:

"Yes, my father, I will do it."

"The third," resumed Savonarola, "is that you restore to the republic her ancient independence and her former liberty."

Lorenzo sat up on his bed, shaken by a convulsive movement, and questioned with his eyes the eyes of the Dominican, as though he would find out if he had deceived himself and not heard aright. Savonarola repeated the same words.

"Never! never!" exclaimed Lorenzo, falling back on his bed and shaking his head,— "never!"

The monk, without replying a single word, made a step to withdraw.

"My father, my father," said the dying man, "do not leave me thus: have pity on me!"

"Have pity on Florence," said the monk.

"But, my father," cried Lorenzo, "Florence is free, Florence is happy."

"Florence is a slave, Florence is poor," cried Savonarola, "poor in genius, poor in money, and poor in courage; poor in genius, because after you, Lorenzo, will come your son Piero; poor in money, because from the funds of the republic you have kept up the magnificence of your family and the credit of your business houses; poor in courage, because you have robbed the rightful magistrates of the authority which was constitutionally theirs, and diverted the citizens from the double path of military and civil life, wherein, before they were enervated by your luxuries, they had displayed the virtues of the ancients; and therefore, when the day shall dawn which is not far distant," continued the monk, his eyes fixed and glowing as if he were reading in the future, "whereon the barbarians shall

descend from the mountains, the walls of our towns, like those of Jericho, shall fall at the blast of the trumpets."

"And do you desire that I should yield up on my deathbed the power that has made the glory of my whole life?" cried Lorenzo dei Medici.

"It is not I who desire it; it is the Lord," replied Savonarola coldly.

"Impossible, impossible!" murmured Lorenzo.

"Very well; then die as you have lived!" cried the monk, "in the midst of your courtiers and flatterers let them ruin your soul as they have ruined your body!" And at these words, the austere Dominican without listening to the cries of the dying man, left the room as he had entered it, with face and step unaltered; far above human things he seemed to soar, a spirit already detached from the earth.

At the cry which broke from Lorenzo dei Medici when he saw him disappear, Ermolao, Poliziano, and Pico della Mirandola, who had heard all, returned into the room, and found their friend convulsively clutching in his arms a magnificent crucifix which he had just taken down from the bed-head. In vain did they try to reassure him with friendly words. Lorenzo the Magnificent only replied with sobs; and one hour after the scene which we have just related, his lips clinging to the feet of the Christ, he breathed his last in the arms of these three men, of whom the most fortunate—though all three were young—was not destined to survive him more than two years. "Since his death was to bring about many calamities," says Niccolò Machiavelli, "it was the will of Heaven to show this by omens on too certain: the dome of the church of Santa Regarata was struck by lightning, and Roderigo Borgia was elected pope."

Chapter I

*

Towards the end of the fifteenth century—that is to say, at the epoch when our history opens the Piazza of St. Peter's at Rome was far from presenting so noble an aspect as that which is offered in our own day to anyone who approaches it by the Piazza dei Rusticucci.

In fact, the Basilica of Constantine existed no longer, while that of Michael Angelo, the masterpiece of thirty popes, which cost the labour of three centuries and the expense of two hundred and sixty millions, existed not yet. The ancient edifice, which had lasted for eleven hundred and forty-five years, had been threatening to fall in about 1440, and Nicholas V, artistic forerunner of Julius II and Leo X, had had it pulled down, together with the temple of Probus Anicius which adjoined it. In the place he had had the foundations of a new temple laid by the architects Rossellini and Battista Alberti, but some years later, after the death of Nicholas V, Paul II, the Venetian, had not been able to give more than five thousand crowns to continue the project of his predecessor, and thus the building was arrested when it had scarcely risen above the ground, and presented the appearance of a still-born edifice, even sadder than that of a ruin.

As to the piazza itself, it had not yet, as the reader will understand from the foregoing explanation, either the fine colonnade of Bernini, or the dancing fountains, or that Egyptian obelisk which, according to Pliny, was set up by the Pharaoh at Heliopolis, and transferred to Rome by Caligula, who set it up in Nero's Circus, where it remained till 1586. Now, as Nero's Circus was situated on the very ground where St. Peter's now stands, and the base of this obelisk covered the actual site where the vestry now is, it looked like a gigantic needle shooting up from the middle of truncated columns, walls of unequal height, and half-carved stones.

On the right of this building, a ruin from its cradle, arose the Vatican, a splendid Tower of Babel, to which all the celebrated architects of the Roman school contributed their work for a thousand years: at this epoch the two magnificent chapels did not exist, nor the twelve great halls, the two-and-twenty courts, the thirty staircases, and the two thousand bedchambers; for Pope Sixtus V, the sublime swineherd, who did so many things in a five years' reign, had not yet been able to add the immense building which on the eastern side towers above the court of St. Damasius; still, it was truly the most sacred edifice, with its venerable associations, in which Charlemagne received hospitality when he was crowned emperor by Pope Leo III.

All the same, on the 9th of August, 1492, the whole of Rome, from the People's Gate to the Coliseum, and from the Baths of Diocletian to the castle of Sant' Angelo, seemed to have made an appointment on this piazza: the multitude thronging it was so great as to overflow into all the neighbouring streets, which started from this centre like the rays of a star. The crowds of people, looking like a motley moving carpet, were climbing up into the basilica, grouping themselves upon the stones, hanging on the columns, standing up against the walls; they entered by the doors of houses and reappeared at the windows, so numerous and so densely packed that one might have said each window was walled up with heads. Now all this multitude had its eyes fixed on one single point in the Vatican; for in the

Vatican was the Conclave, and as Innocent VIII had been dead for sixteen days, the Conclave was the act of electing a pope.

Rome is the town of elections: since her foundation down to our own day—that is to say, in the course of nearly twenty-six centuries—she has constantly elected her kings, consuls, tribunes, emperors, and popes: thus Rome during the days of Conclave appears to be attacked by a strange fever which drives everyone to the Vatican or to Monte Cavallo, according as the scarlet-robed assembly is held in one or the other of these two palaces: it is, in fact, because the raising up of a new pontiff is a great event for everybody; for, according to the average established in the period between St. Peter and Gregory XV every pope lasts about eight years, and these eight years, according to the character of the man who is elected, are a period either of tranquillity or of disorder, of justice or of venality, of peace or of war.

Never perhaps since the day when the first successor of St. Peter took his seat on the pontifical throne until the interregnum which now occurred, had so great an agitation been shown as there was at that moment, when, as we have shown, all these people were thronging on the Piazza of St. Peter and in the streets which led to it. It is true that this was not without reason; for Innocent VIII—who was called the father of his people because he had added to his subjects eight sons and the same number of daughters—had, as we have said, after living a life of self-indulgence, just died, after a death-struggle during which, if the journal of Stefano Infessura may be believed, two hundred and twenty murders were committed in the streets of Rome. The authority had then devolved in the customary way upon the Cardinal Camerlengo, who during the interregnum had sovereign powers; but as he had been obliged to fulfil all the duties of his office—that is, to get money coined in his name and bearing his arms, to take the fisherman's ring from the finger of the dead pope, to dress, shave and paint him, to have the corpse embalmed, to lower the coffin after nine days' obsequies into the provisional niche where the last deceased pope has to remain until his successor comes to take his place and consign him to his final tomb; lastly, as he had been obliged to wall up the door of the Conclave and the window of the balcony from which the pontifical election is proclaimed, he had not had a single moment for busying himself with the police; so that the assassinations had continued in good order and in good fashion, and there were loud cries for an energetic hand which should make all these swords and all these daggers retire into their sheaths.

Now the eyes of this multitude were fixed, as we have said, upon the Vatican, and particularly upon one chimney, from which would come the first signal, when suddenly, at the moment of the 'Ave Maria'—that is to say, at the hour when the day begins to decline—great cries went up from all the crowd mixed with bursts of laughter, a discordant murmur of threats and raillery, the cause being that they had just perceived at the top of the chimney a thin smoke, which seemed like a light cloud to go up perpendicularly into the sky. This smoke announced that Rome was still without a master, and that the world still had no pope; for this was the smoke of the voting tickets which were being burned, a proof that the cardinals had not yet come to an agreement.

Scarcely had this smoke appeared, to vanish almost immediately, when all the innumerable crowd, knowing well that there was nothing else to wait for, and that all was said and done until ten o'clock the next morning, the time when the cardinals had their first voting, went off in a tumult of noise and joking, just as they would after the last rocket of a firework display; so that at the end of one minute nobody was there where a quarter of an hour before there had been an excited crowd, except a few curious laggards, who, living in the neighbourhood or on the very piazza itself; were less in a hurry than the rest to get back to their homes; again, little by little, these last groups insensibly diminished.

for half-past nine had just struck, and at this hour the streets of Rome began already to be far from safe; then after these groups followed some solitary passer-by, hurrying his steps; one after another the doors were closed, one after another the windows were darkened; at last, when ten o'clock struck with the single exception of one window in the Vatican where a lamp might be seen keeping obstinate vigil, all the houses, piazzas, and streets were plunged in the deepest obscurity.

At this moment a man wrapped in a cloak stood up like a ghost against one of the columns of the uncompleted basilica, and gliding slowly and carefully among the stones which were lying about round the foundations of the new church, advanced as far as the fountain which, formed the centre of the piazza, erected in the very place where the obelisk is now set up of which we have spoken already; when he reached this spot he stopped, doubly concealed by the darkness of the night and by the shadow of the monument, and after looking around him to see if he were really alone, drew his sword, and with its point rapping three times on the pavement of the piazza, each time made the sparks fly. This signal, for signal it was, was not lost: the last lamp which still kept vigil in the Vatican went out, and at the same instant an object thrown out of the window fell a few paces off from the young man in the cloak: he, guided by the silvery sound it had made in touching the flags, lost no time in laying his hands upon it in spite of the darkness, and when he had it in his possession hurried quickly away.

Thus the unknown walked without turning round half-way along the Borgo Vecchio; but there he turned to the right and took a street at the other end of which was set up a Madonna with a lamp: he approached the light, and drew from his pocket the object he had picked up, which was nothing else than a Roman crown piece; but this crown unscrewed, and in a cavity hollowed in its thickness enclosed a letter, which the man to whom it was addressed began to read at the risk of being recognised, so great was his haste to know what it contained.

We say at the risk of being recognised, for in his eagerness the recipient of this nocturnal missive had thrown back the hood of his cloak; and as his head was wholly within the luminous circle cast by the lamp, it was easy to distinguish in the light the head of a handsome young man of about five or six and twenty, dressed in a purple doublet slashed at the shoulder and elbow to let the shirt come through, and wearing on his head a cap of the same colour with a long black feather falling to his shoulder. It is true that he did not stand there long; for scarcely had he finished the letter, or rather the note, which he had just received in so strange and mysterious a manner, when he replaced it in its silver receptacle and readjusting his cloak so as to hide all the lower part of his face, resumed his walk with a rapid step, crossed Borgo San Spirito, and took the street of the Longara, which he followed as far as the church of Regina Coeli. When he arrived at this place, he gave three rapid knocks on the door of a house of good appearance, which immediately opened; then slowly mounting the stairs he entered a room where two women were awaiting him with an impatience so unconcealed that both as they saw him exclaimed together:

"Well, Francesco, what news?"

"Good news, my mother; good, my sister," replied the young man, kissing the one and giving his hand to the other. "Our father has gained three votes to-day, but he still needs six to have the majority."

"Then is there no means of buying them?" cried the elder of the two women, while the younger, instead of speaking, asked him with a look.

"Certainly, my mother, certainly," replied the young man; "and it is just about that that my father has

been thinking. He is giving Cardinal Orsini his palace at Rome and his two castles of Monticello and Soriano; to Cardinal Colonna his abbey of Subiaca; he gives Cardinal Sant' Angelo the bishopric of Porto, with the furniture and cellar; to the Cardinal of Parma the town of Nepi; to the Cardinal of Genoa the church of Santa Maria-in-Via-Lata; and lastly, to Cardinal Savelli the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and the town of Civita Castellana; as to Cardinal Ascanio-Sforza, he knows already that the day before yesterday we sent to his house four mules laden with silver and plate, and out of this treasure he has engaged to give five thousand ducats to the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice."

"But how shall we get the others to know the intentions of Roderigo?" asked the elder of the two women.

"My father has provided for everything, and proposes an easy method; you know, my mother, what sort of ceremonial the cardinals' dinner is carried in."

"Yes, on a litter, in a large basket with the arms of the cardinal for whom the meal is prepared."

"My father has bribed the bishop who examines it: to-morrow is a feast-day; to the Cardinals Orsini, Colonna, Savelli, Sant' Angelo, and the Cardinals of Parma and of Genoa, chickens will be sent for his meat, and each chicken will contain a deed of gift duly drawn up, made by me in my father's name, of the houses, palaces, or churches which are destined for each."

"Capital!" said the elder of the two women; "now, I am certain, all will go well."

"And by the grace of God," added the younger, with a strangely mocking smile, "our father will be pope."

"Oh, it will be a fine day for us!" cried Francesco.

"And for Christendom," replied his sister, with a still more ironical expression.

"Lucrezia, Lucrezia," said the mother, "you do not deserve the happiness which is coming to us."

"What does that matter, if it comes all the same? Besides, you know the proverb; mother: 'Large families are blessed of the Lord'; and still more so our family, which is so patriarchal."

At the same time she cast on her brother a look so wanton that the young man blushed under it: but at the moment he had to think of other things than his illicit loves, he ordered that four servants should be awakened; and while they were getting armed to accompany him, he drew up and signed the several deeds of gift which were to be carried the next day to the cardinals; for, not wishing to be seen at the houses, he thought he would profit by the night-time to carry them himself to certain persons in his confidence who would have them passed in, as had been arranged, at the dinner-hour. Then, when the deeds were quite ready and the servants also, Francesco went out with them, leaving the two women to dream golden dreams of their future greatness.

From the first dawn of day the people hurried anew, as ardent and interested as on the evening before, to the Piazza of the Vatican, where; at the ordinary time, that is, at ten o'clock in the morning,—the smoke rose again as usual, evoking laughter and murmuring, as it announced that none of the cardinals had secured the majority. A report, however, began to be spread about that the chances were divided

between three candidates, who were Roderigo Borgia, Giuliano delta Rovera, and Ascanio Sforza; for the people as yet knew nothing of the four mules laden with plate and silver which had been led to Sforza's house, by reason of which he had given up his own votes to his rival. In the midst of the agitation excited in the crowd by this new report a solemn chanting was heard; it proceeded from a procession, led by the Cardinal Camerlengo, with the object of obtaining from Heaven the speedy election of a pope: this procession, starting from the church of Ara Coeli at the Capitol, was to make several stations before the principal Madannas and the most frequented churches. As soon as the silver crucifix was perceived which went in front, the most profound silence prevailed, and everyone fell on his knees; thus a supreme calm followed the tumult and uproar which had been heard a few minutes before, and which at each appearance of the smoke had assumed a more threatening character: there was a shrewd suspicion that the procession, as well as having a religious end in view, had a political object also, and that its influence was intended to be as great on earth as in heaven. In any case, if such had been the design of the Cardinal Camerlengo, he had not deceived himself, and the effect was what he desired: when the procession had gone past, the laughing and joking continued, but the cries and threats had completely ceased.

The whole day passed thus; for in Rome nobody works. You are either a cardinal or a lacquey, and you live, nobody knows how. The crowd was still extremely numerous, when, towards two o'clock in the afternoon, another procession, which had quite as much power of provoking noise as the first imposing silence, traversed in its turn the Piazza of St. Peter's: this was the dinner procession. The people received it with the usual bursts of laughter, without suspecting, for all their irreverence, that this procession, more efficacious than the former, had just settled the election of the new pope.

The hour of the Ave Maria came as on the evening before; but, as on the evening before, the waiting for the whole day was lost; for, as half-past eight struck, the daily smoke reappeared at the top of the chimney. But when at the same moment rumours which came from the inside of the Vatican were spread abroad, announcing that, in all probability, the election would take place the next day, the good people preserved their patience. Besides, it had been very hot that day, and they were so broken with fatigue and roasted by the sun, these dwellers in shade and idleness, that they had no strength left to complain.

The morning of the next day, which was the 11th of August, 1492, arose stormy and dark; this did not hinder the multitude from thronging the piazzas, streets, doors, houses, churches. Moreover, the disposition of the weather was a real blessing from Heaven; for if there were heat, at least there would be no sun. Towards nine o'clock threatening storm-clouds were heaped up over all the Trastevere; but to this crowd what mattered rain, lightning, or thunder? They were preoccupied with a concern of a very different nature; they were waiting for their pope: a promise had been made them for to-day, and it could be seen by the manner of all, that if the day should pass without any election taking place, the end of it might very well be a riot; therefore, in proportion as the time advanced, the agitation grew greater. Nine o'clock, half-past nine, a quarter to ten struck, without anything happening to confirm or destroy their hopes. At last the first stroke of ten was heard; all eyes turned towards the chimney: ten o'clock struck slowly, each stroke vibrating in the heart of the multitude. At last the tenth stroke trembled, then vanished shuddering into space, and, a great cry breaking simultaneously from a hundred thousand breasts followed the silence "Non v'e fumo! There is no smoke!" In other words "We have a pope."

At this moment the rain began to fall; but no one paid any attention to it, so great were the transports

of joy and impatience among all the people. At last a little stone was detached from the wall of the window which gave on the balcony and upon which all eyes were fixed: a general shout saluted its fall; little by little the aperture grew larger, and in a few minutes it was large enough to allow a man to come out on the balcony.

The Cardinal Ascanio Sforza appeared; but at the moment when he was on the point of coming out, frightened by the rain and the lightning, he hesitated an instant, and finally drew back: immediately the multitude in their turn broke out like a tempest into cries, curses, howls, threatening to tear down the Vatican and to go and seek their pope themselves. At this noise Cardinal Sforza, more terrified by the popular storm than by the storm in the heavens, advanced on the balcony, and between two thunderclaps, in a moment of silence astonishing to anyone who had just heard the clamour that went before, made the following proclamation:

"I announce to you a great joy: the most Eminent and most Reverend Signor Roderigo Lenzuolo Borgia, Archbishop of Valencia, Cardinal-Deacon of San Nicolao-in-Carcere, Vice-Chancellor of the Holy Church, has now been elected Pope, and has assumed the name of Alexander VI."

The news of this nomination was received with strange joy. Roderigo Borgia had the reputation of a dissolute man, it is true, but libertinism had mounted the throne with Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII, so that for the Romans there was nothing new in the singular situation of a pope with a mistress and five children. The great thing for the moment was that the power fell into strong hands; and it was more important for the tranquillity of Rome that the new pope inherited the sword of St. Paul than that he inherited the keys of St. Peter.

And so, in the feasts that were given on this occasion, the dominant character was much more warlike than religious, and would have appeared rather to suit with the election of some young conqueror than the exaltation of an old pontiff: there was no limit to the pleasantries and prophetic epigrams on the name of Alexander, which for the second time seemed to promise the Romans the empire of the world; and the same evening, in the midst of brilliant illuminations and bonfires, which seemed to turn the town into a lake of flame, the following epigram was read, amid the acclamation of the people:

"Rome under Caesar's rule in ancient story
At home and o'er the world victorious trod;
But Alexander still extends his glory:
Caesar was man, but Alexander God."

As to the new pope, scarcely had he completed the formalities of etiquette which his exaltation imposed upon him, and paid to each man the price of his simony, when from the height of the Vatican he cast his eyes upon Europe, a vast political game of chess, which he cherished the hope of directing at the will of his own genius.

Chapter II

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The world had now arrived at one of those supreme moments of history when every thing transformed between the end of one period and the beginning of another: in the East Turkey, in the South Spain, in the West France, and in the North German, all were going to assume, together with the title of great Powers, that influence which they were destined to exert in the future over the secondary States. Accordingly we too, with Alexander VI, will cast a rapid glance over them, and see what were their respective situations in regard to Italy, which they all coveted as a prize.

Constantine, Palaeologos Dragozes, besieged by three hundred thousand Turks, after having appealed in vain for aid to the whole of Christendom, had not been willing to survive the loss of his empire, and had been found in the midst of the dead, close to the Tophana Gate; and on the 30th of May, 1453, Mahomet II had made his entry into Constantinople, where, after a reign which had earned for him the surname of 'Fatile', or the Conqueror, he had died leaving two sons, the elder of whom had ascended the throne under the name of Bajazet II.

The accession of the new sultan, however, had not taken place with the tranquillity which his right elder brother and his father's choice of him should have promised. His younger brother, D'jem, better known under the name of Zizimeh, had argued that whereas he was born in the purple—that is, born during the reign of Mahomet—Bajazet was born prior to his epoch, and was therefore the son of a private individual. This was rather a poor trick; but where force is all and right is naught, it was good enough to stir up a war. The two brothers, each at the head of an army, met accordingly in Asia in 1482. D'jem was defeated after a seven hours' fight, and pursued by his brother, who gave him no time to rally his army: he was obliged to embark from Cilicia, and took refuge in Rhodes, where he implored the protection of the Knights of St. John. They, not daring to give him an asylum in the island so near to Asia, sent him to France, where they had him carefully guarded in one of the commanderies, in spite of the urgency of Cait Bey, Sultan of Egypt, who, having revolted against Bajazet, desired to have the young prince in his army to give his rebellion the appearance of legitimate warfare. The same demand, moreover, with the same political object, had been made successively by Mathias Corvinus, King of Hungary, by Ferdinand, King of Aragon and Sicily, and by Ferdinand, King of Naples.

On his side Bajazet, who knew all the importance of such a rival, if he once allied himself with any one of the princes with whom he was at war, had sent ambassadors to Charles VIII, offering, if he would consent to keep D'jem with him, to give him a considerable pension, and to give to France the sovereignty of the Holy Land, so soon as Jerusalem should be conquered by the Sultan of Egypt. The King of France had accepted these terms.

But then Innocent VIII had intervened, and in his turn had claimed D'jem, ostensibly to give support by the claims of the refugee to a crusade which he was preaching against the Turks, but in reality to appropriate the pension of 40,000 ducats to be given by Bajazet to any one of the Christian princes who would undertake to be his brother's gaoler. Charles VIII had not dared to refuse to the spiritu-

head of Christendom a request supported by such holy reasons; and therefore D'jem had quitted France, accompanied by the Grand Master d'Aubusson, under whose direct charge he was; but his guardian had consented, for the sake of a cardinal's hat, to yield up his prisoner. Thus, on the 13th of March, 1489, the unhappy young man, cynosure of so many interested eyes, made his solemn entry into Rome, mounted on a superb horse, clothed in a magnificent oriental costume, between the Prince of Auvergne, nephew of the Grand Master d'Aubusson, and Francesco Cibo, the son of the pope.

After this he had remained there, and Bajazet, faithful to promises which it was so much his interest to fulfil, had punctually paid to the sovereign pontiff a pension of 40,000 ducats.

So much for Turkey.

Ferdinand and Isabella were reigning in Spain, and were laying the foundations of that vast power which was destined, five-and-twenty years later, to make Charles V declare that the sun never set on his dominions. In fact, these two sovereigns, on whom history has bestowed the name of Catholic, had reconquered in succession nearly all Spain, and driven the Moors out of Granada, their last entrenchment; while two men of genius, Bartolome Diaz and Christopher Columbus, had succeeded so much to the profit of Spain, the one in recovering a lost world, the other in conquering a world yet unknown. They had accordingly, thanks to their victories in the ancient world and their discoveries in the new, acquired an influence at the court of Rome which had never been enjoyed by any of their predecessors.

So much for Spain.

In France, Charles VIII had succeeded his father, Louis XI, on the 30th of August, 1483. Louis by dint of executions, had tranquillised his kingdom and smoothed the way for a child who ascended the throne under the regency of a woman. And the regency had been a glorious one, and had put down the pretensions of princes of the blood, put an end to civil wars, and united to the crown all that yet remained of the great independent fiefs. The result was that at the epoch where we now are, here was Charles VIII, about twenty-two years of age, a prince (if we are to believe La Tremouille) little more than a body but great of heart; a child (if we are to believe Commines) only now making his first flight from the nest, destitute of both sense and money, feeble in person, full of self-will, and consorting rather with fools than with the wise; lastly, if we are to believe Guicciardini, who was an Italian, might we not have brought a somewhat partial judgment to bear upon the subject, a young man of little wisdom concerning the actions of men, but carried away by an ardent desire for rule and the acquisition of glory, a desire based far more on his shallow character and impetuosity than on any consciousness of genius: he was an enemy to all fatigue and all business, and when he tried to give his attention to it he showed himself always totally wanting in prudence and judgment. If anything in him appeared at first sight to be worthy of praise, on a closer inspection it was found to be something nearer akin to vice than to virtue. He was liberal, it is true, but without thought, with no measure and no discrimination. He was sometimes inflexible in will; but this was through obstinacy rather than a constant mind; and what his flatterers called goodness deserved far more the name of insensibility to injuries or poverty of spirit.

As to his physical appearance, if we are to believe the same author, it was still less admirable, and answered marvellously to his weakness of mind and character. He was small, with a large head, a short thick neck, broad chest, and high shoulders; his thighs and legs were long and thin; and as his face altogether was ugly—and was only redeemed by the dignity and force of his glance—and all his limbs were

disproportionate with one another, he had rather the appearance of a monster than a man. Such was he whom Fortune was destined to make a conqueror, for whom Heaven was reserving more glory than he had power to carry.

So much for France.

The Imperial throne was occupied by Frederic III, who had been rightly named the Peaceful, not for the reason that he had always maintained peace, but because, having constantly been beaten, he had always been forced to make it. The first proof he had given of this very philosophical forbearance was during his journey to Rome, whither he betook himself to be consecrated. In crossing the Apennines he was attacked by brigands. They robbed him, but he made no pursuit. And so, encouraged by this example and by the impunity of lesser thieves, the greater ones soon took part in the robberies. Amurath seized part of Hungary. Mathias Corvinus took Lower Austria, and Frederic consoled himself for these usurpations by repeating the maxim, Forgetfulness is the best cure for the losses we suffer. At the time we have now reached, he had just, after a reign of fifty-three years, affianced his son Maximilian to Marie of Burgundy and had put under the ban of the Empire his son-in-law, Albert of Bavaria, who laid claim to the ownership of the Tyrol. He was therefore too full of his family affairs to be troubled about Italy. Besides, he was busy looking for a motto for the house of Austria, a matter of the highest importance for a man of the character of Frederic III. This motto, which Charles V was destined almost to render true, was at last discovered, to the great joy of the emperor, who, judging that he had nothing more to do on earth after he had given this last proof of his sagacity, died on the 19th of August, 1493; leaving the empire to his son Maximilian.

This motto was simply founded on the five vowels, a, e, i, o, u, the initial letters of these five words

"AUSTRIAE EST IMPERARE ORBI UNIVERSO."

This means

"It is the destiny of Austria to rule over the whole world."

So much for Germany.

Now that we have cast a glance over the four nations which were on the way, as we said before, to become European Powers, let us turn our attention to those secondary States which formed a circle more contiguous to Rome, and whose business it was to serve as armour, so to speak, to the spiritual queen of the world, should it please any of these political giants whom we have described to make encroachments with a view to an attack, on the seas or the mountains, the Adriatic Gulf or the Alps, the Mediterranean or the Apennines.

These were the kingdom of Naples, the duchy of Milan, the magnificent republic of Florence, and the most serene republic of Venice.

The kingdom of Naples was in the hands of the old Ferdinand, whose birth was not only illegitimate but probably also well within the prohibited degrees. His father, Alfonso of Aragon, received his crown from Giovanna of Naples, who had adopted him as her successor. But since, in the fear of having no heir, the queen on her deathbed had named two instead of one, Alfonso had to sustain his rights against Rene. The two aspirants for some time disputed the crown. At last the house of Aragon

carried the day over the house of Anjou, and in the course of the year 1442, Alfonso definitely secured his seat on the throne. Of this sort were the claims of the defeated rival which we shall see Charles VIII maintaining later on. Ferdinand had neither the courage nor the genius of his father, and yet he triumphed over his enemies, one after another he had two rivals, both far superior in merit to him self. The one was his nephew, the Count of Viana, who, basing his claim on his uncle's shameful birth, commanded the whole Aragonese party; the other was Duke John of Calabria, who commanded the whole Angevin party. Still he managed to hold the two apart, and to keep himself on the throne by dint of his prudence, which often verged upon duplicity. He had a cultivated mind, and had studied the sciences—above all, law. He was of middle height, with a large handsome head, his brow open and admirably framed in beautiful white hair, which fell nearly down to his shoulders. Moreover, though he had rarely exercised his physical strength in arms, this strength was so great that one day, when he happened to be on the square of the Mercato Nuovo at Naples, he seized by the horns a bull that had escaped and stopped him short, in spite of all the efforts the animal made to escape from his hands. Now the election of Alexander had caused him great uneasiness, and in spite of his usual prudence he had not been able to restrain himself from saying before the bearer of the news that not only did he fail to rejoice in this election, but also that he did not think that any Christian could rejoice in it, seeing that Borgia, having always been a bad man, would certainly make a bad pope. To this he added that, even were the choice an excellent one and such as would please everybody else, it would be none the less fatal to the house of Aragon, although Roderigo was born her subject and owed to her the origin and progress of his fortunes; for wherever reasons of state come in, the ties of blood and parentage are soon forgotten, and, 'a fortiori', relations arising from the obligations of nationality.

Thus, one may see that Ferdinand judged Alexander VI with his usual perspicacity; this, however, did not hinder him, as we shall soon perceive, from being the first to contract an alliance with him.

The duchy of Milan belonged nominally to John Galeazzo, grandson of Francesco Sforza, who had seized it by violence on the 26th of February, 1450, and bequeathed it to his son, Galeazzo Maria, father of the young prince now reigning; we say nominally, because the real master of the Milanese was at this period not the legitimate heir who was supposed to possess it, but his uncle Ludovico, surnamed 'il Moro', because of the mulberry tree which he bore in his arms. After being exiled with his two brothers, Philip who died of poison in 1479, and Ascanio who became the cardinal, he returned to Milan some days after the assassination of Galeazzo Maria, which took place on the 26th of December 1476, in St. Stephen's Church, and assumed the regency for the young duke, who at that time was only eight years old. From now onward, even after his nephew had reached the age of twenty and-twenty, Ludovico continued to rule, and according to all probabilities was destined to rule a long time yet; for, some days after the poor young man had shown a desire to take the reins himself, he had fallen sick, and it was said, and not in a whisper, that he had taken one of those slow but mortal poisons of which princes made so frequent a use at this period, that, even when a malady was natural, a cause was always sought connected with some great man's interests. However it may have been, Ludovico had relegated his nephew, now too weak to busy himself henceforward with the affairs of his duchy, to the castle of Pavia, where he lay and languished under the eyes of his wife Isabella, daughter of King Ferdinand of Naples.

As to Ludovico, he was an ambitious man, full of courage and astuteness, familiar with the sword and with poison, which he used alternately, according to the occasion, without feeling any repugnance or any predilection for either of them; but quite decided to be his nephew's heir whether he died or lived.

Florence, although she had preserved the name of a republic, had little by little lost all her liberties and belonged in fact, if not by right, to Piero dei Medici, to whom she had been bequeathed as paternal legacy by Lorenzo, as we have seen, at the risk of his soul's salvation.

The son, unfortunately, was far from having the genius of his father: he was handsome, it is true, whereas Lorenzo, on the contrary, was remarkably ugly; he had an agreeable, musical voice, whereas Lorenzo had always spoken through his nose; he was instructed in Latin and Greek, his conversation was pleasant and easy, and he improvised verses almost as well as the so-called Magnificent; but he was both ignorant of political affairs and haughtily insolent in his behaviour to those who had made them their study. Added to this, he was an ardent lover of pleasure, passionately addicted to women, incessantly occupied with bodily exercises that should make him shine in their eyes, above all with tennis, a game at which he very highly excelled: he promised himself that, when the period of mourning was past, he would occupy the attention not only of Florence but of the whole of Italy, by the splendour of his courts and the renown of his fetes. Piero dei Medici had at any rate formed this plan, but Heaven decreed otherwise.

As to the most serene republic of Venice, whose doge was Agostino Barbarigo, she had attained, at the time we have reached, to her highest degree of power and splendour. From Cadiz to the Palus Maeotis there was no port that was not open to her thousand ships; she possessed in Italy, beyond the coastlines of the canals and the ancient duchy of Venice, the provinces of Bergamo, Brescia, Crema, Verona, Vicenza, and Padua; she owned the marches of Treviso, which comprehend the districts of Feltrina, Belluno, Cadore, Polesella of Rovigo, and the principality of Ravenna; she also owned the Friuli, except Aquileia; Istria, except Trieste; she owned, on the east side of the Gulf, Zara, Spalatra, and the shore of Albania; in the Ionian Sea, the islands of Zante and Corfu; in Greece, Lepanto and Patras; in the Morea, Morone, Corone, Neapolis, and Argos; lastly, in the Archipelago, besides several little towns and stations on the coast, she owned Candia and the kingdom of Cyprus.

Thus from the mouth of the Po to the eastern extremity of the Mediterranean, the most serene republic was mistress of the whole coastline, and Italy and Greece seemed to be mere suburbs of Venice.

In the intervals of space left free between Naples, Milan, Florence, and Venice, petty tyrants had arisen who exercised an absolute sovereignty over their territories: thus the Colonnas were at Ostia and at Nettuna, the Montefeltri at Urbino, the Manfredi at Faenza, the Bentivogli at Bologna, the Malatesta family at Rimini, the Vitelli at Citta di Castello, the Baglioni at Perugia, the Orsini at Vicovaro, and the princes of Este at Ferrara.

Finally, in the centre of this immense circle, composed of great Powers, of secondary States, and of little tyrannies, Rome was set on high, the most exalted, yet the weakest of all, without influence, without lands, without an army, without gold. It was the concern of the new pope to secure all this: let us see, therefore, what manner of man was this Alexander VI, for undertaking and accomplishing such a project.

Chapter III

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RODERIGO LENZUOLO was born at Valencia, in Spain, in 1430 or 1431, and on his mother's side was descended, as some writers declare, of a family of royal blood, which had cast its eyes on the throne only after cherishing hopes of the crowns of Aragon and Valencia. Roderigo from his infancy had shown signs of a marvellous quickness of mind, and as he grew older he exhibited an intelligence extremely apt for the study of sciences, especially law and jurisprudence: the result was that his first distinctions were gained in the law, a profession wherein he soon made a great reputation by his ability in the discussion of the most thorny cases. All the same, he was not slow to leave this career and abandoned it quite suddenly for the military profession, which his father had followed; but after various actions which served to display his presence of mind and courage, he was as much disgusted with this profession as with the other; and since it happened that at the very time he began to feel the disgust his father died, leaving a considerable fortune, he resolved to do no more work, but to live according to his own fancies and caprices. About this time he became the lover of a widow who had two daughters. The widow dying, Roderigo took the girls under his protection, put one into a convent and as the other was one of the loveliest women imaginable, made her his mistress. This was the notorious Rosa Vanozza, by whom he had five children—Francesco, Caesar, Lucrezia, and Goffredo; the name of the fifth is unknown.

Roderigo, retired from public affairs, was given up entirely to the affections of a lover and a father when he heard that his uncle, who loved him like a son, had been elected pope under the name of Calixtus III. But the young man was at this time so much a lover that love imposed silence on his ambition; and indeed he was almost terrified at the exaltation of his uncle, which was no doubt destined to force him once more into public life. Consequently, instead of hurrying to Rome, as anyone else in his place would have done, he was content to indite to His Holiness a letter in which he begged for the continuation of his favours, and wished him a long and happy reign.

This reserve on the part of one of his relatives, contrasted with the ambitious schemes which beset the new pope at every step, struck Calixtus III in a singular way: he knew the stuff that was in young Roderigo, and at a time when he was besieged on all sides by mediocrities, this powerful nature holding modestly aside gained new grandeur in his eyes so he replied instantly to Roderigo that on the receipt of his letter he must quit Spain for Italy, Valencia for Rome.

This letter uprooted Roderigo from the centre of happiness he had created for himself, and where he might perhaps have slumbered on like an ordinary man, if fortune had not thus interposed to drag him forcibly away. Roderigo was happy, Roderigo was rich; the evil passions which were natural to him had been, if not extinguished,—at least lulled; he was frightened himself at the idea of changing the quiet life he was leading for the ambitious, agitated career that was promised him; and instead of obeying his uncle, he delayed the preparations for departure, hoping that Calixtus would forget him. He was not so: two months after he received the letter from the pope, there arrived at Valencia a prelate from Rome, the bearer of Roderigo's nomination to a benefice worth 20,000 ducats a year, and also a positive order to the holder of the post to come and take possession of his charge as soon as possible.

Holding back was no longer feasible: so Roderigo obeyed; but as he did not wish to be separated from the source whence had sprung eight years of happiness, Rosa Vanozza also left Spain, and while he was going to Rome, she betook herself to Venice, accompanied by two confidential servants, and under the protection of a Spanish gentleman named Manuel Melchior.

Fortune kept the promises she had made to Roderigo: the pope received him as a son, and made him successively Archbishop of Valencia, Cardinal-Deacon, and Vice-Chancellor. To all these favours Calixtus added a revenue of 20,000 ducats, so that at the age of scarcely thirty-five Roderigo found himself the equal of a prince in riches and power.

Roderigo had had some reluctance about accepting the cardinalship, which kept him fast at Rome, and he would have preferred to be General of the Church, a position which would have allowed him more liberty for seeing his mistress and his family; but his uncle Calixtus made him reckon with the possibility of being his successor some day, and from that moment the idea of being the supreme head of kings and nations took such hold of Roderigo, that he no longer had any end in view but that which his uncle had made him entertain.

From that day forward, there began to grow up in the young cardinal that talent for hypocrisy which made of him the most perfect incarnation of the devil that has perhaps ever existed; and Roderigo was no longer the same man: with words of repentance and humility on his lips, his head bowed as though he were bearing the weight of his past sins, disparaging the riches which he had acquired and which according to him, were the wealth of the poor and ought to return to the poor, he passed his life in churches, monasteries, and hospitals, acquiring, his historian tells us, even in the eyes of his enemies the reputation of a Solomon for wisdom, of a Job for patience, and of a very Moses for his promulgation of the word of God: Rosa Vanozza was the only person in the world who could appreciate the value of this pious cardinal's conversion.

It proved a lucky thing for Roderigo that he had assumed this pious attitude, for his protector died after a reign of three years three months and nineteen days, and he was now sustained by his own merit alone against the numerous enemies he had made by his rapid rise to fortune: so during the whole of the reign of Pius II he lived always apart from public affairs, and only reappeared in the day of Sixtus IV, who made him the gift of the abbacy of Subiaco, and sent him in the capacity of ambassador to the kings of Aragon and Portugal. On his return, which took place during the pontificate of Innocent VIII, he decided to fetch his family at last to Rome: thither they came escorted by Don Manuel Melchior, who from that moment passed as the husband of Rosa Vanozza, and took the name of Count Ferdinand of Castile. The Cardinal Roderigo received the noble Spaniard as a countryman and a friend; and he, who expected to lead a most retired life, engaged a house in the street of the Lungara, near the church of Regina Coeli, on the banks of the Tiber. There it was that after passing the day in prayers and pious works, Cardinal Roderigo used to repair each evening and lay aside his mask. And it was said, though nobody could prove it, that in this house infamous scenes passed: Report said the dissipations were of so dissolute a character that their equals had never been seen in Rome. With a view to checking the rumours that began to spread abroad, Roderigo sent Caesar to study at Pisa, and married Lucrezia to a young gentleman of Aragon; thus there only remained at home Rosa Vanozza and her two sons: such was the state of things when Innocent VIII died and Roderigo Borgia was proclaimed pope.

We have seen by what means the nomination was effected; and so the five cardinals who had taken n

part in this simony—namely, the Cardinals of Naples, Sierra, Portugal, Santa Maria-in-Porticu, and St. Peter-in-Vinculis—protested loudly against this election, which they treated as a piece of jobbery; but Roderigo had none the less, however it was done, secured his majority; Roderigo was none the less the two hundred and sixtieth successor of St. Peter.

Alexander VI, however, though he had arrived at his object, did not dare throw off at first the mask which the Cardinal Borgia had worn so long, although when he was apprised of his election he could not dissimulate his joy; indeed, on hearing the favourable result of the scrutiny, he lifted his hands to heaven and cried, in the accents of satisfied ambition, "Am I then pope? Am I then Christ's vicar? Am I then the keystone of the Christian world?"

"Yes, holy father," replied Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, the same who had sold to Roderigo the nine votes that were at his disposal at the Conclave for four mules laden with silver; "and we hope by your election to give glory to God, repose to the Church, and joy to Christendom, seeing that you have been chosen by the Almighty Himself as the most worthy among all your brethren."

But in the short interval occupied by this reply, the new pope had already assumed the papal authority, and in a humble voice and with hands crossed upon his breast, he spoke:

"We hope that God will grant us His powerful aid, in spite of our weakness, and that He will do for us that which He did for the apostle when aforesaid He put into his hands the keys of heaven and entrusted to him the government of the Church, a government which without the aid of God would prove too heavy a burden for mortal man; but God promised that His Spirit should direct him; God will do the same, I trust, for us; and for your part we fear not lest any of you fail in that holy obedience which is due unto the head of the Church, even as the flock of Christ was bidden to follow the prince of the apostles."

Having spoken these words, Alexander donned the pontifical robes, and through the windows of the Vatican had strips of paper thrown out on which his name was written in Latin. These, blown by the wind, seemed to convey to the whole world the news of the great event which was about to change the face of Italy. The same day couriers started for all the courts of Europe.

Caesar Borgia learned the news of his father's election at the University of Pisa, where he was a student. His ambition had sometimes dreamed of such good fortune, yet his joy was little short of madness. He was then a young man, about twenty-two or twenty-four years of age, skilful in all bodily exercises, and especially in fencing; he could ride barebacked the most fiery steeds, could cut off the head of a bull at a single sword-stroke; moreover, he was arrogant, jealous, and insincere. According to Tammasi, he was great among the godless, as his brother Francesco was good among the great. As to his face, even contemporary authors have left utterly different descriptions; for some have painted him as a monster of ugliness, while others, on the contrary, extol his beauty. This contradiction is due to the fact that at certain times of the year, and especially in the spring, his face was covered with an eruption which, so long as it lasted, made him an object of horror and disgust, while all the rest of the year he was the sombre, black-haired cavalier with pale skin and tawny beard whom Raphael shows in the fine portrait he made of him. And historians, both chroniclers and painters, agree as to his fixed and powerful gaze, behind which burned a ceaseless flame, giving to his face something infernal and superhuman. Such was the man whose fortune was to fulfil all his desires. He had taken for his motto 'Aut Caesar, aut nihil': Caesar or nothing.

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