A WAITRESS.

BY CONSTANCE FENIMORE WOOLSON.

AS the evening was delightful, their coffee was served in the garden. Modesta brought out a low table and a tray; then returning to the kitchen, she came forth again with the coffee-pot, fresh from the fire, and filled the two cups, one for Dennison, the other for his guest, Edward Gray. The coffee was fragrant, very hot, very black. John Dennison never took at night more than this one small cupful; but it was necessary that the quality of the drops within should be of the purest, and Peppino, the cook, knew that he must not fail. The dinner which had preceded the coffee had been excellent.

They were sitting at one end of a flower-bordered walk which leads to a terrace with a parapet; from here opens out a panorama of the velvety hills of Tuscany, with a crowd of serried mountain-peaks rising behind them; below, in the narrow valley of a winding stream, is the small mediæval town of Tre Ponti, or Three Bridges. The garden retains a distinctly monastic air, though its last monk took leave of it several hundred years ago; here are no statues of goddesses and muses, so common in Italy; instead there are two worn stone crosses, with illegible Latin inscriptions at their bases. An arcade along one side is paved with flagstones, and has the air of a cloister; at its end is a fresco representing a monk with his finger on his lips, as if inculcating silence; the face is dim, all save the eyes, but these have a strange vitality, and appear to follow the gazer with intelligence as he turns away. There are two ancient sundials, and there is a relic which excites curiosity—a flight of stone steps attached to a high boundary wall; the steps go up for a distance of eight or nine feet, and then stop, leading to nothing. On the north and west, where it stretches to the verge of the hill, the garden is open, defended only by its parapet. Across its south edge it is shut in by the irregular stone house called Casa Colombina. On the east there is the boundary wall already mentioned, and above this wall there rises outside, not fifteen yards away, a massive square battlemented tower, one hundred and thirty feet high, named Torre Colombina, or Tower of the Dove. This tower is now occupied only by owls, and travellers suppose vaguely that it belongs in some way to the little church of Santa Lucia, which nestles at its feet; they even fancy that it is the campanile for Santa Lucia's bells. But the great stone Tower of the Dove dates from the thirteenth century, and although Santa Lucia cannot be called young, her two hundred and fifty years are nothing to the greater antiquity of her ponderous overshadowing neighbor. Each mountain-peak was bathed in the light of sunset; all was softly fair—the ineffable loveliness of Italy.

Modesta now came to take the tray. She was accompanied by a cat and a dog. The dog was a small dachshund, black, with long silky ears and very crooked paws. The cat, a sinuous yellow matron, appeared to believe that she was the favorite, for she rubbed herself against her mistress's ankles caressingly. As Modesta, with murmured "excuses," lifted the tray, four kittens rushed from the house, gambolling and tumbling over each other; they all made their way to her feet, round which they curled themselves so that she walked in a tangle of cats. She returned toward the house with her tray, laughing, and careful not to step on them. The dog waited a moment with dignity. "Here, Hannibal! Here!" said Dennison. But the dachshund paid no attention to him; he trotted back to the house as fast as his short legs could carry him.

"He is supposed to be my property. But he spends his life in the kitchen," commented Dennison.

"That girl of yours has a passion for animals; one might rather call it a compassion, perhaps, for I have even seen her petting that preternaturally ill-tempered and hideous donkey who turns your water-wheel," remarked Gray. "It seems to extend in all directions, for she runs out to help the old milkman up the hill with his cans, and she gives tidbits to that idiot boy who haunts the main road."

"That isn't half. She feeds regularly two children who live a little below here, on the way down to the valley. Partly she robs me to do it, after the easy Italian fashion; but she also robs herself—I have had proof of that. She almost always has some forlorn object, varying any-

where from a lame chicken to a blind man, stowed away in a corner of the court or the kitchen, where she can see to and comfort it. And every Friday, when the regular beggars of Tre Ponti—the authorized humbugs—make the round of the villas and poderes on this side of the valley, invariably she has saved something for each one of them."

"She is extraordinarily handsome. With her full throat, her large soft eyes, and that classic head and hair, she looks like a Madonna of one of the old painters. I have never seen a more kindly and beautiful smile."

"It's well enough. But the great thing is that she is perfect as a servant. What she has to do is done without a fault."

"And she is so placid and sweet-tempered, too, as well as skilful," Gray went on. "She's a regular marvel!"

"She's a regular Tuscan!"

"You don't half appreciate the beautiful natures of these people. As to this particular girl—come back to America, and see what we have to put up with! A waitress like that, over there, would be worth her weight in silver—if not gold."

"A what?" asked Dennison.

"A waitress; that's what we call 'em now; we've given up 'help.' Is she married to your cook?"

"Oh no; Peppino is nearly sixty. She is only twenty-five, though she looks thirty. She is a widow, and she is thinking of taking another husband before long. Have you noticed a young fellow working in the vineyard just under your windows?"

"I have noticed some one loafing there."

"That's the man."

"Poor good-natured woman—he has imposed upon her; she will have to earn his living as well as her own. As it happens, I have watched him, and a lazier creature I never saw; he looks at the vines occasionally, and he calls down jokes to the other men below; that is the extent of his exertions. Come out for a walk."

"I don't walk after dinner."

"Come at least as far as the tower."

Thus adjured, Dennison rose. He was a tall man, whose outlines had grown large; but he was muscular still. Gray also was tall. If Edward Gray had a hobby, it was to show to the world that an American business man can be as athletic as an English fox-hunter or an ancient Greek; his face, which was thin and deeply lined, did not come up to his ambition; but his erect figure, wiry and elastic, was well developed and strong.

As they passed through the house, now growing dim in the twilight, they caught a glimpse of the waitress in the distance, seated in the kitchen, knitting. On the table by her side two of the tall slender Tuscan lamps were burning, each with its three little wicks and its three brass chains; in her lap two kittens were curled asleep. The light illumined also a gaudy print on the wall, apparently a Madonna. Beneath the print was a jug filled with flowers.

"Is that little piece of piety your cook's?" Gray asked, as they passed out.

"No. The cook is a free-thinker. It's Modesta; she is overwhelmingly devout. She has the whole house blessed at regular intervals—priest and holy water."

The outer door of Casa Colombina opens directly upon the small square or piazza of Santa Lucia, a grassy space dotted with minute pink daisies. One side of this square is bordered by a low wall. In the daytime this wall's broad flat top was adorned not infrequently by the recumbent figure of one of Modesta's protégés, who, after enjoying her bounty, was taking a siesta here, in the sunshine or the shade, according to the season; sometimes it was Hannibal, with his nose on his paws; sometimes it was the cat; very often it was a beggar or the idiot boy. To-night the slab was empty, and, after a stroll of half an hour up the road and back, Dennison and his visitor sat down here for a moment; it made an excellent seat. It was now dark; the lights of Tre Ponti were twinkling in the valley, the evening star shone above the Tower of the Dove; the soft air of the Italian May was filled with the fragrance of blossoms. Suddenly on one of the mountains in the northern sky there appeared flashing out a gleam. Then a blaze.

"Woods on fire up there," said Gray, who was accustomed to forest fires at home.

But while he was speaking a similar glare appeared on a mountain in the south. And then a third in the east. Many summits and flanks of the Apennines were in sight, and before long there were fifty of the blazing signals visible, some near, some distant, but all at high points.

TEA IN THE GARDEN.

"It's the vigil of the Ascension, the night when the mountain peasants light bonfires on their peaks as a species of religious rite," explained Dennison. "In reality it is a relic of pagan times. Their belief is that the ceremony will bring tranquillity to their families during the year."

A figure which had come from the house now passed them. "Lordships will pardon," said Modesta's voice; "they know that I would not wish to disturb. But from the kitchen it is not possible to count the mountain fires. And to count them all is important, since tranquillity is most surely a blessed thing. Excuses." She passed on to a distant angle of the wall, where she stood for five or ten minutes.

"What did she say?" asked Gray, who was sure that he could learn to speak Italian in a week or two. Simplest thing in the world—so much like Latin.

Dennison translated the phrases—the lordships, the excuses, and the proffered opinion as to tranquillity.

"It's awfully pretty," said Gray, admiringly.

Modesta, after finishing her counting, crossed the piazza to the little church. In the starlit darkness they could see her kneel down there in the porch.

"She is clinching it—the tranquillity—by a few private orisons," said Dennison.

Presently, her devotions concluded, the waitress returned to the house. The two men remained where they were. They had all sorts of subjects to thresh out together. They took them up, or rather Gray did, by fits and starts.

"Well, Jack, it's settled then that you're never coming home?" he remarked, as he accepted another cigarette.

"Not at all," Dennison answered. "I shall come back by-and-by, when I feel like it. In the mean while I pay my taxes regularly over there, and I subscribe to all the charities I believe in—three or four. If there were to be another war (but there won't be), I should return at once."

"Well, I don't call it a useful life."

"Is it more useful to make money—at somebody else's expense?"

"It's more useful to be a good citizen; to bring up one's family well; to—"

"Let's stop there," Dennison interposed. "People with families never approve of the people who haven't those blessings. It doesn't occur to them that nobody forced them to marry; they selected the lot, and therefore they accepted responsibilities. But a man who has not undertaken family life ought not to be saddled with its cares. You chose your boys and girls; I chose Italy. Each to his taste. You may ask, 'Isn't the world to be peopled, then?' No trouble about that; it always will be. Personally my own answer to the same question might be, however, the old one, 'Je n'en vois pas la nécessité.'"

"That's where you all end; dreary nihilism!"

They returned to the house. The outer door of Casa Colombina bore no relation to the drawing-room, dining-room, or library. It led to the court, to the cellar, to the gardens, to the podere, to the kitchen, to whatever you please; but it was only by a circuitous route through corridors and purposeless anterooms that Dennison could reach his own apartments. As he and his guest were following this route they caught another glimpse across the court of Modesta in her kitchen. The door was more widely open this time, and they could see the whole interior of the large vaulted hall-like room, with the rows of copper pans on the wall. The kittens were now in their basket on the floor, and Modesta's lap was occupied by the dachshund, who had curled himself into a ball. The waitress was still knitting, her head bent forward over her work. With her smoothly braided hair and her white apron, in her neat quiet room with her cats and her dog and her flower-decked shrine, she was the image of peace.

"Tranquillity is most surely a blessed thing," quoted Gray. "If it were not for the moving needles, I should say she was asleep."

"She probably is asleep; she is knitting unconsciously. She appears to require about fifteen hours of slumber out of the twenty-four," said Dennison, as he lighted wax matches, one after the other, to show the way. When he reached the sitting-room he rang for lights, and presently Modesta appeared, carrying the lamp, her eyes drowsy.

"As soon as Peppino comes in you may close the house," said Dennison. "We shall require nothing more to-night."

The waitress put down the lamp, adjusting its wick so that it burned brightly. Then she lighted the shaded candles which stood on a side table. Hannibal

had followed her; when she had finished her task she stooped and picked him up. "If the master allows, he must be washed to-morrow," she said. "Or, rather, not to-morrow, for it is a festa, but the day after. As it is now warm weather, Peppino shall take him to the pond, instead of bathing him in the green crockery basin. Annibale himself will not wish to go—silly cherub!" (Here she stroked the dog's head.) "But—what do they wish? It is necessary. Good-night to the lordships." And she disappeared, carrying the dog, and murmuring endearments to him as she went.

After lunch the next day the two men went out for a stroll. The roads were gay with the country-folk, celebrating the festa in the Italian fashion by the simple amusement of being together in the open air. The wrinkled faces of the old women were framed in their new red and yellow kerchiefs, which were folded over their heads and tied under their chins. Each girl wore a flower in her hair, and this hair was always thick, rising up round the face in a dense mass, no matter how closely the long ends were braided and coiled behind. The men were dressed in their best, but they all carried their jackets folded and tossed over one shoulder.

The young men were entertaining themselves.

"They will end by slicing us in two at the ankles," said Gray, indignantly, after he had jumped aside three or four times to escape a sharp disk which met them suddenly as they turned a corner, whizzing past them as it flew down the road, almost invisible from its speed.

"It's a game," said Dennison.

"Oh, is it? I thought it was assassination."

They went down to the Tre Ponti, where they took horses and a rattling phaeton, and went off on one of those quests with whose mild excitements Dennison enlivened his quiet Italian days. This time it was a search for some tapestry, which had been discovered, so it was said, in a villa six miles distant. The villa was one of those which had degenerated, having been used for the last hundred years as a farm-house. During the preceding week an addition had been pulled down, and the demolition had uncovered a window which corresponded to nothing within; further search had revealed a walled-up chamber, and it was this chamber which contained the tapestry. The chamber was there—a small room with a high ceiling. It contained no tapestry; nothing, in fact, but one singular object, a lady's toilet table with a lace cover, an old mirror, two candlesticks, and various saucers, vials, and boxes. The lace, which was falling to pieces from age, was ordinary in quality; the mirror-frame and the candlesticks were made of metal that imitates bronze; and the saucers, vials, and boxes were of glass that imitates crystal; nothing therefore had intrinsic value. Dennison made a small offer for the whole just as it stood, in case the government should not lay claim to the objects.

"It's only for the riddle," he said to his companion, as they drove back to Tre Ponti. "There is a history, of course, and nobody can ever know it; that is the charm; one can fancy anything one pleases. If I get the table, I'll put it in one of the unused bedrooms. And then when there comes a wild windy night, such as we sometimes have in Tuscany, I'll go there after midnight, and see if she doesn't glide slowly in and look at herself in her old glass."

It was late in the afternoon when they drove through the eastern gate of Three Bridges. Leaving the phaeton at the stable, they strolled about the village for a while before returning to Casa Colombina.

But village is hardly the word. Although Tre Ponti has never contained more than two thousand inhabitants (at present there are but fifteen hundred), it is surrounded by an important stone wall with bastions, and two of the old gateways, massive arched portals, are still in use. The narrow winding streets are paved with broad flag-stones, which reach to the house walls on each side, so that one seems to be following hallways open at the top, rather than roads. Nowhere is there an inch of garden; the high blocks stand side by side in solid rows. The only breathing-place is the central square; one side of this piazza is embellished by a palazzo-pubblico, or town-hall, decorated with griffins and armorial bearings. Along another side there is an arcade ornamented with a row of heads by Andrea della Robbia, old women, monks, knights, children, and others, each looking out with lifelike expression from a heavy frame of clustered porcelain fruit.

"Those frames of fruit would do for a State fair," said Gray, irreverently. "Queer, solid, stony little place! Somehow it looks fierce, too."

"Naturally. They did almost nothing here but fight for hundreds of years; they fought with every town in Tuscany. And almost every town in Tuscany responded by fighting with them."

When Gray had seen everything, they passed through the western gate, taking the road which leads down the hill and across one of the three bridges; on the other side of this bridge begins the path which is a short-cut to Casa Colombina.

In the open space outside of this gate there stands a small café of the most modern type. Its exterior is adorned in fresco on one side of the door with a portrait of Garibaldi as large as life. On the other side there is a second work of art, a painted open window from whose lattice leans a damsel, dressed in the remarkable apparel which is produced by a translation of the latest Paris fashions into Italian. This damsel hospitably offers to the passers-by a glass of wine. "Let's breathe," said Dennison, seating himself on one of the benches which, with a green table, was placed before the door.

"You want to attach yourself to every bench you see, Jack."

"On the contrary, I much prefer my own, at home. It's only for your sake that I go tramping about the country in this way, on my feet."

"What do they have in such a place as this?" asked Gray, fanning himself with his hat. "We can't sit here without ordering something."

"Yes, we can. Don't be throwing your money about."

"Only a quarter. What can I get for that?"

"Red vinegar."

At this moment the proprietor of the café came forth, carrying a three-legged stool and a brazier filled with hot coals. He saluted the gentlemen with a beaming smile, but made no effort to solicit their patronage: placing the stool and the brazier at a little distance, he returned to the house, and came forth again with a large shallow pan, whose bottom was covered with a layer half an inch deep of coffee in the berry. Seating himself on the stool, he began to roast the coffee, holding the pan over the coals by its long handle, and swaying it slightly from side to side with a rhythmical motion. He was a picturesque young man, with a brilliant pink silk handkerchief round his neck. Whenever his roving glance happened to meet that of either of the Americans he smiled genially, as though he wished to assure them that, whatever their mood might be, he should be sure to sympathize with it if admitted to their confidence.

"Ask him for the wine," said Gray.

"You can't possibly drink it," expostulated Dennison.

"I'll take it to Modesta—for her Friday beggars. You won't? Very well, then, I'll do it myself. Here, vyno! Vyno, do you hear? Vyno bono. Oon liry. *Oon!*" And he held up one finger.

The young landlord, with cordial smiles, put down his pan, hurried into the house, and returned with two little tumblers, and one of the graceful Tuscan flasks swathed in its covering of plaited straw. Taking out the stopper, he removed with exaggerated care the protecting layer of oil by means of a long wisp, and then placed the flask on the table with a flourish. "Ecco!"

"They always understand me," said Gray, complacently, when the coffee-roasting had begun again.

"They would understand a Patagonian; one who was a lunatic, and dumb!"

"That is what I mean; they are so extraordinarily intelligent," replied Gray, declining to be snubbed.

Tre Ponti was keeping the festa with much gayety; the streets were full of strolling figures; the benches in front of all the cafés were full. This little wayside hostelry beyond the gate now began to receive its share; four men coming to town from a distant podere stopped here to refresh themselves with wine and chunks of the dark Italian bread. Then came a procession of youths returning from an expedition up the valley. They wore branches of blossoms in their hats, and kept step as they marched. More wine was brought out, and they all drank.

A party of women now appeared, coming through the gateway from the town; one of them had a baby in her arms, and another was carrying a heavy boy of three, whose head, adorned with a red cap, lay sleepily on her shoulder. Set in the wall outside of this gateway there is a large shrine shielded by a grating. It bears an inscription in Italian—"Erected in token of mercies felt on this spot."

There is a low marble step outside of the grating, and the woman who had the older child knelt down here for a moment, and made the child kneel by her side; taking some flowers from the knot at her belt, she showed him how to throw them through the grating as far as he could, as an offering to the Madonna within. The boy obeyed her; and then she gently bent his head forward with her hand as salutation. The other women knelt also, after this one had risen; but they did it perfunctorily; they bobbed down and bobbed up again, crossing themselves, the whole process taking about two seconds.

"The one carrying the red-capped boy is your waitress again," said Gray, as the women, their devotions over, drew nearer on their way to the bridge. "What is she doing down here?"

"It's her home; she is a Tre Ponti girl —was born here; and her family live here still. She herself much prefers the town to the country; she shares to the full the ideas which Browning expressed in 'Up in a Villa, Down in the City.'"

Modesta had now discovered them, and paused, while the women who were with her gave such a general greeting to "lordships" that it seemed to Gray that he beheld several yards of white teeth, surmounted by rows of dark eyes whose depths held a sweetness which no Northern orbs could ever contain.

"I accompany for a short distance my friend Paola," explained the waitress, "Paola being tired, and having already the baby to carry. This, the one I have, is her Angelo—as the master can perceive for himself, an angel indeed—though his little ankles are not strong. But—what would they have? That requires patience; it will improve. The masters would like without doubt to see also the baby? A miracle of beauty!" And giving the older child to one of her companions, she took the swaddled infant from its mother, and brought it to Dennison and his friend, a smile of pure enthusiasm irradiating her face. "His cheeks—do the masters behold them? And his eyes like stars? Lordships can note the quality of his arms."

Gray lightly pinched the dimpled roll of fat extended towards him. "Oui, oui. Grandeena!" he said, emphatically.

Modesta appeared to be charmed with this attention; she thanked him warmly. Then she carried the baby back to its mother, kissing it before she gave it up, and taking the other child, led the way down the hill, the whole party making fresh obeisances before they turned away.

"What frank, pleasant faces they all have!" said Gray.

"Very frank. They never changed a muscle when, as a token of your admiration of the baby, you told them that it was hailing."

"Hailing? What are you talking about? I said the baby's arm was big."

"Grandina happens to mean 'it is hailing'; that's all."

"It couldn't; it wouldn't be such a fool! Are we going to stay here all night? It's awfully dusty."

For the open space outside of the gate was now filled with loungers, and the café of Garibaldi was crowded both inside and out; the two Americans left their bench and strolled down the hill. When they reached the bridge they stopped to watch the water. As they did so they heard music; down the gorge beside the stream came a party of girls, two and two, with linked arms; they were singing all together something slow and sweet, and as they passed under the bridge each gave a glance upward towards the two gentlemen who were leaning over the parapet to look at them.

"What are they singing?" asked Gray.

"A hymn to the Virgin, with an endless number of verses; stay here a month, and you'll hear it so often that you'll sing it in your sleep."

"That girl who was last did not look like an Italian," Gray went on, as the musical band disappeared round a bend.

"She isn't; she is a Swede. She was brought here last summer by a queer old English woman, who has lived for ten years, off and on, in that villa just above the second bridge; she had a fancy for servants who could not speak a word of English, and she picked up this girl in Stockholm during one of her journeys—for when she wasn't in Tuscany, she was trotting all over the globe. She died, at the last, suddenly; it was two months ago, and, so far, her heirs in England, distant cousins, I believe, have refused to do anything for this stranded maid. The Swedish consul, however, has taken it up, and I hear that there is prospect of a remittance some time or other—enough to pay her expenses back to Stockholm.

Fortunately for herself, she had learned to speak Italian. And she had made friends in Tre Ponti; she is staying with these friends now, and turning her hand meanwhile to anything that offers in order to support herself until the money comes. Let's go home and have some tea. Dinner will be very late this evening on account of the festa; no hope of its being on the table before nine o'clock."

"Just a minute more," said Gray.

It was no wonder that the man who was unfamiliar with the scene should wish to linger. The sun was sinking out of sight, sending up broad shafts of gold as he disappeared; above the gold a deep rose tint filled the sky. The water of the stream was gilded, and gilded were the bristling turrets of a fourteenth-century monastery, which here crowns a crag where the gorge makes a bend toward the south. Opposite, beyond Casa Colombina, the soaring Tower of the Dove was flushed with pink. And on the eastern side, over their heads, the little stone town with its bastioned walls was colored in bars of salmon and pearl. The close circle of hills, the wider amphitheatre of mountains behind, all of them clothed in the violet mantle which mountains wear in Italy, were tipped with orange. And somehow all these lovely hues seemed to deepen as the chimes of Tre Ponti began to ring the Angelus. The peal of the monastery on the crag soon joined in the anthem, these latter bells flinging themselves far out from their open belfry against the sky, to and fro, to and fro, with an abandon which was in itself a picture. And when the chime stopped, music of another kind took its place, for coming up the road appeared the same band of girls singing their slow hymn; they had left the gorge, and were returning by way of the bridge to Tre Ponti.

They were no longer a small company; a dozen women had joined them, and six or eight youths followed behind. Modesta accompanied the girls, having finished her duties as escort to Paola and her children.

"Here is your waitress coming back," said Gray. "How handsome she looks!"

The arch of the bridge is high, and the ascent which leads to it steep; the two gentlemen were standing in a small projecting half-bastion, which once served, no doubt, as a sentry-box; their figures were therefore inconspicuous from below, and no one saw them. Modesta walked beside one of the girls. Her arms were folded, her hands resting upon them tranquilly; she was clad in a dress of dark blue tint, with a kerchief of cream-colored silk folded over her breast, and in her hair there was a crimson rose; she was singing as she walked, joining in the hymn to the Virgin, and her eyes were slightly raised, fixed dreamily upon the tinted sky. As the group approached the ascent leading to the bridge, a girl at the end of the procession began playfully to push against one of her companions, and the pushing ended in a hoidenish race, the two turning and rushing back down the road, the one who had been attacked in pursuit of the aggressor. The others paused, and stood watching the chase, but without stopping their hymn, which went steadily on, though, as the pursued girl doubled unexpectedly and baffled her pursuer, the mouths of the singers became so widely stretched in their glee that it was impossible for them to pronounce their syllables, and they carried the melody on mechanically, without words and almost in a shriek.

"Modesta is the only one who appears to remember that it is a hymn," remarked Gray.

"Hymn? It's a him of another kind. She probably doesn't know that she is singing at all; much less what. And she doesn't even see those racing tomboys. She only knows one thing, sees one thing, and that is her Goro."

"Goro?"

"Yes; the young fellow she is going to marry. He is just behind her; there at her elbow. You've seen him in our vineyard half a dozen times."

"He appeared dull enough there. To-day he looks very smart. However, he is much too young for her—hardly more than a boy."

The pursued girl had now escaped, and was returning. The pursuer followed, and as they both reached the waiting group she made a last desperate effort, and succeeded in grasping the other again, and so firmly that they both fell to the ground. The hymn now ceased abruptly, drowned in the general laughter as the two girls struggled in the dust. After a moment they rose, shaking their skirts, and joining in the merriment, until suddenly there came from one of them a high yell. Drawing herself away from the others, she stood with her body stiffened

as though it had been turned into wood, and her eyes closed, while she poured forth in a shrill voice a flood of rapid Italian. Her companions meanwhile were so overcome with their laughter as they listened that they rocked to and fro, and clapped their hands on their sides.

"What was she saying?" asked Gray, when at last the piercing voice stopped.

"You wish a sample? She said: 'Brute, thou! Beast, thou! Thou it is who hast done it, pig of a Vanna! For thou puttest me in a fury so that I say evil words. And now what is the use of my Lent? Didn't I drop with fasting? Wasn't I faint? Didn't I do every one of my devotions? And now all lost through *thee*? Serpent! and frog!'"

Modesta had paid no more attention to this raving outburst than she had paid to the race which had preceded it; she had stopped singing when the others stopped, but her eyes still gazed dreamily at the sky. After a moment or two she turned so that her glance could take in Goro, and then she stood tranquilly waiting, her face serene, content.

Presently the little company, its laugh out, began to move on again, coming up the ascent in a straggling band, the girl who had yelled forth her accusations with her body stiffened so strangely accompanying them, her fit of excitement ended. She even tried to frolic in a shamefaced sort of way; she took the flower from her hair, threw it up and caught it, as though it were a ball, humming a tune to herself carelessly. As they reached the bridge the band perceived the two gentlemen in the semi-bastion; all, that is, save Modesta. In her absorption the waitress saw nothing, until the girl who was beside her pulled her sleeve.

"The master, thine," she whispered. "Thy two lordships."

The waitress now came back to actual life. She waited a moment, until the others had passed on. "It is Goro," she said, presenting him. "The masters already know him well."

"Not in his festival clothes," answered Dennison. "He is nothing," he added, banteringly; "not half good enough! I wouldn't have him, Modesta, if I were you."

When Dennison said "he is nothing," Goro answered, "È vero" (It is true), and laughed lightly. He was a tall youth, with curling hair and a joyous smile.

"Eh—he wishes me so much good!" replied Modesta, fondly.

The next morning Gray took a sunrise walk; he had but five days more to spend in Tuscany, and he wished to make every hour tell. When he came back the waitress was in the court occupied in tying a long cord to Hannibal's collar; beside her were two towels and a cake of soap.

"It is Annibale, who goes now for his bath," she explained; "Peppino takes him. A bath is excellent for Annibale."

The dog's spirits were deeply depressed; his elongated little body seemed almost to sweep the ground, owing to the dejected state of his short legs. "It is nothing, thou silly one!" said Modesta, affectionately. "Thou must be washed—that thou knowest. And as the morning is so warm, thou art to go to the pond."

Peppino now came from the kitchen, ready for the expedition; with a salute to their visitor, he took the end of the cord in his hand, and turned down the path which leads to the fields below.

"I'll go too," said Gray. "Ego," he added, tapping his breast violently, to show that he meant himself.

The two servants were charmed with this idea; Modesta said that it would give Hannibal courage to be accompanied by the gentleman, and Peppino added that it was "too much honor." The cook was very tall, with the countenance of a seer; in his spotless white linen jacket, his long white apron, and white linen cap, his appearance, with his dark eyes and thick gray hair, was striking. He was suspected of belonging to a secret society of nihilistic principles. But his nihilism must have applied only to mankind, for he went down the hill as slowly as he could, in order that Hannibal's neck should not be hurt by undue pressure from his collar. For the dog was following at the extreme length of his cord, dragging back obstinately with all his might, and digging his crooked little paws as deeply into the sand as he possibly could with each reluctant step; as Peppino was six feet in height, and Hannibal ten inches, the spectacle was amusing. At the foot of the hill the glitter of the pond became visible, and Hannibal's resistance grew so desperate that Peppino went back and picked him up, carrying him onward in his arms as though he had been a baby. "Most surely he must not be permitted to stran-

gle himself," he explained to Gray, in his serious voice. The valley fields belonging to Casa Colombina are six in number; five are for grain and one for vegetables, and all are bordered by rows of fruit trees, with grape-vines trained to swing from trunk to trunk. These fields are watered by artificial rivulets, which are fed from the pond. And the pond is in reality a reservoir for the water of a spring above. They passed the spring first. It is covered by a roof which extends some distance beyond it, supported by pillars of brick; the ground beneath is paved with flag-stones, and here were assembled a collection of the large tubs, of red earthen-ware, in shape and hue like mammoth flower-pots, which the Tuscan peasants use for washing clothes. Above the spring, fastened to one of the pillars, was a china image of St. Agnes, and beneath the image there was a hanging lamp with one wick, its tiny flame like a pale yellow point in the brilliant morning light.

"Modesta?" said Gray, indicating the lamp as they passed.

The cook nodded affirmatively.

"She is foolishly superstitious," he said. "But women—!" A shrug completed the sentence.

The pool was square, paved within, and bordered by a low stone parapet; the water was not quite a foot deep. Peppino soaped Hannibal carefully until he was a mass of white lather; then he placed him gently in the pool, and kept him from returning to the shore by the aid of a long branch. "Walk about, then; walk! Agitate thyself," he said, pressing him softly with the twigs. Hannibal walked as little as he possibly could; his indignation was plainly visible even in the tip of his nose, which was the only part of him above the water. When he was judged to be sufficiently laved the branch was withdrawn, and as he leaped out the cook caught him and dried him with a towel. Another towel was then folded closely round him and fastened with long tapes, leaving only his head and paws and tail free. "Now must thou run back, so as not to take cold," said Peppino, putting on the collar and readjusting the cord. And then the procession returned, the swathed Hannibal this time as far in advance as the cord would permit, and pulling up the hill like a miniature steam-engine. "He is anxious to get back to Modesta," said Gray.

The cook comprehended. "It is true. She spoils him with her indulgence; it is a melancholy weakness in her character," he replied, as with his disengaged hand he took his red handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face, which was heavily bedewed with drops of perspiration, owing to his exertions at the pond.

As they reached the level ground behind the house the cat could be seen audaciously reposing in Hannibal's basket, which had been set outside to air. The dachshund barked angrily; the cook did not set him free, but hurried forward himself to eject the intruder; and as he did so, in some way his foot slipped, and he came down full length on the grass with a thud. And then Modesta, who had appeared at the kitchen door, began to call out in excitement: "He laughs; behold him! Annibale *laughs!*" And, in truth, the dog had that look as, with his mouth set in a broad grin, his tongue hanging out a little, his tail wagging, and his eyes brilliant with glee, he surveyed his prostrate companion. Modesta ran and took him up. "Didst thou laugh, little one? Like a human creature? And, indeed, thou art one; 'tis a man thou art!" Peppino, as soon as he was on his feet again, was almost as much interested as she was; between them they took off the towel, and dried him anew with a fresh one, watching him tenderly meanwhile with bated breath, as though they were expecting every instant to hear him speak.

The last day of Gray's visit came. As they sat at the breakfast table, his host said: "There's a powwow to-night, to celebrate something or other, at one of the poderes about a mile from here. Modesta is going if I give her permission. If I do, she won't be back until after midnight, and the table service at dinner will therefore be at sixes and sevens. As the day is so fine, we might take it for a drive to that tower on the mountain—the one which is adorned, according to *you*, with a winding outside stairway!"

"There certainly is a stairway," persisted Gray.

"And then we could get something in the way of a dinner at a little summer hotel, which is already open for the season. There is a moon for the drive back, and we could stop and have a look at the powwow before coming home—as you're so athirst for everything Tuscan."

"Excellent," said Gray.

It was three o'clock when they started, and a beautiful May afternoon. A pair of horses and the rattling phaeton had been sent to Casa Colombina from Tre Ponti. Modesta had already departed.

"The celebration begins early," said Gray, as he saw her start.

"She isn't going there now," answered Dennison. "She will go first to the house of Goro's mother, about half a mile from here; there she will sit braiding straw and gossiping with the old woman in a dark cellarlike room until the beloved object comes home and is ready to accompany her. I dare say she is taking him something with which to make himself smart for the occasion—a new necktie or a silk handkerchief."

As they passed out on their way to the carriage they caught a glimpse of the distant white figure of the cook seated with his back towards them outside of his kitchen door in the shade, occupying his leisure in playing the flute; his notes, which just reached them, were soft and long-drawn as sighs.

"What is it?" said Gray, listening. "I'm sure I know it."

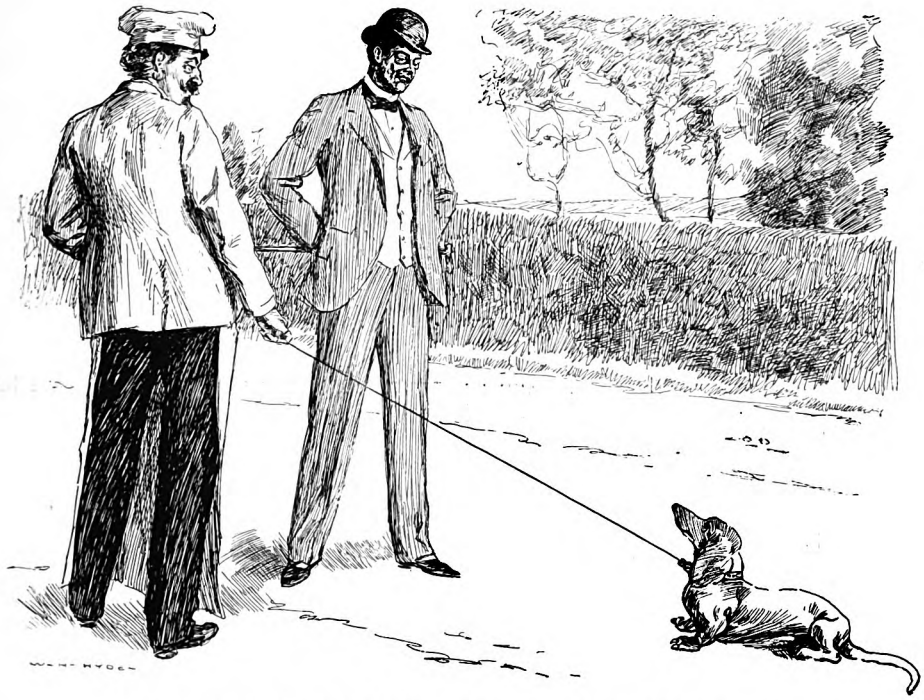
"'Com' è gentil'; that is, 'O summer-night.' Peppino is very sentimental in his musical tastes."

"He doesn't go to the party, then?"

"He despises parties. He goes in for bombs."

It was between eight and nine o'clock in the evening when, on their return from the drive, Dennison checked his horses in a hedge-bordered lane, and stopped. (It may be mentioned that they did not reach the tower; no one—that is, no stranger—has ever reached it. Italians are indifferent to its mystery.) "This is the place," he said. "The house is a quarter of a mile from here, and I could have taken you nearer by keeping to the main road; but in that case they might have heard the sound of our wheels. I haven't let any one know we were coming, so that you can have a glimpse of the scene as it really is, and not tamed by the presence of strangers." He tied the horses to the hedge, and climbing over a stone wall, led the way across a broad field, freshly ploughed. On the other side of this field the ground ascended, and the slope was covered by an olive grove. The sparse gray foliage of the pruned trees cast hardly more than a lace-work of shade upon the moonlit ground, and the two men made their way upward easily; in ten minutes they had reached the top. Here, on a broad plateau, stood the farm-house with its outbuildings. Beyond the plateau the ground ascended again, decked by another grove. The door and windows of the house were open, and sounds of laughter came forth. The two Americans drew near cautiously, walking as quietly as they could in the shadow of the trees. But their care was unnecessary; all were assembled within, and no one was looking either from the door or the windows; the noise, too, was so great that no sound outside could have been heard even by a listening ear. Dennison, making a detour, led the way round to one of the back casements. This window, a small one, was breast-high; its little lattices of lead-bordered panes had been thrown back; they opened into the room, as the exterior of the window was guarded by iron rods set close together. The two spectators outside, by looking between these rods, obtained a view of the scene within. The room was large, low, and smoke-browned; it was lighted by all the lamps the house could muster—lamps of the old Tuscan pattern for olive-oil; there were also earthen-ware saucers filled with the same oil, and carrying a floating wick. Two candles illumined a supper table which was placed across one end of the apartment. This table bore upon its white linen cloth the dishes of the feast—dishes and little else, as everything had been eaten save bread, of which there was still a supply (in case any one should feel a return of hunger). There were also fresh flasks of wine for future thirst, and over a handful of coals on the hearth there was a long-handled coffee-pot. A game was now going on, or rather a pantomime; two men in masks were jumping about like harlequins, and every now and then they seized a person from the ranks of spectators, and whirled him or her round and round dizzily; there was guessing connected with it in some way, as everybody called out names loudly; the uproar was incessant, with occasional applause and a great deal of laughter. The feet of the harlequins had raised much dust, and at last the room became dim. "More light, more light, Filippo. We can't see," called several voices.

Filippo, a sinewy little man who had



"THE DOG WAS FOLLOWING AT THE EXTREME LENGTH OF HIS CORD."

been acting as harlequin himself (for the men took turns), consulted with his wife. They had no more candles, and no more saucers and wicks; but they could make a blaze of brushwood on the hearth, if the company would not mind the additional heat? The wife, a laughing ample matron who still showed a handsome face above her rotund person, opened a door into an out-building, and after some rummaging produced three fagots of small dry twigs; one of these she placed over the coals, and in a minute or two a blaze leaped up the wide chimney, lighting the room brilliantly. The game now went on with redoubled vigor and glee, and the gazers without could see all the faces of the circle distinctly.

"There is Modesta by the table," whispered Gray. "How she does laugh! It doesn't seem natural."

"Oh yes, it is. That is the way they laugh sometimes; they can go on for hours like children."

"Isn't that the Swedish girl with one of the harlequins? How light-colored she looks in that tanned, black-haired crowd! She is rather pretty; instead of letting her go back to Stockholm, one of these Italian youths had better marry her."

"She probably holds herself above them," answered Dennison, in the same low tone. "But, in any case, Tuscan peasants are extremely slow to marry a person who is not a Tuscan. They call even Romans foreigners; generally, too, they call them brutes! Well, we've been here twenty minutes: had enough?"

They turned, and making a second circuit of the house, they crossed the plateau noiselessly and re-entered the grove. They had gone but a few paces down the slope when the distant voices and laughter suddenly grew louder; looking back they saw that the whole company had come outside, following the harlequins, each one of whom held a girl by the elbows, and was whirling her over the grass in the brilliant moonlight. Presently four more couples began to whirl in the same manner, and all the others, inspired by the sight, joined hands, and made a long chain which moved to and fro with rhythmical steps, forming now a star, now a square, now a figure 8. The game was at an end; everybody was dancing. One of the har-

lequins changed his partner every few minutes, but the other did not loosen his grasp of the girl whom he had brought with him from the house. After a while this second harlequin moved away from the other dancers, and came waltzing across the plateau towards the grove where Dennison and Gray were standing, each hidden in the shadow of a tree trunk; at the top of the slope the man did not stop, but began to descend, still dancing, or pretending to dance, and pulling his unwilling partner with him.

At this instant a woman detached herself from the distant groups of revellers and rushed towards the grove. And as she came on, her figure was such a vision of swiftness of motion and of intensity of purpose that Gray unconsciously held his breath as he watched her. The plateau was broad; she was a full minute in crossing it. As she drew near the grove she lifted her head a little, and the moonlight, which had been behind her, fell across her forehead; then he saw that it was Modesta.

The harlequin also had recognized her, for, suddenly ceasing his gyrations, he released his companion, and ran off in the opposite direction, bounding as he went, in accordance with his assumed character, and joining the chain of dancers near the house with a high leap which gained for him their loud applause. Meanwhile his partner, freed at last, stood still for an instant, with her eyes closed, dizzy from the whirling.

It was during this instant that Modesta reached her; coming down the slope with all the gathered impetus of her tremendous speed, she swooped upon the girl, bore her to the ground, struck her across the cheek, and then, holding her down with one hand, she fumbled in her own pocket with the other.

Dennison meanwhile, as soon as he had recognized his waitress at the top of the descent (he had not distinguished who it was before, his eyesight not being so keen as Gray's), had left his tree, and darting across the intervening space, he now caught her arm tightly, while her hand was still in her pocket. Gray hurried to his aid, and seized her other wrist, dragging her fingers away from the girl on the ground; thus holding her between them, they pulled her to her feet. As they did so, her right hand came out of her pocket. It held a murderous-looking knife.

"You devil," said Dennison, in Italian, "drop that knife!"

They held her so closely that she could not move, but her face glared at them in the moonlight. It was like nothing human; her head was thrust out, the eyes were narrowed and glittering, the nostrils flattened, and the lips drawn up and back from the set fierce teeth. Their four figures—three standing, one on the ground—were below the slope, and no one saw them. There had been no sound from the prostrate girl, who had lost consciousness from fright, paralyzed by the terrible countenance of the woman who had attacked her; and the waitress herself had made no sound as she came. She made no sound now, save that she panted as she breathed; she was like a wild beast who has made one spring and is about to make another.

"Drop the knife, or you shall go to prison," said Dennison, sternly, his hands on her shoulder like a vise.

Her fingers did not move.

"Listen. If you don't drop it, I swear to you I'll send Goro to America by the next Leghorn steamer, with five hundred lire in his pocket."

The knife dropped.

"Pick it up," said Dennison to Gray, in English. "Now see if you can lift that girl and carry her down the hill. Get her across the field somehow to that stone wall where we climbed over; wait there for me—unless she should come to on the way, in which case perhaps she will be able to climb over the wall herself. If she does, wait there with her by the phaeton. I sha'n't be long. But I must take this she-wolf back to the house first."

Gray had bent down. He lifted the inert body at their feet, raising it a little, and as he did so the head fell back, and the moonlight, shining on the hair and temples, showed that it was the Swede. Modesta, as she too saw the face, made a spring at it. But Dennison jerked her back. Then, with a snarling sound in her throat, she twisted her head round and bit savagely at his hand where it held her shoulder.

"Do hurry. She is perfectly insane," he said to Gray.

Gray, having got the Swede off the ground, put his left arm under her back at the shoulders, and his right under her knees, and lifting her in this position, he carried her down the hill with as much

speed as was possible. This was not great, because the ground was uneven, and as he could not see where to place his steps, he was obliged to feel his way with his feet as he advanced—to shuffle along cautiously. In time, however, he reached the bottom of the hill. Then slowly he began to cross the field. This, too, was difficult, owing to the soft, crumbling earth of the freshly ploughed furrows. But here at last the girl opened her eyes.

"Can you stand?" asked Gray, breathlessly. Then he thought, with irritation, "None of them can speak *anything*."

But the Swede now made of her own accord the motion of trying to get to her feet, and gladly enough he let her slip down and stand on the ground, as his arms were aching. He still supported her, however, lest she should fall.

But the girl seemed to be more terrified than weak; the instant her feet touched the earth she began to run towards the stone boundary wall, looking back every half-minute to see that no one was following. He went with her, trying to help her over the furrows; and as they hurried onward side by side, her face was such a picture of deathly fear that the feeling took possession of him also; he found himself regretting that their figures were so plainly visible on the moonlit expanse, and he too looked nervously over his shoulder, as though he expected to see the Italian woman coming after them madly, with her glittering eyes and the shining knife.

They reached the wall, and climbed over into the road outside, the Swede needing no help, but quicker in her movements than he was. In the road he tried to stop her. But she pulled herself from him. Still holding her, he showed her the horses tied in the shadow of the hedge. This she comprehended. She waited, therefore; but she kept herself several yards away from him, so that he should not stop her in case she should again wish to flee. She was a slender young creature, and she stood there much as a bird poises itself on a twig; not resting, not bearing its full weight, but perched provisionally, as it were, ready to fly away again in an instant.

Gray, who had now recovered his composure, tried to soothe her. With his most encouraging inflections he repeated: "All safe now. *All-ll* safe! Stay right here with me."

She paid not the least attention to him. Her eyes continued their strained watch of the lower trees of the grove. At length a man's figure emerged from these trees, and the girl gave a muffled scream. But Gray had caught hold of her arm; pointing to the horses, and then to Dennison, he said, gesticulating energetically: "Horses are *his*. Dennison's. *My* friend. *Your* friend. (Oh, what *is* 'friend'?) Amicus! Don't you see he's alone? Nobody with him? Solo? Sola?"

And the girl could indeed see for herself that the person approaching was alone. She had understood the fact that the horses belonged to this person, and her hope was in the horses; they could take her away—away from here!

As soon as Dennison was near enough, he began speaking in Italian, and he continued to talk to her as he climbed over the wall, calming her, explaining and arranging. Then he turned the phaeton, and they all took their places within, the Swede sitting between the two men on the broad seat. Dennison drove down the lane, still talking encouragingly. When they reached the main road, he took a direction which led them away from Casa Colombina and Tre Ponti. "We're in for it!" he said, in English, to Gray. "I shall take her to the nearest railway station—not the one you know, but another—and pack her off to Florence; there her consul can see to her. I have explained it to her clearly. She is glad enough to go."

"What was it all about, anyhow?"

"Didn't you comprehend? That harlequin (I'll mention no names, and then she won't be startled) was no less a person than the lover of your Madonna beauty—the youth she expects to marry. During the game he was flirting, or trying to flirt after his fashion, with our present companion. This was too much for the older woman. Hence the knife."

"Which I have in my pocket, by-the-bye."

"Don't take it out now; you can throw it away after we have disposed of our Scandinavian. I suppose she has never before seen such a thing as a brandished weapon of that sort. It's a knife used by the peasants about here to cut hides with; your Madonna probably took it from among Filippo's tools somehow while the festivities were going on. She must have been jealous even then."

"I told you that her laugh wasn't natural. 'Twas an awful sight, though! She would certainly have murdered the girl if we hadn't happened to be standing just where we were."

"Very likely," answered Dennison. "Tchk, tchk," he added to the horses.

"I hope she is safely locked up by this time?"

"Locked up? She is probably dancing with her harlequin."

"You don't mean to say that you let her go?"

"Quite so. She is all right now; she has come back to her senses. I had six words with the youth, however; he'll treat her better—for the present at least; I have frightened him."

"What did you mean when you said you'd send him away?"

"That was what brought her round. He has had a hankering for a long time to emigrate to—to the land of the free; he would go in a minute if his passage were paid and he had a hundred dollars in his pocket—go and never think of her again; she knows this. But the land of the free doesn't want him—he is incorrigibly lazy; and his departure would end her as far as I am concerned; make her perfectly useless."

"Good heavens! you're not going to take that murderess back?"

"I can't take her back without sending her away first. And that I haven't done," answered Dennison.

"But won't she be arrested, in any case? Every one will know that she attacked this girl, and that the girl has fled."

"No one knows that she attacked her. And even if it is guessed, Tuscan peasants are not so easily alarmed as you suppose; they understand each other. As to the disappearance of this one, *I* shall explain it by saying that I decided to advance the money to send her as far as Florence, instead of making her wait for the remittance which is expected from the consul; it is known that she was to go before long, in any case. It will cost me something, but I like peace and quietness. The other woman is perfect as a servant, and, the cause of her jealousy removed, she will continue perfect."

"Brrrr!" said Gray, uttering the sound that accompanies a shudder.

The Swede recognized the meaning of this; she looked at him quickly with parted lips and her hand extended. She was ready to spring from the phaeton.

"Do be quiet!" said Dennison. Then he spoke to the girl in Italian, quieting her dread.

They reached the station in safety, and soon after sunrise the Northerner, her breath still hurried, her hands cold, was placed in the care of the official who had charge of the Florence train. Dennison gave her his white silk handkerchief to tie over her uncovered head. The daylight had revealed the discolored lines of the bruise on her cheek produced by Modesta's blow. "Poor thing!" said Gray, as the train started, and they had a last glimpse of her frightened eyes at the window.

"Yes; but she will get over it in time; she is strong and healthy. I have telegraphed to the consul at Florence to meet her, and take every care of her; he is to give her money from me, and then he is to send her to Stockholm, comfortably, in the charge of a suitable person. When she arrives there she will find a tidy little sum to her credit at a banker's."

"You're paying well for her scare."

"I'm paying well for my comfort."

They took fresh horses and returned to Casa Colombina.

As the Tower of the Dove came into sight on its hill, Gray said: "She won't be there, will she?—I mean at the house?"

"Oh yes."

"What will she do when she sees us?"

"She will bring in the breakfast just as she brings it every morning, and Hannibal and the cats will follow behind. Perhaps she will talk rather more than usual; if she does, it will be on the most agreeable topics, and her smile (which you admire so much) will be sweeter than ever; her hair will be braided to perfection, and, what is more important, her work will be done to perfection. We shall pretend, both of us, she and I, that we don't see the mark of the bite on my hand. Shall I go on? In a week or two, probably, she will marry her Goro, and then he will be so constantly under my feet that I shall end by installing him as my gardener for life. He will do no work of importance; but, owing to his presence, *I* shall continue to enjoy the services of a waitress whom you yourself have described as a regular marvel."

It may be added that this prophecy has been exactly fulfilled.