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LOUISIANA.

The emblematical picture on this page, designed for us by Billings, groups gracefully together some of the most characteristic features of the great State of Louisiana. In the very centre of the design are the State arms, the device of which is a pelican feeding her young. Overhead is a tiara of the stars of the Union, and the scales of justice, with an appropriate motto. On the right is seen a gang of negroes, cutting sugar canes. A couple of servants who appear to have had a dispute are referring the matter to their master, who is riding over his plantation. To the left are Indians, engaged in their famous ball-play. Below the State arms is a general view of New Orleans; the crescent moon in the sky indicating the popular title of the place—the Crescent City. The State of Louisiana comprises an area of about 41,225 square miles. It was visited and the mouth of the Mississippi discovered by Lasalle, in 1691. In 1712 M. Crozart obtained a grant of the whole territory from Louis XIV., and called it Louisiana in honor of that monarch. John Law, the famous banker, bought it in 1717, but after the failure of his schemes, it reverted to the crown of France and was transferred to Spain in 1762. It was retroceded to France in 1800, and was purchased by President Jefferson, of Napoleon, in 1803, for the sum of $11,250,000. Louisiana was admitted into the Union in 1812. The surface of Louisiana nowhere attains a greater elevation than 200 feet. A great variety of minerals are found within the State, and the soil is highly productive. Tropical fruits grow in the southern parts, and the apple and other fruits in the northern. Almost all kinds of grain are raised here; tobacco, rice, sugar, &c. The sugar crop of 1853 amounted to 321,939 hogsheads. The sylva of Louisiana is rich in a great variety of forest trees. As much of the State is yet unsettled, bears and wolves are sometimes found here. Birds and beasts abound in the woods, while huge alligators and various species of turtle are found in the swamps and bayous. The manufactures of Louisiana are not important; but her commerce, from her position and advantages, is very great. Education receives due provision and encouragement. In 1850 there were 306 churches in the State. Its population in 1850, 517,762. There are several railroads and canals in the State connected with the navigation of the Mississippi, which give quite a strong impetus to business; and other public works of the kind are in contemplation, some of which are already undergoing the process of construction.

[Written for Ballou's Pictorial.]

THE VISCONTI:

—OR,—

BARBARIGO THE STRANGER.

A TALE OF MILAN DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

BY AUSTIN C. BURDICK.

[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER XVI.—[CONTINUED.]

"The thing is in train," answered the count, hopefully, and with considerable assurance. "I have touched the duchess's feelings, and am sure she will urge my suit. I told her Francesco was dead, and I think she bore the news very calmly. And I think I convinced her that I love her daughter most truly."

"So far all is well," said the duke; "but there is yet one obstacle, and one that 'twere well to remove. You know Barbarigo?"

"What—the ubiquitous stranger?"

"Yes."

"I know him by sight, but I think no one knows him fully."

"You are right, count; but he is in our way."

"Ha—how?"

"I cannot tell you. I can only tell you that he has even had the audacity to come to me and forbid me to oppose the marquis; and from what I have overheard since Julia's return, I know that he has seen her, and that he has promised to assist her. I put him in one of my deepest dungeons when he came to me, and he disappeared as if by magic. He is dangerous. He has sworn to help the marquis, and we know not where his power may end."

"But do you not know something of this strange man, my lord?"

"I am sorely puzzled, count, on that very thing. There is in my memory something that calls those features to mind in connection with things long since passed; but I cannot get at the bottom of it. I know the face is familiar, but to save my soul from perdition, I cannot tell when nor where he has crossed my path before. But this I do know; he is in our way, and may thwart us if we do not dispose of him."

"And how shall that be done?" asked the count, gazing fixedly into Visconti's face.

"Can you not judge? You know no open means could be used. How would you dispose of a viper?"

"I would tread on it."

"But if 'twere very poisonous you would strike it?"

"Yes."

"Then why not use Barbarigo the same? You will have more opportunity than I."

"By the host, my lord, I shall not stop at trifles, if there's really danger in my path. I have trusty servants."

"Then watch for the man. He will be in the city ere long, for I know that he is expected here at the palace. Will you watch for him?"

"I will."

"And mind—he must not come hither."

"No—he shall, if saint, go up to his last home. If sinner, his course will be downward. But he shall not come here."

The duke grasped Loredano's hand, and ere they separated, Barbarigo's death-warrant was sealed!

CHAPTER XVII.

SUNSHINE IN A PRISON-HOUSE.

When daylight came, Francesco found himself in a dungeon not so damp as the one he had left at Verona, but far more gloomy in appearance and association. The walls of the cell were of solid rock, and so neatly placed were the stones that 'twas with difficulty the prisoner could find any seam. Even the door was missing. The marquis looked in every direction, but the surface of the wall presented the same appearance on all hands. This puzzled him much. He knew, of course, that he had entered at a door, for he had heard it open and shut, but it was not to be found now. He thumped upon various parts of the wall, but from every place came the same solid, massive sound. The cell was octangular in form, its eight sides being equal, and the ceiling was an arch of the same shape, the eight angles meeting at a point in the centre. The place was about eight feet in diameter, and the only furniture was a simple pallet of oak, upon which was thrown a mass of unconfined straw.

The light came into the dungeon through narrow crevices where the arch of the ceiling joined with the wall, and the apertures were let through the masonry in such a manner that they could hardly be detected were it not for the light which struggled in through them, their course being oblique, and parallel with the rise of the ceiling; so that the rays of light glanced upward along the arch and were then reflected down.

The very form and structure of this place were horrible, for the fact was at once apparent that it was made for no common prison. As soon as the light was sufficient the marquis began to examine the walls to see if he could find any inscriptions thereon, for he had heard of the various things which had been found written upon the walls of such places. But he found nothing of the kind. Yet he at length found something which he at once translated into a calendar—a record of passing time. It was a simple score—a succession of marks scratched upon the wall with some hard point. These marks were made in groups of seven each, the seventh line being drawn diagonally across the other six. Of course these single lines were days, and the groups represented weeks. Francesco counted them, and he made forty six groups—almost a year some fellow-being had passed within the dungeon.

And should he take hope from this—or should he only shudder at such a prospect? If a prisoner had remained there so long as that, then the inmate of the dungeon was not, of course, condemned to instant or speedy death. And if time were granted, perhaps escape might be possible. The marquis tried to hope, for he had promise of succor from Barbarigo. But then what power had Barbarigo here?

For a long time the prisoner's mind was wandering about in search of something upon which to hang its hopes. He had passed through many trials in his lifetime, and thus far he had come off free from every danger. Thus had he gained a sort of indwelling hope which seldom left him. But gradually the sterner reality was left alone in his mind. He had no companion now. That faithful guardian of his person—his Damascus blade—was gone, and he was in the hands of those whose power was as the venomous serpent that crawls upon its mission of death at midnight.

He was upon the point of turning towards the pallet to sit down, when a small dark object near the wall arrested his attention. He approached it and stooped down, and found it to be a small loaf of black bread and an earthen pot of water. How it came there he knew not, though he judged, of course, that it must have been placed there while he slept; for he had sunk into a sort of drowse upon the straw. Where this lay he examined the wall more thoroughly, but without effect. He could find nothing that looked or sounded like a door. He drank some of the water, which was sweet and pure, but he had no appetite for food. He placed the loaf and jar near the head of his pallet, and then sat down.

The day passed slowly away, and the night came. The prisoner slept, but his dreams were terrible, and ever and anon he would arise to shake off the fearful phantoms which clung to his drowsy imagination. At length the morning came again, and another loaf and another jar of water were found, but not in the same position where the first were placed. Francesco was wondering if they would give him a new jar every night, when he discovered that the first one was gone. Of course some one must have been in his dungeon. He resolved that the following night he would watch, and discover, if he could, how access was gained to him.

Another day passed away, and another night came. The prisoner had slept part of the afternoon, for he was planning to watch through the night. As the last beam and glimmer faded from the arched ceiling, he sat down upon his pallet and bowed his head. There was something terribly lonesome in the place. At Verona the hum of busy life had come to greet his ears and keep him company through the day, but he heard not a sound here. Since he had been confined not a human sound had broken in upon the dull monotony of the place—only at times there came the dim reverberations of a distant bell; but even that had a solemn, deathly echo, more like the knell of the tomb than like the ring of earth.

Hour after hour wore on, and the prisoner still kept his eyes open. At times his heavy lids would droop, and a few turns across the dungeon were necessary. But as the night wore on and all was still, nature called for rest so stoutly that the marquis resolved to lie down and close his lids, but still keep his ears open. He had done that on the battle-field, and he could surely do it here. So he threw himself upon the mouldy straw, and for a while he did listen attentively. But where no sound of any kind broke the deathlike stillness of the place, how was he to tell if his ears were open while his mind slept?

At length the watcher was lost in the sleeper. He gave up, and Somnus conquered. By and-by the sleeper dreamed. He found himself in a spacious room, all hung in black, while black-robed men moved about him. Before him, upon a throne formed of human skulls, sat a gigantic man, who held a book in his hand. This man was clothed in black like his fellows, and like them he wore a sable mask upon his face. "Francesco Della Torre," read the giant from his book, "you have slain the servants of the Lord. What shall be your reward?" Then up from the bowels of the earth came the response, as from the lips of those who slept in their graves: "Death! Death! Death!"

Then the prisoner heard the opening of a door—it creaked and groaned upon its hinges, and as it opened wide a sheet of flame poured into the apartment, enveloping everything within its devouring folds. "Come," pronounced a voice close to his ear—"come to the furnace!" And he felt a hot, burning hand clutched upon his shoulder. The glare of the roaring flame almost blinded him, and with a wild cry he broke from the grasp that held him. His head hit the solid wall with painful force, and he awoke. But there was reality to part of the dream. As he opened his eyes, the strong rays of a lamp poured into them, and he saw a tall, dark form standing over him.

"Francesco," spoke the visitor, "you sleep most soundly. Are you awake now?"

The prisoner looked up, and now, as the lantern was turned from him, he could see more plainly. His visitor wore a dark robe of velvet stuff, and his head was bare; but the features were not yet revealed.

"Are you awake yet?" the stranger repeated.

"I am," answered the marquis, rising to a sitting posture, and shading his eyes with his hand.

"I should think one in your situation would sleep not quite so soundly. Have you slept in that manner through the night?"

"No. I had but just fallen asleep when you must have entered. I watched through much of the night."

"Ah—and for what?"

"For mere curiosity."

"Oho—you wished to see how entrance was gained here, eh?"

"You have guessed it, signor."

As the marquis thus spoke, the lantern was turned so that its beams fell upon the face of him who held it, and the prisoner beheld the features of Barbarigo!

"But you are none the wiser now," said the strange man, with a smile. "This is a queer sort of a place, though I fancy its uniqueness would not lead you to wish to spend much time here, eh?"

"You are right there," said the marquis, who had started to his feet. "But tell me if you are not Barbarigo."

"I am."

"O, and you have come to help me. You have come to save me. Tell me that you have."

"What makes you think so?" quietly asked the visitor.

"Because you told Donna Julia that you would help me if you could."

"So I did—and so I will. And I have come now to give you warning to that effect. I shall help you soon."

"But can you not let me out from here now?"

"No, no. Not yet. There are those above us who are watching you narrowly now; but ere long I am sure I can help you."

"But answer me one question. Am I not within the prison of the Holy Inquisition?"

"Ha! What put that into your head?" uttered Barbarigo, starting.

"But is it not so?"

"Answer me first. What reason have you to think so?"

"Because I know I am in St. Donato, and surely there is no other prison-house there."

"But you were blinded when you came here?"

"Yes."

"Then how know you that you are in St. Donato?"

"I know by the length and sound of the bridge over which we came, and the distance we travelled before we reached the pavements."

"Then you are sure you are in St. Donato?"

"O—I know that."

"Then of course you are right in regard to the rest. But you must not ask too many questions. You are in the dungeons of the Holy Inquisition, but I may have the power to aid you. But mind—should you be visited by any of the officers before I see you again, you will not hint that you have seen any one—lisp not my name if you hope for life."

"You need not fear, signor, for I needed not your caution to that effect."

"Yet the giving of it will not harm you."

"O, no. I rather thank you for it. But tell me why I was brought hither."

"Probably for the same reason that many others have been here before you. You have enemies."

"But has there been no charge made against me? Was—"

"Stop, stop. You are now going beyond my power to answer. You should know enough of this place to know that few questions can be answered save by those who have hands in the affair. But I came not to stop. I only came to give you hope—to let you know that you need not starve yourself nor in any other way hasten your exit from earth, for the future may be one of promise and joy."

"Do you mean that I can ever gain my heart's dearest wish?"

"You will have the world before you."

"Pardon me if I am inquisitive here; but I must ask the question so that you shall understand it. Shall I gain the hand of Julia Visconti?"

"The thing is not impossible, nor is it improbable. At all events, I may safely pledge you my word that the duke shall not oppose your suit."

"Then of course she is mine. O, I hardly dare open my heart to this hope so fully."

"About that you can do as you please; but I may assure you that I hold a strange power over Barnabas Visconti. I can speak a very few words that will make another man of him, and of this you shall receive the benefit. Now let me come to the case in hand. On the fifth day from this it is meant that your trial shall take place; but on the night preceding that day I will come to you again—premising that I am alive."

"And well," added Francesco.

"No, I make no such provision. If I am alive and able to move, you shall see me on the fourth night following the one we are now passing. Then I will come and lead you hence."

"Then I shall go to no trial before the court of the Holy Office?"

"No—that would hardly be safe, for it needs a wondrous power to wrest a victim from such a grasp. But rest you now in peace, and watch for my coming. You may be visited by the old Franciscan officials, but they will only call as a matter of course. Fear not until the fifth day shall open. Take heart now and put your trust in God."

"But suppose you do not come on the fourth night?" queried the marquis.

"That is hardly a supposable case; yet we are but human, and hold not an hour of the future. If I fail you, then you must think as you please, but in all human probability you would be right in supposing my influence lost."

"Yet I shall hope."

"You will be happier if you do."

As the strange man thus spoke he turned towards the wall; but ere he had taken two steps the marquis spoke again.