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ACERVO DE LITERATURA

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CONSUELO.

CHAPTER I.

"Yes, yes, young ladies, toss your heads as much as you please; the wisest and best among you is—But I shall not say it; for she is the only one of my class who has a particle of modesty, and I should fear, were I to name her, that she would forthwith lose that uncommon virtue which I could wish to see in you—"

"In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti,"

sang Costanza, impudently.

"Amen!" exclaimed all the other girls, in chorus.

"Vile slanderer," said Clorinda, making a pretty little mouth at him, and giving the bony and wrinkled fingers, which the singing master had suffered to rest idly on the keys of the silent instrument, a little tap with the handle of her fan.

"Go on, young ladies—go on," said the old professor, with the resigned and submissive air of one who for forty years had had to suffer for six hours daily the airs and contradictions of successive generations of female pupils. "It is not the less true," added he, putting his spectacles into their case, and his snuff-box into his pocket, without raising his eyes towards the angry and railing group, "that this chaste, this docile, this studious, this attentive, this good child, is not you, Signora Clorinda: nor you, Signora Costanza; nor you either, Signora Zuleta: neither is it Rosina; and still less Michela—"

"In that case, it is I!"

"No it is I!"

"By no means; it is I!"

"'Tis I!"

"'Tis I!" screamed out all at once, with their clear and thrilling voices, some fifty fair or dark-haired girls, darting like a flock of sea-birds on some poor shell-fish left stranded by the waves.

The shell-fish, that is to say, the master—and I maintain that no other metaphor could so well express his angular movements, his filmy eyes, his red-streaked cheeks, and more especially the innumerable stiff, white, and pointed curls of professional periwig, the master, I say, compelled thrice to seat himself after he had risen to go away, but calm and indifferent as the shell-fish itself, rooked and hardened

by the storms, had long to be entreated to declare what of his pupils deserved the praises of which he was usually so sparing, but of which he now showed himself so prodigal. At last, yielding as if with regret to the entreaties which his sarcasm had provoked, he took the roll with which he was in the habit of marking the time, and made use of it to separate and range in two lines his unruly row. Then, advancing with a serious air between the double row of these light-headed creatures, he proceeded toward the organ-loft, and stopped before a little figure who was seated, bent down, on one of the steps. She, with her elbows on her knees, and her fingers in her ears, in order not to be distracted by the noise, and twisted into a sort of coil, like a squirrel sinking to sleep, conned over her lessons in a low voice, so as to disturb no one. He, solemn and triumphant, with leg advanced and outstretched arm, seemed like the shepherd Paris awarding the apple, not to the most beautiful, but to the most modest.

"Consuelo! the Spaniard!" exclaimed all the young choristers, struck at first with the utmost surprise, but almost immediately joining in a general burst of laughter, such as Homer attributes to the gods of Olympus, and which caused a blush of anger and indignation on the majestic countenance of the professor.

Little Consuelo, with her closed ears, had heard nothing of this dialogue. Her eyes were bent on vacancy, and, busied with her task, she remained some moments unconscious of the uproar. Then, perceiving herself the object of general attention, she dropped her hands on her knees, allowed her book to fall on the floor, and, petrified with astonishment, not unmixed with fear, rose at length, and looked around, in order to see what ridiculous person or thing afforded matter for such noisy mirth.

"Consuelo," said the master, taking her hand without further explanation, "come, my good child, and sing me the '*Salve Regina*' of Pergolese, which thou hast learned but a fortnight, and which Clorinda has been studying for more than a year."

Consuelo, without replying, and without evincing either pride, shame, or embarrassment, followed the singing-master to the organ, where, sitting down, he struck with an air of triumph the key-note for his young pupil. Then Consuelo, with unaffected simplicity and ease, raised her clear and thrilling voice, and filled the lofty roof with the sweetest and purest notes with which it had ever echoed. She sang the "*Salve Regina*" without a single error—without venturing upon one note which was not just, full, sustained, or interrupted at the proper place; and, following with unvarying precision the instructions which the learned master had given her, fulfilling with her clear perceptions his precise and correct intentions, she accomplished, with the inexperience and indifference of a child, that which science, practice, and enthusiasm had not perhaps done for the most perfect singer. In a word, she sang to admiration.

"It is well, my child," said the good old master, always chary of his praise. "You have studied with attention that which you have faithfully performed. Next time you shall repeat the cantata of Scarlatti which I have taught you."

"*Sì, Signor Professor,*" replied Consuelo—"now may I go?"

"Yes, my dear. Young ladies, the lesson is over."

Consuelo placed in her little basket her music and crayons, as well as her black fan—the inseparable companion alike of Spaniard and Venetian—which she never used, although she never went without

it. Then disappearing behind the fretwork of the organ, she flew as lightly as a bird down the mysterious stairs which led to the body of the cathedral, knelt for a moment in crossing the nave, and, when just on the point of leaving the church, found beside the font a handsome young man, who, smiling, presented the holy water to her. She took some of it, looking at him all the time with the self-possession of a little girl who knows and feels that she is not yet a woman, and mingling her thanks and her devotional gesture in so agreeable a fashion that the signor could not help laughing outright. Consuelo began to laugh likewise; but, all at once, as if she had recollected that some one was waiting for her, she cleared the porch and the steps at a bound, and was off in an instant.

In the mean time, the professor again replaced his spectacles in his huge waistcoat pocket, and thus addressed his silent scholars:—

"Shame upon you, my fair pupils!" said he. "This little girl, the youngest of you all—the youngest in the whole class—is the only one of you capable of executing a solo. And in the choruses, no matter what tricks are played on every side of her, I always find her firm and steady as a note of the harpsichord. It is because she has zeal, patience, and—what you will never have, no, not one of you—a conscience!"

"Ah! now the murder is out," cried Costanza, as soon as the professor had left the church. "He only repeated it some thirty-nine times during the lesson, and now, I verily believe, he would fall ill if he did not get saying it the fortieth."

"A great wonder, indeed, that this Consuelo should get on!" exclaimed Zuletta: "she is so poor that she must work to learn something whereby to earn her bread."

"They tell me her mother was a gipsy," said Michelina, "and that the little one sang about the streets and highways before she came here. To be sure, she has not a bad voice; but then she has not a particle of intelligence, poor girl! She learns merely by rote; she follows to the letter the professor's instructions,—and her lungs do the rest."

"If she had the best lungs in the world, and the best brains into the bargain," said the handsome Clorinda, "I would not give my face in exchange for hers."

"I do not know that you would lose so much," replied Costanza, who had not had a very exalted opinion of Clorinda's beauty.

"She is not pretty for all that," said another. "She is as yellow as a paschal candle. Her great eyes say just nothing at all, and then she is always so ill dressed! She is decidedly ugly."

"Poor girl! she is much to be pitied—no money—no beauty?"

Thus finished the praises of Consuelo. They comforted themselves by their contemptuous pity, for having been forced to admire her singing.

CHAPTER II.

THE scene just related took place in Venice about a hundred years ago, in the church of the Mendicanti, where the celebrated master Porpora had just rehearsed the grand vespers which he was

to direct on the following Assumption-day. The young christers whom he had so smartly scolded were pupils of the state schools, in which they were instructed at the expense of government, and afterwards received a dowry preparatory to marriage or the cloister, as Jean Jacques Rousseau, who admired their magnificent voices at the same period and in the same church, has observed. He mentions the circumstance in the charming episode in the eighth book of his Confessions. I shall not here transcribe those two delightful pages, lest the friendly reader, whose example under similar circumstances I should certainly imitate, might be unable to resume my own. Hoping, then, that the aforesaid Confessions are not at hand, I continue my narrative.

All those young ladies were not equally poor. Notwithstanding the strictness of the administration, it is certain that some gained admission, to whom it was a matter of speculation rather than of need to receive an artistic education at the expense of the republic. For this reason it was that some permitted themselves to forget the sacred laws of equality, thanks to which, they had been enabled to take their seats clandestinely along with their poorer sisters. All, therefore, did not fulfil the intentions of the austere republic respecting their future lot. From time to time there were numbers who, having received their gratuitous education, renounced their dowry to seek a more brilliant fortune elsewhere. The administration, seeing that this was inevitable, had sometimes admitted to the course of instruction the children of poor artists, whose wandering existence did not permit them a long stay in Venice. Among this number was the little Consuelo, who was born in Spain and had come thence to Italy by the route of St. Petersburg, Constantinople, Mexico, Archangel, or any other still more direct, after the eccentric fashion of the gipsies.

Nevertheless, she hardly merited this appellation: for she was neither Hindoo nor gipsy, any more than of any of the tribes of Israel. She was of good Spanish blood—doubtless with a tinge of the Moresco; and though somewhat swarthy, she had a tranquillity of manner which was quite foreign to any of the wandering races. I do not wish to say anything ill of the latter. If I had invented the character of Consuelo, I do not say but that I would have traced her parentage from Israel, or even farther; but she was altogether, as everything about her organization betrayed, of the family of Ishmael. To be sure I never saw her, not being a century old, but I was told so and I needs must repeat it. She had none of the feverish petulance, alternated by fits of apathetic languor, which distinguishes the *zingarella*; neither had she the insinuating curiosity nor the frontless audacity of Hebrew mendicancy. She was calm as the water of the lagunes, and at the same time active as the light gondolas that skimmed along their surface.

As she was growing rapidly and as her mother was very poor, her clothes were always a year too short, which gave to her long legs of fourteen years' growth, accustomed to show themselves in public, a sort of savage grace which one was pleased and at the same time sorry to see. Whether her foot was large or not, it was impossible to say, her shoes were so bad. On the other hand, her figure, confined in narrow stays ripped at every seam, was elastic and flexible as a palm-tree, but without form, fulness, or attraction. She, poor girl! thought nothing about it, accustomed as she was to hear herself

called a gipsy and a wanderer by the fair daughters of the Adriatic. Her face was round, sallow, and insignificant, and would have struck nobody, if her short thick hair fastened behind her ears, and at the same time her serious and indifferent demeanor, had not given her a singularity of aspect which was but little attractive. Faces which do not please at first, by degrees lose still more the power of pleasing. The beings to whom they belong, indifferent to others, become so to themselves, and assume a negligence of aspect which repels more and more. On the contrary, beauty observes, admires, and decks itself as it were in an imaginary mirror which is always before its eyes. Ugliness forgets itself and is passed by. Nevertheless, there are two sorts of ugliness; one which suffers, and protests against the general disapprobation by habitual rage and envy—that is the true, the only ugliness. The other, ingenuous, heedless, which goes quietly on its way, neither inviting nor shunning comparisons, and which wins the heart while it shocks the sense—such was the ugliness of Consuelo. Those who were sufficiently generous to interest themselves about her, at first regretted that she was not pretty; and then correcting themselves, and patting her head with a familiarity which beauty does not permit, added: "After all, you are a good creature;" and Consuelo was perfectly satisfied, although she knew very well that that meant, "You are nothing more."

In the mean time, the young and handsome signor who had offered her the holy water at the font, stayed behind till he had seen all the scholars disappear. He looked at them with attention, and when Clorinda, the handsomest, passed near him, he held out his moistened fingers that he might have the pleasure of touching hers. The young girl blushed with pride, and passed on, casting as she did so, one of those glances of shame mixed with boldness, which are expressive neither of self-respect nor modesty.

As soon as they had disappeared in the interior of the convent, the gallant patrician returned to the nave, and addressed the preceptor who was descending more slowly the steps of the tribune.

"*Corpo di Bacco!* dear maestro," said he, "will you tell me which of your pupils sang the '*Salve Regina*?'"

"And why so anxious to know, Count Zustiniani?" asked the professor, accompanying him out of the church.

"To compliment you on your pupil," replied the patrician. "You know how long I have attended vespers, and even the exercises; for you are aware how very fond I am of sacred music. Well, this is the first time that I have heard Pergolese sung in so perfect a manner, and as to the voice, it is the most beautiful that I have ever listened to."

"I believe it well," replied the professor, inhaling a large pinch of snuff with dignity and satisfaction.

"Tell me then the name of this heavenly creature who has thrown me into such an ecstasy. In spite of your severity and your continual fault-finding, you have created the best school in all Italy. Your choruses are excellent, and your solos very good; but your music is severe, so grand, that young girls can hardly be expected to express its beauties."

"They do not express them," said the professor mournfully, "because they do not feel them. Good voices, God be thanked, we do not want; but as for a good musical organization, alas, it is hardly to be met with!"

"You possess at least one admirably endowed. Her organ is magnificent, her sentiment perfect, her skill remarkable—name her then."

"Is it not so?" said the professor, evading the question; "did it not delight you?"

"It took my heart by storm—it even drew tears from me—and that by means so simple, combinations so little sought after, that at first I could hardly understand it. Then I remembered what you had so often told me touching your divine art, my dear master, and for the first time I understood how much you were in the right."

"And what did I say to you?" said the maestro, with an air of triumph.

"You told me," replied the count, "that simplicity is the essence of the great, the true, the beautiful in art."

"I also told you that there was often much to observe and applaud in the clever, and brilliant, and well combined."

"Doubtless; but between these secondary qualities and the true manifestation of genius, there was an abyss, you said. Very well, dear maestro: your cantatrice is alone on one side while all the rest are on the other."

"It is not less true than well expressed," observed the professor, rubbing his hands.

"Her name?" replied the count.

"Whose name?" rejoined the malicious professor.

"Oh, *per Dio Santo!* that of the siren whom I have just been hearing."

"What do you want with her name, Signor Count?" replied Porpora, in a tone of severity.

"Why should you wish to make a secret of it, maestro?"

"I will tell you why, if you will let me know what object you have in finding out."

"Is it not a natural and irresistible feeling to wish to see and to know the objects of our admiration?"

"Ah! that is not your only motive. My dear Count, pardon that I thus contradict you. You are a skilful amateur and a profound connoisseur in music, as everybody knows; but you are, over and above all, proprietor of the theatre of San Samuel. It is your glory and your interest alike, to encourage the loftiest talent and the finest voices of Italy. You know that our instruction is good, and that with us alone those studies are pursued which form great musicians. You have already carried off Corilla from me, as she will one day be carried off from you by an engagement in some other theatre; so you are come to spy about, to see if you can't get a hold of some other Corilla—if, indeed, we have formed one. That is the truth, Signor Count, you must admit."

"And were it even so, dear maestro," replied the count, smiling, "what would it signify to you?—where is the harm?"

"It is a great deal of harm, Signor Count. Is it nothing to corrupt, to destroy these poor creatures?"

"Ha! my most austere professor, how long have you been the guardian angel of their frail virtues?"

"I know very well, Signor Count, I have nothing to do with them, except as regards their talent, which you disfigure, and disgrace in your theatres by giving them inferior music to sing. Is it not a sorrow—is it not a sin—to see Corilla, who was just beginning to understand

your serious art, descend from the sacred to the profane—from prayer to badinage—from the altar to the boards—from the sublime to the absurd—from Allegri and Palestrina to Ajmonini and the barber Apollini?"

"So you refuse, in your severity, to name a girl respecting whom I can have no intention, seeing that I do not know whether she has other necessary qualifications for the theatre?"

"I absolutely refuse."

"And do you suppose I shall not find it out?"

"Alas! you will do so if you are bent upon it, but I shall do my utmost to prevent you from taking her from us."

"Very well, maestro, you are half conquered, for I have seen her—I have divined your mysterious divinity."

"So, so," replied the master, with a reserved and distrustful air; "are you sure of that?"

"My eyes and my heart have alike revealed her to me; and, that you may be convinced, I shall describe her to you. She is tall—taller, I think, than any of your pupils—fair as the snow on Friuli, and rosy as the dawn of a summer morn; she has golden hair, azure eyes, an exquisitely rounded form, with a ruby on her finger which burned my hand as I touched it, like sparks from a magic fire."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Porpora, with a cunning air; "in that case I have nothing to conceal. The name of your beauty is Clorinda. Go and pay your court to her; gain her over with gold, with diamonds, and gay attire. You will easily conclude an engagement with her. She will help you to replace Corilla; for the public of your theatre always prefer fine shoulders to sweet sounds, flashing eyes to a lofty intellect."

"Am I then mistaken, my dear maestro?" said the count, a little confused; "and is Clorinda but a common-place beauty?"

"But suppose my siren, my divinity, my angel, as you are pleased to call her," resumed the maestro, maliciously, "was anything but a beauty?"

"If she be deformed, I beseech you not to name her, for my illusion would be too cruelly dissipated. If she were only ugly, I could still adore her: but I should not engage her for the theatre, because talent without beauty is a misfortune, a struggle, a perpetual torment for a woman. What are you looking at, maestro, and why do you pause?"

"Why? because we are at the water-steps, and I see no gondola. But you, Count, what do you look at?"

"I was looking to see if that young fellow on the steps there beside that plain little girl, was not my protégé, Anzoleto, the handsomest and most intelligent of all our little plebeians. Look at him, dear maestro. Do you not, like me, feel interested in him? That boy has the sweetest tenor in Venice, and he is passionately fond of music, for which he has an incredible aptitude. I have long wished to talk to you about it, and to ask you to give him lessons. I look upon him as the future support of my theatre, and hope in a few years to be repaid for all my trouble. *Hola, Zoto!* come hither, my lad, that I may present you to the illustrious master Porpora."

Anzoleto drew his naked legs out of the water, where they hung carelessly, while he amused himself stringing those pretty shells which in Venice are poetically termed *fiore di mare*. His only garments were a pair of well-worn pantaloons and a fine shirt, through the rents of which one could see his white shoulders, modelled like those of a

youthful Bacchus. He had all the grace and beauty of a young Faun chiselled in the palmiest days of Grecian art; and his features displayed that singular union, not unfrequent in the creation of Grecian statuary, of careless rony with meditative sadness. His fine fair hair, somewhat bronzed by the sun, clustered in Antinous-like curls about his alabaster neck; his features were regular and beautifully formed; but there was something bold and forward in the expression of his jet-black eyes which displeased the maestro. The boy promptly rose when he heard the voice of Zustiniani, pitched his shells into the lap of the little girl beside him, who without raising her eyes went on with her occupation of stringing them along with golden beads, and coming forward, kissed the count's hand, after the fashion of the country. "Upon my word, a handsome fellow!" said the professor, tapping him gently on the cheek; "but he seems occupied with amusements rather childish for his time of life; he is fully eighteen years old, is he not?"

"Nineteen shortly, *Sior Profesor*," replied Anzoletto, in the Venetian dialect; "but if I amuse myself with shells, it is to help little Consuelo here to make her necklaces."

"Consuelo," said the master, advancing towards his pupil with the count and Anzoletto, "I did not imagine that you cared for ornaments."

"Oh, it is not for myself, Signor," replied Consuelo, rising cautiously to prevent the shells falling from her lap; "I make them for sale, in order to procure rice and Indian corn."

"She is poor, and supports her mother," said Porpora. "Listen, Consuelo: should you find yourselves in any difficulty, be sure to come and see me; but I absolutely forbid you to beg, remember."

"Oh, you need not forbid her, *Sior Profesor*," replied Anzoletto, with animation; "she will never do so; and, besides, I would prevent her."

"But you have nothing," said the count.

"Nothing but your liberality, *Eccellenza*; but we share together, the little one and myself."

"She is a relative then!"

"No; she is a stranger—it is Consuelo."

"Consuelo! what a singular name!" said the count.

"A beautiful name, *Eccellenza*," resumed Anzoletto; "it means Consolation."

"Oh, indeed? She is your friend then, it seems?"

"She is my betrothed, Signor."

"So soon? Such children! to think of marriage already!"

"We shall marry on the day that you may sign my engagement at San Samuel, *Eccellenza*."

"In that case you will have to wait a long time, my little ones."

"Oh, we shall wait," replied Consuelo, with the cheerful gaiety of innocence.

The count and the maestro amused themselves for some time longer with the frank remarks and repartees of the young couple; then, having arranged that Anzoletto should give the professor an opportunity of hearing his voice in the morning, they separated, leaving him to his serious occupations.

"What do you think of that little girl?" said the professor to Zustiniani.

"I saw her but an instant, and I think her sufficiently ugly to justify the maxim, that in the eyes of a youth of eighteen every woman is handsome."

"Very good," rejoined the professor; "now permit me to inform you that your divine songstress, your siren, your mysterious beauty, was no other than Consuelo."

"What! that dirty creature?—that dark and meagre grasshopper? Impossible, maestro."

"No other, Signor Count. "Would she not make a fascinating *prima donna*?"

The count stopped, looked back, and clasping his hands while he surveyed Consuelo at a distance, exclaimed in mock despair, "Just Heaven! how canst thou so err as to pour the fire of genius into heads so poorly formed!"

"So you give up your culpable intentions?" said the professor.

"Most certainly."

"You promise me?" added Porpora.

"Oh, I swear it," replied the count.

CHAPTER III.

BORN in sunny Italy, brought up by chance, like a seabird sporting on its shores, poor, an orphan, a castaway, and nevertheless happy in the present and confiding in the future, founding as he doubtless was—Anzoletto, the handsome youth of nineteen, who spent his days with little Consuelo, in perfect freedom on the footways of Venice, was not, as might be supposed, in his first love. Too early initiated, he would perhaps have been completely corrupted and worn out, had he dwelt in our gloomy climate, or had Nature endowed him with a feebler organization. But early developed and destined to a long and powerful career, his heart was pure, and his senses were restrained by his will. He had met the little Spaniard by chance, singing hymns before the Madonette; and for the pleasure of exercising his voice he had joined her for hours together beneath the stars. Then they met upon the sands of the Lido to gather shell-fish, which he ate, and which she converted into chaplets and other ornaments. And then again they had met in the churches, where she prayed with all her heart, and where he gazed with all his eyes at the fine ladies. In all these interviews Consuelo had appeared to him so good, so sweet, so obliging, and so gay, that she had become his inseparable friend and companion—he knew not very well how or why. Anzoletto had known love's rapture only. He was attached for Consuelo; and as he belonged to a country and a people where passion reigns over every other feeling, he knew no other name for this attachment than that of love. Consuelo admitted this mode of speaking after she had addressed Anzoletto as follows:—"If you are my lover, it is then with the intention of marrying me?" To which he replied—"Certainly, if you wish it, we shall marry each other." From that moment it was a settled affair. Possibly Anzoletto was amusing himself, but to Consuelo it was a matter of firm conviction. Even already his young heart experienced those contradictory and complicated emotions which agitate and discompose the existence of those who love too early.

Given up to violent impulses, greedily of pleasure, loving only what

promoted his happiness, hating and avoiding everything which opposed his gratifications, at heart an artist—that is to say, feeling and revelling in life with frightful intensity—he soon found that his transient attachments imposed on him the sufferings and dangers of a passion which he did not really feel; and he experienced the want of sweet companionship, and of a chaste and tranquil outlet to his feelings. Then, without understanding the charm which drew him to Consuelo—having little experience of the beautiful—hardly knowing whether she was handsome or ugly—joining for her sake in amusements beneath his age—he led with her in public, on the marble floors, and on the waters of Venice, a life as happy, as pure, as retired, and almost as poetic, as that of Paul and Virginia in the recesses of the forest. Although they enjoyed unrestrained liberty—no watchful, tender parents to form them to virtue—no devoted attendant to seek them and bring them back to the bosom of their homes—not even a dog to warn them of danger—they never experienced harm. They skimmed over the waters of the lagunes in all times and seasons in their open boat, without oars or pilot; they wandered over the marshes without guide, without watch, and heedless of the rising waters; they sang before the vine-covered chapels at the corners of the streets, without thinking of the hour, and sometimes with no other couch than the white tiles, still warm with the summer rays. They paused before the theatre of Punchinello, and followed with riveted attention the fantastic drama of the beautiful *Corisanda*, queen of the puppet show, without thinking of their breakfast, or the little probability there was of supper. They enjoyed the excesses of the carnival, he with his coat turned inside out, she with a bunch of old ribbons placed coquettishly over her ear. They dined sumptuously—sometimes on the balustrades of a bridge or on the steps of a palace—on shell-fish, fennel stalks, and pieces of citron. In short, they led a free and joyous life, without incurring more risk, or feeling more emotion, than might have been experienced by two young people of the same age and sex. Days, years passed away. Anzoleto formed other connections, while Consuelo never imagined that he could love any one but her. She became a young woman without feeling it necessary to exercise any further reserve with her betrothed; while he saw her undergo this transformation without feeling any impatience, or desiring to change this intimacy, free as it was at once from scruple, mystery, or remorse.

It was already four years since Professor Porpora and Zustiniani had mutually introduced their little musicians, and during this period the count had never once thought of the young chorister. The professor had likewise forgotten the handsome Anzoleto, inasmuch as he had found him endowed with none of the qualities desirable in a pupil—to wit, a serious, patient disposition, submission to his teacher, and complete absence of all musical studies before the period of his instruction. “Do not talk to me,” said he, “about a pupil whose mind is anything else than a *tabula rasa*, or virgin wax, on which I am to make the first impression. I cannot afford to give up a year to unteach what has been learned before. If you want me to write, give me a clear surface, and that too of a good quality. If it be too hard I can make no impression on it; if too soft, I shall destroy it at the first stroke.” In short, although he acknowledged the extraordinary talents of the young Anzoleto, he told the count with some temper and ironical humility, at the end of his first lesson, that his

method was not adapted to a pupil so far advanced, and that a master could only embarrass and retard the natural progress and invincible development of so superior an organization.

The count sent his protégé to Professor Melliflore, who, with roulades and cadences, modulations and trills, so developed his brilliant qualities, that at twenty-three he was considered capable, in the opinion of all those who heard him in the saloons of the court, of coming out at San Samuel in the first parts. One evening the dilettanti, nobility, and artists of repute then in Venice, were requested to be present at a final and decisive trial. For the first time in his life Anzoleto doffed his plebeian attire, put on a black coat, a satin vest, and with curled and powdered hair, and buckles in his shoes, glided over with a composed air to the harpsichord, where amid the glare of a hundred wax-lights, and under the gaze of two or three hundred persons, he boldly distended his chest, and made the utmost display of powers that were to introduce him into a career where not one judge alone, but a whole public, held the palm in one hand and downfall in the other.

We need not ask whether Anzoleto was secretly agitated. Nevertheless, he scarcely allowed his emotion to be apparent; and hardly had his piercing eyes divined by a stealthy glance the secret approbation which women rarely refuse to grant to so handsome a youth—hardly had the amateurs, surprised at the compass of his voice, and his facility of expression, uttered a few faint murmurs of applause—when joy and hope flooded his whole being. For the first time Anzoleto, hitherto ill-instructed and undervalued, felt that he was no common man; and transported by the necessity and the consciousness of success, he sang with an originality, an energy, and skill, that were altogether remarkable. His taste, to be sure, was not always pure, nor his execution faultless; but he was always able to extricate himself by his boldness, his intelligence, and enthusiasm. He failed in effects which the composer had intended, but he realized others which no one ever thought of—neither the author who composed, the professor who interpreted, nor the virtuoso who rehearsed them. His originality took the world by storm. For one innovation his awkwardness was pardoned, and for an original sentiment they excused ten rebellions against method. So true it is that in point of art the least spark of genius—the smallest flight in the direction of new conquests—exercises a greater fascination than all the resources and lights of science within known limits.

Nobody, perhaps, was able to explain these matters, and nobody escaped the common enthusiasm. Corilla began by a grand aria, well sung and loudly applauded; yet the success of the young débutant was so much greater than her own, that she could not help feeling an emotion of anger. But when Anzoleto, loaded with caresses and praises, returned to the harpsichord where she was seated, he said, with a mixture of humility and boldness, “And you, queen of song and queen of beauty! have you not one encouraging glance for the poor wretch who fears even while he adores you?” The prima donna surprised at so much assurance, looked more closely at the handsome countenance which till then she had hardly deigned to notice—for what vain and triumphant woman cares to cast a glance on the child of obscurity and poverty? She looked, and was struck with his beauty. The fire of his glances penetrated her soul; and, vanquished, fascinated in her turn, she directed towards him a ’ving

and earnest gaze, which served to seal his celebrity. In his memorable meeting, Anzoleto had led the public, and disarmed his most redoubtable adversary; for the beautiful songstress was not only queen of the stage, but at the head of the management, and of the cabinet of Count Zustiniani.

CHAPTER IV.

In the midst of the general and somewhat exaggerated applause which the voice and manner of the débutant had drawn forth, a single auditor, seated on the extreme edge of his chair, his legs close together and his hands motionless on his knees, after the fashion of the Egyptian gods, remained dumb as a sphinx, and mysterious as a hieroglyphic. It was the able professor and celebrated composer Porpora. Whilst his gallant colleague, Professor Melliflore, ascribing to himself all the glory of Anzoleto's success, plumed himself before the women and bowed to the men, as if to thank them even for their looks, the master of sacred song, with eyes bent on the ground, silent and severe, seemed lost in thought. When the company, who were engaged to a ball at the palace of the Doge, had slowly departed, and the most enthusiastic dilettanti, with some ladies, alone remained, Zustiniani drew nigh to the austere master.

"You are too hard upon us, poor moderns, my dear professor," said he; "but your silence has no influence on me. You would exclude this new and charming style which delights us all. But your heart is open in spite of you, and your ears have drunk in the seductive poison."

"Come *Sior Profesor*," said the charming Corilla, resuming with her old master the childish manners of the *scuola*, "you must grant me a favor."

"Away, unhappy girl!" said the master, partly smiling and partly displeased at the caresses of his inconstant pupil: "there is no further communication between us. I know you no more. Take your sweet smiles and perfidious warblings elsewhere."

"There now, he is coming round," said Corilla, taking with one hand the arm of the débutant, without letting go her hold of the white and ample cravat of the professor. "Come hitherto, Zoto, and bow the knee before the most learned maestro in all Italy. Submit thyself, my child, and disarm his rigor. One word from him, if thou couldst obtain it, would be more to thee than all the trumpets of renown."

"You have been severe towards me, Signor Professor," said Anzoleto, bending before him with mock humility; "nevertheless, my only wish for four years has been to induce you to reconsider a cruel judgment; and if I fail in doing so to-night, I fear I shall never have the courage to appear before the public, loaded with your anathema."

"Child!" said the professor, rising hastily, and speaking with an earnestness which imparted something noble to his unimpressive figure, "leave false and honied words to women. Never descend to the language of flattery, even to your superiors—much less to those whose suffrage you disdain. It is but an hour ago since, poor, unknown,

timid, in this little corner, all your prospects hung upon a hair—on a note from your throat—a moment's failure of your resources, or a mere whim of your audience. Chance, and the efforts of an instant, have made you rich, celebrated, insolent. Your career is open before you, and you have only to go on, so long as your strength sustains you. Listen then: for the first, and perhaps for the last time, you are about to hear the truth. You are in a false direction; you sing badly, and love bad music. You know nothing, and have studied nothing thoroughly. All you have is the facility which practice imparts. You assume a passion which you do not feel: you warble and shake like those pretty coquettish young damsels whom one pardons for simpering where they know not how to sing. You know not how to phrase your music; you pronounce badly; you have a vulgar accent, a false and common style. Do not be discouraged, however, with all these defects. You have wherewithal to combat them. You have qualities which neither labor nor instruction can impart. You have that which neither bad advice nor bad example can take away. You have the sacred fire—you have genius! Alas! it is a fire which will shine upon nothing grand, a genius that will remain for ever barren; for I have seen it in your eyes, aye I have felt it in your breast. You have not the worship of art; you have not faith in the great masters, nor respect for their grand conceptions; you love glory, and glory for yourself alone. You might—you could—but, no! it is too late! Your destiny will be as the flash of a meteor—like that of—"

And the professor, thrusting his hat over his brows, turned his back, and without bowing to any one, left the apartment, absorbed in mentally completing his energetic sentence.

Every one tried to laugh at the sententious professor; but his words left a painful impression, and a melancholy feeling of doubt, which lasted for some moments. Anzoleto was the first who apparently ceased to think of them, though they had occasioned him an intense feeling of joy, pride, anger, and emulation, which was destined to influence all his latter life. He appeared exclusively engaged in pleasing Corilla, and he knew so well how to flatter her, that she was very much taken with him at this first meeting. Count Zustiniani was not jealous, and perhaps had his reasons for taking no notice of them. He was interested in the fame and success of his theatre more than anything else in the world; not that he cared about money, but because he was a real fanatic in all that related to what are termed the *fine arts*. This, in my opinion, is a phrase which is generally employed in a vulgar sense, and being altogether Italian, is consequently enthusiastic and without much discernment. The *culture of art*, a modern expression, which the world did not make use of a hundred years ago, has a meaning altogether different from a *taste for the fine arts*. The count was a man of taste in the common acceptation of the word—amateur, and nothing more; but the gratification of his taste was the great business of his life. He loved to be busy about the public, and to have the public busy about him—to frequent the society of artists—to lead the fashion—to have his theatre, his luxury, his amiability, and his magnificence, made the subject of conversation. He had, in short, the ruling passion of the great noblemen of his country—namely, ostentation. To possess and direct a theatre was the best means of occupying and amusing the whole city. He would have been happy if he could have asked the whole republic to dinner. When strangers asked Professor Porpora who was the Count Zustin-

iani, he was accustomed to reply—"He is one who loves to give entertainments, and who serves up music at his theatre as he would pheasants on his table."

It was one in the morning before the company separated. "Anzoletto," said Corilla, when alone with him in the embrasure of the balcony, "where do you live?" At this unexpected inquiry, Anzoletto grew pale and red almost at the same moment; for how could he confess to the rich and fascinating beauty before him, that he had in a manner neither house nor home? Even this response would have been easier than to mention the miserable den where he was in the habit of taking refuge, when neither inclination nor necessity obliged him to pass the night in the open air.

"Well, what is there so extraordinary in my question?" said Corilla, laughing.

"I am asking myself," replied Anzoletto, with much presence of mind, "what royal or fairy palace were fitting home for the happy mortal who is honored by a glance from Corilla."

"What does all this flattery mean?" said she, darting on him one of the most bewitching glances contained in the storehouse of her charms.

"That I have not that honor," replied the young man; "but that, if I had, I should be content only to float between earth and sky, like the stars."

"Or like the *cuccali*," said the songstress, bursting into a fit of laughter. It is well known that gulls (*cuccali*) are proverbially simple, and to speak of their awkwardness, in the language of Venice, is equivalent to saying, in ours, "As stupid as a goose."

"Ridicule me—despise me," replied Anzoletto; "I would rather that you should do so than not think of me at all."

"Well, then," said she, "since you must reply in metaphors, I shall take you with me in my gondola; and if I take you away from your abode, instead of taking you to it, it will be your own fault."

"If that be your motive for inquiry, my answer is brief and explicit: my home is on the steps of your palace."

"Go then, and await me on the stairs below," said Corilla, lowering her voice; "for Zustiniani may blame the indulgence with which I have listened to your nonsense."

In the first impulse of his vanity Anzoletto disappeared, and darting towards the landing-place of the palace, to the prow of Corilla's gondola, counted the moments by the beating of his fevered pulse. But before she appeared on the steps of the palace, many thoughts had passed through the anxious and ambitious brain of the debutant. "Corilla," said he to himself, "is all powerful; but if by pleasing her I were to displease the count, or if, in virtue of my too easy triumph, I were to destroy her power, and disgust him altogether with so inconstant a beauty—"

In the midst of these perplexing thoughts, Anzoletto measured with a glance the stair which he might yet remount, and was planning how to effect his escape, when torches gleamed under the portico, and the beautiful Corilla, wrapped in an ermine cloak, appeared upon the upper steps, amid a group of cavaliers, anxious to support her rounded elbow in the hollow of their hand, and in this manner to assist her to descend, as is the custom in Venice.

"Well," said the gondolier of the prima donna to the confounded Anzoletto, "what are you doing there? Make haste into the gondola

if you have permission; if not, proceed on your way, for my lord count is with the signora.'

Anzoletto threw himself into the bottom of the gondola, without knowing what he did. He was stupefied. But scarcely did he find himself there, when he fancied the amazement and indignation which the count would feel, should he enter into the gondola with Corilla, and find there his insolent protégé. His cruel anxiety was protracted for several minutes. The signora had stopped about half-way down the staircase; she was laughing and talking with those about her, and, in discussing a musical phrase, she repeated it in several different ways. Her clear and thrilling voice died away amid the palaces and cupolas of the canal, as the crow of the cock before the dawn, is lost in the silence of the open country.

Anzoletto, unable to contain himself, resolved to escape by the opening of the gondola which was farthest from the stair. He had already thrust aside the glass in its panel of black velvet, and had passed one leg through the opening, when the second rower of the prima donna, who was stationed at the stern, leaning over the edge of the little cabin, said in a low voice, "They are singing—that is as much as to say, 'You may wait without being afraid.'"

"I did not know the usual custom," thought Anzoletto, who still tarried, not without some mixture of consternation. Corilla amused herself by bringing the count as far as the side of the gondola, and kept him standing there, while she repeated the "*felicissima notte*," until she had left the shore. She then came and placed herself beside her new admirer, with as much ease and self-possession as if his life and her own fortune had not been at stake.

"Look at Corilla," said Zustiniani to the Count Barberigo. "Well, I would wager my head that she is not alone in yonder gondola."

"And why do you think so?" replied Barberigo.

"Because she asked me a thousand times to accompany her to her palace."

"Is that your jealousy?"

"Oh, I have been long free from that weakness. I should be right glad if our prima donna would take a fancy to some one who would prevent her from leaving Venice as she sometimes threatens. I could console myself for her desertion of me, but I could neither replace her voice nor her talents, nor the ardor with which she inspires the public at San Samuel."

"I understand; but who, then, is the happy favorite of this mad princess?"

The count and his friend enumerated all whom Corilla appeared to encourage during the evening. Anzoletto was absolutely the only one whom they failed to think of.

CHAPTER V.

A VIOLENT struggle arose in the breast of the happy lover, who agitated and palpitating, was borne on the waters through the tranquil night, with the most celebrated beauty of Venice. Anzoletto was transported by his ardor, which gratified vanity rendered still more