

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### IN WHICH IS RELATED THE NOVEL OF "THE ILL-ADVISED CURIOSITY"

In Florence, a rich and famous city of Italy in the province called Tuscany, there lived two gentlemen of wealth and quality, Anselmo and Lothario, such great friends that by way of distinction they were called by all that knew them "The Two Friends." They were unmarried, young, of the same age and of the same tastes, which was enough to account for the reciprocal friendship between them. Anselmo, it is true, was somewhat more inclined to seek pleasure in love than Lothario, for whom the pleasures of the chase had more attraction; but on occasion Anselmo would forego his own tastes to yield to those of Lothario, and Lothario would surrender his to fall in with those of Anselmo, and in this way their inclinations kept pace one with the other with a concord so perfect that the best regulated clock could not surpass it.

Anselmo was deep in love with a high-born and beautiful maiden of the same city, the daughter of parents so estimable, and so estimable herself, that he resolved, with the approval of his friend Lothario, without whom he did nothing, to ask her of them in marriage, and did so, Lothario being the bearer of the demand, and conducting the negotiation so much to the satisfaction of his friend that in a short time he was in possession of the object of his desires, and Camilla so happy in having won Anselmo for her husband, that she gave thanks unceasingly to heaven and to Lothario, by whose means such good fortune had fallen to her. The

first few days, those of a wedding being usually days of merry-making, Lothario frequented his friend Anselmo's house as he had been wont, striving to do honour to him and to the occasion, and to gratify him in every way he could; but when the wedding days were over and the succession of visits and congratulations had slackened, he began purposely to leave off going to the house of Anselmo, for it seemed to him, as it naturally would to all men of sense, that friends' houses ought not to be visited after marriage with the same frequency as in their masters' bachelor days: because, though true and genuine friendship cannot and should not be in any way suspicious, still a married man's honour is a thing of such delicacy that it is held liable to injury from brothers, much more from friends. Anselmo remarked the cessation of Lothario's visits, and complained of it to him, saying that if he had known that marriage was to keep him from enjoying his society as he used, he would have never married; and that, if by the thorough harmony that subsisted between them while he was a bachelor they had earned such a sweet name as that of "The Two Friends," he should not allow a title so rare and so delightful to be lost through a needless anxiety to act circumspectly; and so he entreated him, if such a phrase was allowable between them, to be once more master of his house and to come in and go out as formerly, assuring him that his wife Camilla had no other desire or inclination than that which he would wish her to have, and that knowing how sincerely they loved one another she was grieved to see such coldness in him.

To all this and much more that Anselmo said to Lothario to persuade him to come to his house as he had been in the habit of doing, Lothario

replied with so much prudence, sense, and judgment, that Anselmo was satisfied of his friend's good intentions, and it was agreed that on two days in the week, and on holidays, Lothario should come to dine with him; but though this arrangement was made between them Lothario resolved to observe it no further than he considered to be in accordance with the honour of his friend, whose good name was more to him than his own. He said, and justly, that a married man upon whom heaven had bestowed a beautiful wife should consider as carefully what friends he brought to his house as what female friends his wife associated with, for what cannot be done or arranged in the market-place, in church, at public festivals or at stations (opportunities that husbands cannot always deny their wives), may be easily managed in the house of the female friend or relative in whom most confidence is reposed. Lothario said, too, that every married man should have some friend who would point out to him any negligence he might be guilty of in his conduct, for it will sometimes happen that owing to the deep affection the husband bears his wife either he does not caution her, or, not to vex her, refrains from telling her to do or not to do certain things, doing or avoiding which may be a matter of honour or reproach to him; and errors of this kind he could easily correct if warned by a friend. But where is such a friend to be found as Lothario would have, so judicious, so loyal, and so true?

Of a truth I know not; Lothario alone was such a one, for with the utmost care and vigilance he watched over the honour of his friend, and strove to diminish, cut down, and reduce the number of days for going to his house according to their agreement, lest the visits of a young man, wealthy, high-born, and with the attractions he was conscious of

possessing, at the house of a woman so beautiful as Camilla, should be regarded with suspicion by the inquisitive and malicious eyes of the idle public. For though his integrity and reputation might bridle slanderous tongues, still he was unwilling to hazard either his own good name or that of his friend; and for this reason most of the days agreed upon he devoted to some other business which he pretended was unavoidable; so that a great portion of the day was taken up with complaints on one side and excuses on the other. It happened, however, that on one occasion when the two were strolling together outside the city, Anselmo addressed the following words to Lothario.

"Thou mayest suppose, Lothario my friend, that I am unable to give sufficient thanks for the favours God has rendered me in making me the son of such parents as mine were, and bestowing upon me with no niggard hand what are called the gifts of nature as well as those of fortune, and above all for what he has done in giving me thee for a friend and Camilla for a wife--two treasures that I value, if not as highly as I ought, at least as highly as I am able. And yet, with all these good things, which are commonly all that men need to enable them to live happily, I am the most discontented and dissatisfied man in the whole world; for, I know not how long since, I have been harassed and oppressed by a desire so strange and so unusual, that I wonder at myself and blame and chide myself when I am alone, and strive to stifle it and hide it from my own thoughts, and with no better success than if I were endeavouring deliberately to publish it to all the world; and as, in short, it must come out, I would confide it to thy safe keeping, feeling sure that by this means, and by thy readiness as a true friend to afford me relief, I

shall soon find myself freed from the distress it causes me, and that thy care will give me happiness in the same degree as my own folly has caused me misery."

The words of Anselmo struck Lothario with astonishment, unable as he was to conjecture the purport of such a lengthy preamble; and though he strove to imagine what desire it could be that so troubled his friend, his conjectures were all far from the truth, and to relieve the anxiety which this perplexity was causing him, he told him he was doing a flagrant injustice to their great friendship in seeking circuitous methods of confiding to him his most hidden thoughts, for he well knew he might reckon upon his counsel in diverting them, or his help in carrying them into effect.

"That is the truth," replied Anselmo, "and relying upon that I will tell thee, friend Lothario, that the desire which harasses me is that of knowing whether my wife Camilla is as good and as perfect as I think her to be; and I cannot satisfy myself of the truth on this point except by testing her in such a way that the trial may prove the purity of her virtue as the fire proves that of gold; because I am persuaded, my friend, that a woman is virtuous only in proportion as she is or is not tempted; and that she alone is strong who does not yield to the promises, gifts, tears, and importunities of earnest lovers; for what thanks does a woman deserve for being good if no one urges her to be bad, and what wonder is it that she is reserved and circumspect to whom no opportunity is given of going wrong and who knows she has a husband that will take her life the first time he detects her in an impropriety? I do not

therefore hold her who is virtuous through fear or want of opportunity in the same estimation as her who comes out of temptation and trial with a crown of victory; and so, for these reasons and many others that I could give thee to justify and support the opinion I hold, I am desirous that my wife Camilla should pass this crisis, and be refined and tested by the fire of finding herself wooed and by one worthy to set his affections upon her; and if she comes out, as I know she will, victorious from this struggle, I shall look upon my good fortune as unequalled, I shall be able to say that the cup of my desire is full, and that the virtuous woman of whom the sage says 'Who shall find her?' has fallen to my lot. And if the result be the contrary of what I expect, in the satisfaction of knowing that I have been right in my opinion, I shall bear without complaint the pain which my so dearly bought experience will naturally cause me. And, as nothing of all thou wilt urge in opposition to my wish will avail to keep me from carrying it into effect, it is my desire, friend Lothario, that thou shouldst consent to become the instrument for effecting this purpose that I am bent upon, for I will afford thee opportunities to that end, and nothing shall be wanting that I may think necessary for the pursuit of a virtuous, honourable, modest and high-minded woman. And among other reasons, I am induced to entrust this arduous task to thee by the consideration that if Camilla be conquered by thee the conquest will not be pushed to extremes, but only far enough to account that accomplished which from a sense of honour will be left undone; thus I shall not be wronged in anything more than intention, and my wrong will remain buried in the integrity of thy silence, which I know well will be as lasting as that of death in what concerns me. If, therefore, thou wouldst have me enjoy what can be called life, thou wilt

at once engage in this love struggle, not lukewarmly nor slothfully, but with the energy and zeal that my desire demands, and with the loyalty our friendship assures me of."

Such were the words Anselmo addressed to Lothario, who listened to them with such attention that, except to say what has been already mentioned, he did not open his lips until the other had finished. Then perceiving that he had no more to say, after regarding him for awhile, as one would regard something never before seen that excited wonder and amazement, he said to him, "I cannot persuade myself, Anselmo my friend, that what thou hast said to me is not in jest; if I thought that thou wert speaking seriously I would not have allowed thee to go so far; so as to put a stop to thy long harangue by not listening to thee I verily suspect that either thou dost not know me, or I do not know thee; but no, I know well thou art Anselmo, and thou knowest that I am Lothario; the misfortune is, it seems to me, that thou art not the Anselmo thou wert, and must have thought that I am not the Lothario I should be; for the things that thou hast said to me are not those of that Anselmo who was my friend, nor are those that thou demandest of me what should be asked of the Lothario thou knowest. True friends will prove their friends and make use of them, as a poet has said, *usque ad aras*; whereby he meant that they will not make use of their friendship in things that are contrary to God's will. If this, then, was a heathen's feeling about friendship, how much more should it be a Christian's, who knows that the divine must not be forfeited for the sake of any human friendship? And if a friend should go so far as to put aside his duty to Heaven to fulfil his duty to his friend, it should not be in matters that are trifling or of little

moment, but in such as affect the friend's life and honour. Now tell me, Anselmo, in which of these two art thou imperilled, that I should hazard myself to gratify thee, and do a thing so detestable as that thou seekest of me? Neither forsooth; on the contrary, thou dost ask of me, so far as I understand, to strive and labour to rob thee of honour and life, and to rob myself of them at the same time; for if I take away thy honour it is plain I take away thy life, as a man without honour is worse than dead; and being the instrument, as thou wilt have it so, of so much wrong to thee, shall not I, too, be left without honour, and consequently without life? Listen to me, Anselmo my friend, and be not impatient to answer me until I have said what occurs to me touching the object of thy desire, for there will be time enough left for thee to reply and for me to hear."

"Be it so," said Anselmo, "say what thou wilt."

Lothario then went on to say, "It seems to me, Anselmo, that thine is just now the temper of mind which is always that of the Moors, who can never be brought to see the error of their creed by quotations from the Holy Scriptures, or by reasons which depend upon the examination of the understanding or are founded upon the articles of faith, but must have examples that are palpable, easy, intelligible, capable of proof, not admitting of doubt, with mathematical demonstrations that cannot be denied, like, 'If equals be taken from equals, the remainders are equal;' and if they do not understand this in words, and indeed they do not, it has to be shown to them with the hands, and put before their eyes, and even with all this no one succeeds in convincing them of the truth of our holy religion. This same mode of proceeding I shall have to adopt with



thee, for the desire which has sprung up in thee is so absurd and remote from everything that has a semblance of reason, that I feel it would be a waste of time to employ it in reasoning with thy simplicity, for at present I will call it by no other name; and I am even tempted to leave thee in thy folly as a punishment for thy pernicious desire; but the friendship I bear thee, which will not allow me to desert thee in such manifest danger of destruction, keeps me from dealing so harshly by thee. And that thou mayest clearly see this, say, Anselmo, hast thou not told me that I must force my suit upon a modest woman, decoy one that is virtuous, make overtures to one that is pure-minded, pay court to one that is prudent? Yes, thou hast told me so. Then, if thou knowest that thou hast a wife, modest, virtuous, pure-minded and prudent, what is it that thou seekest? And if thou believest that she will come forth victorious from all my attacks--as doubtless she would--what higher titles than those she possesses now dost thou think thou canst upon her then, or in what will she be better than she is now? Either thou dost not hold her to be what thou sayest, or thou knowest not what thou dost demand. If thou dost not hold her to be what thou why dost thou seek to prove her instead of treating her as guilty in the way that may seem best to thee? but if she be as virtuous as thou believest, it is an uncalled-for proceeding to make trial of truth itself, for, after trial, it will but be in the same estimation as before. Thus, then, it is conclusive that to attempt things from which harm rather than advantage may come to us is the part of unreasoning and reckless minds, more especially when they are things which we are not forced or compelled to attempt, and which show from afar that it is plainly madness to attempt them.

"Difficulties are attempted either for the sake of God or for the sake of the world, or for both; those undertaken for God's sake are those which the saints undertake when they attempt to live the lives of angels in human bodies; those undertaken for the sake of the world are those of the men who traverse such a vast expanse of water, such a variety of climates, so many strange countries, to acquire what are called the blessings of fortune; and those undertaken for the sake of God and the world together are those of brave soldiers, who no sooner do they see in the enemy's wall a breach as wide as a cannon ball could make, than, casting aside all fear, without hesitating, or heeding the manifest peril that threatens them, borne onward by the desire of defending their faith, their country, and their king, they fling themselves dauntlessly into the midst of the thousand opposing deaths that await them. Such are the things that men are wont to attempt, and there is honour, glory, gain, in attempting them, however full of difficulty and peril they may be; but that which thou sayest it is thy wish to attempt and carry out will not win thee the glory of God nor the blessings of fortune nor fame among men; for even if the issue be as thou wouldst have it, thou wilt be no happier, richer, or more honoured than thou art this moment; and if it be otherwise thou wilt be reduced to misery greater than can be imagined, for then it will avail thee nothing to reflect that no one is aware of the misfortune that has befallen thee; it will suffice to torture and crush thee that thou knowest it thyself. And in confirmation of the truth of what I say, let me repeat to thee a stanza made by the famous poet Luigi Tansillo at the end of the first part of his 'Tears of Saint Peter,' which says thus:

The anguish and the shame but greater grew In Peter's heart as morning slowly came; No eye was there to see him, well he knew, Yet he himself was to himself a shame; Exposed to all men's gaze, or screened from view, A noble heart will feel the pang the same; A prey to shame the sinning soul will be, Though none but heaven and earth its shame can see.

Thus by keeping it secret thou wilt not escape thy sorrow, but rather thou wilt shed tears unceasingly, if not tears of the eyes, tears of blood from the heart, like those shed by that simple doctor our poet tells us of, that tried the test of the cup, which the wise Rinaldo, better advised, refused to do; for though this may be a poetic fiction it contains a moral lesson worthy of attention and study and imitation. Moreover by what I am about to say to thee thou wilt be led to see the great error thou wouldst commit.

"Tell me, Anselmo, if Heaven or good fortune had made thee master and lawful owner of a diamond of the finest quality, with the excellence and purity of which all the lapidaries that had seen it had been satisfied, saying with one voice and common consent that in purity, quality, and fineness, it was all that a stone of the kind could possibly be, thou thyself too being of the same belief, as knowing nothing to the contrary, would it be reasonable in thee to desire to take that diamond and place it between an anvil and a hammer, and by mere force of blows and strength of arm try if it were as hard and as fine as they said? And if thou didst, and if the stone should resist so silly a test, that would add nothing to its value or reputation; and if it were broken, as it might

be, would not all be lost? Undoubtedly it would, leaving its owner to be rated as a fool in the opinion of all. Consider, then, Anselmo my friend, that Camilla is a diamond of the finest quality as well in thy estimation as in that of others, and that it is contrary to reason to expose her to the risk of being broken; for if she remains intact she cannot rise to a higher value than she now possesses; and if she give way and be unable to resist, bethink thee now how thou wilt be deprived of her, and with what good reason thou wilt complain of thyself for having been the cause of her ruin and thine own. Remember there is no jewel in the world so precious as a chaste and virtuous woman, and that the whole honour of women consists in reputation; and since thy wife's is of that high excellence that thou knowest, wherefore shouldst thou seek to call that truth in question? Remember, my friend, that woman is an imperfect animal, and that impediments are not to be placed in her way to make her trip and fall, but that they should be removed, and her path left clear of all obstacles, so that without hindrance she may run her course freely to attain the desired perfection, which consists in being virtuous.

Naturalists tell us that the ermine is a little animal which has a fur of purest white, and that when the hunters wish to take it, they make use of this artifice. Having ascertained the places which it frequents and passes, they stop the way to them with mud, and then rousing it, drive it towards the spot, and as soon as the ermine comes to the mud it halts, and allows itself to be taken captive rather than pass through the mire, and spoil and sully its whiteness, which it values more than life and liberty. The virtuous and chaste woman is an ermine, and whiter and purer than snow is the virtue of modesty; and he who wishes her not to lose it, but to keep and preserve it, must adopt a course different from that

employed with the ermine; he must not put before her the mire of the gifts and attentions of persevering lovers, because perhaps--and even without a perhaps--she may not have sufficient virtue and natural strength in herself to pass through and tread under foot these impediments; they must be removed, and the brightness of virtue and the beauty of a fair fame must be put before her. A virtuous woman, too, is like a mirror, of clear shining crystal, liable to be tarnished and dimmed by every breath that touches it. She must be treated as relics are; adored, not touched. She must be protected and prized as one protects and prizes a fair garden full of roses and flowers, the owner of which allows no one to trespass or pluck a blossom; enough for others that from afar and through the iron grating they may enjoy its fragrance and its beauty. Finally let me repeat to thee some verses that come to my mind; I heard them in a modern comedy, and it seems to me they bear upon the point we are discussing. A prudent old man was giving advice to another, the father of a young girl, to lock her up, watch over her and keep her in seclusion, and among other arguments he used these:

Woman is a thing of glass;  
But her brittleness 'tis best  
Not too curiously to test:  
Who knows what may come to pass?

Breaking is an easy matter,  
And it's folly to expose  
What you cannot mend to blows;  
What you can't make whole to shatter.

This, then, all may hold as true,  
And the reason's plain to see;  
For if Danaes there be,  
There are golden showers too.

"All that I have said to thee so far, Anselmo, has had reference to what concerns thee; now it is right that I should say something of what regards myself; and if I be prolix, pardon me, for the labyrinth into which thou hast entered and from which thou wouldst have me extricate thee makes it necessary.

"Thou dost reckon me thy friend, and thou wouldst rob me of honour, a thing wholly inconsistent with friendship; and not only dost thou aim at this, but thou wouldst have me rob thee of it also. That thou wouldst rob me of it is clear, for when Camilla sees that I pay court to her as thou requirest, she will certainly regard me as a man without honour or right feeling, since I attempt and do a thing so much opposed to what I owe to my own position and thy friendship. That thou wouldst have me rob thee of it is beyond a doubt, for Camilla, seeing that I press my suit upon her, will suppose that I have perceived in her something light that has encouraged me to make known to her my base desire; and if she holds herself dishonoured, her dishonour touches thee as belonging to her; and hence arises what so commonly takes place, that the husband of the adulterous woman, though he may not be aware of or have given any cause for his wife's failure in her duty, or (being careless or negligent) have had it in his power to prevent his dishonour, nevertheless is stigmatised

by a vile and reproachful name, and in a manner regarded with eyes of contempt instead of pity by all who know of his wife's guilt, though they see that he is unfortunate not by his own fault, but by the lust of a vicious consort. But I will tell thee why with good reason dishonour attaches to the husband of the unchaste wife, though he know not that she is so, nor be to blame, nor have done anything, or given any provocation to make her so; and be not weary with listening to me, for it will be for thy good.

"When God created our first parent in the earthly paradise, the Holy Scripture says that he infused sleep into Adam and while he slept took a rib from his left side of which he formed our mother Eve, and when Adam awoke and beheld her he said, 'This is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone.' And God said 'For this shall a man leave his father and his mother, and they shall be two in one flesh; and then was instituted the divine sacrament of marriage, with such ties that death alone can loose them. And such is the force and virtue of this miraculous sacrament that it makes two different persons one and the same flesh; and even more than this when the virtuous are married; for though they have two souls they have but one will. And hence it follows that as the flesh of the wife is one and the same with that of her husband the stains that may come upon it, or the injuries it incurs fall upon the husband's flesh, though he, as has been said, may have given no cause for them; for as the pain of the foot or any member of the body is felt by the whole body, because all is one flesh, as the head feels the hurt to the ankle without having caused it, so the husband, being one with her, shares the dishonour of the wife; and as all worldly honour or dishonour comes of flesh and

blood, and the erring wife's is of that kind, the husband must needs bear his part of it and be held dishonoured without knowing it. See, then, Anselmo, the peril thou art encountering in seeking to disturb the peace of thy virtuous consort; see for what an empty and ill-advised curiosity thou wouldst rouse up passions that now repose in quiet in the breast of thy chaste wife; reflect that what thou art staking all to win is little, and what thou wilt lose so much that I leave it undescribed, not having the words to express it. But if all I have said be not enough to turn thee from thy vile purpose, thou must seek some other instrument for thy dishonour and misfortune; for such I will not consent to be, though I lose thy friendship, the greatest loss that I can conceive."

Having said this, the wise and virtuous Lothario was silent, and Anselmo, troubled in mind and deep in thought, was unable for a while to utter a word in reply; but at length he said, "I have listened, Lothario my friend, attentively, as thou hast seen, to what thou hast chosen to say to me, and in thy arguments, examples, and comparisons I have seen that high intelligence thou dost possess, and the perfection of true friendship thou hast reached; and likewise I see and confess that if I am not guided by thy opinion, but follow my own, I am flying from the good and pursuing the evil. This being so, thou must remember that I am now labouring under that infirmity which women sometimes suffer from, when the craving seizes them to eat clay, plaster, charcoal, and things even worse, disgusting to look at, much more to eat; so that it will be necessary to have recourse to some artifice to cure me; and this can be easily effected if only thou wilt make a beginning, even though it be in a lukewarm and make-believe fashion, to pay court to Camilla, who will



not be so yielding that her virtue will give way at the first attack:  
with this mere attempt I shall rest satisfied, and thou wilt have done  
what our friendship binds thee to do, not only in giving me life, but in  
persuading me not to discard my honour. And this thou art bound to do for  
one reason alone, that, being, as I am, resolved to apply this test, it  
is not for thee to permit me to reveal my weakness to another, and so  
imperil that honour thou art striving to keep me from losing; and if  
thine may not stand as high as it ought in the estimation of Camilla  
while thou art paying court to her, that is of little or no importance,  
because ere long, on finding in her that constancy which we expect, thou  
canst tell her the plain truth as regards our stratagem, and so regain  
thy place in her esteem; and as thou art venturing so little, and by the  
venture canst afford me so much satisfaction, refuse not to undertake it,  
even if further difficulties present themselves to thee; for, as I have  
said, if thou wilt only make a beginning I will acknowledge the issue  
decided."

Lothario seeing the fixed determination of Anselmo, and not knowing what  
further examples to offer or arguments to urge in order to dissuade him  
from it, and perceiving that he threatened to confide his pernicious  
scheme to some one else, to avoid a greater evil resolved to gratify him  
and do what he asked, intending to manage the business so as to satisfy  
Anselmo without corrupting the mind of Camilla; so in reply he told him  
not to communicate his purpose to any other, for he would undertake the  
task himself, and would begin it as soon as he pleased. Anselmo embraced  
him warmly and affectionately, and thanked him for his offer as if he had  
bestowed some great favour upon him; and it was agreed between them to

set about it the next day, Anselmo affording opportunity and time to Lothario to converse alone with Camilla, and furnishing him with money and jewels to offer and present to her. He suggested, too, that he should treat her to music, and write verses in her praise, and if he was unwilling to take the trouble of composing them, he offered to do it himself. Lothario agreed to all with an intention very different from what Anselmo supposed, and with this understanding they returned to Anselmo's house, where they found Camilla awaiting her husband anxiously and uneasily, for he was later than usual in returning that day. Lothario repaired to his own house, and Anselmo remained in his, as well satisfied as Lothario was troubled in mind; for he could see no satisfactory way out of this ill-advised business. That night, however, he thought of a plan by which he might deceive Anselmo without any injury to Camilla. The next day he went to dine with his friend, and was welcomed by Camilla, who received and treated him with great cordiality, knowing the affection her husband felt for him. When dinner was over and the cloth removed, Anselmo told Lothario to stay there with Camilla while he attended to some pressing business, as he would return in an hour and a half. Camilla begged him not to go, and Lothario offered to accompany him, but nothing could persuade Anselmo, who on the contrary pressed Lothario to remain waiting for him as he had a matter of great importance to discuss with him. At the same time he bade Camilla not to leave Lothario alone until he came back. In short he contrived to put so good a face on the reason, or the folly, of his absence that no one could have suspected it was a pretence.

Anselmo took his departure, and Camilla and Lothario were left alone at

the table, for the rest of the household had gone to dinner. Lothario saw himself in the lists according to his friend's wish, and facing an enemy that could by her beauty alone vanquish a squadron of armed knights; judge whether he had good reason to fear; but what he did was to lean his elbow on the arm of the chair, and his cheek upon his hand, and, asking Camilla's pardon for his ill manners, he said he wished to take a little sleep until Anselmo returned. Camilla in reply said he could repose more at his ease in the reception-room than in his chair, and begged of him to go in and sleep there; but Lothario declined, and there he remained asleep until the return of Anselmo, who finding Camilla in her own room, and Lothario asleep, imagined that he had stayed away so long as to have afforded them time enough for conversation and even for sleep, and was all impatience until Lothario should wake up, that he might go out with him and question him as to his success. Everything fell out as he wished; Lothario awoke, and the two at once left the house, and Anselmo asked what he was anxious to know, and Lothario in answer told him that he had not thought it advisable to declare himself entirely the first time, and therefore had only extolled the charms of Camilla, telling her that all the city spoke of nothing else but her beauty and wit, for this seemed to him an excellent way of beginning to gain her good-will and render her disposed to listen to him with pleasure the next time, thus availing himself of the device the devil has recourse to when he would deceive one who is on the watch; for he being the angel of darkness transforms himself into an angel of light, and, under cover of a fair seeming, discloses himself at length, and effects his purpose if at the beginning his wiles are not discovered. All this gave great satisfaction to Anselmo, and he said he would afford the same opportunity every day, but

without leaving the house, for he would find things to do at home so that Camilla should not detect the plot.

Thus, then, several days went by, and Lothario, without uttering a word to Camilla, reported to Anselmo that he had talked with her and that he had never been able to draw from her the slightest indication of consent to anything dishonourable, nor even a sign or shadow of hope; on the contrary, he said she would inform her husband of it.

"So far well," said Anselmo; "Camilla has thus far resisted words; we must now see how she will resist deeds. I will give you to-morrow two thousand crowns in gold for you to offer or even present, and as many more to buy jewels to lure her, for women are fond of being becomingly attired and going gaily dressed, and all the more so if they are beautiful, however chaste they may be; and if she resists this temptation, I will rest satisfied and will give you no more trouble."

Lothario replied that now he had begun he would carry on the undertaking to the end, though he perceived he was to come out of it wearied and vanquished. The next day he received the four thousand crowns, and with them four thousand perplexities, for he knew not what to say by way of a new falsehood; but in the end he made up his mind to tell him that Camilla stood as firm against gifts and promises as against words, and that there was no use in taking any further trouble, for the time was all spent to no purpose.

But chance, directing things in a different manner, so ordered it that

Anselmo, having left Lothario and Camilla alone as on other occasions, shut himself into a chamber and posted himself to watch and listen through the keyhole to what passed between them, and perceived that for more than half an hour Lothario did not utter a word to Camilla, nor would utter a word though he were to be there for an age; and he came to the conclusion that what his friend had told him about the replies of Camilla was all invention and falsehood, and to ascertain if it were so, he came out, and calling Lothario aside asked him what news he had and in what humour Camilla was. Lothario replied that he was not disposed to go on with the business, for she had answered him so angrily and harshly that he had no heart to say anything more to her.

"Ah, Lothario, Lothario," said Anselmo, "how ill dost thou meet thy obligations to me, and the great confidence I repose in thee! I have been just now watching through this keyhole, and I have seen that thou has not said a word to Camilla, whence I conclude that on the former occasions thou hast not spoken to her either, and if this be so, as no doubt it is, why dost thou deceive me, or wherefore seekest thou by craft to deprive me of the means I might find of attaining my desire?"

Anselmo said no more, but he had said enough to cover Lothario with shame and confusion, and he, feeling as it were his honour touched by having been detected in a lie, swore to Anselmo that he would from that moment devote himself to satisfying him without any deception, as he would see if he had the curiosity to watch; though he need not take the trouble, for the pains he would take to satisfy him would remove all suspicions from his mind. Anselmo believed him, and to afford him an opportunity

more free and less liable to surprise, he resolved to absent himself from his house for eight days, betaking himself to that of a friend of his who lived in a village not far from the city; and, the better to account for his departure to Camilla, he so arranged it that the friend should send him a very pressing invitation.

Unhappy, shortsighted Anselmo, what art thou doing, what art thou plotting, what art thou devising? Bethink thee thou art working against thyself, plotting thine own dishonour, devising thine own ruin. Thy wife Camilla is virtuous, thou dost possess her in peace and quietness, no one assails thy happiness, her thoughts wander not beyond the walls of thy house, thou art her heaven on earth, the object of her wishes, the fulfilment of her desires, the measure wherewith she measures her will, making it conform in all things to thine and Heaven's. If, then, the mine of her honour, beauty, virtue, and modesty yields thee without labour all the wealth it contains and thou canst wish for, why wilt thou dig the earth in search of fresh veins, of new unknown treasure, risking the collapse of all, since it but rests on the feeble props of her weak nature? Bethink thee that from him who seeks impossibilities that which is possible may with justice be withheld, as was better expressed by a poet who said:

'Tis mine to seek for life in death,  
Health in disease seek I,  
I seek in prison freedom's breath,  
In traitors loyalty.  
So Fate that ever scorns to grant

Or grace or boon to me,  
Since what can never be I want,  
Denies me what might be.

The next day Anselmo took his departure for the village, leaving instructions with Camilla that during his absence Lothario would come to look after his house and to dine with her, and that she was to treat him as she would himself. Camilla was distressed, as a discreet and right-minded woman would be, at the orders her husband left her, and bade him remember that it was not becoming that anyone should occupy his seat at the table during his absence, and if he acted thus from not feeling confidence that she would be able to manage his house, let him try her this time, and he would find by experience that she was equal to greater responsibilities. Anselmo replied that it was his pleasure to have it so, and that she had only to submit and obey. Camilla said she would do so, though against her will.

Anselmo went, and the next day Lothario came to his house, where he was received by Camilla with a friendly and modest welcome; but she never suffered Lothario to see her alone, for she was always attended by her men and women servants, especially by a handmaid of hers, Leonela by name, to whom she was much attached (for they had been brought up together from childhood in her father's house), and whom she had kept with her after her marriage with Anselmo. The first three days Lothario did not speak to her, though he might have done so when they removed the cloth and the servants retired to dine hastily; for such were Camilla's orders; nay more, Leonela had directions to dine earlier than Camilla and

never to leave her side. She, however, having her thoughts fixed upon other things more to her taste, and wanting that time and opportunity for her own pleasures, did not always obey her mistress's commands, but on the contrary left them alone, as if they had ordered her to do so; but the modest bearing of Camilla, the calmness of her countenance, the composure of her aspect were enough to bridle the tongue of Lothario. But the influence which the many virtues of Camilla exerted in imposing silence on Lothario's tongue proved mischievous for both of them, for if his tongue was silent his thoughts were busy, and could dwell at leisure upon the perfections of Camilla's goodness and beauty one by one, charms enough to warm with love a marble statue, not to say a heart of flesh. Lothario gazed upon her when he might have been speaking to her, and thought how worthy of being loved she was; and thus reflection began little by little to assail his allegiance to Anselmo, and a thousand times he thought of withdrawing from the city and going where Anselmo should never see him nor he see Camilla. But already the delight he found in gazing on her interposed and held him fast. He put a constraint upon himself, and struggled to repel and repress the pleasure he found in contemplating Camilla; when alone he blamed himself for his weakness, called himself a bad friend, nay a bad Christian; then he argued the matter and compared himself with Anselmo; always coming to the conclusion that the folly and rashness of Anselmo had been worse than his faithlessness, and that if he could excuse his intentions as easily before God as with man, he had no reason to fear any punishment for his offence.

In short the beauty and goodness of Camilla, joined with the opportunity



which the blind husband had placed in his hands, overthrew the loyalty of Lothario; and giving heed to nothing save the object towards which his inclinations led him, after Anselmo had been three days absent, during which he had been carrying on a continual struggle with his passion, he began to make love to Camilla with so much vehemence and warmth of language that she was overwhelmed with amazement, and could only rise from her place and retire to her room without answering him a word. But the hope which always springs up with love was not weakened in Lothario by this repelling demeanour; on the contrary his passion for Camilla increased, and she discovering in him what she had never expected, knew not what to do; and considering it neither safe nor right to give him the chance or opportunity of speaking to her again, she resolved to send, as she did that very night, one of her servants with a letter to Anselmo, in which she addressed the following words to him.