



The Cenci

Stendhal

(Translator: C K Scott Moncrieff)

Published: 1839

Categorie(s): Fiction, Short Stories

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About Stendhal:

Marie-Henri Beyle (January 23, 1783 – March 23, 1842), better known by his penname Stendhal, was a 19th century French writer. Known for his acute analysis of his characters' psychology, he is considered one of the earliest and foremost practitioners of the realism in his two novels *Le Rouge et le Noir* (The Red and the Black, 1830) and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (The Charterhouse of Parma, 1839). Source: Wikipedia

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The Don Juan of Molière is, unquestionably, a rake, but first and foremost he is a man of the world; before giving way to the irresistible inclination that attracts him to pretty women, he feels that he must conform to a certain ideal standard, he seeks to be the type of man that would be most admired at the court of a young king of gallantry and parts.

The Don Juan of Mozart is already more true to nature, and less French, he thinks less of *what other people will say*; his first care is not for appearances, is not *parestre*, to quote d'Aubigné's *Baron de Foëneste*. We have but two portraits of the Italian Don Juan, as he must have appeared, in that fair land, in the sixteenth century, in the dawn of the new civilisation.

Of these two portraits, there is one which I simply cannot display, our generation is too straitlaced; one has to remind oneself of that great expression which I used often to hear Lord Byron repeat: "This age of cant." This tiresome form of hypocrisy, which takes in no one, has the great advantage of giving fools something to say: they express their horror that people have ventured to mention this, or to laugh at that, etc. Its disadvantage is that it vastly restricts the field of history.

If the reader has the good taste to allow me, I intend to offer him, in all humility, an historical notice of the second of these Don Juans, of whom it is possible to speak in 1837; his name was Francesco Cenci.

To render a Don Juan possible, there must be hypocrisy in society. A Don Juan would have been an effect without a cause in the ancient world; religion was a matter for rejoicing, it urged men to take their pleasure; how could it have punished people who make a certain pleasure their whole business in life? The government alone spoke of *abstinence*, it forbade things that might harm the state, that is to say the common interest of all, and not what might harm the individual actor.

And so any man with a taste for women and plenty of money could be a Don Juan in Athens; no one would have made any objection; no one professed that this life is a vale of tears and that there is merit in inflicting suffering on oneself.

I do not think that the Athenian Don Juan could arrive at the criminal stage as rapidly as the Don Juan of a modern monarchy; a great part of the latter's pleasure consists in challenging public opinion, and he has made a start, in his youth, by imagining that he was only challenging hypocrisy.

To break the laws under a monarchy like that of Louis XV, to fire a shot at a slater and bring him crashing down from his roof, does not that prove that one moves in royal circles, has the best possible tone, and

laughs at one's judge, who is a *bourgeois*? To laugh at the judge, is not that the first exploit of every little incipient Don Juan?

With us, women are no longer in fashion, that is why the Don Juan type is rare; but when it existed, such men invariably began by seeking quite natural pleasures, boasting the while of their courage in challenging ideas which seemed to them not to be founded on reason in the religion of their contemporaries. It is only later on, and when he is beginning to become perverted that your Don Juan finds an exquisite pleasure in challenging opinions which he himself feels to be just and rational.

This transition must have been difficult and rare in ancient times, and it is only when we come to the Roman Emperors, after Tiberius and Capri, that we find libertines who love corruption for its own sake, that is to say for the pleasure of challenging the rational opinions of their contemporaries.

Thus it is to the Christian religion that I ascribe the possibility of the Satanic part played by Don Juan. It was this religion, doubtless, which taught the world that a poor slave, a gladiator had a soul absolutely equal in capacity to that of Cassar himself; we have, therefore, to thank it for having produced a delicacy of feeling. Not that I have any doubt that sooner or later such feelings would have grown up spontaneously in the human breast. The *Aeneid* is considerably more *tender* than the *Iliad*.

The theory held by Jesus was that of the Arab philosophers of His day; the only new thing introduced into the world as a result of the principles preached by Saint Paul is a body of priests absolutely set apart from their fellow citizens and having, indeed, diametrically opposite interests to theirs. [Footnote: See Montesquieu, *Politique des Romains dans la religion*.]

This body made it its sole business to cultivate and strengthen the *religious sense*; it invented privileges and habits to stir the hearts of all classes, from the uncultured shepherd to the jaded courtier; it contrived to stamp the memory of itself on the charming impressions of early childhood; it never allowed the slightest pestilence or general calamity to pass without profiting by it to intensify the dread and *sense of religion*, or at any rate to build a fine church, like the Salute at Venice.

The existence of this body produced that admirable spectacle: Pope Saint Leo resisting without *physical force* the savage Attila and his hordes of barbarians who had just overrun China, Persia and the Gauls.

And so, religion, like that absolute power tempered by popular songs, which we call the French Monarchy, has produced certain singular things which the world might never, perhaps, have seen had it been deprived of those two institutions.

Among these several things, good or bad but all alike singular and curious, which would indeed have astonished Aristotle, Polybius, Augustus, and the other wise heads of antiquity, I have no hesitation in including the wholly modern character of Don Juan. He is, to my mind, a product of the *ascetic institutions* of the Popes that came after Luther; for Leo X and his court (1506) followed more or less closely the religious principles of the Athenians.

Molière's Don Juan was performed early in the reign of Louis XIV, on the 15th of February, 1665; that monarch was not as yet devout, nevertheless the ecclesiastical censure ordered the scene of the *beggar in the forest* to be omitted. These censors, to strengthen their position, tried to persuade the young king, so prodigiously ignorant, that the word Jansenist was synonymous with Republican. [Footnote: Saint-Simon, *Mémoires de l'abbé Blache*.]

The original is by a Spaniard, Tirso de Molina; [Footnote: This was the name adopted by a monk, a man of parts, Fray Gabriel Tellez. He belonged to the Order of Mercy, and we have several plays by him in which there are inspired passages, among others *El Timido a la Corte*. Tellez was the author of three hundred comedies, some seventy or eighty of which still survive. He died about 1610.] an Italian company played an imitation of it in Paris about the year 1664, and created a furore. It has probably been acted more often than any other comedy in the world. This is because it contains the devil and love, the fear of hell and an exalted passion for a woman, that is to say the most terrible and the most attractive things that exist in the eyes of all men who have to any degree risen above the level of savagery.

It is not surprising that the portrait of Don Juan was introduced into literature by a Spanish poet. Love fills a large place in the life of that nation; it is a serious passion there, and one that compels the sacrifice of every other passion to itself, including that, incredible as it may seem, of *vanity*! It is the same in Germany and in Italy. Properly speaking, France is the only country completely free from this passion, which makes these foreigners commit so many acts of folly: such as marrying a penniless girl, making the excuse that she is pretty and you are in love with her. Girls who lack beauty do not lack admirers in France; we are a cautious people. Otherwise they are reduced to entering religion, and that is why convents are indispensable in Spain. Girls have no dowry in that country, and this rule has maintained the triumph of love. In France has not love fled to the attics, taken refuge, that is, among the girls who do not marry by the intervention of the family lawyer?

Nothing need be said of the Don Juan of Lord Byron, he is merely a Faublas, a good looking but insignificant young man, upon whom all sorts of improbable good fortune are heaped.

So it is in Italy alone, and there only in the sixteenth century that this singular character could make his first appearance. It was in Italy and in the seventeenth century that a Princess said, as she sipped an ice with keen enjoyment on the evening of a hot day: "*What a pity, this is not a sin!*"

This sentiment forms, in my opinion, the foundation of the character of a Don Juan, and, as we see, the Christian religion is necessary to it.

As to which a Neapolitan writer exclaims: "Is it nothing to defy heaven, and to believe that at that very instant heaven may consume one to ashes? Hence, it is said, the intense pleasure of having a nun for one's mistress, and a nun full of piety, who knows quite well that she is doing wrong, and asks pardon of God with passion, as she sins with passion." [Footnote: Don Domenico Paglietta.]

Let us take the case of a Christian extremely perverse, born in Rome at the moment when the stern Pius V had just restored to favour or invented a mass of trifling practices absolutely alien to that simple morality which gives the name of virtue only to *what is of use to mankind*. An inexorable Inquisition, so inexorable indeed that it lasted but a short time in Italy, and was obliged to take refuge in Spain, had been given fresh powers, [Footnote: Saint Pius V (Ghislieri), a Piedmontese, whose thin, stern face is to be seen on the tomb of Sixtus V in Santa Maria Maggiore, was *Grand Inquisitor* when he was called to the throne of Saint Peter, in 1586. He governed the Church for six years and twenty-four days. The reader should refer to his letters, edited by M. de Potter, the only man of our time with any knowledge of this detail of history. The work of M. de Potter, an inexhaustible mine of facts, is the fruit of fourteen years of conscientious research in the libraries of Florence, Venice and Rome.] and was inspiring terror in all. For some years, the severest penalties were attached to the non-observance or public disparagement of these minute little practices, raised to the rank of the most sacred duties of religion; the perverse Roman of whom we have spoken would have shrugged his shoulders when he saw the whole of his fellow citizens trembling before the terrible laws of the Inquisition.

"Very good!" we can imagine him saying to himself, "I am the richest man in Rome, this capital of the world; I am going to be the most courageous man also; I shall publicly deride everything that these people respect, and that bears so little resemblance to what people ought to respect."

For a Don Juan, to be true to his type, must be a man of feeling, and be endowed with that quick and keen mind which gives one a clear insight into the motives of human actions.

Francesco Cenci must have said to himself: "By what speaking actions can I, a Roman, born in Rome in the year 1527, during those six months in which the Lutheran troops of the Connétable de Bourbon were committing the most appalling profanations in the holy places; by what actions can I call attention to my own courage and give myself, as fully as possible, the pleasure of defying public opinion? How am I to astonish my foolish contemporaries? How can I give myself that keenest of pleasures, of feeling myself to be different from all that vulgar rabble?"

It could never have entered the head of a Roman, and of a Roman of those days to stop short at words. There is no country in which brave words are more despised than Italy.

The man who might have conversed thus with himself was called Francesco Cenci: he was killed before the eyes of his wife and daughter on the 15th of September, 1598. No pleasant memories remain to us of this Don Juan, his character was in no way softened and *modified*, like that of Molière's Don Juan, by the idea of being, first and foremost, a man of the world. He paid no heed to the rest of mankind except by shewing his superiority to them, making use of them in carrying out his plans, or hating them. For your Don Juan finds no pleasure in sympathy, in sweet musings or in the illusions of a tender heart. He requires, above all, pleasures which shall be triumphs, which can be seen by others, and *cannot be denied*; he requires the list flaunted by the insolent Leporello before the sorrowful eyes of Elvira.

The Roman Don Juan took good care to avoid the signal folly of giving the key to his character and confiding his secrets to a lackey, like the Don Juan of Molière; he lived without a confidant, and uttered no words save those that would be useful in the *advancement of his projects*. No one ever surprised him in one of those moments of true tenderness and charming gaiety which make us forgive the Don Juan of Mozart; in short, the portrait which I am about to reproduce is appalling.

Had I been free to choose, I should not have written of this character, I should have confined myself to studying it, for it is more horrible than strange; but I must explain that it was demanded of me by travelling companions to whom I could refuse nothing. In 1823 I had the pleasure of visiting Italy with certain charming people, whom I shall never forget; like them, I was captivated by the portrait of Beatrice Cenci which is to be seen in Rome, at the palazzo Barberini.

The gallery of that palazzo is now reduced to seven or eight pictures; but of these four are masterpieces: there is first of all the portrait of the famous *Fornarina*, Raphael's mistress, by Raphael himself. This portrait, of the authenticity of which no doubt can be entertained, for we find copies of it made at the time, differs entirely from the figure which, in the gallery at Florence, is described as that of Raphael's mistress, and has been engraved, with that title, by Morghen. The Florence portrait is not even by Raphael. In deference to that great name, will the reader kindly pardon this little digression?

The second priceless portrait in the Barberini gallery is by Guido; it is the portrait of Beatrice Cenci, of which one sees so many bad engravings. That great painter has placed a meaningless piece of drapery over Beatrice's throat: he has crowned her with a turban; he would have been afraid of carrying accuracy to the pitch of horror had he reproduced exactly the toilet that she made before appearing at the place of execution, and the dishevelled hair of a poor girl of sixteen, abandoned to the wildest despair. The face has sweetness and beauty, the expression is most appealing and the eyes very large: they have the startled air of a person who has just been caught in the act of shedding large tears. The hair is golden and of great beauty. This head has nothing of the Roman pride and consciousness of its own strength which one often detects in the assured glance of a daughter of the Tiber, *una figlia del Tevere*, as they say of themselves with pride. Unfortunately the flesh tints of this portrait have turned to brick red during the long interval of two hundred and thirty-eight years which separates us from the catastrophe of which you are about to read.

The third portrait in the Barberini gallery is that of Lucrezia Petroni, Beatrice's stepmother, who was executed with her. She is the type of the Roman matron in her natural beauty and pride. [Footnote: This pride is not in the least dependent on social *rank*, as in portraits by Vandyck.] The features are large and the flesh of a dazzling whiteness, the eyebrows are black and strongly marked, the gaze commanding and at the same time sensuous. She makes a fine contrast with so sweet, so simple a face, almost a German face, as that of her stepdaughter.

The fourth portrait, rendered striking by the accuracy and brightness of its colouring, is one of the masterpieces of Titian; it is that of a Greek slave who was the mistress of the famous Doge Barbarigo.

Almost invariably, foreigners coming to Rome ask to be taken, at the outset of their tour of inspection, to the Barberini gallery; they are attracted, the women especially, by the portraits of Beatrice Cenci and her

stepmother. I had my share of the general curiosity; then, like everyone else, I sought to obtain access to the reports of the famous trial. If you are similarly privileged, you will be quite surprised, I expect, as you peruse these documents, which are all in Latin except the replies made by the accused persons, to find almost no indication of the facts of the case. The reason is that in Rome, in 1599, there was no one who was not acquainted with the facts. I purchased the right to transcribe a contemporary account; I felt that it would be possible to give a translation of it without shocking any sensibility; anyhow this translation could be read aloud before ladies in 1823. It must be understood that the translator ceases to be faithful to his original when he can no longer be so: otherwise the sense of horror would soon outweigh that of curiosity.

The tragic part played by a Don Juan (one who seeks to conform to no ideal standard, and considers public opinion only with a view to outraging it) is here set forth in all its horror. The enormity of his crimes forces two unhappy women to have him killed before their eyes; of these two women one was his wife and the other his daughter, and the reader will not dare to make up his mind as to whether they were guilty. Their contemporaries were of the opinion that they ought not to have been put to death.

I am convinced that the tragedy of *Galeotto Manfredi* (who was killed by his wife: the subject is treated by the great poet Monti) and ever so many other domestic tragedies of the *cinquecento*, which are less well known, and barely mentioned in the local histories of Italian cities, ended in a scene similar to that in the castle of Petrella. What follows is my translation of the contemporary account; it is in the *Italian of Rome*, and was written on the 14th of September, 1599.

A TRUE NARRATIVE

Of the deaths of Giacomo and Beatrice Cenci, and of Lucrezia Petroni Cenci, their stepmother, executed for the crime of parricide, on Saturday last, the 11th of September, 1599, in the reign of our Holy Father the Pope, Clement VIII, Aldobrandini.

The execrable life consistently led by Francesco Cenci, a native of Rome and one of the wealthiest of our fellow citizens, has ended by leading him to disaster. He has brought to a precocious death his sons, stout hearted young fellows, and his daughter Beatrice, who, although she mounted the scaffold when barely sixteen years old (four days since), was reckoned nevertheless one of the chief beauties of the States of the Church, if not the whole of Italy. The rumour has gone abroad that Signor Guido Reni, one of the pupils of that admirable school of Bologna,

was pleased to paint the portrait of poor Beatrice, last Friday, that is to say on the day preceding her execution. If this great painter has performed this task as he has done in the case of the other paintings which he has executed in this capital, posterity will be able to form some idea of the beauty of this lovely girl. In order that it may also preserve some record of her unprecedented misfortunes, and of the astounding force with which this truly Roman nature was able to fight against them, I have decided to write down what I have learned as to the action which brought her to her death, and what I saw on the day of her glorious tragedy.

The people who have supplied me with my information were in a position which made them acquainted with the roost secret details, such as are unknown in Rome even to-day, although for the last six weeks people have been speaking of nothing but the Cenci trial. I shall write with a certain freedom, knowing as I do that I shall be able to deposit my *commentary* in respectable archives from which it will certainly not be released until after my day. My one regret is that I must pronounce, but truth will have it so, against the innocence of this poor Beatrice Cenci, as greatly adored and respected by all that knew her as her horrible father was hated and execrated.

This man who, indisputably, had received from heaven the most astounding sagacity and eccentricity, was the son of Monsignor Cenci, who, under Pius V, had risen to the post of *Tesoriere*, or Minister of Finance. That saintly Pope, entirely taken up, as we know, with his righteous hatred of heresy and the re-establishment of his admirable Inquisition, felt only contempt for the temporal administration of his State, so that this Monsignor Cenci, who was Treasurer for some years before 1572, found himself able to leave to this terrible man who was his son and the father of Beatrice Cenci a clear income of one hundred and sixty thousand piastres (about two and a half millions of our francs in 1837).

Francesco Cenci, apart from this great fortune, had a reputation for courage and prudence to which, in his youth, no other Roman could lay claim; and this reputation established him all the more firmly at the Papal court and among the people as a whole, inasmuch as the criminal actions which were beginning to be imputed to him were all of the kind which the world is most ready to forgive. Many citizens of Rome still recalled, with a bitter regret, the freedom of thought and action which they had enjoyed in the days of Leo X, who was taken from us in 1513, and under Paul III, who died in 1549. Already, in the reign of the latter of these Popes, people were beginning to speak of young Francesco Cenci

on account of certain singular love affairs, carried to a successful issue by means more singular still.

Under Paul III, at a time when one could still speak with a certain degree of freedom, many people said that Francesco delighted most of all in strange incidents such as might give him *peripezie di nuova idea*, novel and disturbing sensations; those who take this view find support in the discovery, among his account books, of such entries as the following:

"For the adventures and *peripezie* of Toscanella, three thousand five hundred piastres" (about sixty thousand francs in 1837) "*e non fu caro*" (and not dear at that).

It is not known, perhaps, in the other cities of Italy, that our destinies and our mode of conduct in Rome vary with the character of the reigning Pope. Thus, for thirteen years, under the good Pope Gregory XIII (Buoncompagni), everything was permitted in Rome; if you wished, you had your enemy stabbed, and were never punished, provided that you behaved in a modest fashion. This excessive indulgence was followed by an excessive severity during the five years of the reign of the great Sixtus V, of whom it has been said, as of the Emperor Augustus, that he should either never have occurred or have remained for ever. Then one saw wretched creatures executed for murders or poisonings which had been forgotten for ten years, but which they had been so unfortunate as to confess to Cardinal Montalto, afterwards Sixtus V.

It was chiefly under Gregory XIII that people began to speak regularly of Francesco Cenci; he had married a wife of great wealth and such as befitted a gentleman of his high standing; she died after bearing him seven children. Shortly after her death, he took as his second wife Lucrezia Petroni, a woman of rare beauty, and distinguished especially for the dazzling whiteness of her skin, but a little too plump, a common fault among our Roman women. By Lucrezia he had no children.

The least fault to be found with Francesco Cenci was his propensity towards an infamous form of love; the greatest was that of unbelief in God. Never in his life was he seen to enter a church.

Three times imprisoned for his infamous love affairs, he secured his freedom by giving two hundred thousand piastres to the persons most in favour with the twelve successive Popes under whom he lived. (Two hundred thousand piastres amount to about five millions in 1837.)

When I first set eyes on Francesco Cenci his hair was already grey, during the reign of Pope Buoncompagni, when every licence was allowed to such as dared take it. He was a man of about five feet four inches, and very well built, though a trifle thin; he was reputed to be

extremely strong, possibly he spread this rumour himself; he had large and expressive eyes, but the upper lids were too much inclined to droop; his nose was too large and prominent, his lips thin, and parted in a charming smile. This smile became terrible when he fastened his gaze on one of his enemies; if anything moved or annoyed him, he would begin to tremble in an alarming fashion. I have known him when I was young, in the days of Pope Buoncompagni, go on horseback from Rome to Naples, doubtless upon some amorous errand; he would pass through the forests of San Germano and la Faggiola, regardless of brigands, and would complete the journey, it was said, in less than twenty hours. He travelled always by himself, and without informing anyone; when his first horse was worn out, he would buy or steal another. Should any objection be offered by the owner, he had no objection, himself, to using his dagger. But it is true to say that in the days of my youth, that is to say when he was about forty-eight or fifty, there was no one bold enough to withstand him. His great pleasure was to defy his enemies.

He was very well known on all the roads in the States of His Holiness; he paid generously, but he was capable also, two or three months after an injury had been done him, of sending one of his *sicarj* to dispatch the person who had offended him.

The one virtuous action which he performed in the whole of his long life was to build, in the courtyard of his vast palazzo by the Tiber, a church dedicated to Saint Thomas; and even to this good deed he was prompted by the curious desire to be able to look down [Footnote: In Rome people are buried beneath the floors of churches,] upon the graves of all his children, whom he hated with an extravagant and unnatural loathing, even in their earliest infancy, when they were incapable of offending him in any way.

"*That is where I wish to put them all,*" he would often say with a bitter laugh to the masons whom he employed to build his church. He sent the three eldest, Giacomo, Cristoforo and Rocco, to study at the University of Salamanca in Spain. Once they were in that distant land he took an evil delight in never sending them any money, so that these unfortunate youths, after addressing a number of letters to their father, who made no reply, were reduced to the miserable necessity, for their return journey, of borrowing small sums of money or begging their way along the roads.

In Rome, they found a father more severe and rigid, more harsh than ever, who, for all his immense wealth, would neither clothe them nor give them the money necessary to purchase the cheapest forms of food. They were obliged to have recourse to the Pope, who forced Francesco

Cenci to make them a small allowance. With this very modest provision they parted from their father.

Shortly afterwards, on account of some scandalous love affair, Francesco was put in prison for the third and last time; whereupon the three brothers begged an audience of our Holy Father the Pope now reigning, and jointly besought him to put to death Francesco Cenci their father, who, they said, was dishonouring their house. Clement VIII had a great mind to do so, but decided not to follow his first impulse, so as not to give satisfaction to these unnatural children, and expelled them ignominiously from his presence.

The father, as we have already said, came out of prison after paying a large sum of money to a powerful protector. It may be imagined that the strange action of his three elder sons was bound to increase still further the hatred that he felt for his children. He continually rained curses on them all, old and young, and every day would take a stick to his two poor daughters, who lived with him in his palazzo.

The eldest daughter, although closely watched, by dint of endless efforts managed to present a petition to the Pope; she implored His Holiness to give her in marriage or to place her in a convent. Clement VIII took pity on her distress, and married her to Carlo Gabrielli, of the noblest family of Gubbio; His Holiness obliged her father to give her an ample dowry.

Struck by this unexpected blow, Francesco Cenci shewed an intense rage, and to prevent Beatrice, when she grew older, from taking it into her head to follow her sister's example, confined her in one of the apartments of his huge palazzo. There, no one was allowed to set eyes on Beatrice, at that time barely fourteen years old, and already in the full splendour of her enchanting beauty. She had, above all, a gaiety, a candour and a comic spirit which I have never seen in anyone but her. Francesco Cenci carried her food to her himself. We may suppose that it was then that the monster fell in love with her, or pretended to fall in love, in order to torment his wretched daughter. He often spoke to her of the perfidious trick which her elder sister had played on him, and flying into a rage at the sound of his own voice, would end by showering blows on Beatrice.

While this was happening, Rocco Cenci, his son, was killed by a pork-butcher, and, in the following year, Cristoforo Cenci was killed by Paolo Corso of Massa. On this occasion, he displayed his black impiety, for at the funerals of his two sons he refused to spend so much as a single baiocco on candles. On learning of the death of his son Cristoforo, he

exclaimed that he could never be truly happy until all his children were buried, and that, when the last of them died, he would, as a sign of joy, set fire to his palazzo. Rome was astounded at this utterance, but considered that everything was possible with such a man, who gloried in defying the whole world, including the Pope himself.

(Here it becomes quite impossible to follow the Roman narrator in his extremely obscure account of the strange actions by which Francesco Cenci sought to astonish his contemporaries. His wife and his unfortunate daughter were, to all appearance, made the victims of his abominable ideas.)

All this was not enough for him; he attempted with threats, and with the use of force, to outrage his own daughter Beatrice, who was already fully grown and beautiful; he was not ashamed to go and lie down in her bed, being himself completely naked. He walked about with her in the rooms of his palazzo, still stark naked; then he took her into his wife's bed, in order that, by the light of the lamps, poor Lucrezia might see what he was doing to Beatrice.

He taught the poor girl a frightful heresy, which I scarcely dare repeat, to wit that, when a father has carnal knowledge of his own daughter, the children born of the union are of necessity saints, and that all the greatest saints whom the Church venerates were born in this manner, that is to say, that their maternal grandfather was also their father.

When Beatrice resisted his execrable intentions, he belaboured her with the cruellest blows, until the wretched girl, unable to endure so miserable an existence, decided to follow the example that her sister had given her. She addressed to our Holy Father the Pope a petition set forth in great detail; but there is reason to believe that Francesco Cenci had taken due precautions, for it does not appear that this petition ever came into the hands of His Holiness; at least, it could not be found in the secretariat of the *Memoriali*, when, after Beatrice's imprisonment, her counsel was in urgent need of the document; it would to some extent have furnished proof of the appalling excesses committed in the castle of la Petrella. Would it not have been evident to all that Beatrice Cenci had found herself legally entitled to protection? This memorial was written also in the name of Lucrezia, Beatrice's stepmother.

Francesco Cenci learned of this attempt, and one may guess with what fury he intensified his maltreatment of these two wretched women.

Life became absolutely intolerable to them, and it was at this point that, seeing that they had nothing to expect from the justice of the Sovereign, whose courtiers were seduced by Francesco's lavish gifts, they

conceived the idea of adopting those extreme measures which ended in their ruin, but had nevertheless the advantage of ending their sufferings in this world.

It should be explained that the famous Monsignor Guerra was a frequent visitor to the palazzo Cenci; he was a man of tall stature and extremely handsome to boot, and had received this special gift from fortune that, to whatever task he might apply himself, he performed it with a grace that was quite peculiarly his own. It has been supposed that he was in love with Beatrice and had thoughts of discarding the *ciantellata* and marrying her; [Footnote: The majority of the *monsignori* are not in holy orders, and are free to marry.] but, albeit he took the utmost care to conceal his feelings, he was execrated by Francesco Cenci, who accused him of having been the intimate friend of all his children. When Monsignor Guerra knew that Signor Cenci was not in his palazzo, he went up to the ladies' rooms, and spent several hours in conversing with them and listening to their complaints of the incredible treatment to which they were both subjected. It appears that Beatrice was the first to speak openly to Monsignor Guerra of the plan upon which they had decided. After a time, he promised them his support; and finally, after strong and repeated pressure from Beatrice, consented to convey their strange design to Giacomo Cenci, without whose consent nothing could be done, since he was the eldest brother, and head of the family after Francesco.

Nothing was easier than to draw him into the conspiracy; he was treated extremely ill by his father, who gave him no assistance, a deprivation which Giacomo felt all the more keenly, inasmuch as he was married and had six children. The conspirators chose as a meeting place, in which to discuss the means of putting Francesco Cenci to death, Monsignor Guerra's apartment. They conducted their business with due formality, and the votes of the stepmother and the girl were taken on all points. When at length a decision had been reached, they chose two of Francesco Cenci's vassals, each of whom had conceived an undying hatred for him. One of these was named Marzio; he was a stout fellow, deeply attached to Francesco's unfortunate children, and, in order to do something that would give them pleasure, he consented to take part in the parricide. Olimpio, the second, had been chosen as warden of the fortress of la Petrella, in the Kingdom of Naples, by Prince Colonna; but, by using his all-powerful influence with the Prince, Francesco Cenci had procured his dismissal.

Everything was arranged with these two men; Francesco Cenci having announced that, in order to escape from the unhealthy air of Rome, he

was going to spend the summer in this fortress of la Petrella, it occurred to them that they might collect there a dozen Neapolitan *banditi*. Olimpio undertook to provide these. It was decided to conceal the men in the forests adjoining la Petrella, to warn them of the hour at which Francesco Cenci was to start on his journey; they would intercept him on the road, and send word to his family that they would release him on payment of a large ransom. Then his children would be obliged to return to Rome to collect the sum demanded by the brigands; they would pretend to be unable to find this sum immediately, and the brigands, carrying out their threat, and seeing no sign of the money, would put Francesco Cenci to death. In this way, no one would be led to suspect the true authors of the crime.

But, when summer came and Francesco Cenci left Rome for la Petrella, the spy who was to give notice that he had started was too late in warning the *banditi* posted in the woods, and they had not time to come down to the high road. Cenci arrived without interference at la Petrella; the brigands, tired of waiting for an uncertain booty, went off to rob elsewhere on their own account.

For his part, Cenci, grown prudent and cautious with advancing years, never ventured to emerge from his fortress. And, his ill humour increasing with the infirmities of age, which he found insupportable, he intensified the atrocious treatment which he made the two poor women undergo. He pretended that they were rejoicing in his weakness.

Beatrice, driven to desperation by the horrible things which she had to endure, summoned Marzio and Olimpio beneath the walls of the fortress. During the night, while her father slept, she conversed with them from one of the lower windows and threw down to them letters addressed to Monsignor Guerra. By means of these letters, it was arranged that Monsignor Guerra should promise Marzio and Olimpio a thousand piastres if they would take upon themselves the responsibility for putting Francesco Cenci to death. A third of the sum was to be paid in Rome, before the deed, by Monsignor Guerra, and the other two-thirds by Lucrezia and Beatrice, when, the deed done, they should be in command of Cenci's strong-box.

It was further agreed that the deed should be done on the Nativity of the Virgin, and for this purpose the two men were secretly admitted to the fortress. But Lucrezia was overcome by the respect due to a festival of the Madonna, and she made Beatrice postpone the action until the following day, so as not to be guilty of a twofold crime.

It was therefore on the evening of the 9th of September, 1598, that, mother and daughter having with great dexterity administered opium to Francesco Cenci, that man so hard to deceive, he fell into a deep sleep.

Towards midnight Beatrice herself let into the fortress Marzio and Olimpio; next, Lucrezia and Beatrice led them to the old man's room, where he lay fast asleep. There, they were left by themselves that they might do what had been determined upon, and the women withdrew to wait in an adjoining room. Suddenly they saw the two men appear with pallid faces, and apparently out of their wits.

"What has happened?" cried the ladies.

"It is a shame and a disgrace," the men answered, "to kill a poor old man in his sleep! Pity stayed our hands."

On hearing this excuse, Beatrice grew indignant, and began to abuse them, saying:

"And so you two men, thoroughly prepared to act, have not the courage to kill a man in his sleep! [Footnote: All these details were proved at the trial.] You would be a great deal less willing to look him in the face if he were awake! And so it is for nothing more than this that you dare to ask for money? Very well! Since your cowardice forces me, I will kill my father myself; and as for you, you have not long to live either!"

Animated by these few scathing words, and fearing a reduction of the fee that had been promised them, the assassins boldly returned to the bedroom, followed by the women. One of them had a great nail which he placed vertically over the sleeping man's eye; the other, who had a hammer, drove the nail into his head. Another large nail was driven similarly into his breast, so that the wretched soul, burdened with all its recent sins, was carried off by devils; the body struggled, but in vain.

The deed accomplished, the girl gave Olimpio a great purse filled with money: she gave Marzio a cloak of broadcloth with a gold stripe, which had belonged to her father, and dismissed them.

The women, left to themselves, began by withdrawing the large nail driven into the head of the corpse, and the other in his throat; then, after wrapping the body in a sheet from the bed, they dragged it through a long series of rooms to a gallery which overlooked a small, deserted garden. From this gallery, they threw down the body upon a great elder tree which grew in that lonely spot. As there was a privy at the end of this little gallery, they hoped that when, in the morning, the old man's body was found caught in the branches of the elder, it would be supposed that his foot had slipped and that he had fallen while on his way to the privy.

Things fell out exactly as they had foreseen. In the morning, when the body was found, a great clamour arose in the fortress; they did not forget to utter piercing cries, and to bewail the lamentable death of their husband and father. But the young Beatrice had the courage of outraged modesty, not the prudence necessary in this life; early in the morning, she had given to a woman who washed the linen in the fortress a sheet stained with blood, telling her not to be surprised at such a quantity of blood, because she herself, all night long, had been suffering from a copious issue; and in this way, for the moment, all went well.

Francesco Cenci was given a pompous funeral, and the women returned to Rome to enjoy that tranquillity which they had for so long desired in vain. They imagined themselves to be happy now for ever, for they did not know what was happening at Naples.

The justice of heaven, which would not allow so atrocious a parricide to remain unpunished, brought it about that, as soon as the news reached that city of what had occurred in the fortress of la Petrella, the principal judge there felt misgivings, and sent a royal commissioner to examine the body and arrest any suspected persons.

The royal commissioner ordered the arrest of everyone living in the fortress. They were all taken to Naples in chains; and nothing in their depositions appeared suspicious, except that the laundress professed to have received from Beatrice a sheet or sheets stained with blood. She was asked whether Beatrice had attempted to explain these great stains of blood; she replied that Beatrice had spoken of a natural infirmity. She was asked whether stains of such a size could be due to such an infirmity; she replied that they could not, and that the stains on the sheet were of too bright a red.

This information was immediately sent to the judicial authorities in Rome, and yet many months elapsed before it occurred to anyone here to order the arrest of Francesco Cenci's children. Lucrezia, Beatrice and Giacomo could have escaped a thousand times over, either by going to Florence on the pretext of making some pilgrimage, or by taking ship at Civita-Vecchia; but God withheld from them this life-giving inspiration.

Monsignor Guerra, having had word of what was happening in Naples, at once sent out a number of men with orders to kill Marzio and Olimpio; but Olimpio alone did they succeed in killing at Terni. The Neapolitan authorities had arrested Marzio, who was taken to Naples, where he immediately confessed all.

This terrible deposition was at once sent to the authorities in Rome, who at last decided to arrest and confine in the Corte Savella prison

Giacomo and Bernardo Cenci, the only surviving sons of Francesco, as also Lucrezia, his widow. Beatrice was guarded in her father's palazzo by a numerous troop of *sbirri*. Marzio was brought from Naples, and likewise confined in the Savella prison; there he was confronted with the two women, who denied everything consistently, Beatrice in particular refusing steadfastly to recognise the striped cloak which she had given to Marzio. The brigand, overcome by enthusiasm for the marvellous beauty and astonishing eloquence of the girl as she answered the judge, denied everything that he had confessed in Naples. He was put to the question, he admitted nothing, preferring to die in agony; fit homage to the beauty of Beatrice!

After the death of this man, there being no proof of the crime, the judges found that there was not sufficient reason for putting to the torture either Cenci's two sons or the two women. All four were taken to the Castel Sant' Angelo, where they remained for some months in peace and quietness.

The matter seemed to be at an end, and no one in Rome had any doubt that this girl, of such beauty and courage, who had aroused so keen an interest, would shortly be set at liberty, when, unfortunately, the officers of justice succeeded in arresting the brigand who, at Terni, had killed Olimpio; he was brought to Rome, where he confessed everything.

Monsignor Guerra, whom the brigand's confession so dangerously compromised, was summoned to appear before the court without delay; imprisonment was certain, death probable. But this remarkable man, whom fate had endowed with the art of doing everything well, succeeded in escaping in a manner which seems miraculous. He was reckoned the handsomest man at the Papal court, and was too well known in Rome to have any chance of escape; besides, a close watch was being kept at the gates, and probably, from the moment of his summons, his house had been under supervision. It should be added that he was very tall, with an extremely fair skin, and a fine beard and hair, fair also.

With inconceivable rapidity, he procured a charcoal seller, took his clothes, had his own head and beard shaved, stained his face, bought a pair of asses, and began to perambulate the streets of Rome selling charcoal, limping as he went. He assumed with admirable skill an air of plebeian stupidity, and went about crying his charcoal with his mouth full of bread and onions, while hundreds of *sbirri* were searching for him not only in Rome, but on all the roads as well. At length, when his appearance was familiar to most of the *sbirri*, he ventured to leave Rome, still driving before him his pair of asses laden with charcoal. He met several

troops of *sbirri*, who had no thought of stopping him. Since then, only one letter has been received from him; his mother has sent money to him at Marseilles, and it is supposed that he is serving in the French war, as a private soldier.

The confession of the Terni assassin and this flight of Monsignor Guerra, which created an enormous sensation in Rome, so revived suspicion, and indeed seemed so to point to the guilt of the Cenci, that they were taken from the Castel Sant' Angelo and brought back to the Savella prison.

The two brothers, put to the torture, were far from imitating the magnanimity of the brigand Marzio; they were so pusillanimous as to confess everything. Signora Lucrezia Petroni was so habituated to the ease and comfort of a life of the greatest luxury, and besides was so stout in figure that she could not endure the question by the *cord*; she told everything that she knew.

But it was not so with Beatrice Cenci, a girl full of vivacity and courage. Neither the kind words nor the threats of the judge Moscati had any effect on her. She endured the torture of the *cord* without a moment's faltering and with perfect courage. Never once could the judge induce her to give an answer that compromised her in the slightest degree; indeed, by her quick-witted vivacity, she utterly confounded the famous Olisse Moscati, the judge responsible for examining her. He was so much surprised by the conduct of the girl that he felt it his duty to make a full report to His Holiness Pope Clement VIII, whom God preserve.

His Holiness wished to see the documents and to study the case. He was afraid lest the judge Olisse Moscati, so celebrated for his deep learning and the superior sagacity of his mind, might have been overpowered by Beatrice's beauty, and be helping her out in his examinations of her. The consequence was that His Holiness took the case out of his hands, and entrusted it to another and a more severe judge. Indeed, this barbarian had the heart to subject without pity so lovely a body *ad torturam capillorum* (that is to say, questions were put to Beatrice Cenci while she was hanging by her hair.) [Footnote: See the treatise *de Suppliciis*, by the celebrated Farinacci, a jurist of the time. It contains horrible details which our nineteenth century sensibility cannot endure even to read about, but which were very creditably endured by a Roman girl of sixteen abandoned by her lover.] While she was fastened to the cord, this new judge confronted Beatrice with her stepmother and her brothers. As soon as Giacomo and Donna Lucrezia saw her:

"The sin has been committed," they cried; "you should perform the penance also, and not let your body be torn to pieces through a futile obstinacy."

"So you wish to cover our house with shame," replied the girl, "and to die an ignominious death. You are greatly mistaken; but, since you wish it, so be it."

And, turning to the *sbirri*:

"Release me," she said to them, "and let someone read over to me my mother's examination. I will admit what must be admitted, and deny what must be denied."

This was duly done; she admitted everything that was true. [Footnote: Farinacci quotes several passages from Beatrice's confession; they seem to me touching in their simplicity.] Immediately the chains were removed from them all, and because for five months she had not seen her brothers, she expressed a wish to dine with them, and all four spent a very happy day together.

But next day they were separated once more; the two brothers were taken to the prison of Tordinona, while the women remained in the Savella. Our Holy Father the Pope, having seen the authentic document containing all their confessions, ordered that without further delay they should be tied to the tails of wild horses, and so put to death.

The whole of Rome shuddered on learning of this rigorous decree. A great number of cardinals and princes went to throw themselves on their knees before the Pope, imploring him to allow the poor wretches to present their defence.

"And they, did they give their aged father time to present his?" the Pope replied angrily.

Finally, by a special grace, he was pleased to allow a respite of five and twenty days. At once the leading *avvocati* in Rome began to write their pleadings in this case which had filled the town with pity and dismay. On the twenty-fifth day, they appeared in a body before His Holiness. Niccolo de' Angelis was the first to speak, but he had barely read the first line of his defence when Clement VIII interrupted him:

"And so, here in Rome," he exclaimed, "we find people who kill their father, and counsel afterwards to defend such people!"

All stood speechless, until Farinacci ventured to raise his voice.

"Most Holy Father," he said, "we are here not to defend the crime, but to prove, if we can, that one or more of these unfortunate people are innocent of the crime."

The Pope made a sign to him to speak, and he spoke for fully three hours, after which the Pope took their briefs from them all and dismissed them. As they were leaving the presence, Altieri was the last to go; he was afraid that he might have compromised himself, and turned to kneel before the Pope, saying:

"I could not help appearing in this case, since I am counsel for the poor."

To which the Pope replied:

"We are not surprised at you, but at the others."

The Pope refused to go to bed, but spent the whole night reading the pleadings of counsel, calling upon the Cardinal of San Marcello to help him in this task; His Holiness appeared so deeply touched that many people felt a spark of hope for the lives of the unhappy prisoners. In the hope of saving the sons, the counsel threw the whole onus of the crime upon Beatrice. As it had been proved in the trial that her father had on several occasions employed force with a criminal intention, the lawyers hoped that the murder would be pardoned in her case, as being justified in self-defence; and if so, when the principal author of the crime was granted her life, how could her brothers, who had acted at her persuasion, be put to death?

After this night devoted to his judicial duties, Clement VIII ordered that the accused persons should be taken back to prison and placed in *secret confinement*. This circumstance gave rise to great hopes in Rome, which throughout the whole of this case considered no one but Beatrice. It was alleged that she had been in love with Monsignor Guerra, but that she had never infringed the rules of the strictest virtue; it was impossible, therefore, in justice, to impute to her the crimes of a monster, and she was to be punished because she had made use of her right of self-defence; what would have been her punishment had she consented? Was it necessary that human justice should step in to increase the misery of a creature so lovable, so deserving of pity, and already in such a plight? After so sad a life, which had heaped upon her every form of misery before her sixteenth birthday, had she not acquired the right to a few days of greater happiness? The whole of Rome seemed to be briefed in her defence. Would she not have been pardoned if, when for the first time Francesco Cenci made a criminal assault upon her, she had stabbed him?

Pope Clement VIII was mild and merciful. We were beginning to hope that, a little ashamed of the burst of ill temper which had made him interrupt the counsels' pleadings, he would pardon one who had repelled force with force, not, to be accurate, at the moment of the original crime,

but when the assailant tried to commit it anew. The whole of Rome was on tenterhooks, when the Pope received the news of the violent death of the Marchesa Costanza Santa Croce. Her son, Paolo Santa Croce, had killed the lady in question, who was sixty years old, by stabbing her with his dagger, because she would not bind herself to make him the heir to her whole fortune. The report added that Santa Croce had taken flight, and that there was little or no hope of arresting him. The Pope remembered the fratricide by the Massini, which had occurred quite recently.

Appalled by the frequency of these murders of near relatives, His Holiness felt that he would not be entitled to grant a pardon. When he received this fatal report of the Santa Croce murder, the Pope was at the palace of Monte Cavallo, where he was spending the eve of September, in order to be nearer, next morning, to the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, where he was to consecrate as Bishop a German Cardinal.

On the Friday at the twenty-second hour (4 P.M.) he sent for Ferrante Taverna, the Governor of Rome (afterwards made Cardinal, for so singular a reason), and addressed him in the following words:

"We entrust the case of the Cenci to your hands, in order that justice may be done without delay."

The Governor returned to his Palace deeply moved by the order he had received; he at once signed the sentence of death, and convened a congregation to decide upon the method of execution.

On Saturday morning, the 11th of September, 1599, the first gentlemen of Rome, members of the Confraternity of the Confortatori, repaired to the two prisons, that of Corte Savella, where were Beatrice and her step-mother, and Tordinona, in which Giacomo and Bernardo Cenci were confined. Throughout the whole of the night between the Friday and the Saturday, the Roman nobles who were aware of what was happening did nothing but hasten from the palace of Monte Cavallo to those of the principal Cardinals, hoping to obtain at least the concession that the women might be put to death inside the prison, and not upon an ignominious scaffold; and that mercy be shewn to the young Bernardo Cenci, who, being only fifteen years old, could not have been admitted to the secret. The noble Cardinal Sforza was conspicuous for his zeal during that fatal night, but albeit so powerful a prince he could obtain nothing. The Santa Croce crime was a vile crime, committed for the sake of money, and the crime of Beatrice Cenci was committed in defence of her honour.

While the most powerful Cardinals were taking such fruitless pains, Farinacci, our great jurist, actually dared to make his way into the Pope's presence; face to face with His Holiness, this remarkable man contrived to stir his listener's conscience, and at length, by sheer importunity, wrested from him the life of Bernardo Cenci.

When the Pope made this important utterance, it was about four o'clock in the morning (of Saturday, the 11th of September). All night long men had been at work on the *piazza* of the Ponte Sant' Angelo preparing the scene of this cruel tragedy. All the necessary copies of the death sentence could not, however, be completed before five o'clock in the morning, so that it was not until six o'clock that the fatal tidings could be conveyed to the wretched prisoners, who were peacefully asleep.

The girl, for the first few moments, could not even summon up strength to put on her clothes. She uttered piercing and continuous shrieks and gave way uncontrollably to the most terrible desperation.

"How is it possible, oh, God," she cried, "that I must die suddenly, like this?"

Lucrezia Petroni, on the other hand, said nothing that was not entirely proper; first of all, she fell on her knees and prayed, then calmly exhorted her daughter to accompany her to the chapel, where they would make preparation together for the great journey from life to death.

These words restored to Beatrice all her calm; just as she had shewn extravagance and want of control at first, so now she was reasonable and wise as soon as her stepmother had summoned up the resources of that noble soul. From that moment she was a mirror of constancy which all Rome admired.

She asked for a notary to draw up her will, which was permitted. She ordered that her body should be taken to San Pietro in Montorio; she left three hundred thousand francs to the Stimata (nuns of the Stigmata of Saint Francis); this sum was to provide dowries for fifty poor girls. This example moved the heart of Donna Lucrezia, who also made her will and ordered her body to be taken to San Giorgio; she left five hundred thousand francs to that church and made other pious bequests.

At eight o'clock they made their confession, heard mass and received the Holy Communion. But, before going to mass, Donna Beatrice reflected that it was not proper to appear on the scaffold, in the sight of the whole populace, in the rich garments which she was wearing. She ordered two gowns, one for herself, one for her mother. These gowns were made like nuns' habits, without ornaments on bosom or shoulders, and gathered only at the wide sleeves. The stepmother's gown was of

black cotton; the girl's of blue taffeta, with a large cord fastening it at the waist.

When the gowns were brought, Donna Beatrice, who was on her knees, rose and said to Donna Lucrezia:

"My lady mother, the hour of our passion approaches; it would be well for us to make ready, to put on these other clothes, and for the last time to perform the mutual service of dressing each other."

There had been erected on the *Piazza, del Ponte Sant' Angelo* a huge scaffold with a block and a *mannaja* (a sort of guillotine). About the thirteenth hour (eight o'clock in the morning), the Company of the Misericordia came with their great crucifix to the gate of the prison. Giacomo Cenci was the first to emerge; he fell devoutly upon his knees at the threshold, made his prayer, and kissed the Sacred Wounds on the crucifix. He was followed by Bernardo Cenci, his young brother, who also had his hands bound and a little board before his eyes. The crowd was enormous, and a disturbance arose owing to a basin which fell from a window almost upon the head of one of the penitents who was holding a lighted torch by the side of the banner.

Everyone was gazing at the brothers, when suddenly the Fiscal of Rome came forward, and said:

"Don Bernardo, Our Sovereign Lord grants you your life; prepare to accompany your family, and pray to God for them."

Thereupon his two *comfortatori* removed the little board that covered his eyes. The executioner installed Giacomo Cenci on the cart and had removed his coat, as he was to be tortured with the *pincers*. When the executioner came to Bernardo, he verified the signature on the pardon, unbound him, removed his handcuffs, and, as he had no coat, for he was awaiting the pincers, the executioner set him on the cart and wrapped him in a rich cloak of broadcloth striped with gold. (It was said that this was the same cloak that was given by Beatrice to Marzio after the deed in the fortress of la Petrella.) The vast crowd that filled the street, the windows and the roofs, was suddenly stirred; one heard a deep and sullen murmur, people were beginning to tell one another that the boy had been pardoned.

The intoning of the Psalms began, and the procession moved slowly across the *Piazza Navona* towards the *Savella* prison. On reaching the prison gate the banner halted, the two women came out, made an act of adoration at the foot of the holy crucifix and then proceeded on foot, one following the other. They were dressed in the manner already described,

the head of each being draped in a great taffeta veil which reached almost to her waist.

Donna Lucrezia, as a widow, wore a black veil and slippers of black velvet without heels, according to custom.

The girl's veil was of blue taffeta, like her dress; she had in addition a great veil of cloth of silver over her shoulders, a petticoat of violet cloth, and slippers of white velvet, elegantly laced and fastened with crimson cords. She appeared singularly charming as she walked, in this costume, and a tear came to every eye as the spectators caught sight of her slowly advancing in the rear of the procession.

Both women had their hands free, but their arms tied to their sides, so that each of them was able to carry a crucifix; they held these close to their eyes. The sleeves of their gowns were very wide, so that one saw their arms, which were covered by sleeved shifts fastened at the wrists, as is the custom in this country.

Donna Lucrezia, whose heart was less stout, wept almost continuously; the young Beatrice, on the other hand, shewed great courage; and, turning to gaze at each of the churches by which the procession passed, would fall on her knees for a moment and say in a firm voice: "*Adoramus Te, Christe!*"

Meanwhile, poor Giacomo Cenci was being tortured upon the cart, and shewed great constancy.

The procession had difficulty in crossing the lower end of the Piazza del Ponte S'ant' Angelo, so great was the number of carriages and the crowd of people. The women were taken straight to the chapel which had been made ready, and there Giacomo Cenci was afterwards brought.

Young Bernardo, wrapped in his striped cloak, was taken straight to the scaffold; whereupon everyone thought that he was going to be put to death, and had not been pardoned. The poor boy was so frightened that he fell in a faint as soon as he had stepped on to the scaffold. He was revived with cold water and made to sit opposite the *mannaja*.

The executioner went to fetch Donna Lucrezia Petroni; her hands were tied behind her back, the veil no longer covered her shoulders. She appeared on the piazza accompanied by the banner, her head wrapped in the veil of black taffeta; there she made an act of reconciliation to God and kissed the Sacred Wounds. She was told to leave her slippers on the pavement; as she was very stout, she had some difficulty in climbing the scaffold. When she was on the scaffold and the black taffeta veil was taken from her, she was greatly ashamed to be seen with bare shoulders and bosom; she examined herself, then the *mannaja*, and, as a sign of

resignation, raised her shoulders slightly; tears came to her eyes, she said: "O my God!... And you, my brethren, pray for my soul."

Not knowing what was expected of her, she asked Alessandro, the chief headsman, what she ought to do. He told her to place herself astride the plank of the block. But this position seemed to her offensive to modesty, and she took a long time to assume it. (The details which follow are endurable by the Italian public, which likes to know everything with the utmost exactitude; let it suffice the French reader to know that this poor woman's modesty led to her injuring her bosom; the executioner shewed her head to the people and then wrapped it in the black taffeta veil.)

While the *mannaja* was being put in order for the girl, a scaffold loaded with spectators fell, and many people were killed. They thus appeared in God's presence before Beatrice.

When Beatrice saw the banner returning to the chapel to fetch her, she asked boldly:

"Is my lady mother really dead?"

They replied that it was so; she fell on her knees before the crucifix and prayed fervently for her stepmother's soul. Then she spoke aloud and at great length to the crucifix.

"Lord, Thou hast come back for me, and I will follow Thee with a willing heart, despairing not of Thy mercy for my great sin," etc.

She then repeated several Psalms and prayers, all in praise of God. When at length the executioner appeared before her with a cord, she said:

"Bind this body which is to be punished, and unbind this soul which is to win immortality and an eternal glory."

Then she rose, said her prayer, left her slippers at the foot of the steps and, having mounted the scaffold, stepped nimbly across the plank, placed her neck beneath the *mannaja*, and made all the arrangements perfectly herself, so as to avoid being touched by the executioner. By the swiftness of her movements she prevented the crowd, at the moment when the taffeta veil was taken from her, from seeing her shoulders and bosom. The blow was a long time in falling, as an interruption occurred. During this time she called in a loud voice upon Jesus Christ and the Most Holy Virgin. [Footnote: A contemporary writer states that Clement VIII was extremely uneasy as to the salvation of Beatrice's soul; as he knew that she had been unjustly sentenced, he feared an impatient revulsion. The moment she had placed her head upon the *mannaja*, the fortress of Sant' Angelo, from which the *mannaja* was plainly visible, fired a gun.

The Pope, who was engaged in prayer at Monte Cavallo, awaiting this signal, at once gave the girl the Papal major absolution *in articula mortis*. This accounts for the delay in carrying out the sentence, of which the chronicler speaks.]

Her body sprang with an impulsive movement at the fatal instant. Poor Bernardo Cenci, who had remained seated on the scaffold, fell once again in a faint, and it took his *comfortatori* a good half hour and more to revive him. Then there appeared upon the scaffold Giacomo Cenci; but here again we must pass over details that are too harrowing. Giacomo Cenci was "broken" (*mazzolato*).

Immediately, Bernardo was taken back to prison; he was in a high fever and was bled.

As for the poor women, each of them was placed in her coffin and laid down a few feet away from the scaffold, near the statue of Saint Paul, which is the first on the right-hand side on the Ponte Sant' Angelo. Round each coffin burned four candles of white wax.

Later, with all that remained of Giacomo Cenci, they were conveyed to the palace of the Florentine Consul. At a quarter past nine in the evening, [Footnote: This is the hour set apart, in Rome, for the obsequies of Princes. The funeral of a citizen starts at sunset; the lesser nobility are carried to church at the first hour of night, Cardinals and Princes at half-past two of the night, which, on the 11th of September, corresponds to a quarter to ten.] the body of the girl, dressed in her own clothes and covered with a profusion of flowers, was carried to San Pietro in Montorio. She was exquisitely beautiful; looking at her, one would have said that she was asleep. She was buried in front of the high altar, and of Raphael's *Transfiguration*. She was escorted by fifty great candles, lighted, and by all the Franciscans in Rome.

Lucrezia Petroni was carried, at ten o'clock at night, to the Church of San Giorgio. During the course of this tragedy, the crowd was beyond number; as far as the eye could reach, one saw the streets packed with carriages and people, scaffoldings, windows and roofs covered with curious spectators. The sun's heat was so intense that day that many people lost consciousness. Any number of them took fever; and when the whole affair was at an end, at the nineteenth hour (a quarter to two), and the crowd dispersed, many people were suffocated, others trampled down by the horses. The number of deaths was considerable.

Donna Lucrezia Petroni was of middle height, or a little shorter, and, although fifty years old, was still a handsome woman. She had very fine

features, a small nose, dark eyes, the skin of her face quite white with a fine complexion; her hair, which was not abundant, was chestnut.

Beatrice Cenci, who must inspire undying regret, was just sixteen; she was of short stature; her figure was charmingly rounded, and there were dimples in the centre of her cheeks, so that, lying dead and garlanded with flowers, she appeared to be asleep and even smiling, as she had so often lain when she was alive. Her mouth was small, her hair golden, and naturally curling. As she went to the scaffold these fair ringlets fell over her eyes, which gave her a certain charm and inspired pity.

Giacomo Cenci was of short stature, stout, with a pale face and black beard; he was about twenty-six years old when he died.

Bernardo Cenci closely resembled his sister, and as he wore his hair long like hers, many people, when he appeared on the scaffold, mistook him for her.

The heat of the sun had been so intense that a number of the spectators of this tragedy died during the night, and among them Ubaldino Ubaldini, a young man of rare beauty who had until then been in perfect health. He was brother to Signor Renzi, so well known in Rome. Thus the shades of the Cenci left this world numerous escorted.

Yesterday, which was Tuesday the 14th of September, 1599, the penitents of San Marcello, on the occasion of the Feast of the Holy Cross, made use of their privilege to deliver from prison Don Bernardo Cenci, who has bound himself to pay within a year four hundred thousand francs to the Santissima Trinità del Ponte Sisto.

Added by another hand.

It is from him that the Francesco and Bernardo Cenci, now alive, descend.

The famous Farinacci, who, by his persistence, saved young Cenci's life, afterwards published his pleadings. He gives only an extract from pleading no. 66, which he declaimed before Clement VIII on behalf of the Cenci. This pleading, in the Latin tongue, would occupy fully six pages, and I cannot insert it here; this I regret, as it portrays the mental attitude of 1599; it seems to me eminently reasonable. Many years after 1599, Farinacci, when sending his pleadings to the press, added a note to this speech in defence of the Cenci: *Omnes fuerunt ultimo supplicio effecti, excepto Bernardo qui ad triremes cum bonorum confiscatione condemnatus fuit, ac etiam ad interessendum aliorum morti prout interfuit.* The end of this Latin note is touching, but I expect the reader is tired of so long a story.

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