

IMELDA OF BOLOGNA.

BY MISS CATHARINE M. SEDGWICK.

In the year 1273, and on as bright a day as eve shone, even on that bright land of Italy, two females issued from the bronze gate of the palace Lambertazzi at Bologna. The one by her stature, her elastic step, rich dress, and close veiling, inspired the ideas of youth, beauty and rank. The other stood revealed, a sturdy serving-woman, who vigilantly watched and cared for the lady she attended. As they threaded their way, through one of the narrow passes which characterized those old fortress-like cities, to the grand square, the elder woman stretched her arm behind the younger as a sort of rampart to defend her from even the accidental touch of a passer-by.

Suddenly they heard the tramping of horses behind them, and the elder exclaimed, "Quick, my lady! turn the corner; these precious gallants of our city, will think no more of trampling us under their horses' hoofs, than if we were the grass made to be trodden on! There, now we are safe, for they cannot reach us here," she added, following the young lady who sprang on the elevated pedestal of a cross. "Hear how they come, but whether our people or old Orlando's, who can tell?" At this moment, out poured from the narrow street, some fifty horsemen—horses and men so disguised by paint, carapison, dress and masks, that it would have seemed impossible for those who knew them best to recognize them.

It was market-day in Bologna, and the square, though it was early morning, was already filled with peasantry. The crowd receded to the right and the left, but as the horsemen did not halt nor scarcely check the speed of their horses, it seemed inevitable that life would be sacrificed.

"Holy Virgin! save the poor wretches!" cried the young lady, in a voice whose sweet tone was to her attendants like that of a lute to a brazen instrument.

To exclude the frightful peril from her sight, she put her hands before her eyes, just in time to save herself the torture of seeing a poor woman, who was walking forward with her back to the cavaliers, knocked down by one of them and ridden over by three others, whose horses, though they instinctively recoiled from the body, seemed to tread the life out of it. Loud exclamations burst out on every side. A cry of "shame! shame!" "Every bone in her body is broken!" "See the blood from her head!" "She is dead!" "She is dead!"

One of the cavaliers made a motion as if turning his horse's head, but an urgent order from the leader of the troop checked this single movement of humanity, and turning out of the square into another narrow and devious passage, they rode unheeding on through the gates of the city in pursuit of some lawless adventure.

"Kneel not here, my dear lady Imelda," said her attendant; "rise up and let us hasten to church and pray to Madonna for the soul so, without rith, sent out of this world."

"Yes, yes, dear Nilla, but first," she added, taking her purse from her pocket and giving it to her, "go in among these people, take this money and see what can be done for her body or soul. Oh, Nilla—Frederico was their leader. It is but half an hour ago that he came to me to tie that blood red band around his arm. I told him it was an evil omen.

"Was it Frederico? Then save thy money, for it will empty the coffers of the Lambertazzi to pay for the sins thy brothers are heaping on their wild heads. Alas! that the young should think life so long and judgment so far!"

"Nay, I tell thee go, Nilla, and offer aid!" said the young lady, with the air of one not to be disobeyed, even by a privileged nurse. "Money may buy bread and cataplasms, but it will not efface sin." If it would, she thought as Nilla left her side, it were well that our nobles are rich; the treasure of the Lambertazzi would then indeed be precious. Oh, Frederico! my brother! God stay thy violent hand.

After a few moments Nilla returned with the purse.

"There is no use," she said, "in showing it there—she is not dead. She bids them carry her into Santa Maria, and lay her before the altar of Madonna. There where she has prayed all her life—there will she die."

"We will follow her, Nilla."

"Nay, my dear lady Imelda, we cannot. The altar is in the Giéraméi chapel, and I gathered from words dropped, that this woman's family are their followers."

"Be it so. We have nought to do with their hates, Nilla; ours is a better part."

"But if your father or your brothers hear you have been in that chapel, my lady?"