OLD PROGRAMMES.

ALTNE PORTBOUS.

Locking my treasures over
To-day, I chanced upon
A package of party programmes,
Danced ther' a winter gone.
As I read the long list over
That told of the midnight whirl,
I wondered, a little sadly,
If I were the same glad girl.

Redowa, waltz and polka,
Jenkins and Jones and Brown—
Something after that order
Danced ther' a winter gone.
Over the names I pondered—
Full half I can't recall;
Men who were bowed so—and—with—
And forgotten after the ball.

But ther' the reason's programmes
The single letter G
Is written over and over—
How much it means to me!
Men and names are forgotten—
Gay partners by the score—
But the letter G and the writer
Are remembered forevermore.

Meetings under the gas light,
A hint and a passionate glance;
Smiles that are set to music,
A hand-clasp in the dance.
Nights that are full of glory,
Whispered vows in the waltz;
Fashion and pain and parting—
And there the measure halts.

Ah! each life has its programme,
With its mystic letter G,
And to all its inner secrets
That letter is the key.
Titles and men are forgotten—
The famous and the brave—
But that one silent letter stands,
Like a tombstone by a grave.

THE WOMAN IN RED.

A Thrilling Italian Story of the Last Century.

BY GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANCESCA TAKES AN OATH.

The confession wrung from the Countess Donati struck all present with dismay. The Jewess stood the queen of the situation, while the unfortunate Constanza Donati was utterly crushed and broken in spirit. She could not muster courage enough to look Francesca in the face, till the latter spoke to her.

Running up to her as she lay on a couch, hiding her face, and giving vent to her grief in deep sobs, Francesca seized her hands, and pressing them fondly, endeavored to console her.

"Mother, dear mother—for to me you have ever been one—do not grieve, though I am not indeed, your daughter, I will, from heaven, always act as such. Yours was the hand that saved me from my infancy, yours the voice that first taught me to lisp the sacred name of mother. To you, then, my love and gratitude are ever due, and shall ever be rendered."

"And what of me, oh, Naomi, my daughter?" and the Jewess in a voice of emotion.

Francesca went up to the Woman in Red, a sweet smile on her beautiful face; she took her hand.

"To you—for I can no longer doubt that you speak truth, and that you are indeed my parent—to you I owe duty. It is for you to command, for me to obey. I have known little of you, you have been to me a stranger, although I am your daughter. Time may ripen a sense of duty into a feeling of love, I pity your misfortunes—I pray Heaven to heaven for your welfare; more I cannot say."

"It is the voice of an angel speaking," cried the Jewess rapturously. "My child, my darling child, Heaven will listen to your prayer, and the poor Jewess will once again press to her heart daughter and her daughter's love."

She folded Francesca in a close embrace, and after so fond a caress of two, then she released her, and addressing her and the Countess Donati, said

"Listen to what I am about to say. It has pleased Heaven to point out to me my long lost daughter, but not yet to restore her to my arms. The labor of all will complete His work in His own time. Meanwhile, the child grieves at the thought of being torn from the home and associations of her childhood. Is it not so, Naomi? Speak and fear not."

"Oh, yes, yes; do not take me away; let me remain here but a little time longer."

"My child, it shall be as you wish at least for a time," said the Jewess, smiling sadly. "The hour for my full restitution in my rights, I see, yet come; for know, Constanza Donati, that I, Rudiga, the Jewess, will not take my daughter until I have won back the love of which you have robbed me. I will not tear her away, while yet a stranger, at the sacrifice of her happiness—perhaps of her life, her life. No; for the present she may remain with you; but so sure as Jehovah reigns in Heaven, He will work upon her heart, and her love will insensibly wander back to me, her mother. When that shall have happened, then and not till then, will I reclaim her."

Turning to the maiden she said:

"You have decided for the sake of your happiness, to let you remain under the care of the Countess Donati, your foster-mother."

The girl bent her knee, and kissed the hand of the Jewess.

"Promise me," continued the latter, "that when I claim you at the expiration of three years, you will willingly come and yield me your obedience, duty and love."

"I promise," murmured the girl faintly.

"Swear by the Almighty, and call his vengeance down on the head of yourself and the Countess Donati should you refuse obedience."

"I will swear."

"You will swear, at the end of three years, to come to me, wherever you may be, whomsoever you may be with."

"I swear."

"Then the Jewess dictated an oath, which Francesca, pale and trembling did not refuse to take.

"Rise, daughter; rise Naomi. I, your mother, have your vow now; but for a time. In three years, wherever you may be, I shall not fail to claim you. As for you, sir," she said, turning to Count Claudio, "you shall never again set eyes on my daughter."

"Horror!" echoed the Countess Donati, remembering the late audacious attempt of the young man.

"Francesca," he said despairingly, "will you not forgive me?"

"Count Claudio, you have grossly and wantonly insulted me this day; I wish to see you no more. Henceforth we are strangers; not even in my thoughts shall you be present. I now tear your image from my heart, and dismiss you forever."

He bowed his head.

"As you will. I now feel reckless, and equal to any desperate deed. Francesca, I loved you; and because the very violence of my love impelled me to an indiscretion, you dismiss me forever! Be it so. Cruel girl, you care not to what you doom me—to a life of violence, of crime; to a bitter, dreary existence; with but little hope for the future, no pleasure in looking back on the past. Adieu."

She was about to speak, perhaps somewhat relentingly; but before she could give utterance to the words he was gone.

"Alas," she sighed inwardly, "I shall never see him again! Fate is very cruel."

The Jewess embraced her new-found daughter, repeated her words of warning and command, and also took her departure.

We will leave them for a while and follow the fortunes of Count Claudio and others who are closely interwoven with our story.

Reckless, driven to despair by the words of Francesca, the young Count cared little now what became of him. He loved Francesca deeply and truly, and thought she looked on him only in contempt. He expected to receive with her to relieve him from his embarrassments, that was not the object of his desires.

Even when he learned that her father, the Count, was ruined, and that there was no hope of wealth with the daughter, he had determined not to give her up. Now, then, that she had discarded him, he felt the wound deeply, and he was plunged into a career of reckless dissipation. The small remnant of his property disappeared, and in less than a week he was utterly ruined.

"The gaming-table was now his only hope of retrieving his lost fortunes, and there he was night after night, a constant attendant.

At last the catastrophe of his fortunes arrived. He had played all one night, with desperate and never-failing ill-fortune, against the bank. His watch, his ring, every article of jewelry everything that could be pledged into money, all were staked, and all swept away, till at four o'clock in the morning the once gay, dashing, and wealthy Count Claudio, stepped out into the street a penniless outcast.

There gentlemen gamblers whose ill-luck had even been worse than that of Count Claudio, in that he played for lower stakes and as uniformly lost, till at the close of the rooms before was utterly ruined as the other. He was a middle-aged man, richly dressed, and by his appearance of some consequence.

He followed Count Claudio out of the saloon, and walked behind him unseen, down the broad stair case leading to the street

"Behind ruined utterly and irretrievably ruined!" ejaculated the man to himself. "I have not my sword left; and, failing all else, must do as many an other ruined noble has done—turn brigand."

"By the saints, not a bad idea!" exclaimed the other, who had overheard the remark. "Excuse me, sir, for listening, but I heard your words; and as I am exactly in the same position myself, I will take the liberty of addressing you. Were you serious when you said that turning brigand, or, rather, say mountain-chief, it is more polite."

"Serious, why not? I see no other career open."

"By heavens! young spark, I am with you. Your name, young sir?"

"Count Claudio. And yours?"

"I am the Count Donati."

An exclamation of surprise broke from Claudio. Before him was the father of the supposed father of Francesca. Neither Claudio nor Count Donati were conscious of the fact either, and this was the first time they had met. Donati had not the least knowledge of the events of the last week at his palace, as he had not been called to pay a flying visit there, on account of the desperate state of his affairs; even the marriage of Francesca to Claudio, and the impending ruin which hung over the house of Donati, to enter into the particulars of which Claudio and Count Donati had in vain endeavored to make known to the old nobleman, were unknown to him.

Now Count Donati, and his companion in service, the sharp-witted Pinta, knew if he had ordered his servants to admit their master, and so they looked, and both answered that they "didn't know."

At the same time the people of the large piazza of the main front of the palace were three rows of lattice work, on Spanish balconies, which darkened three windows of the ground floor, and the whole of the first. Italian manner. "Who knows that the middle range of lattice work behind which appeared and disappeared the stranger alighted and made his way walk slowly, a pair of brilliant eyes might have been seen through one of the interstices, and a female form, obviously upon the measurement. He was young-ish man, upper only in his shirt sleeves, and with a sash round his measure dressed. He secured his horse at the gate, and advancing to the very base of the balcony, he removed his slouched hat, and wiped off the perspiration from his overheated with his hand.

"Give you good day, Count," he exclaimed, address ng himself at once to the dozing Count.

"Well, what now?" inquired Count Donati, without deigning to turn his head.

"I have come a long distance Count, to speak with you on a matter of much moment, and I am now fasting since yesterday night."

"That is no business of mine," said the old Italian.

"Yes, it is, signor."

"Who are you?"

"A poor man in distress."

"We have such men here every day in the month."

"You do not have me here often, Count; and I pray you give me a draught of good wine, and bid some fellow to see to my horse yonder. She has borne me many a league since daybreak, without an ounce of barley."

"And I, sir, what to me? Off with you! lest I set the hound after you."

At this moment, for the first time, the stranger heard a low snarl at his side, he beheld the teeth of a mastiff, the blood-hound just beyond him, lying under the shadow of a cluster of evergreens.

"Ha, ha!" grinned Count Donati viciously, "I see you will be evil at any rate. The dog will be hungry, but doesn't fancy your costume. Be quiet, Carlo; quiet, sir."

"Let him eat his teeth, signor, an' he will. Come, since you are so inclined, release him. He is a vicious cur like, master. You shall send him at me, and I will show you how I will make his acquaintance."

"Out on you, fellow, for a stupid fool!" retorted the Count, tartly. "Will I please to say to him, 'Go there!' thy skin would be the worse for having ensured within the gate."

"Will it please you, Count, to let him come? I have said he is a cur, but he is his master."

"What means the fellow?"

"Not his master, S gnor."

"But, then! Out of my gates!"

"Not until my errand is accomplished."

"Speed thee, then, and do thy errand, and by Saint Peter my dog shall drive thee hence."

"Will it please thee, Count, to order hungry horse some grain?"

"No."

"Indeed you will anon," continued the stranger, approaching him more closely. "I come from Rodolpho."

"What?" exclaimed the Italian, quickly springing up. "Tell me, stranger—I doubt thy words—the proof that thou art sent."

"It is here," said the traveler at once, as he pointed to a heavy signet-ring upon his left hand.

"Come in, come in. Copo, Pinta, see to the horse."

"And mind you," said the stranger, "she must have good care and faithful grooming."

"See to it," added Donat, extending his hand to the traveler, and leading him into the mans on without further hesitation.

The wayfarer very soon found himself perfectly at home. A choice repast of excellent fare and delicious wine was instantly placed before him and an explanation quickly followed.

"You come from Count Claudio? What can I do—that is, how can I serve my old friend?"

"Your old companion, I believe?"

"Companion. Ah, yes, yes; partner, you mean.

"Well, partner in trade, if you like that term better partner or companion.

"You know them——"

"Yes; I know Rodolpho, and I know Bernardo.

"Bernardo! Who—who was he?"

"It was a good while ago——"

"Yes, yes; the Empress——"

"I know. It is a long while since you and he traded together, eh?"

"Traded together! You don't know——You—you have heard——"

"Have I? after what I have said, we may speak in confidence I think."

"Ah!"

"There is no occasion for doubt, Count. I am here to ask an accommodation of you.

"Well?"

"Business with us has been and before—and you are aware, since your retirement from the profession, we work together to profit. We have an opportunity now of serving us both, but in the meeting me you lose. You see, eh?

"Well, go on."

"The companies in the mountains are not supposed organization—exercise rare discipline—but they are—they are not to be trifled with. Bernardo is one of their chiefs, and Rodolpho has an enemy in the very midst of the community, and that enemy is the husband of the lady you have carried off. Rodolpho has no objection to the lady, but she is married, and her husband, a gallant fellow, has sprung to arms—mustered all the——"

"Twenty thousand devils! I said, changing the expression of my face, or seeming for a moment to do so, that I would not be interrupted."

"Twenty thousand devils—the husband Count Donati, catches his——a lesson more."

"It is a very good one, I know it."

"I know it," responded the stranger.

"Was the man single?"

"Had three children."

"Then he was strong, to be sure, to make such a demand of me."

"I will say one thing further, Count for his——I am not fond of wine, as you are aware, but I must know that he has not a better cellar than yours to offer me, or I am in for an extravagant——fast. Count, added the stranger, with a laugh, "this gentleman with whom——one of the chiefs of the mountains——is in your good health! By the——the noble of the land, Count Donati, as I speak to you myself."

Twenty thousand devils! Count, eh? what?"

"Twenty thousand devils, Count, and I will repeat it, if you desire it, a hundred times, to the——"

"Ah! enough, enough! Count Donati, as I speak to you myself."

"An economical——"

"Ha! ha! ha! I see you are in earnest in the matter, and you know that I do not——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"Excuse, Count. Your pardon for the interruption. Really, this is not for either you nor me, but——"

"Ha! ha! ha! Well, then, I will laugh with you. Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha! Ha! ha! ha!