

The Battle of Life.

Go forth in the battle of life, my boy.
For while it is called today,
For the years go on, and the years come on,
Regardless of those who may love or win—
Of those who may work or play.

And the troops march steadily on, my boy.
To the army gone to the front, my boy.
You may hear the sound of their falling feet,
Going down to the valley where the battle is fought.
They go to return no more.

There is room for you in the ranks, my boy.
And duty, too, assigned.
Step into the front with your comrades,
Work for the glory, and the peace, and the gain.
And you may be left behind.

There is work to be done by the way, my boy.
That you never can tread again.
Work for the glory, and the peace, and the gain.
Work for the hands and the brain.

The serpent will follow your steps, my boy.
To lay for your feet a snare,
And pleasure sit in her fairy looms,
With garlands of poppies and lotus flowers
Enwreathing her golden hair.

Temptations will wait by the way, my boy.
Temptations without and within:
As the serpent sits in her fairy looms,
Will lure you to deadly sin.

Then put on the armor of God, my boy.
In the beautiful days of youth,
Put on the helmet, breast-plate, and shield,
And the sword that the faithful arm may wield
In the campaign of Right and Truth.

And go to the Battle of Life, my boy.
With the peace of the Gospel shield,
And before High Heaven, do the best you can
For the Kingdom and Crown of God.

Sold on the Balm of Vesuvius.

BY MARY KYLE DALLAS.

"What is the meaning of that crowd,
If you please?" asked a young American
of a fruit seller in the streets of Naples,
of whom he had just bought some grapes.

"It is an improvisatore, Signor," replied the man.

"I must hear him," said the foreigner, delighted.

Now, this American had read of the improvisatore often. He is a peculiarly Italian institution—a man who, generally at twilight, pauses in a crowded place, casts down his hat at his feet and improvises a story in prose or verse. He is much more romantic than the organ grinder, and gets many more small coin.

The American felt quite delighted at the opportunity afforded him, and took a place very near the porch on which the man had elevated himself. He posed himself, this improvisatore, most gracefully; beside his hat lay his knapsack. He was handsome, as we all expect poets to be and seldom find them.

His eyes rolled about him, and caught glints of light, and sparkled and grew soft as the eyes of the most estimable English-speaking person never could.

His hair was black and rippling, and his olive cheek smooth as a girl's. The American waited eagerly, and with romance in his heart, for the beginning. This is what he heard:

"Signors and Signoras and Signorinas also," said the Italian, with that musical accent which makes the speech of some parts of Italy almost a song to foreign ears—"Signors, Signoras and Signorinas, I am about to tell you a true story—a tale of fact, not of imagination. Think you it will interest you less for that? No; assuredly you will remember that fact is stranger than fiction. Besides, my grandmother was the prettiest woman in Naples."

"I hear some one cry, laughing. Ah, Signor, you need not laugh; I am speaking of my grandmother, Beatrice, Panchini, at eighteen years of age. She was the beauty of the town, the envy of the girls, the adoration of the youths of the place."

"Not a young fellow in Naples but admired her—she had given her heart to one alone, Luigi Vannicci, the bravest of all the young Neapolitans, and when he was rich enough they were to be married. Meanwhile no other, however handsome or gallant, could get so much as a smile from her. She was as constant and true as she was beautiful. Half way up the slope of Vesuvius, in a little house long since destroyed by eruption, she lived with her father. Her mother had perished at her birth, and the father was very old. He had about his dwelling a little vineyard and a few fig trees, but his subsistence was derived from the sale of a lotion which he himself had discovered, of which he knew the secret; he called it the 'Balm of Vesuvius.' To procure its ingredients it was necessary that the old man should arise at night and climb the mountain and pick a certain weed that grew in the hollows of the earth before the sun had dried the dew upon it. At times, after the mountain had been silent for a long while, a strange vine began to grow in the crater. This he must tear from its bed, for the roots were precious. He dared not confide his secret to any man, and at his age, the task of gathering the ingredients for his lotion had grown laborious. However, when made, this mixture was a sovereign remedy for all those wounds and bruises the mountaineers and guides were so apt to receive. It also cured rheumatism and allayed the anguish of fever pains. As he was honest and skilful, he made a fair price for this precious balm, and two managed to live upon its sale, for Beatrice was a careful housekeeper and did not waste money as most girls of her age will do."

"They were happy in their little home, this good old man and his beautiful daughter; and, surely it must have been a demon who could have plotted evil against Beatrice—a demon or a jealous lover." The improvisatore paused and folded his arms.

The American settled himself more comfortably and prepared to be interested. Now the romance was coming; a few small coin rattled into the hat lying at the story-teller's feet. It was what he was waiting for, and he went on:

"Beatrice Tupelo was in love with Luigi Vannicci and hated Luigi Vannicci bitterly."

"Love is a strange thing, Signoras. The disappointed lover scarcely knows what it is he feels for the woman who scorns his passion. Is it love? Is it hate? He longs for her, yet he could kill her. Often when Beatrice and Luigi wandered hand in hand amongst the vines in the soft summer evenings, Pedro was behind them. Twice he had drawn his dagger to slay his rival, but had sheathed it without striking, for Pedro could hate as hotly as he loved; but his life was precious to him, and he feared the wrath of Luigi's kinspeople, if it were known that he had been his murderer."

"Alone, when no eye saw him, Pedro had resolved to do the bloody deed—alone, near the dark crater of Vesuvius, or on the lonely road infested by brigands, who robbed the wealthy or made them captive until their ransom was paid. Signors and Signoras, it was not always a brigand who drove the knife to the heart of the dead man found at dawn."

staring with blank eyes toward heaven. It was sometimes the very kinsman who most bewailed his taking off, who had followed and done him to death for the sake of an inheritance, and often a jealous lover in whose way he stood, for Italians love and hate as they do not elsewhere.

"Pedro waited for his opportunity, bearing his stolen glimpses of Paradise as best he might, and the moment came at last."

There was another pause. The American tossed a handful of coin into the hat. The improvisatore went on:

"Signors, Signoras, and Signorinas, you would not care to know on what embassy the handsome young Luigi was sent on the day when Pedro followed him out of Naples. It was one of importance, however, and he was employed by the Count di L. If he pleased this patron, some good place would surely be given him. Pedro heard him tell this to Beatrice as they parted at the door of her father's cottage."

"We can be married, Beatrice," he said. "We will all live together, and your old father shall never know want. How happy we shall be, my Beatrice."

"At this moment the dark face of Pedro looked upon them from the vine trellis, but neither saw it."

"He was gone, the beautiful Luigi. The days passed, the hours came when he should have returned, but he came not."

"Pedro walked about the city as usual; no one had missed him."

"The Count began to cast doubts on Luigi's honesty. His friends spoke of bandits—for he had a valuable package entrusted to his care—and in her father's house, Beatrice, after a long fit of weeping, fell into a strange swoon, and it seemed to die."

"The old man was in despair; the watchers sat in the low room; the candles burnt beside her. On the morrow she would be buried."

"Meanwhile, Luigi had performed his task and was returning by night over a road that seemed as lonely as though the world were deserted, when a sudden step, hastening into a run, behind him, startled him. He turned and saw Pedro. No thought of his purpose occurred to Luigi. He smiled and held out his hand."

"Welcome," he said. "Whence did you drop? From the moon?"

"For answer Pedro rushed toward him and plunged a dagger into his breast; another stab, another and another followed, and then Pedro lifted the bleeding and senseless body of Luigi in his arms and bore it to the edge of a deep precipice and cast it over."

"It fell with a thud to the bottom, and Pedro rushed away horror-stricken at his own deed. He alone of all Naples knew that Luigi lay in the depths of the dark chasm; and even he did not know that Luigi was not dead."

"Down in the dark hollows between the rocks Luigi came to himself. He could not move, he could not even lift his hand. At first he could not see, and there was a roaring in his ears. He felt that his life's blood was oozing away, and tried to say a prayer to heaven for his soul. As he prayed his brain grew clearer; he thought of Beatrice and her grief when the news of his death should reach her; and suddenly he seemed to see her, or something like her. It was a figure delicate, transparent and clothed in white, with her face, her smile, her loving glance."

"It stood for a moment above him on the edge of the chasm and then descended. In its hands it held two white flasks that glittered in the light. It knelt beside him."

"I have come to save you, Luigi," it said, and from the flasks a soft and healing balm fell on Luigi's wounds, healing them like magic. Strength returned to him—he moved a little; he was able at length to rise. Leaning on his elbow he addressed the lovely vision: "Is it indeed my Beatrice, or an angel in her form?" he asked. But as he spoke his senses were lulled in a dreamy calm, his eyes closed and he slept."

"When he awakened, greatly refreshed, he found a yellow flask lying beside him. He knew at once that it was the balm which the old father of his Beatrice prepared from the weeds and vines that grew in the hollows of the volcano, 'The Balm of Vesuvius,' and he felt that he was saved."

"At that moment the watchers about the bier of the beautiful Beatrice started to their feet, staring at each other and calling upon all holy names, for the girl's face was slowly changing from its dead whiteness to the brilliant hues of life; her eyes opened; her lips moved; she spoke."

"My friends," she cried, "I am not dead. I have only been absent from my body a little while. I have been with Luigi—Luigi, who also lives. Stabbed by the hand of the wicked Pedro, he lies at the bottom of a deep chasm; but I have healed him. Unseen, I bore from this place some flasks of the balm my father makes so well. He is saved; he will be here ere long. Lift me from this bier, and help me to attire myself to meet him."

"Signors and Signoras, I cannot explain the mystery to you. I can only tell you the plain, unvarnished truth. Beatrice and Luigi were united. The count fulfilled his promise, and they prospered. Pursued by the wrath of Luigi's kinsfolk, Pedro fled from Naples forever. My grandmother lived to be a very old woman, thanks to the Balm of Vesuvius, and dying, left me the receipt as a legacy."

"Signors, Signoras, and Signorinas, I have in this knapsack a number of flasks of this precious balsam. It will heal all wounds and bruises, cure rheumatism, and taken inwardly break a fever. Who will buy? Remember it has magical properties. Remember the story of the way it was conveyed to my grandfather, in yellow flasks, exactly resembling these. Who will buy the balm of Vesuvius?"

A good many did. The yellow flasks came, one after the other, out of the improvisatore's knapsack; but the American, who had been so anxious to listen, thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets and walked away, uttering one English word—"sold."

It did not mean the Balm of Vesuvius. Photograph Albums, At the Miramichi Bookstore.

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