CATARINA CORNARO.

WHILE Catarina Cornaro, the future queen of Cyprus, was yet a child, praying and dreaming among the vines of her Paduan convent, a drama was being enacted on that island which, in the intimate relation of its personages, the severe unity of its conditions of time and place, and that mysterious retributive power which the Greeks called Nemesis, bears a close resemblance to the old Greek tragedies. From the fall of paganism until the time of the Crusades little is known of the history of Cyprus. Its people had plunged into a state of semi-barbarity, and the kings who ruled over it were cruel and fierce. Richard Cœur-de-Lion dethroned and executed the then reigning sovereign. He sold the island to the Knights of Rhodes; but they, unable to govern the half-savage inhabitants, returned it to Richard. He then offered it to Guido Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, who had been driven from his throne, in exchange for a certain sum of money and the renunciation of all his claims to his former title in favor of the English crown.

At the period under consideration the island was governed by one Giovanni, fourteenth of the line of Lusignan, who had taken to wife a daughter of the house of Paleologe, the imperial dynasty of Byzantium. The queen was a woman of fierce and jealous temper, and, in connection with her brother Tommaso, stirred up revolt and rebellion on all sides against her weak, pleasure-loving husband. She murdered her daughter’s husband, and aroused the hatred of his widow, who appealed to her half-brother Giacomo for protection, and instigated him to the murder of her uncle Tommaso. For this crime Giacomo was banished from court. The queen hated him because of the king’s affection for his mother, and his exile lasted as long as her jealous spirit ruled the island. But one day she died of rage at learning of the remarriage of her daughter with a prince of Savoy, and the feeble old king allowed his much-loved son to return to court.

It was at this time that the Venetian mediation was first actively called into play. For several years members of the Cornaro family had hung about the court, winning favor both with the king and with his rebellious son, and often employed as ambassadors between them. The Venetian senate had long been weighing the slender length of its serpent policy about this royal family, so divided against itself. Fortunate it was for the republic that Marco Cornaro, the father of young Catarina, should have come down from Venice to inspect some lands belonging to his wife, and that his brother Andrea should have won Prince Giacomo’s indebtedness by his generous aid in time of need.

The old king died, and Giacomo, after a severe contest with his sister Carlotta, mounted the throne of Cyprus. Tradition relates that Giacomo’s ambition was stimulated by the fact that Andrea Cornaro one day showed him the portrait of a beautiful young girl. Giacomo fell madly in love with the portrait. When the crafty Venetian saw that the right moment had come, he revealed to him that this beautiful young creature was none other than his niece Catarina Cornaro, a girl of fourteen, who was in all respects worthy to bo a queen. Be that as it may, when the crown was fairly on his head, Giacomo determined to contract an alliance with some powerful state, and he naturally turned to the Venetian republic. He dispatched an ambassador to the senate to ask the hand of some high-born maiden in marriage.

There was work now in Venice for the sellers of cloth of gold and velvets and satins and cunning embroidery, for the hairdressers and seamstresses and dealers in beautifying cosmetics. There were seventy-two noble damsels to be assembled in the great council hall of the Ducal Palace. The great day came at last. From all the balconies along the canal hung the festal arazzi—the crimson damasks and cloths of gold and tapestries from Flanders—and crowds leaned over them gazing down curiously into the black gondole that flitted by with their curtains closely drawn. At the Piazzetta stood the Doge’s guards in holiday uniform to receive and escort the noble damsels as they passed across the Molo to the court-yard and up the staircase of the giants to the council chamber. A goodly sight it was—all the patrician matrons of the city loaded with diamonds and rubies, all the highest dignitaries of the state in robes of crimson and scarlet, the seventy-two potential queens combed and coiffed and powdered and stiff-laced. The ambassadors passed from one to another, complimenting the young damsels upon their beauty and their taste in dress, like the finished courtiers they were. But they paused lon-
gest by the side of a slight girl with some rich white stuff drooping about her, her white shoulders bare in all their beautiful moulding, her perfect form drawn to its full height, and her queenly head, with its crown of dark gold hair cast slightly back, as though disclaiming to court the favor of king or ambassador. Think what glad surprise filled that heart of fifteen years when the ambassadors took her by the hand and led her to where the Doge sat on his throne at the end of the great council hall, with the senators grouped about him, and told him they had chosen for their future queen young Catarina, daughter of the noble patrician Marco Cornaro!

The Doge ordered her portrait to be painted and sent to the King of Cyprus. Catarina was proclaimed by decree of the senate "Daughter of the Venetian Republic." Her marriage portion was fixed at one hundred thousand ducats, and the protection of the state was assured to the island of Cyprus. Catarina was married by proxy, and the Doge himself gave her away. Then he led her by the hand down the tapestried stair to where a gorgeous fairy bark was waiting to receive her—the Bucentaur itself—a mass of gold, dazzling in the sunlight, with white statues of saints standing against the brightness, and lions' heads and escutcheons and Doges' caps and emblems of the republic covering it, and silken silver-fringed streamers of pale blue and scarlet trailing behind it in the luminous green water, and trains of velvet sweeping along the sides, purple and crimson. From between the decks extended long scarlet blades that cut the water noiselessly at the command of lithe figures in dresses of blue and silver. On the upper deck was a throne for the old Doge, with velvet hangings sweeping behind it, and at his right hand, on her gilded chair, sat young Catarina in her white bridal dress sown with great pearls. How proud the city was of her! The wide-mouthed monsters smiled down upon her in blessing as she moved along the canal among the stuffs of crimson and gold that fluttered from the arched windows against their background of tender gray.

A multitude of enchanted barges escorted her down the canal and across the lagoon—long, slender, graceful craft, like delicate-billed birds gliding down the slow rivers of some tropical clime, or the barges of the Cydnus, or the souls of antique galleys, with their stately curved prows, steel and silver and gold, flashing erect and proud as the beaks of the ships of heroic fable. Some were all gilding, with sumptuous velvet trains sweeping from prow to stern, with proud patrician dames seated in them, and manned by gondoliers in dresses of satin, brilliant in the clear day, and hand with plumes in their hats that waved with every fall of the oar as the sculpturesque figures swayed back and forth in unison. Others were of transparent glass, shaped in lilies and daisies and heart's-ease, with children dressed like fairies asleep among the petals, and rowers grouped together like the stamens of the blossom. Great crystal birds floated at ease on the surface of the water, and dolphins, changing from pink to purple in the sunlight, or griffins with open beaks and cruel claws, glided on with the retreating tide to the mouth of the canal. From every bark ascended songs in praise of the new-made queen.

The brilliant pageant skirted the Lido, and emerged through the channel between the fortresses upon the tossing sea. There the galleys were waiting to bear the queen away. The Doge gave her his blessing, her parents took leave of her, and she went on board, followed by the train of friends and servants who were to form her household in her barbaric home on the Greek island. How desolate the poor child must have been as she watched the lace-work spires and glistening domes of St. Mark's vanish one by one, the stunted Lombard turrets settle down into the adjacent roofs, the golden angel of the Campanile fold his wings beneath the rising sea, the red steeple of San Giorgio melt with the night-fall into the red clouds above!

After a long and tempestuous voyage the galleys reached Famagusta, and here Catarina was met by the king. He was not the man to treat with coldness the lovely young creature whose happiness the state reasons of two governments had confided to his care. A strong affection sprang up between them, which ended only with death. Catarina's new position offered all that a woman could ask of happiness. Idolized by the people, adored by her husband, living in a court which combined barbaric Eastern splendor with the refinement and luxury with which the thoughtful senate had surrounded her, she knew nothing of life but its sweetness until that fatal day (in A.D. 1473) when King Giacomo went hunting in the neighborhood of Famagusta, and, being exposed to a heavy storm, fell ill. The physicians told him his end was near at hand. The queen was recalled from Nico­ sia to her husband's side by her uncle Andrea Cornaro and his nephew Marco Bembo. The dying king ordered his counsellors to appear before him, and committed to their care the execution of his last wishes. He made his unborn child, if it should prove a son, heir to the throne of Cyprus; if a daughter, joint heiress with his wife. At this critical moment Mocenigo, the commander of the Venetian galleys, came to visit him, and assured him that the senate would uphold the rights of his wife and child against all usurpers. The king was comforted; for
all his life he had placed his dependence on the Venetian strength, and he died in peace. Suspicion of poison was cast by the natives upon the king's Venetian counsellors and upon his half-sister Carlotta. The island was divided into factions waiting an opportunity to seize the crown. In the midst of these disquieting movements the queen bore a son.

For two years Catarina stood watchful and alert, ready to do battle for her crown, with no counsellor but her own brave spirit. She stood through those long months by the cradle in which was the baby King of Cyprus, like some beautiful, strong-limbed tigress protecting its young. But one day the child died, and Catarina stood alone in the world, with no human creature upon which to expend the wealth of affection that throbbed in her rich veins.

The one purpose was firmly rooted in her soul to maintain the independence of her crown. The greatest danger lay upon the side of the Venetians. The Princess Carlotta, after having made frequent but unsuccessful attempts on the queen's life, had died in great poverty in Rome. The Venetian state was thus left without a rival in its designs upon the independence of Cyprus. Plots and conspiracies were constantly formed and discovered at the island court. The senate began to grow impatient at the long life of its dutiful daughter. Her crown was certain to revert to it at her decease, and she gave no sign of preparing to leave the world. The senate determined to request her to abdicate. That patient Venetian policy had woven its net so closely about her that the victim had no chance of escape. Tempests gathered thick and fast about her that one might feel who should watch the queenly dignity, flung at the feet of the reverend senators brought against her proposal the queen proudly replied that she was ready to remarry, and thus at her death the crown of Cyprus would revert to the republic. Until then the noble senators might wait.

This answer, with all its defiant strength and queenly dignity, flung at the feet of the Venetian senators, filled them with the surprise that one might feel who should watch a gazelle at its gambols, and returning in the morning find it transformed into a tigress.

The senate replied to the queen in an indignant strain. Catarina asked for time to deliberate, and loud and angry were the discussions between herself and her brother. He was the only member of her family for whom she felt any affection, and the senate had remembered this when it chose him for its ambassador. They told her that one might feel who should watch a gazelle at its gambols, and returning in the morning find it transformed into a tigress.

The queen sat unshaken and erect upon the throne, with all the insinuations of the senate. The kingdom was her own, the people her subjects, and so long as one heart remained at ease in the simple state of a private gentlewoman; that her strength had already been tried, and was able to meet whatever new misfortune might overtake her; that she had never known much of happiness, for her husband had died very early, and the sweetness of motherhood had been hers but a little space; her relations had been murdered before her eyes; the revolts of her vassals, the intrigues of her court, had familiarized her with danger in all its forms. She demanded of her brother, the state's ambassador, how he could have so little regard for the honor of their name as to ask of her a deed that would blacken it in the eyes of all posterity. She had resolved never to remarry, and thus at her death the crown of Cyprus would revert to the republic. Until then the noble senators might wait.

The threat of force which crouched behind the courtly phrases revealed the dread Venetian tribunal in all its hideousness. But resistance meant ruin and desolation to her people. If the senate withdrew its support, the barbarian hordes would rush down upon the island and take it by storm. Every outlet was closed, every avenue of escape walled up by the crafty senate. It was only the sacrifice of her own pride that was demanded, and she was a widow without child. A few short years and all would be over, and she might make other wives widows and other mothers childless by fighting for her crown? The woman's heart was stronger within her than the sovereign's pride.

She avoided all direct mention of the Venetian coercion. "Too well I see how fleet
ing were the shows of happiness with which Fortune sought to tempt me in my first youth, for I have received nothing at her hands but grief and disappointment. Thus I renounce the pomp and the ambitions of the world as I renounce my kingdom. Never again will happiness enter my life. I see too clearly the uncertainty and the futility of earthly circumstance. I give my thoughts and my soul to God, imploring Him to grant me His grace in return for the sacrifice of my kingdom."

The news of the queen's abdication and return to her native land spread throughout Cyprus. The people followed her in procession to Famousata with shouts of clamorous applause and demonstrations of regret. The people loved her deeply and truly, for they knew her to be a Cypriote at heart through and through. But she answered that she was disposed to obey the state blindly, only praying it to have at heart the happiness of her kingdom, for although her body was about to leave it, her soul would remain. A council was held, in which the queen made a formal renunciation of her rights, the island magistrates took the oath of allegiance to the republic, and after a solemn mass the standard of St. Mark was consigned to the queen by the Venetian general, who caused it to be reared aloft in the market-place of the city.

A few months later (A.D. 1489) the queen took her departure. Crowds followed her to the shore. Mothers hid up their children that they might look upon the last of the sovereigns of Cyprus. The old proud line of Lusignan had been swept from the earth, and the storm-ridden island which had held its own for so many years was now but a vassal of the arrogant republic. Centuries of suffering lay between the fair young bride who had left the sea city and the proud sad widow who returned to it. At the Lido she was met by the Doge. The old sovereign who had blessed her marriage had long before been laid to rest in some dark church beneath his marble effigy. The same courtier train, the same fairy barks, the same brilliant trappings, that had adorned her departure from the sea city tempered the bitterness of her return. She went on board the *Bucentaur*, accompanied by her train of Cypriotes. Seated on the right of the Doge, in the very place she had occupied when she went forth a new-made queen, this widowed, childless, dethroned sovereign was borne across the lagoon to the old familiar landing at the Piazzetta.

The senate invested the house of Cornaro with certain fiefs of the island of Cyprus, and accorded to it the right to unite the arms of Lusignan with its own. Every sumptuous banquet, every gorgeous color-scene, every pleasure of sight or sound that the senate could devise, was offered to this half-tamed tigress that had been torn from her jungle and imprisoned within a gilded cage. The religious sentiment, which had grown stronger in Catarina year by year since her husband's death, took firmer hold upon her weary yet restless spirit after her return to Venice.

She lived on in the palace on the canal, taming her haughty soul with prayer and meditation, feeding her strong intellect with the talk of the scholars who flocked to her table, brooding over her island life with the fierce melancholy of a captive eagle. As the second lady in the state, she led all royalties, all banquets, all festivities offered by the republic to its guests.

Four years later, when the Emperor Maximilian passed through the Tyrol in his triumphal homeward progress, Catarina obtained permission from the senate to make a pilgrimage to Conegliano—a town a few hours' journey north of Venice—to greet the Northern sovereign. After the imperial train had passed she still lingered in the Tyrol. The free mountain air, the sense of liberty awakened in the heart after the stifling atmosphere of Venice, brought her high royal strength back to her crushed soul. The eagle determined to build for itself another eyrie high up among the rocks. She craved the splendid solitude, the stately loneliness, the feeling of command, that had been hers on the far-off Greek island.

In the course of her wanderings among the northern mountains, she chanced upon a little town called Asola, frowned upon by a mighty castle. Here she determined to establish her court and revive some shadow of her old dignity. The senate had frequently offered to bestow upon her any one of its numerous estates, and when she demanded a free gift of the government of the country about Asola, her request was readily granted. When the inhabitants of Asola learned that the famous Queen of Cyprus was coming to live among them, they were almost beside themselves with excitement. They were simple, pious folk who tilled their fields and trod their vine-presses all the week, and on Sunday went to mass in the little white churches, and had their games of bowls on the plaza outside, or sat in the apothecary's haunt among the blue and white jars through the long afternoons, and talked of the wars and the Pope, the last earthquake and the latest miracle.

When the municipal rulers learned that the queen was close at hand, they sent two notaries—monstrous figures, with cylinder hats and long furred gowns and solemn shaven faces—out on to the dusty white road to greet the fair sovereign. As the train approached, these two solemn mummers fell on their knees, bowing their heads, pressing...
their hands to their hearts, and averting their eyes, to signify that they were dazzled by so much beauty. She was received at the town gate by the podesta and municipal council, made her triumphal entry under an umbrella of cloth of gold, borne by nobles of the country, entered the cathedral, and listened to a mass of thanksgiving for her arrival. The following day she was conducted to the public loggia, where all the magistrates were gathered. The podesta, commanding the populace to silence, read an address, in which I doubt not the queen found more true loyalty, despite its florid classicism, than in all the flattering missives of the senate. These good, honest peasants must needs have reminded her of her own islanders. They held jousts and rude games there on the piazza, and the queen gave the prizes with her own hand, and had a kindly word for all the winners. On Christmas-eve, when Asola lay deep in the snow, and warm red lights gleamed out from the churches over the whitened earth, and the faithful were gathered in prayer about the blazing altars, the inhabitants were surprised at the arrival of a company of dark-faced men in garments of strange Eastern fashion, who asked the way to the castle of the Queen of Cyprus. The people thought the Magi had come among them, but it was only a deputation of nobles from the far-off island, who had brought the Christmas greeting of the people to the queen, and gifts of native confections.

The report of the queen's residence in Asola went abroad through Italy. From the neighboring states came knights and ladies to offer their homage. Her court became the resort of scholars and wits and poets. She showed particular favor to the young courtesans of Asola. She could not help being charmed by the seductive sadness and the look of contempt that made her a match for her young attendants. She dowered the bride with splendid gifts, and made the union an occasion for gorgeous feasts that lasted for days. Her court was known throughout Italy as the Court of Love. One of these marriage festivities was celebrated by Pietro Bembo, the Venetian poet and historian, who in his youth lived long in Catarina's court. He wrote a dialogue treating of the power of love, the scene of which was laid in the magnificent gardens with which Catarina had surrounded her palace, and the various sides of the question sustained by different dama sido and gallants of Catarina's court in the presence of her majesty. Young Bembo, who was even then celebrated among his countrymen for his precocity of learning and ingenuity, dictated the inscriptions for the queen's fountains and pavilions. In his old age, when he had become a cardinal and a pedant, he looked back upon those days at Asola as the golden era of his life, and called the court of Cyprus's queen the Arcadia of its time.

The queen dwelt for many years in Asola, governing her people with mercy and wisdom, filling her halls with all the intellect and beauty of the state, offering a refuge and asylum to the oppressed. The senate did not allow her to remain undisturbed in her sovereign loneliness. Every now and then came a petition from the noble body begging her presence in the sea city for the reception and entertainment of some foreign dignitary. Then there were splendid dances given in the ducal halls, for which young Bembo composed odes to all the illustrious ladies present, regattas upon the canal, and serenades of summer nights. On one of these great occasions, when the winter was so severe that the lagoons were frozen and the people walked back and forth from the main-land, there was jousting upon the Grand Canal under the queen's windows.

In the course of the queen's visits to Venice her portrait had been painted by several of the greatest colorists in the state. After she had dwelt a while in the free air of Asola her old queenly pride returned to her, and the wish arose in her heart to have herself worthily represented in her robes of state by some master-hand, that posterity might judge of her as Queen of Cyprus and Daughter of the Republic. The supreme genius of the young painter Titian, the courtliness of his manner, the ingenuousness and manly strength of his character, had impressed her most favorably. She determined to commission him with the portrayal. There was a certain sympathy between these two beautiful natures—a royal outlook upon the world, with him from the heights of his genius, with her from the pinnacle of her station. She invited the young painter to Asola. There, as he beheld her surrounded by all the state and splendor of her court, with the darkness of her past life mellowing the quiet happiness of her latter days, he painted that portrait of this sovereign lady which to-day hangs in the palace above the Arno.

The queen stands erect, with her large white hands, generous and feminine, loosely clasped. In her attitude is something of the feigned repose and negligence with which a watchful tigress stretches her lithe body by the side of her cubs. The figure is full, the throat bare and white. A loose garment, shaped to the limbs, falls in long folds from shoulder to knee, the length of the picture. It is of that rich, deep-toned velvets, shading from crimson to purple, full of dark, solid shadows, which the Venetian masters loved, sown with rows of great white pearls, as though to remind the after-
world of the tears the wearer had shed. The head is cast proudly back, and is encircled by a diadem of wrought gold studded with jewels, with a long white gauze veil depending from it, which suggests the Eastern traditions of the far-off Greek island. Something of Oriental mystery is in the face—a rapid shifting of expression, which defies you to read its character or fathom its purposes. The self-communion and secretiveness which the young and solitary ruler learned in those days when she strained every nerve to keep the crown upon her head have hardened the curves of the fair face, and closed the full lips with defiance. The pallor and immobility of the features, the perfect arch of the eyebrows, increase the Oriental character of the face. It was the intuition of genius that led the painter to stamp that impress of half-savage, defensive watchfulness upon that face which when he knew it was always wreathed with smiles of genial hospitality. With a subtle comprehension of her past suffering, and a sense of analogy which only a great poet—nature could possess, he placed in the corner of the canvas the spiked wheel of torture, the emblem of St. Catharine.

Years passed on, and shadows gathered thick about the brilliant Court of Love. The queen grew very devout, and the voice of the holy hermit who dwelt on the hill above the castle was oftener heard within her halls than the songs of young pages or the tinkling of mandolins. Wars swept over the Venetian state, and the mountain castle was often threatened with attack. The queen was frequently obliged to leave it for months at a time.

One morning she left Asola to visit her brother in Venice. Scarcely had she reached Venice when she fell ill of a fever, and knew that her end was approaching. She begged her relatives not to mourn the loss of her uncertain mortal life. “Here I have seen only the shows of things, but there I shall behold the things themselves. If instead of the royal robes I have always worn and the splendid palaces in which I have dwelt, I could have been clad in the rags of a beggar and have slept on a bed of rushes, how much more lightly would the burden of the past weigh upon my soul! I have all my life known sorrow and care. There I shall meet those I loved, and dwell forever with them in peace.”

There were sorrow and desolation throughout Venice. The senate ordered the city to be hung with mourning. Catarina’s body, dressed in its robes of state, was laid upon a bier in the great hall of her brother’s palace, and the people streamed in to take their farewell of the dead sovereign. A bridge draped with black was erected from the water gate of the palace to the street opening on the opposite side, and along the solemn avenue of mourning was borne to its rest, in the family chapel in the Church of the Holy Apostles, the queenly body of the last sovereign of Cyprus.

Editor’s Easy Chair.

THERE was a time within the memory of Easy Chairs when, in a college town, Commencement was the one high festival of the year. The Fourth of July, Christmas, New-Year’s, and Thanksgiving all were days of less lustre. They were common to Christendom, or the country, or the State, but there was only one town in the world that contained this college, and only one day in the year when this college celebrated its Commencement. There was always something pleasant, too, in the misnomer. The especial significance of the day, its pathos, its charm, was that of farewell. It was the end of boyhood, of young manhood, of the preparatory years; a day of memory and tender regrets. Being peculiarly an end, there was a delightful jest in calling it a Commencement. It was, indeed, the beginning of a new experience, but it was still more the closing of an old one. It was undoubtedly the opening of the college career to Freshmen. But Freshmen? Who are freshmen on Commencement-day? Surely if there be any negative quantity, every Senior and Junior, and especially every Soph, who was a Freshman yesterday, will tell you that it is a Freshman at Commencement. What a cruel contrast in the feeling of that unfortunate before and after! What palpitations of hope and awful fear about “getting in!” Once in, what abrupt sense of unworthiness and absolute extinction before the unspeakable Senior! Commencement derives no glory, no romance, no association, from any event in the life of Freshmen.

The enormous increase in the number of colleges—there are thirty-five in the State of New York alone—has somewhat affected this intensity of college feeling. There is no longer the college town in a State, but a choice, even a mob of them. The sole day of the year, when his Excellency the Governor was escorted in state by a brilliant troop “to attend the exercises;” when the village church was packed with girls in muslin, with waving fans; when the graduating class, one after another, clad in solemn black, with the silken gowns over all, ascended the well-carpeted stage, and, with low reverence to president, faculty, trustees, corporation, and then urbi et orbi, pronounced the essay, dissertation, intermediate oration, or oration; the day when, at last, after many hot hours, during which some reverend don, melting in his suit of thick winter sables, had turned haply to his profusely perspiring brother, and murmured,

“The heart, distrustful, asks if this be joy,”

the venerable president arose, in the scholar’s