

# Cremona

BY W. L. ALDEN

FIVE successive times have I started from Paris or London with the firm resolve to go to Cremona, but never until last spring did I succeed in reaching it. Sometimes I reached Milan, Brescia, Mantua, Parma, Pavia, or Piacenza, which last-mentioned town is nearer than any of the others to Cremona, in point of miles, although it is connected with Cremona only by the slowest of tramways; but I could never break through the charmed circle and gain the centre. Something always happened to convince me that I must give up visiting Cremona for that particular time. Certain of my friends, who are not strong in geography, and who take no interest in violins, began to doubt the existence of Cremona, and to insinuate that when a man annually leaves home for the avowed purpose of going to Cremona, and invariably returns saying that he has not yet visited that elusive town, it is time that his real and not his pretended destination should be made the subject of investigation on the part of his family and friends. It finally became evident to me that unless I went to Cremona my reputation for veracity would be gone, and my character as a moderately moral man would seriously suffer.

Therefore on one miserably rainy day last April I left the train at Brescia and took the branch railway to Cremona. My feelings were very much like those of a man who is ordered by his physician to some horribly healthy and uninteresting place. I had come that morning from Venice, and was suffering from the indigestion which is the penalty of breakfasting at the Verona station. I wanted to go on to Milan, where I could be sure of a good dinner and a comfortable bed. But I was firm. I said to myself: "This time it is either Cremona or ruin. If you venture home with that same old story of having decided not to go to Cremona until next year, all your respectable

friends will feel compelled to drop you." So, filled with gloom, and hating Cremona with a bitter hatred, I took the train—it was a goods train with a solitary passenger-carriage—and rolled slowly across the Lombard Plain. I mention the Lombard Plain because all respectable tourists who have ever travelled in the north of Italy always speak of crossing, or traversing, or rolling over the Lombard Plain, when they go from one town to another. This is done lest people should imagine that when you travel in Lombardy you pass the Rocky Mountains, or cross the English Channel. The conscientious traveller cannot be too careful to tell the exact truth on all trivial occasions. He can thus reserve his imagination for more important subjects.

I reached Cremona in due time—that is to say, an hour after the time-table said that I should have reached the town; but when I drove from the station to the hotel I was glad that I had made the journey. The guide-books are right. Cremona is better worth visiting than are dozens of the regular show-places of Italy. It has not yet been spoiled either by the mania for improvement or by the footsteps of the Cook tourist. Lying for centuries in a sort of social and political eddy, it has kept more of the mediæval characteristics than have any other Lombard towns. I fell in love with Cremona at first sight, not merely because she is picturesque, but because of her placid, sympathetic temperament. She is the sort of city with whom a quiet and studious man could spend his life, and never have his municipal felicity ruffled by coarse buildings, cold and heartless avenues, or worldly, fashionable, sneering streets. The buildings of Cremona are thoughtful, and her streets simple, gentle, and unassuming. She may not be beautiful like Florence, nor bustling and epigrammatic like Milan, nor fascinating and wicked like Naples, but she is eminently a city that a man

can love. You can give your heart to Cremona and feel sure that she will never coldly reject it, or brutally trample it under the feet of electric trams.

There is a hotel in Cremona which is alone a sufficient reason for visiting the town. No! I have not been retained to advertise the hotel, and this will be apparent from the fact that it is one of half a dozen Cremonese hotels, and I shall say nothing that can tend to identify it. The man who deliberately puffs a hotel without having had a previous and satisfactory understanding with the landlord in regard to his bill is a person unworthy of consideration.

One thing that the foreigner rarely finds in Italy is an Italian hotel. He finds excellent hotels kept by enterprising and atheistic Swiss, where he will be patronized by the porter, and fed with a fair imitation of French cookery; but the purely Italian hotel, with its purely Italian cuisine, he will never discover except by accident. There are such hotels in every Italian city, but the guide-book mentions them in a supercilious, depreciatory way, which never fails to convince the tourist that he ought to have nothing to do with them.

This particular hotel in Cremona is the type of the substantial Italian inn. The central court-yard is surrounded by great vaulted stone corridors. The bed-rooms have vaulted ceilings twenty feet above your head, and the windows are set in the depth of massive walls. The floors are either of brick or cement, and are bare, clean, and cool. The beds, unlike those of the average hotel kept by a Swiss, are long enough to suit even the legs of a Lombard. There is no *table d'hôte*, but there is a restaurant furnished with wooden tables covered with coarse but clean linen, and pervaded by an Italian waiter with a dress-coat made in the days of Stradivarius, who at once takes your stomach into his confidence, and proves himself the affectionate, devoted friend of your digestion. You will find no French cookery at this pearl of hotels. Nothing is more admirable than French cookery where there is nothing to cook. In these difficult circumstances it is only the French cook who can make something out of nothing, and make it, moreover, extremely appetizing, and by no means

invariably fatal. The Italian cannot do this; but give him something that deserves to be cooked, and place oil, garlic, and alkermes within his reach, and he will give you a dinner such as you can find in no other land. You will not taste the garlic, but its benign influence will be there. The oil will not offend your senses as does the melted grease of English and German cookery, falsely so called, but it will supply the *tenor* of a true culinary symphony. The alkermes will not be used, like the average bottled English sauce, as a mere disinfectant, but its judicious use will produce a flavor that will satisfy the wildest longings of your stomach.

The dinner that I had at Cremona is as memorable as the Tower of Cremona itself. The wine was the common wine of the district, but it was simply superb. The waiter was motionless and noiseless when noise was out of place, and respectfully conversational at the point in the dinner when the partially satisfied soul craves human fellowship.

I do not want a waiter to tell me what to eat. Such a waiter is nearly as objectionable as a railway newsman who tells you what novels you ought to read. But this Cremona waiter, while he reverently carried out my order, brought me two or three works of art which he begged me, in the name of the cook, simply to glance at. I did more than glance at them, and they would alone have been sufficient to convince the unprejudiced palate that true cookery is a plant of purest Italian growth.

By the time dinner was ended it was rather late, and I went to bed, determined to see Cremona in the morning, and filled with self-righteousness, as well as dinner, over the thought that at last I had succeeded in reaching it. The whole city went to bed at ten o'clock, and there was not a sound except the striking of clocks until, at early dawn, the workmen began to go through the streets.

I like the system according to which the Italian clocks strike. No two of them ever agree in their views as to the time, and between the slowest and the fastest of them there is usually a good half-hour. This works for the benefit of the restless man in two ways. When the fastest clock strikes 2 A.M. he feels happy over the

thought that it will soon be daylight; and when, thirty minutes later, the slowest strikes the same hour, he comforts himself with the reflection that he has half an hour more in which to lie in bed than he thought he had. Many people, lodging for the first time in an Italian provincial town, are alarmed at the variety and independence of the clocks, and fear that the noise, as they call it, will not permit them to sleep. They soon find, however, that the clocks are peculiarly soothing in their influence. They are so constantly striking that the effect is like slow music, and it produces rather than hinders sleep.

Being in Cremona, I naturally went in search of violins. I had a vague idea that I might pick up a Stradivarius, an Amati, a Guarnerius, and perhaps other treasure of the kind, for next to nothing, like those fabulous persons who are said to pick up invaluable furniture and priceless old books for a mere music-hall song. Of course I did not find any valuable violins, but, what was still stranger, I did not see or hear a single violin the whole time I was in Cremona. In every Italian city there are dozens of shops devoted to the sale of musical instruments of all sorts, and, among these, violins of all sizes and conditions, from the young soprano violin to the venerable and gouty contrabass, are exposed in the windows. In Cremona, however, there is not a violin to be sold, and I am persuaded that there is not one in the possession of a single Cremonese. At first I could not understand this mystery. Neither could I understand why no one to whom I spoke seemed to take the slightest interest in the great violin-makers of the town. Baedeker asserts that the house of Antonio Stradivarius is still to be seen, and I went in search of it. I found only a vacant lot where the house had stood, and I was informed by a policeman, who looked at me sternly and with evident suspicion, that the house of Stradivarius had been torn down. I asked him why so valuable a relic had been destroyed, and he replied by suggesting that if I would accompany him to the headquarters of the police, I might possibly receive an answer to my question. I left him more in anger than in sorrow, and asked no more questions of the Cremona police. From

what I afterwards learned in conversation with several of the leading porters and street-sweepers of the place, I came to the conclusion that the people of Cremona had for so many weary years been asked by strangers concerning the Cremona violins and their makers that in a fit of justifiable rage they had resolved that the entire subject of violins should be ignored both by themselves and the strangers who might venture within their gates. I cannot say that I blame them. Their town has picturesque architecture, a school of art of its own, and a history that it has a right to be proud of, but the stranger never thinks these things worthy of notice, and conceives of Cremona exclusively as the birthplace of certain fiddles. I no longer wonder that it is unsafe for a man to speak of violins to the Cremonese. They are a polite people, and a long-suffering people, but they are very tired of violins, and the stranger who visits Cremona will, if he is a prudent man, remember this fact. The story that my hotel porter told me concerning a German who visited Cremona three years ago, and spoke to every man, woman, and policeman in the town concerning violins, may not have been strictly true, but it was certainly impressive. He offered to show me the grave of the German in the campo santo, and one of the knives with which an impulsive citizen of Cremona explained that violins were no longer produced in that city; but I did not care to pursue so lugubrious a subject with him.

There are more paintings to the square foot of wall in Cremona than in any other town in Italy, and they are all the work of four painters, named Campi. Three of them were brothers, and they painted fifteen hours a day from the year 1500 to the year 1572. Probably they adopted the plan of division of labor—one of them drawing the outlines of a picture, another mixing the colors, a third putting the colors on the canvas, and the fourth varnishing the pictures, and delivering them to regular subscribers and other customers every morning, with the aid of a large van. In no other way can the enormous quantity of pictures turned out by this Cremona manufactory be explained. They are said to be good, workmanlike pictures, containing nothing calculated to bring a blush to the cheek of a

Common Council man, and eminently adapted to the walls of churches and the front halls of respectable houses. I cannot say, however, that I found them interesting. Still, there is in one of the churches a picture of the murder of St. Thomas à Becket in Canterbury cathedral which is worthy of notice. The artist had evidently never been at Canterbury, and had never seen a photograph of St. Thomas à Becket. He therefore hit on the plan of first painting a picture of Daniel in the Lions' Den, and then, by the simple process of putting steel helmets on three of the lions, and erecting an altar surmounted by a picture of the Madonna in a corner of the den, he converted a Babylonian zoological picture into an English historical painting. This alone is sufficient to show that he was a clever man.

I gathered that the Cremonese are becoming rather tired of their pictures. They have removed some twenty thousand of them (speaking in round numbers) to a lonely church outside the walls, and they do not speak of the remaining seven hundred thousand with much enthusiasm. Original Campis can be bought in Cremona at a very reasonable figure, and as they were undoubtedly Old Masters, there is an excellent opportunity for any Chicago millionaire who wishes to supply himself with a gallery of Old Masters, at a rate little in excess of what he would ordinarily pay for chromos. I should judge that he would be able to buy Campis either by the ton or the square mile, and it would be easy for him to collect the largest picture-gallery in the world.

I do not propose to describe the buildings of Cremona. I will therefore merely say that anything more charming than the porch of the church of San Luca cannot be found even in Verona. The façade of the cathedral is also delightful, although the interior is not attractive. The chief pride of the Cremonese is their great campanile, which is the highest tower in Italy—that is, if the guide-books are to be trusted, and not to trust them is to launch yourself on a sea of boundless uncertainty and scepticism. The tower is 396 feet high, and is the

despair of amateur photographers, for the reason that nothing smaller than a professional camera is large enough to take in both the foot and the top of the tower at the same time. In order to get any sort of photograph of it the photographer is compelled to go several miles into the country. Even then he can only photograph the upper half of the tower, and is compelled at the same time to photograph the greater part of the city that lies at its foot. To my mind the campanile is not as beautiful as it is tall—say fully thirty feet less beautiful. It is, however, a fairly good tower, and it commands an almost uninterrupted view of nothing in particular.

The country around Cremona is flat, the only elevated ground being the river Po, which flows under the city walls. All through Lombardy the rivers are raised many feet above the surrounding country by huge embankments, which constantly grow in height as the bottom of the river is raised by the ceaseless deposition of sediment. It is easy for the philosophic mind to foresee the final result of this state of things. Ages hence the Lombard rivers will have been lifted so high that they will be perpetually frozen, and Lombardy will be a series of deep valleys bordered by the precipitous heights of the Po, the Mincio, the Ticino, and the Adige. The character of the people dwelling under the shadow of these lofty rivers will grow to resemble that of the mountaineers of Switzerland, and in every Lombard hotel the traveller will be charged a franc a day extra if he does not drink wine, fifty centimes a day for the candles that he has not used, and five francs a day for the view from his front window.

If the tourist who resolves to go to Cremona will take my advice, he will go first from Milan to Pavia, where he will stop over a train. Thence he will go to Cremona, and from Cremona he will take the train to Mantua and Venice. He will thus see three cities that the ordinary tourist never sees, and will ever afterwards feel so intolerably superior to other tourists that his best friends will wish that he were dead.

# His Greatest Speech

BY JOSEPH A. ALTSHELER

IT was the Candidate's eighth speech that day, but Harley, the correspondent of the *New York Gazette*, who was in an analytical mood, could see no decrease either in his energy or spontaneity of thought and expression.

Grayson, the Candidate, was a tall, powerfully built man, with a broad, smoothly shaven, open, and singularly attractive face. They had started at daylight that morning, hurrying across the monotonous Western plains, in a dusty and uncomfortable car, stopping for a half-hour speech here, then racing for another at a second little village, and then a third race and a third speech, and so on all through the day and far into the darkness, sometimes after midnight. Nor was this the first day of such labors; it had been so week after week. But there was no sign to tell of it on the face of the Candidate save a slight redness around the edge of the eyelids.

The village in which Grayson was speaking was a tiny place of twelve or fifteen houses, all square, unadorned, and ugly, standing in the centre of an illimitable prairie that rolled away on either side exactly like the waves of a sea, and with the same monotony. It was a weather-beaten gathering. The prairie winds are not good for the complexion, and the cheeks of these people were brown, not red. On the outskirts of the crowd, still sitting on their ponies, were cowboys who had ridden sixty miles across the Wyoming border to hear Grayson speak. They were dressed exactly like the cowboys of the pictures that Harley had seen in magazine stories of the Western plains. They wore the sombrero and leggings and leather belts, but there was no disorder, no cursing, no shouting nor yelling. This was a phase that had passed.

They heard the Candidate tell of mighty corporations, of a vague and distant place called Wall Street, where fat

men with soft white fingers and pouches under their eyes, sat in red-carpeted offices and pulled little but very strong strings that made farmers on the Western plains two thousand miles away dance like jumping-jacks, just as the fat men wished, and just when they wished. These fat men were allied with others in Europe, pouchy-eyed and smooth-fingered like themselves, and it was their object to own all the money-bags of the world, and gather all the profits of the world's labor. Harley, watching these people, saw a spark appear in their eyes many times, but it was always brightest at the mention of Wall Street. That both speaker and those to whom his words were spoken were thoroughly sincere, he did not doubt for a moment.

Grayson ceased, the engine blew the starting signal, the Candidate and the correspondent swung aboard, and off they went. Harley looked back, and as long as he could see the station the little crowd on the lone prairie was still watching the disappearing train. There was something pathetic in the sight of these people following with their eyes until the last moment the man whom they considered their particular champion.

It was but an ordinary train of day cars, the red plush of the seats now whitened by the prairie dust, and it was used in common by the Candidate, the little flock of correspondents, and a dozen politicians, the last chiefly committeemen or their friends, one being the Governor of the State through which they were then travelling.

It was not yet daylight when they were awakened for the start of a record-breaking day. A cold wind moaned around the hamlet as they ate their breakfast, and then hastened, valise in hand and still half asleep, to the train, which stood steam up and ready to be off. They found several men already on board, and Churchill, when he saw them, uttered