

MAZZINI AND NIETZSCHE

BY ELISABETH FÖRSTER-NIETZSCHE

AMONG the papers left by my brother, Friedrich Nietzsche, I found a little memorandum to the effect that the moral phrases used by a nation at different periods in its history might remain the same, but that the sentiments expressed by these phrases might completely change. He cited several examples of this. 'Among the people with whom I have lived, men are classified as good, noble, and great. The word "good" varies considerably in meaning, according to the viewpoint of the user. In fact, it is employed with contradictory meanings. "Noble" generally indicates something more than good, not extraordinary goodness, but a different quality in a good man, which places him somehow in a superior category. A "great" man in the current acceptance of the word need be neither good nor noble. I recall only one example in this century of a man to whom all three adjectives could be applied even by his enemies — Mazzini.'

Recently, someone asked me about my brother's acquaintance with Mazzini. I had to reply that it was only a fleeting travel acquaintanceship made under unusually romantic surroundings and circumstances. My thoughts flew back fifty years. My brother had returned in the autumn of 1870 from the war, where he had served as a nurse for a short period. He was in ill health. His war experiences had shaken him to the depths. He had chanced to be an eye witness of the horrible way French prowlers tortured

the helpless wounded who fell into their hands. He rarely spoke of this, because the mere memory excited him so unpleasantly. After the physical and spiritual shock of his military life, he returned to his professorship in Basel too early, and broke down completely. His physician ordered him to go South, and to take his 'jolly young sister' with him. Therefore, I was suddenly summoned from icebound North Germany, and picking my brother up at Basel, we started for Italy. At that time, there was no railway through the Gotthard, and we had to take the coach road over the mountains, as our predecessors had done for centuries. We bought our tickets for the journey at Lucerne, and our guide regarded his party from that time on much as a piece of private property which he had to look after. I still recall pleasantly his good humored, confidence-inspiring countenance. I got my brother tucked away in a sheltered spot on the deck of the steamer, well wrapped up with rugs and furs, but found my precautions unnecessary, for our route lay down the sunny side of the lake, and the breath of spring was in the air, although the northern shore still looked gloomy and icebound. I soon noticed that our guide was showing particular attention to another couple in the party, and, a little later, he confided to us who they were. 'The old gentleman is a very distinguished man, but no one must know who he is, for he has been exiled from his native country as a dangerous subject and a

reward of many thousand lire has been placed upon his head. But,' continued the good man, triumphantly, 'I know him well. He is a wonderful gentleman, and I shall not betray him.' When I asked, with intense curiosity, who he was, the guide looked around, placed his hand cautiously over his mouth, and whispered to me: 'Mazzini.' My brother said quickly: 'Do you understand, Elisabeth? That is Fantasio.' We had just read an English book, *Lorenzo Benoni*, which we had been told described the personal adventures of the two Italian conspirators, Ruffini. A very noble, and sympathy-inspiring conspirator named Fantasio was an important character in the story, and was supposed to portray Mazzini. The guide finally yielded to our entreaties to point him out. He was not difficult to identify; for all of the rest of the passengers aboard the steamer were Swiss, returning from some celebration. Mazzini sat wrapped up in a big gray rug at the forward end of the deck. His finely-shaped head with its abundant white hair gave him a striking appearance. Care and trouble had engraved deep lines in his noble, haggard countenance, which had the yellow cast of a Southerner. As his gaze swept over the beautiful landscape, he gradually turned in our direction. His dark and marvelously brilliant eyes betrayed an expression of such suffering, that we were both a little intimidated by his glance. It came back to me vividly, later, when I read an account of a letter written by Mazzini, in the *Memoirs of an Idealist*, describing the impression which the trip over the Lake of the Four Cantons made upon him. The authoress, Malvida von Meysenburg says: 'One day when I was with C, she received a letter from Mazzini containing an extremely poetical and melancholy account of his trip down the Lake of the

Four Cantons. He described how the solemn repose of the glorious landscape inspired him with deep religious sentiment, a renewed faith and hope for his fatherland, which he so ardently loved and which he could visit only in secret.' That particular letter must have been written long before 1871; but I was none the less sure that Mazzini was overpowered by the same sentiment at the moment when we chanced to catch the expression of his eyes as he again surveyed that magnificent mountain panorama.

We reached Fluelen on a marvelously beautiful evening, and had to stay there over night, because the post wagon to Gotthard did not leave until morning. Had we come a few days earlier, we would have been obliged to tarry here for fourteen days; for it took that time to open the roads over the pass after a recent heavy snow fall. Our guide told us that the snow lay two metres deep above the stone walls along the highway.

At supper, we discovered that Mazzini and his young Italian companion were the only other guests besides my brother and myself. However, my brother and I sat at some distance from them, at a little private table. After dessert, we drew up to the warm stove and overheard the lively Italian conversation of the two gentlemen, who were at some distance from us. Mazzini's voice was a particularly pleasing one. I could not understand what they said, but my brother told me that Mazzini was trying to explain the beauty and the genius of Goethe's poetry to his young companion. Before long, I heard Mazzini quoting:

Sich des Halben zu entwöhnen
Und im Ganzen, Vollen, Schönen
Resolut zu leben.

My brother ever afterward associated this quotation with Mazzini. The next morning, our hostess asked