

THE
ATLANTIC MONTHLY:

A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and Politics.

VOL. LII. — AUGUST, 1883. — No. CCCX.

— ♦ —
A ROMAN SINGER.

III.

Now I ought to tell you that many things in this story were only told me quite lately, for at first I would not help Nino at all, thinking it was but a foolish fancy of his boy's heart and would soon pass. I have tried to gather and to order all the different incidents into one harmonious whole, so that you can follow the story; and you must not wonder that I can describe some things that I did not see, and that I know how some of the people felt; for Nino and I have talked over the whole matter very often, and the baroness came here and told me her share, though I wonder how she could talk so plainly of what must have given her so much pain. But it was very kind of her to come; and she sat over there in the old green arm-chair, by the glass case that has the artificial flowers under it, and the sugar lamb that the padre curato gave Nino when he made his first communion at Easter. However, it is not time to speak of the baroness yet, but I cannot forget her.

Nino was very amusing when he began to love the young countess, and the very first morning — the day after we had been to St. Peter's — he went out at half-past six, though it was only just sunrise, for we were in October. I knew very well that he was going for

his extra lesson with De Pretis, but I had nothing to say about it, and I only recommended him to cover himself well, for the scirocco had passed and it was a bright morning, with a clear tramontana wind blowing fresh from the north. I can always tell when it is a tramontana wind, before I open my window, for Mariuccia makes such a clattering with the coffee-pot in the kitchen, and the goldfinch in the sitting-room sings very loud; which he never does if it is cloudy. Nino, then, went off to Maestro Ercole's house for his singing, and this is what happened there.

De Pretis knew perfectly well that Nino had only asked for the extra lesson in order to get a chance of talking about the Contessina di Lira, and so, to tease him, as soon as he appeared the maestro made a great bustle about singing scales, and insisted upon beginning at once. Moreover, he pretended to be in a bad humor; and that is always pretense with him.

"Ah, my little tenor," he began; "you want a lesson at seven in the morning, do you? That is the time when all the washerwomen sing at the fountain! Well, you shall have a lesson, and by the body of Bacchus it shall be a real lesson! Now, then! Andiamo — Do-o-o!" and he roared out a great note that made the room shake, and a man who was selling cabbage in the

street stopped his hand-cart and mimicked him for five minutes.

"But I am out of breath, maestro," protested Nino, who wanted to talk.

"Out of breath? A singer is never out of breath. Absurd! What would you do if you got out of breath, say, in the last act of *Lucia*, so — *Bell' alma ado* — Then your breath ends, eh? Will you stay with the 'adored soul' between your teeth? A fine singer you will make! *Andiamo! Do-o-o!*"

Nino saw he must begin, and he set up a shout, much against his will, so that the cabbage vender chimed in, making so much noise that the old woman who lives opposite opened her window and emptied a great dustpan full of potato peelings and refuse leaves of lettuce right on his head. And then there was a great noise. But the maestro paid no attention, and went on with the scale, hardly giving Nino time to breathe. Nino, who stood behind De Pretis while he sang, saw the copy of Bordogni's *soffeggi* lying on a chair, and managed to slip it under a pile of music near by, singing so lustily all the while, that the maestro never looked round.

When he got to the end of the scale, Ercole began hunting for the music, and as he could not find it, Nino asked him questions.

"Can she sing, — this *contessina* of yours, maestro?" De Pretis was overturning everything in his search.

"An apoplexy on those *soffeggi* and on the man who made them!" he cried. "Sing, did you say? Yes, a great deal better than you ever will. Why can you not look for your music, instead of chattering?" Nino began to look where he knew it was not.

"By the bye, do you give her lessons every day?" asked the boy.

"Every day? Am I crazy, to ruin people's voices like that?"

"Caro maestro, what is the matter with you, this morning? You have forgotten to say your prayers!"

"You are a donkey, Nino; here he is, this blessed Bordogni, — now come."

"*Sor Ercole mio*," said Nino in despair, "I must really know something about this angel, before I sing at all." Ercole sat down on the piano stool, and puffed up his cheeks, and heaved a tremendous sigh, to show how utterly bored he was by his pupil. Then he took a large pinch of snuff, and sighed again.

"What demon have you got into your head?" he asked, at length.

"What angel, you mean," answered Nino, delighted at having forced the maestro to a parley. "I am in love with her — crazy about her," he cried, running his fingers through his curly hair, "and you must help me to see her. You can easily take me to her house to sing duets, as part of her lesson. I tell you I have not slept a wink all night for thinking of her, and unless I see her, I shall never sleep again as long as I live. Ah!" he cried, putting his hands on Ercole's shoulders, "you do not know what it is to be in love! How everything one touches is fire, and the sky is like lead, and one minute you are cold and one minute you are hot, and you may turn and turn on your pillow all night, and never sleep, and you want to curse everybody you see, or to embrace them, it makes no difference — anything to express the" —

"Devil! and may he carry you off!" interrupted Ercole, laughing. But his manner changed. "Poor fellow," he said presently, "it appears to me you are in love."

"It appears to you, does it? 'Appears' — a beautiful word, in faith. I can tell you it appears to me so, too. Ah! it 'appears' to you — very good indeed!" And Nino waxed wroth.

"I will give you some advice, Ninetto mio. Do not fall in love with any one. It always ends badly."

"You come late with your counsel, *Sor Ercole*. In truth, a very good piece of advice, when a man is fifty, and mar-

ried, and wears a skull-cap. When I wear a skull-cap and take snuff, I will follow your instructions." He walked up and down the room, grinding his teeth and clapping his hands together. Ercole rose and stopped him.

"Let us talk seriously," he said.

"With all my heart; as seriously as you please."

"You have only seen this signorina once."

"Once!" cried Nino, — "as if once were not" —

"Diavolo! let me speak. You have only seen her once. She is noble, an heiress, a great lady — worse than all, a foreigner; as beautiful as a statue, if you please, but twice as cold. She has a father who knows the proprieties, a piece of iron, I tell you, who would kill you just as he would drink a glass of wine, with the greatest indifference, if he suspected you lifted your eyes to his daughter."

"I do not believe your calumnies," said Nino, still hotly. "She is not cold, and if I can see her she will listen to me. I am sure of it."

"We will speak of that by and by. You — what are you? Nothing but a singer, who has not even appeared before the public, without a baiocco in the world, or anything else but your voice. You are not even handsome."

"What difference does that make to a woman of heart?" retorted Nino angrily. "Let me only speak to her" —

"A thousand devils!" exclaimed De Pretis, impatiently; "what good will you do by speaking to her? Are you Dante, or Petrarca, or a preacher — what are you? Do you think you can have a great lady's hand for the asking? Do you flatter yourself that you are so eloquent that nobody can withstand you?"

"Yes," said Nino boldly. "If I could only speak to her" —

"Then, in heaven's name, go and speak to her. Get a new hat and a

pair of lavender gloves, and walk about the Villa Borghese until you meet her, and then throw yourself on your knees and kiss her feet, and the dust from her shoes; and say you are dying for her, and will she be good enough to walk as far as Santa Maria del Popolo and be married to you! That is all; you see it is nothing you ask — a mere politeness on her part — oh, nothing, nothing." And De Pretis rubbed his hands and smiled, and seeing that Nino did not answer, he blew his nose with his great blue cotton handkerchief.

"You have no heart at all, maestro," said Nino at last. "Let us sing."

They worked hard at Bordogni for half an hour, and Nino did not open his mouth except to produce the notes. But as his blood was up from the preceding interview he took great pains, and Ercole, who makes him sing all the solfeggi he can from a sense of duty, himself wearied of the ridiculous old-fashioned runs and intervals.

"Bene," he said; "let us sing a piece now, and then you will have done enough." He put an opera on the piano, and Nino lifted up his voice and sang, only too glad to give his heart passage to his lips. Ercole screwed up his eyes with a queer smile he has when he is pleased.

"Capperi!" he ejaculated, when Nino had done.

"What has happened?" asked the latter.

"I cannot tell you what has happened," said Ercole, "but I will tell you that you had better always sing like that, and you will be applauded. Why have you never sung that piece in that way before?"

"I do not know. Perhaps it is because I am unhappy."

"Very well, never dare to be happy again, if you mean to succeed. You can make a statue shed tears if you please." Ercole took a pinch of snuff, and turned round to look out of the window. Nino

leaned on the piano, drumming with his fingers and looking at the back of the maestro's head. The first rays of the sun just fell into the room and gilded the red brick floor.

"Then instead of buying lavender kid gloves," said Nino at last, his face relaxing a little, "and going to the Villa Borghese, you advise me to borrow a guitar and sing to my statue? Is that it?"

"Che Diana! I did not say that!" said Ercole, still facing the window and finishing his pinch of snuff with a certain satisfaction. "But if you want the guitar, take it,—there it lies. I will not answer for what you do with it." His voice sounded kindly, for he was so much pleased. Then he made Nino sing again, a little love song of Tosti, who writes for the heart and sings so much better without a voice than all your stage tenors put together. And the maestro looked long at Nino when he had done, but he did not say anything. Nino put on his hat, gloomily enough, and prepared to go.

"I will take the guitar, if you will lend it to me," he said.

"Yes, if you like, and I will give you a handkerchief to wrap it up with," said De Pretis, absently, but he did not get up from his seat. He was watching Nino, and he seemed to be thinking. Just as the boy was going with the instrument under his arm, he called him back.

"Ebbene?" said Nino, with his hand on the lock of the door.

"I will make you a song to sing to your guitar," said Ercole.

"You?"

"Yes — but without music. Look here, Nino — sit down. What a hurry you are in. I was young myself, once upon a time."

"Once upon a time! Fairy stories — once upon a time there was a king, and so on." Nino was not to be easily pacified.

"Well, perhaps it is a fairy tale, but it is in the future. I have an idea."

"Oh, is that all? But it is perhaps the first time. I understand."

"Listen. Have you read Dante?"

"I know the Vita Nuova by heart, and some of the Commedia. But how the diavolo does Dante enter into this question?"

"And Silvio Pellico, and a little literature?" continued Ercole, not heeding the comment.

"Yes, after a fashion. And you? Do you know them?"

"Che c'entro io?" cried Ercole impatiently; "what do I want to know such things for? But I have heard of them."

"I congratulate you," replied Nino ironically.

"Have patience. You are no longer an artist. You are a professor of literature."

"I — a professor of literature? What nonsense are you talking?"

"You are a great stupid donkey, Nino. Supposing I obtain for you an engagement to read literature with the Contessina di Lira, will you not be a professor? If you prefer singing" — But Nino comprehended in a flash the whole scope of the proposal, and threw his arms round Ercole's neck and embraced him.

"What a mind! Oh, maestro mio, I will die for you! Command me, and I will do anything for you; I will run errands for you, black your boots, anything" — he cried in the ecstasy of delight that overmastered him.

"Piano, piano," objected the maestro, disengaging himself from his pupil's embrace. "It is not done yet. There is much, much to think of first." Nino retreated, a little disconcerted at not finding his enthusiasm returned, but radiant still.

"Calm yourself," said Ercole, smiling. "If you do this thing, you must act a part. You must manage to con-

ceal your occupation entirely. You must look as solemn as an undertaker and be a real professor. They will ultimately find you out, and throw you out of the window, and dismiss me for recommending you. But that is nothing."

"No," said Nino, "that is of no importance." And he ran his fingers through his hair, and looked delighted.

"You shall know all about it this evening, or to-morrow" —

"This evening, *Sor Ercole*, this evening, or I shall die. Stay, let me go to the house with you, when you give your lesson and wait for you at the door."

"Pumpkin-head! I will have nothing to do with you," said De Pretis.

"Ah, I will be as quiet as you please. I will be like a lamb, and wait until this evening."

"If you will really be quiet, I will do what you wish. Come to me this evening, about the *Ave Maria* — or a little earlier. Yes, come at twenty-three hours." In October that is about five o'clock, by French time.

"And I may take the guitar?" said Nino, as he rose to go.

"With all my heart. But do not spoil everything by singing to her, and betraying yourself."

So Nino thanked the maestro enthusiastically and went away, humming a tune, as he now and again struck the strings of the guitar that he carried under his arm, to be sure it was there.

Do not think that because De Pretis suddenly changed his mind, and even proposed to Nino a plan for making the acquaintance of the young countess, he is a man to veer about like a weathercock, nor yet a bad man, willing to help a boy to do mischief. That is not at all like *Ercole de Pretis*. He has since told me he was much astonished at the way Nino sang the love song at his lesson; and he was instantly convinced that in order to be a great artist Nino must be in love always. Besides, the

maestro is as liberal in his views of life as he is conservative in his ideas about government. Nino is everything the most strait-laced father could wish him to be, and as he was then within a few months of making his first appearance on the stage, De Pretis, who understands those things, could very well foresee the success he has had. Now De Pretis is essentially a man of the people, and I am not; therefore he saw no objection in the way of a match between a great singer and a noble damigella. But had I known what was going on, I would have stopped the whole affair at that point, for I am not so weak as Mariuccia seems to think. I do not mean that now everything is settled I would wish it undone. Heaven forbid! But I would have stopped it then, for it is a most incongruous thing, a peasant boy making love to a countess.

Nino, however, has one great fault, and that is his reticence. It is true, he never does anything he would not like me, or all the world, to know. But I would like to know, all the same. It is a habit I have fallen into, from having to watch that old woman, for fear she should be too extravagant. All that time he never said anything, and I supposed he had forgotten all about the countess, for I did not chance to see De Pretis; and when I did, he talked of nothing but Nino's *début* and the arrangements that were to be made. So that I knew nothing about it, though I was pleased to see him reading so much. He took a sudden fancy for literature, and read when he was not singing, and even made me borrow Ambrosoli, in several volumes, from a friend. He read every word of it, and talked very intelligently about it, too. I never thought there was any reason.

But De Pretis thinks differently. He believes that a man may be the son of a *ciociaro* — a fellow who ties his legs up in rags and thongs, and lives on goats' milk in the mountains — and that if he

has brains enough, or talent enough, he may marry any woman he likes without ever thinking whether she is noble or not. De Pretis must be old-fashioned, for I am sure I do not think in that way, and I know a hundred times as much as he — a hundred times.

I suppose it must have been the very day when Nino had been to De Pretis in the morning, that he had instructions to go to the house of Count von Lira on the morrow; for I remember very well that Nino acted strangely in the evening, singing and making a noise for a few minutes, and then burying himself in a book. However that may be, it was very soon afterwards that he went to the Palazzo Carmandola, dressed in his best clothes, he tells me, in order to make a favorable impression on the count. The latter had spoken to De Pretis about the lessons in literature, to which he attached great importance, and the maestro had turned the idea to account for his pupil. But Nino did not expect to see the young contessa on this first day, or at least he did not hope he would be able to speak to her. And so it turned out.

The footman, who had a red waistcoat and opened the door with authority, as if ready to close it again on the smallest provocation, did not frighten Nino at all, though he eyed him suspiciously enough, and after ascertaining his business departed to announce him to the count. Meanwhile Nino, who was very much excited at the idea of being under the same roof with the object of his adoration, sat himself down on one of the carved chests that surrounded the hall. The green baize door at the other end swung noiselessly on its hinges, closing itself behind the servant, and the boy was left alone. He might well be frightened, if not at the imposing appearance of the footman, at least at the task he had undertaken. But a boy like Nino is afraid of nothing when he is in love, and he simply

looked about him, realizing that he was without doubt in the house of a gran' signore, and from time to time brushing a particle of dust from his clothes, or trying to smooth his curly black hair, which he had caused to be clipped a little for the occasion; a very needless expense, for he looks better with his hair long.

Before many moments the servant returned, and with some condescension said that the count awaited him. Nino would rather have faced the mayor, or the king himself, than Graf von Lira, though he was not at all frightened — he was only very much excited, and he strove to calm himself, as he was ushered through the apartments to the small sitting-room, where he was expected.

Graf von Lira, as I have already told you, is a foreigner of rank, who had been a Prussian colonel, and was wounded in the war of 1866. He is very tall, very thin, and very gray, with wooden features and a huge moustache that stands out like the beaks on the colonna rostrata. His eyes are small and very far apart, and fix themselves with terrible severity when he speaks, even if he is only saying "good-morning." His nails are very long and most carefully kept, and though he is so lame that he could not move a step without the help of his stick, he is still an upright and military figure. I remember well how he looked, for he came to see me under peculiar circumstances, many months after the time of which I am now speaking; and, besides, I had stood next to him for an hour in the chapel of the choir in St. Peter's.

He speaks Italian intelligibly, but with the strangest German constructions, and he rolls the letter *r* curiously in his throat. But he is an intelligent man for a soldier, though he thinks talent is a matter of education, and education a matter of drill. He is the most ceremonious man I ever saw; and Nino says he rose from his chair to meet him, and

would not sit down again until Nino was seated.

"The signore is the professor of Italian literature recommended to me by Signor De Pretis?" inquired the colonel in iron tones, as he scrutinized Nino.

"Yes, Signor Conte," was the answer.

"You are a singularly young man to be a professor." Nino trembled. "And how have you the education obtained in order the obligations and not-to-be-avoided responsibilities of this worthy-of-all honor career to meet?"

"I went to school here, Signor Conte, and the Professor Grandi, in whose house I always have lived, has taught me everything else I know."

"What do you know?" inquired the count, so suddenly that Nino was taken off his guard. He did not know what to answer. The count looked very stern and pulled his moustaches. "You have not here come," he continued, seeing that Nino made no answer, "without knowing something. Evident is it, that, although a man young be, if he nothing knows, he cannot a professor be."

"You speak justly, Signor Conte," Nino answered at last, "and I do know some things. I know the *Commedia* of Alighieri, and Petrarca, and I have read the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, with Professor Grandi, and I can repeat all of the *Vita Nuova* by heart, and some of the" —

"For the present that is enough," said the count. "If you nothing better to do have, will you so kind be as to begin?"

"Begin?" — said Nino, not understanding.

"Yes, signore; it would unsuitable be if I my daughter to the hands of a man committed unacquainted with the matter he to teach her proposes. I desire to be satisfied that you all these things really know."

"Do I understand, Signor Conte, that you wish me to repeat to you some of the things I know by heart?"

"You have me understood," said the count severely. "I have all the books bought, of which you speak. You will repeat, and I will in the book follow. Then shall we know each other much better."

Nino was not a little astonished at this mode of procedure, and wondered how far his memory would serve him in such an unexpected examination.

"It will take a long time to ascertain in this way" — he began.

"This," said the count coldly, as he opened a volume of Dante, "is the celestial play by Signor Alighieri. If you anything know, you will it repeat."

Nino resigned himself and began repeating the first canto of the *Inferno*. When he had finished it he paused.

"Forwards," said the count, without any change of manner.

"More?" inquired Nino.

"March!" said the old gentleman in military tone, and the boy went on with the second canto.

"Apparently know you the beginning." The count opened the book at random in another place. "The thirtieth canto of *Purgatory*. You will now it repeat."

"Ah!" cried Nino, "that is where Dante meets Beatrice."

"My hitherto not-by-any-means-extensive, but always from-the-conscience-undertaken reading, reaches not so far. You will it repeat. So shall we know." Nino, passed his hand inside his collar as though to free his throat, and began again, losing all consciousness of his tormentor in his own enjoyment of the verse.

"When was the Signore Alighieri born?" inquired Graf von Lira, very suddenly, as though to catch him.

"May, 1265, in Florence," answered the other as quickly.

"I said when, not where. I know he was in Florence born. When *and* where died he?" The question was asked fiercely.

"Fourteenth of September, 1321, at Ravenna."

"I think really you something of *Signore Alighieri* know," said the count, and shut up the volume of the poet, and the dictionary of dates he had been obliged to consult to verify Nino's answers. "We will proceed."

Nino is fortunately one of those people whose faculties serve them best at their utmost need, and during the three hours — three blessed hours, — that Graf von Lira kept him under his eye, asking questions and forcing him to repeat all manner of things, he acquitted himself fairly well.

"I have now myself satisfied that you something know," said the count, in his snappish military fashion, and he shut the last book, and never from that day referred in any manner to Nino's extent of knowledge, taking it for granted that he had made an exhaustive investigation. "And now," he continued, "I desire you to engage for the reading of literature with my daughter, upon the usual terms." Nino was so much pleased that he almost lost his self-control, but a moment restored his reflection.

"I am honored" — he began.

"You are not honored at all," interrupted the count coldly. "What are the usual terms?"

"Three or four francs a lesson" — suggested Nino.

"Three or four francs are not the usual terms. I have inquiries made. Five francs are the usual terms. Three times in the week, at eleven. You will on the morrow begin. Allow me to offer you some cigars." And he ended the interview.

IV.

In a sunny room overlooking the great courtyard of the Palazzo Carmandola, Nino sat down to give Hedwig von Lira her first lesson in Italian literature. He had not the remotest idea

what the lesson would be like, for in spite of the tolerably wide acquaintance with the subject which he owed to my care and my efforts to make a scholar of him, he knew nothing about teaching. Nevertheless, as his pupil spoke the language fluently, though with the occasional use of words of low origin, like all foreigners who have grown up in Rome and have learned to speak from their servants, he anticipated little difficulty. He felt quite sure of being able to interpret the hard places, and he had learnt from me to know the best and finest passages in a number of authors.

But imagine the feelings of a boy of twenty, perfectly in love, without having the smallest right to be, suddenly placed by the side of the object of his adoration, and told to teach her all he knows — with her father in the next room and the door open between! I have always thought it was a proof of Nino's determined character, that he should have got over this first lesson without accident.

Hedwig von Lira, the contessina, as we always call her, is just Nino's age, but she seemed much younger, as the children of the North always do. I have told you what she was like to look at, and you will not wonder that I called her a statue. She looked as cold as a statue, just as I said, and so I should hardly describe her as beautiful. But then I am not a sculptor, nor do I know anything about those arts, though I can tell a good work when I see it. I do not wish to appear prejudiced, and so I will not say anything more about it. I like life in living things, and sculptors may, if it please them, adore straight noses, and level brows, and mouths that no one could possibly eat with. I do not care in the least, and if you say that I once thought differently, I answer that I do not wish to change your opinion, but that I will change my own as often as I please. Moreover, if you say that the contessina did not act like a statue

in the sequel, I will argue that if you put marble in the fire it will take longer to heat and longer to cool than clay; only clay is made to be put into the fire, and marble is not. Is not that a cunning answer?

The contessina is a foreigner in every way, although she was born under our sun. They have all sorts of talents, these people, but so little ingenuity in using them that they never accomplish anything. It seems to amuse them to learn to do a great many things, although they must know from the beginning that they can never excel in any one of them. I dare say the contessina plays on the piano very creditably, for even Nino says she plays well; but is it of any use to her?

Nino very soon found out that she meant to read literature very seriously, and, what is more, she meant to read it in her own way. She was as different from her father as possible in everything else, but in a despotic determination to do exactly as she liked, she resembled him. Nino was glad that he was not called upon to use his own judgment, and there he sat, content to look at her, twisting his hands together below the table to concentrate his attention, and master himself; and he read just what she told him to read, expounding the words and phrases she could not understand. I dare say that with his hair well brushed, and his best coat, and his eyes on the book, he looked as proper as you please. But if the high-born young lady had returned the glances he could not refrain from bending upon her now and then, she would have seen a lover, if she could see at all.

She did not see. The haughty Prussian damsel hardly noticed the man, for she was absorbed by the professor. Her small ears were all attention, and her slender fingers made notes with a common pencil, so that Nino wondered at the contrast between the dazzling white hand and the smooth, black, varnished

instrument of writing. He took no account of time that day, and was startled by the sound of the midday gun and the angry clashing of the bells. The contessina looked up suddenly and met his eyes, but it was the boy that blushed.

"Would you mind finishing the canto?" she asked. "There are only ten lines more" — Mind! Nino flushed with pleasure.

"Anzi — by all means," he cried. "My time is yours, signorina."

When they had done, he rose, and his face was sad and pale again. He hated to go, but he was only a teacher, and at his first lesson, too. She also rose, and waited for him to leave the room. He could not hold his tongue.

"Signorina" — he stammered, and checked himself. She looked at him, to listen, but his heart smote him when he had thus arrested her attention. What could he say, as he stood bowing? It was sufficiently stupid, what he said.

"I shall have the honor of returning to-morrow — the day after to-morrow, I would say."

"Yes," said she, "I believe that is the arrangement. Good-morning, Signor Professore." The title of professor rang strangely in his ear. Was there the slightest tinge of irony in her voice? Was she laughing at his boyish looks? Ugh! the thought tingled. He bowed himself out.

That was the first lesson, and the second was like it, I suppose, and a great many others about which I knew nothing, for I was always occupied in the middle of the day, and did not ask where he went. It seemed to me that he was becoming a great dandy, but as he never asked me for any money from the day he learned to copy music, I never put any questions. He certainly had a new coat before Christmas, and gloves, and very nice boots, that made me smile when I thought of the day when he arrived, with only one shoe — and it had a hole in it as big as half his foot. But

now he grew to be so careful of his appearance that Mariuccia began to call him the "signorino." De Pretis said he was making great progress, and so I was contented, though I always thought it was a sacrifice for him to be a singer.

Of course, as he went three times a week to the Palazzo Carmandola, he began to be used to the society of the contessina. I never understood how he succeeded in keeping up the comedy of being a professor. A real Roman would have discovered him in a week. But foreigners are different. If they are satisfied, they pay their money and ask no questions. Besides, he studied all the time, saying that if he ever lost his voice he would turn man of letters — which sounded so prudent that I had nothing to say. Once, we were walking in the Corso, and the contessina with her father passed in the carriage. Nino raised his hat, but they did not see him, for there is always a crowd in the Corso.

"Tell me," he cried excitedly as they went by, "is it not true that she is beautiful?"

"A piece of marble, my son," said I, suspecting nothing; and I turned into a tobacconist's to buy a cigar.

One day — Nino says it was in November — the contessina began asking him questions about the Pantheon. It was in the middle of the lesson, and he wondered at her stopping to talk. But you may imagine whether he was glad or not to have an opportunity of speaking about something besides Dante.

"Yes, signorina," he answered, "Professor Grandi says it was built for public baths; but, of course, we all think it was a temple."

"Were you ever there at night?" asked she, indifferently, and the sun through the window so played with her golden hair, that Nino wondered how she could ever think of night at all.

"At night, signorina? No indeed! What should I go there at night to do,

in the dark! I was never there at night."

"I will go there at night," she said briefly.

"Ah — you would have it lit up with torches, as they do the Coliseum?"

"No. Is there no moon in Italy, professore?"

"The moon, there is. But there is such a little hole in the top of the Rotonda — that is our Roman name for the Pantheon — "that it would be very dark."

"Precisely," said she. "I will go there at night, and see the moon shining through the hole in the dome."

"Eh," cried Nino laughing, "you will see the moon better outside in the piazza. Why should you go inside, where you can see so little of it?"

"I will go," replied the contessina. "The Italians have no sense of the beautiful — the mysterious." Her eyes grew dreamy as she tried to call up the picture she had never seen.

"Perhaps," said Nino, humbly. "But," he added, suddenly brightening at the thought, "it is very easy, if you would like to go. I will arrange it. Will you allow me?"

"Yes, arrange it. Let us go on with our lesson."

I would like to tell you all about it; how Nino saw the sacristan of the Pantheon that evening, and ascertained from his little almanach — which has all kinds of wonderful astrological predictions, as well as the calendar — when it would be full moon. And perhaps what Nino said to the sacristan, and what the sacristan said to Nino might be amusing. I am very fond of these little things, and fond of talking too. For since it is talking that distinguishes us from other animals, I do not see why I should not make the most of it. But you who are listening to me have seen very little of the Contessina Hedwig as yet, and unless I quickly tell you more, you will wonder how all the curious

things that happened to her could possibly have grown out of the attempt of a little singer like Nino to make her acquaintance. Well, Nino is a great singer now of course, but he was little once; and when he palmed himself off on the old count for an Italian master without my knowledge, nobody had heard of him at all.

Therefore since I must satisfy your curiosity before anything else, and not dwell too long on the details — the dear, commonplace details — I will simply say that Nino succeeded without difficulty in arranging with the sacristan of the Pantheon to allow a party of foreigners to visit the building at the full moon, at midnight. I have no doubt he even expended a franc with the little man, who is very old and dirty, and keeps chickens in the vestibule — but no details!

On the appointed night Nino, wrapped in that old cloak of mine (which is very warm, though it is threadbare), accompanied the party to the temple, or church, or whatever you like to call it. The party were simply the count and his daughter, an Austrian gentleman of their acquaintance, and the dear baroness — that sympathetic woman who broke so many hearts and cared not at all for the chatter of the people. Every one has seen her, with her slim, graceful ways, and her face that was like a mulatto peach for darkness and fineness, and her dark eyes and tiger-lily look. They say she lived entirely on sweetmeats and coffee, and it is no wonder she was so sweet and so dark. She called me “count” — which is very foolish now, but if I were going to fall in love, I would have loved her. I would not love a statue. As for the Austrian gentleman, it is not of any importance to describe him.

These four people Nino conducted to the little entrance at the back of the Pantheon, and the sacristan struck a light to show them the way to the door

of the church. Then he put out his taper, and let them do as they pleased.

Conceive if you can the darkness of Egypt, the darkness that can be felt, impaled and stabbed through its whole thickness by one mighty moonbeam, clear and clean and cold, from the top to the bottom. All around, in the circle of the outer black, lie the great dead in their tombs, whispering to each other of deeds that shook the world; whispering in a language all their own as yet — the language of the life to come — the language of a stillness so dread and deep that the very silence clashes against it, and makes dull, muffled beatings in ears that strain to catch the dead men’s talk: the shadow of immortality falling through the shadow of death, and bursting back upon its heavenward course from the depth of the abyss; climbing again upon its silver self to the sky above, leaving behind the horror of the deep.

So in that lonely place at midnight falls the moon upon the floor, and through the mystic shaft of rays ascend and descend the souls of the dead. Hedwig stood out alone upon the white circle on the pavement beneath the dome, and looked up as though she could see the angels coming and going. And, as she looked, the heavy lace veil that covered her head fell back softly, as though a spirit wooed her and would fain look on something fairer than he, and purer. The whiteness clung to her face, and each separate wave of hair was like spun silver. And she looked steadfastly up. For a moment she stood, and the hushed air trembled about her. Then the silence caught the tremor, and quivered, and a thrill of sound hovered and spread its wings, and sailed forth from the night.

“Spirto gentil dei sogni miei” —

Ah, Signorina Edvigia, you know that voice now, but you did not know it then. How your heart stopped, and beat, and stopped again, when you first

heard that man sing out his whole heartful — you in the light and he in the dark! And his soul shot out to you upon the sounds, and died fitfully, as the magic notes dashed their soft wings against the vaulted roof above you, and took new life again and throbbed heavenward in broad, passionate waves, till your breath came thick and your blood ran fiercely — ay, even your cold northern blood — in very triumph that a voice could so move you. A voice in the dark. For a full minute after it ceased you stood there, and the others, wherever they might be in the shadow, scarcely breathed.

That was how Hedwig first heard Nino sing. When at last she recovered herself enough to ask aloud the name of the singer, Nino had moved quite close to her.

"It is a relation of mine, signorina, a young fellow who is going to be an artist. I asked him as a favor to come here and sing to you to-night. I thought it might please you."

"A relation of yours!" exclaimed the contessina. And the others approached so that they all made a group in the disc of moonlight. "Just think, my dear baroness, this wonderful voice is a relation of Signor Cardegna, my excellent Italian master!" There was a little murmur of admiration; then the old count spoke.

"Signore," said he, rolling in his gutturals, "it is my duty to very much thank you. You will now, if you please, me the honor do, me to your all-the-talents-possible-possessing relation to present." Nino had foreseen the contingency, and disappeared into the dark. Presently he returned.

"I am so sorry, Signor Conte," he said. "The sacristan tells me that when my cousin had finished he hurried away, saying he was afraid of taking some ill if he remained here where it is so damp. I will tell him how much you appreciated him."

"Curious is it," remarked the count. "I heard him not going off."

"He stood in the doorway of the sacristy, by the high altar, Signor Conte."

"In that case is it different?"

"I am sorry," said Nino. "The signorina was so unkind as to say, lately, that we Italians have no sense of the beautiful, the mysterious" —

"I take it back," said Hedwig gravely, still standing in the moonlight. "Your cousin has a very great power over the beautiful."

"And the mysterious," added the baroness, who had not spoken, "for his departure without showing himself has left me the impression of a sweet dream. Give me your arm, Professore Cardegna. I will not stay here any longer, now that the dream is over." Nino sprang to her side politely, though to tell the truth she did not attract him at first sight. He freed one arm from the old cloak, and reflected that she could not tell in the dark how very shabby it was.

"You give lessons to the Signora von Lira?" she asked, leading him quickly away from the party.

"Yes — in Italian literature, signora."

"Ah — she tells me great things of you. Could you not spare me an hour or two in the week, professore?"

Here was a new complication. Nino had certainly not contemplated setting up for an Italian teacher to all the world, when he undertook to give lessons to Hedwig.

"Signora" — he began, in a protesting voice.

"You will do it to oblige me, I am sure," she said eagerly, and her slight hand just pressed upon his arm a little. Nino had found time to reflect that this lady was intimate with Hedwig, and that he might possibly gain an opportunity of seeing the girl he loved, if he accepted the offer.

"Whenever it pleases you, signora," he said at length.

"Can you come to me to-morrow at eleven?" she asked.

"At twelve, if you please, signora, or half past. Eleven is the contessina's hour to-morrow."

"At half past twelve, then, to-morrow," said she, and she gave him her address, as they went out into the street. "Stop," she added, "where do you live?"

"Number twenty-seven, Santa Catarina dei Funari," he answered, wondering why she asked. The rest of the party came out, and Nino bowed to the ground, as he bid the contessina good-night.

He was glad to be free of that pressure on his arm, and he was glad to be alone, to wander through the streets under the moonlight and to think over what he had done.

"There is no risk of my being discovered," he said to himself, confidently. "The story of the near relation was well imagined, and besides, it is true. Am I not my own nearest relation? I certainly have no others that I know of. And this baroness — what can she want of me? She speaks Italian like a Spanish cow, and indeed she needs a professor badly enough. But why should she take a fancy for me as a teacher. Ah! those eyes! Not the baroness's. Edvigia — Edvigia de Lira — Edvigia Ca — Cardegna! Why not?" He stopped to think, and looked long at the moonbeams playing on the waters of the fountain. "Why not? But the baroness — may the diavolo fly away with her! What should I do — I indeed! with a pack of baronesses? I will go to bed and dream — not of a baroness! Macchè, never a baroness in my dreams, with eyes like a snake and who cannot speak three words properly in the only language under the sun worth speaking! Not I — I will dream of Edvigia di Lira — she is the spirit of my dreams. Spirto gentil" — and away he went, humming the air from the

Favorita in the top of his head, as is his wont.

The next day the contessina could talk of nothing during her lesson but the unknown singer who had made the night so beautiful for her, and Nino flushed red under his dark skin and ran his fingers wildly through his curly hair, with pleasure. But he set his square jaw, that means so much, and explained to his pupil how hard it would be for her to hear him again. For his friend, he said, was soon to make his appearance on the stage, and of course he could not be heard singing before that. And as the young lady insisted, Nino grew silent, and remarked that the lesson was not progressing. Thereupon Hedwig blushed — the first time he had ever seen her blush — and did not approach the subject again.

After that he went to the house of the baroness, where he was evidently expected, for the servant asked his name and immediately ushered him into her presence. She was one of those lithe, dark women of good race, that are to be met with all over the world, and she has broken a many hearts. But she was not like a snake at all, as Nino had thought at first. She was simply a very fine lady who did exactly what she pleased, and if she did not always act rightly, yet I think she rarely acted unkindly. After all, the buon Dio has not made us all paragons of domestic virtue. Men break their hearts for so very little, and, unless they are ruined, they melt the pieces at the next flame and join them together again like bits of sealing wax.

The baroness sat before a piano in a boudoir, where there was not very much light. Every part of the room was crowded with fans, ferns, palms, Oriental carpets and cushions, books, porcelain, majolica, and pictures. You could hardly move without touching some ornament, and the heavy curtains softened the sunshine, and a small open fire of

wood helped the warmth. There was also an odor of Russian tobacco. The baroness smiled and turned on the piano seat.

"Ah, professore! You come just in time," said she. "I am trying to sing such a pretty song to myself, and I cannot pronounce the words. Come and teach me." Nino contrasted the whole air of this luxurious retreat with the prim, soldierly order that reigned in the count's establishment.

"Indeed, signora, I come to teach you whatever I can. Here I am. I cannot sing, but I will stand beside you and prompt the words."

Nino is not a shy boy at all, and he assumed the duties required of him immediately. He stood by her side, and she just nodded and began to sing a little song that stood on the desk of the piano. She did not sing out of tune, but she made wrong notes and pronounced horribly.

"Pronounce the words for me," she repeated every now and then.

"But pronouncing in singing is different from speaking," he objected at last, and fairly forgetting himself and losing patience, he began softly to sing the words over. Little by little, as the song pleased him, he lost all memory of where he was, and stood beside her singing just as he would have done to De Pretis, from the sheet, with all the accuracy and skill that were in him. At the end, he suddenly remembered how foolish he was. But, after all, he had not sung to the power of his voice, and she might not recognize in him the singer of last night. The baroness looked up with a light laugh.

"I have found you out," she cried, clapping her hands. "I have found you out!"

"What, signora?"

"You are the tenor of the Pantheon — that is all. I knew it. Are you so sorry that I have found you out?" she asked, for Nino turned very white, and his eyes flashed at the thought of the folly he had committed.

F. Marion Crawford.

THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF EARLY TRADITION.

OF late years an immense amount of research has been directed to separating the historical from the traditional elements in the ancient story of the world. But hardly any corresponding attention has been given to the question how far tradition itself may have been really historical. It seems to have been taken for granted that written records or contemporary monuments are alone reliable, and that as soon as we attempt to go beyond these we enter a realm of unlimited exaggeration and romance, in which myth and fable, allegory and legend, must necessarily be all mingled together in such indistinguishable proportions as to be practically useless.

This impression of the essential untrustworthiness of tradition has arisen quite naturally. Tradition in our own times is a very loose and trivial thing. Everything which it is important to have accurately kept in mind is carefully committed to writing. All that is left to tradition is the small gossip of the neighborhood, and incidents not worth formally recording. Thus tradition has become a mere plaything. No wonder that those who judge only by its operation in times of written records do not think much of it as a means of enabling us really to penetrate into the past. This has been the general tone of later historians. Niebuhr, indeed, in his great