THE PAINTER OF PARMA;

— OR, —

THE MAGIC OF A MASTERPIECE.

CHAPTER I.

In a spacious marble building overfooking the grand piazza of Parma, its walls somewhat discolored by the touch of time, was the studio of a painter. His rooms were on the second floor, the windows in front commanding a view that might have inspired any one whose soul was susceptible to the influences of the grand and the beautiful.

Within a stone's throw was the statue of Correggio, whose masterpieces adorn the city and constitute one of its chief attractions; further away the great cathedral, with its imposing arches and its huge red marble lions, from the chisel of Bona da Bisone. Still further, and to the right, an extensive garden, full of bloom and fragrance; and beyond all this, visible through a vista afforded by the Aemelian Way, were to be seen the green forest of the Taro and the towering peak of the distant Apennines.

Our painter occupied two apartments both of goodly size, well lighted and handsomely and artistically furnished. That in the rear, the windows of which overlooked a small garden belonging to the estate, was used as a reception and waiting-room, the other, in front, being the artist's studio proper—his sanctum sanctorum.

It was late in the afternoon of a pleasant day of June. In the rear apartment of the painter's quarters sat a woman, advanced in years— three score at least—wearing a garb as rich in material as any lady in the land could have desired, yet she had nothing of the patrician in her appearance, being, on the contrary, really plebeian. She was, in truth, but a duenna in attendance upon a mistress who occasionally tried her patience, as it was certainly being tried now.

She had waited in that room, solitary and alone, she could not tell how long, but it seemed to her an age. Had she been fond of pictures; had she loved the beautiful in art of nature; had she been able to trace out thought and feeling and grand conception in the bold strokes and more gentle passes of the sculptor's chisel upon the inanimate marble—could she have done this she might have spent hours in that place and never thought of lonesomeness or fatigue, for it was a repository of rare paintings and choice bits of statuary and bas-relief, gathered through years of earnest search, with discriminating taste and judgment, from many lands.

Occasionally the duenna would go to one of the two windows—perhaps step out upon the balcony, and gaze down upon the garden underneath, or away upon other windows, with a natural curiosity to see, if possible, what the neighbors were doing. When she returned to the room and resumed her seat, she fixed her eyes upon the lofty arch within which was the door opening into the sanctum sanctorum beyond, and once or twice, probably in a fit of forgetfulness, while pretending to pass to and fro, she stepped near the closed passage and bent her ear as one does who listens.

Anon she tapped the rich mosaic of the floor with her foot, winked and blinked her sharp gray eyes, pursed her thin lips, and nodded mysteriously.

Madelon Sandoz was of a verity becoming weary and impatient; but it was not the first time she had thus suffered; nor did she expect it to be the last. Nevertheless, even a duenna's patience has its limit, and, if her looks do not belie her, she will ere long make herself officious.

The apartment beyond the arch—the studio proper— was a different place from the waiting-room, and differently occupied. On the walls were paintings, sketches and etchings of various degrees of excellence; several studies by Correggio, two pictures by Murillo, which the artist had brought from Spain besides works from the pencils of other masters, whose names had become imperishable. There were choice pieces of sculpture, too, bestowed in various nooks and corners, together with chaste and valuable bric-a-brac, which we need not particularize.

A peculiar charm of softness — of peace and restfulness—was cast upon the room and upon all it contained by the richly stained glass of the windows and the judicious arrangement of delicately tinted screens and curtains.

Near the center of the studio stood an easel, supporting a canvas, on which was being created a life-size picture of St. Cecilia, the young and beautiful Christian martyr of Rome. The body of the picture was well on the way toward completion. The figure was represented as leaning on a harp; the mood one of sublime contemplation. The harp was finished, save only a touch here and there in shading; the backgrounds was well-nigh complete, and the drapery required but little more work. The face was scarcely more than outlined, but sufficient had been done to reveal the surpassing possibilities of the conception.

By the side of his work stood the painter, Juan Zanoni. He was of medium height and size, possessing a well-knit, muscular frame, the thews and sinews of which had been toughened and strengthened by long continued manly and atheletic exercise. The beauty of his face was startling. The skin in its purity and whiteness was like unspotted marble. There was a glow of perfect health without a particle of a flush, though there were times and occasions when sudden and strong emotion would send the richest carmine to cheek and brow. The features were of the pure Italian type, the eyes, large, dreamy and lustrous, were of a golden brown in color, though the hair clustering about the magnificent head in silken curls, was almost black, there were certain lights, however, in which a brownish tinge was preceptible. His age—since we know it we may as well be exact—was nine and twenty. One month previously he had entered upon his thirtieth year. So he was in the full bloom and perfectness of his manhood.

He was clad in a light, blouse-like frock or doublet of rich green velvet, with a vest of amber-colored satin beneath, the close fitting small-clothes and velvet hose revealing the muscular fullness and satuesque symmetry of his lower limbs. There was no confinement of linen gear about the neck. The collar of his shirt was turned over the collar of his blouse and simply confined by a light silken-scarf, so loosely knotted that the white throat was left free and open.

Near by, reclining upon a luxurious velvet-covered ottoman, was the painter's model for his saint. If she had not been beautiful she would not have been there. Neither would she have been there had her beauty been of the voluptuous cast, or even verging upon it. Hers was most emphatically a beauty of purity and truth—a beauty of soul and intellect. She was twenty years of age, with a figure of surpassing grace and loveliness, and— But —when we say that the artist sought no other model—that she afforded him, in form and feature, all that he could desire for his most exalted conception of the person and character of the saint—when that is said, surely we need say no more. Her garb, as well as her tone and bearing, plainly signified that she belonged to the patrician class.

And so she did. She was the Princess Isabel di Varona, an orphan, and a relative and ward of the Duke of Parma. She had lost her parents when quite young, her father having been killed on the battle-field, her mother dying shortly thereafter. Though Prince di Varona had been only a cousin, twice removed, of the duke on the maternal side, they had been mated together in youth, and had loved one another deeply and truly to the end; hence the mother when dying called upon the dear friend of her husband to be a father to her child. He had promised, and most faithfully had his promise been kept. The orphan girl, inheriting the title with the large estate, had come to him a wealthy ward, her possessions, in fact, rivaling his own in value. And this wealth he had cared for with a faith that knew no swerving. He could not have guarded his life with a more scrupulous fidelity.

If you ask how the princess chanced to be here, serving Zanoni as a model, we answer: The St. Cecilia was being painted for the duke. The subject had originated with him. He had read the touching story of the young and beautiful Roman wife, who had offered her life upon the altar of her religion—preferring death to a renunciation of her blessed faith in her Lord and Savious Jesus Christ—he had read, and it became with him a sort of infatuation that he should not only possess a picture of the saint, but that his beautiful ward should sit for the portrait, that he might thus possess a memento that would be doubly precious to him.

No fear of scandal had entered the duke's thoughts. Zanoni was noted for his stern and unswerving virtue; for his high estimate of women, and for the scrupulous attention to strict propriety and decorum in his intercourse with those who had occasion to sit in his studio.

Once, when the Count Guiseppe Denaro, an only son of one of the wealthiest, oldest, and most noble families in the duchy, who had sought Isabel's hand in marriage—when he, with sadly drawn and lugubrious visage, offered objections to the arrangement, the duke had laughed at him outright.

"In mercy's name, of what are you afraid?' the latter exclaimed. "Do you fancy the populace would dare to breathe the breath of scandal against that pure being. Surely, you can not doubt that her dignity and self-respect will bear her safely through the ordeal. And, my boy, you can not know Juan Zanoni if you fear on his account."

"You mistake me, sir. My thoughts lay not in that direction—"

Before the young man could speak further the duke started under the touch of a quick, deep anger.

"Count Denaro! Dare you hint at such a thing? By San Marco! the man who has not confidence in the immaculate purity of—"

"Oh, sir! sir!" the count had implored, grasping the duke's hand as he spoke. "How could you give such turn to my speech? Good heavens! I would cut my tongue out at its roots if I thought it could frame utterance in that direction. No, no; I meant nothing like that."

"What then, Guiseppe? You must have had a meaning?"

"Dear master," the youth had replied, with deepest feeling, "you will pardon me for what I am about to say. True, Isabel has not yet given assent to my earnest suit; nor yet has she promised me her hand; still I am sure she likes me, and I had hoped that she might, ere long, speak the word that would make me the happiest of men. And now, my dear duke, I will tell you the thought that has given me trouble; and I shame not to confess it." He paused here a few moments, with his head bent and his hand pressed on his brow. Presently he resumed:

"Sire, the painter Zanoni is, without exception, the handsomest man I ever saw; and in his beauty there is a weird, spiritual quality—a quality I have at times thought not of earth —which gives it a depth and power to charm, which no one can escape who is brought within its influence. Then again, I never met another so brilliant and entertaining in conversation. In short, his very presence has in it a charm which is utterly irresistible. Now, sir, I know that the princess is young and impressible, with a deep touch of romance in her thoughts and feelings. Can you not see what I dread?"

For the space of perhaps three seconds the duke had regarded the young man seriously, and they he burst into a merry laugh, and laughed heartily.

"Oh, boy, boy! What a bugbear you have conjured up in that poor fellow's studio! You must be crazy. The Princess di Varona falling in love, like a milkmaid, with a plebeian picture-maker! Zounds! Don't let her mistrust that you think so lightly of her! Hush! say no more. I forgive you, my boy, but I doubt much if she would should she come to know it. And now, Guiseppe, as an end to this matter I will say this: You can only look at one side of Zanoni's character. I admit all that you have said concerning him—every word; but I wish to add—he is wedded to his art. Since he has been in Parma, little more than five years, he has painted the portraits of the most beautiful maidens we have among us. At least a score of young and lovely damsels, marriageable, yet unmarried—I may say of them that they were the loveliest of our lovely women—have sat to him, have spent hours with him alone, while he caught their features and transferred them to canvas.

"Guiseppe, most of those young ladies I have conversed with on the subject of their experience in the artist's studio, and I have found them unanimous in one direction of disappointment and, I think I may say, disgust. Not all the beauty they were able to reveal, no possible charm they could bring to bear, no smiles, nor admiring looks, not even their witching flattery, could draw from him one warm or gallant glance. Had they been so many toothless old hags it would have been the same, so far as his treatment of themselves was concerned. Be sure, my boy, I knew what I was doing when I suffered the dear girl to go there. And you will remember old Madelon always accompanied her. No! I wouldn't forego the pleasure I anticipated in the possession of that picture for my ducal crown. Yet you know I would give my life sooner than harm should come to Isabel. But that can not be. Aha! I must try and see if I can fancy Zanoni in love with mortal woman. There! away you go. Don't let any more such goblins arise to frighten you."

The young count had it on his tongue when the duke spoke of Madelon, to tell him that the good old woman was never suffered to sit in the studio while the artist was painting;. but perhaps his grace already knew it and had ready excuse for it. At all events he had, at that dismissal, turned away without saying more.

This has been a digression, but it will the better enable us to understand the situation about to transpire.

(To be Continued.)

The Three Correspondents

It was his first experience of a trotting camel, and at first the motion, although irregular and abrupt was not unpleasant. Having no stirrup or fixed point of any kind he could not rise to it, but he gripped as tightly as he could with his knep, and he tried to sway backwards and forwards as he had seen the Arabs do. It was a large, very concave Makloofa saddle, and he was conscious that he was bouncing about on it with as little power of adhesion as a billiard ball upon a tea tray. He gripped the two sides with his hands to hold himself steady. The creature had got into its long, swinging, stealthy trot, its sponge-like feet making no sound upon the hard sand. Anerley leaned back with his two hands gripping hard behind him, and he whooped the creature on.

The sun had already sunk behind the line of black volcanic peaks, which look like huge slag-heads at the mouth of a mine. The western sky had taken that lovely light-green and pale-pink tint which makes evening beautiful upon the Nile, and the old brown river itself, swirling down amongst the black rocks, caught some shimmer of the colors above. The glare, the heat and the piping of the insects had all ceased together. In spite of his aching head Anerley could have cried out for pure physical joy as the swift creature beneath him flew along with him through that cool invigorating air, with the virile north wind soothing his pringling face.

He had looked at his watch, and now he made a swift calculation of times and distances. It was past six when he had left the camp. Over broken ground it was impossible that he could hope to do more than seven miles an hour—less on bad parts, more on the smooth. His recollection of the track was that there were few smooth and many bad. He would be lucky then if he reached Sarras anywhere from twelve to one. Then the messages took a good two hours to go through, fr they had to be transcribed at Cairo. At the best he could only hope to have told his story in Fleet Street at two or three in the morning. It was possible that he might manage it, but the chances seemed enormously against him. About three the morning edition would be made up, and his chance gone forever. The one thing clear was that only the first man at the wires would have any chance at all, and Anerley meant to be first if hard riding could do it. So he tapped away at the bird-like neck, and the creature's long, loose limbs went faster and faster at every tap. Where the rocky spurs ran down to the river, horses would have to go round, while camels might get across so that Anerley felt that he was always gaining upon his companions.

But there was a price to be paid for the feeling. He had heard of men who had burst when on camel journeys, and he knew that the Arabs swathe their bodies tightly in broad cloth bandages when they prepare for a long march. It had seemed unnecessary and ridiculous when he first began to speed over the level track, but now, when he got on the rocky paths, he understood what it meant. Never for an instant was he at the same angle. Backwards, forwards he swung, with a tingling jar at the end of each sway, until he ached from his neck to his knee. It caught him across the shoulders, it caught him down the spine, it gripped him over the loins, it marked the lower line of his ribs with one heavy dull throb. He clutched here and there with his hand to try and ease the strain upon his muscles. He drew up his knees, altered his seat and set his teeth with a grim determination to go through with it should it kill him. His head was splitting, his flayed face smarting and every joint in his body aching as if it were dislocated. But he forgot all that when, with the rising of the moon, he heard the clinking of horses' hoofs down upon the track by the river, and knew that, unseen by them, he had already got well abreast of his companions. But he was hardly half-way and the time already eleven.

All day long the needles had been ticking away without intermission in the little corrugated iron hut which served as a telegraph station at Sarras. With its bare walls and its packing-case seats it was none the less for the moment one of the vital spots upon the earth's surface, and the crisp importunate ticking might have come from the world-old clock of destiny. Many august people had been at the other end of those wires and had communed with the moist-faced military clerk. A French premier had demanded a pledge and an English marquis had passed on the request to the general in command, with a question as to how it would affect the situation. Cipher telegrams had nearly driven the clerk out of his wits, for of all crazy occupations the taking of a cipher message when you are without a key to the cipher is the worst. Much high diplomacy had been going on all day in the innermost chambers of European chancellories, and the results of it had been whispered into this little corrugated iron hut. About two in the morning an enormous dispatch had come at last to an end, and the weary operator had opened the door and was lighting his pipe in the cool, fresh air, when he caw a camel, plump down in the dust, and a man, who seemed to be in the last state of drunkenness, come rolling toward him.

"What's the time?" he cried in a voice that appeared to be the only sober thing about him.

It was on the clerk's lips to say that it was time that the questioner was in his bed, but it is not safe upon a campaign to be ironical at the expense of kharki-clad men. He contented himself therefore with the bald statement that it was after two.

But no retort that he could have devised could have had a more crushing effect. The voice turned drunken also, and the man caught at the door post to uphold him.

"Two o'clock! I'm done after all!" said he. His head was tied up in a bloody bandkerchief, and his face was crimson, and he stood with his legs crooked as if the pith had all gone out of his back. The clerk began to realize that something out of the ordinary was in the wind.

"How long does it take to get a wire to London?"

"About two hours,"

"And it's tw onow. I could not get it before four."

"Before three."

"Four?"

"No, three."

"But you said two hours."

"Yes, but there's more than an hour's difference in longitude."

"By heavens, I'll do it yet!" cried Anerley, and staggering to a packing case he began the dictation of his famous dispatch.

And so it came about that the Gazette had a long column, with headlines like an epitaph, when the sheets of the Intelligence and the Courier were as blank as the faces of their editors. And so, too, it happened that when two weary men, upon two foundered horses, arrived about four in the morning at the Sarras post office they looked at each other in silence and departed noiselessly with the conviction that there are some situations with which the English language is not capable of dealing.

The End.

AUSTRALIAN HORSES.

So Plentiful in That Country That a Beggar May Ride.

The land of the kangaroo and the wombat, where the mammal was nothing less marsupial, till the European arrived on the scene, may now be called the land of horses. In New South Wales the sight of a beggar on horseback excites no surprise. The poorest settler has a nag or two of his own, and his children may be seen riding to school like little lords. A one-horse township would be inconceiveable in a country where each village, almost, has its race meeting. With a population scarcely over 1,250,000, the colony owns more than 500,000 horses. And she now exports horses on a rapidly increasing scale. In 1895 the colony exported 1063 horses, of the estimated value of £12,745; in 1896 the number was 8138, value £123,500; and last year there was a further increase India being the leading customer. Australian horses being found admirably adapted for military purposes in that part of the British Empire. Horses are exported also from New South Wales to Victoria, New Zealand, Western Australia, Fiji, the Straits Settlements, Java and the Philippine Islands.

CONSTANCY.

Does Mrs. Marrby always agree with her husband?

Agree? She'd fall in with him if he was to walk into a cistern.

A Hopeless Invalid.

SUCH WAS THE CONDITION OF MISS RODD, OF BROOKLIN.

An Editor Relates the Story of Her Illness and How a Remarkable Change in Her Condition Was Brought About.

From the Gazette, Whitby, Ont.

For some five years the editor of this journal has made weekly visits to Brooklin in search of news. One of his earliest recollections of the village was in noting that Miss Levina Rodd was very ill. Miss Rodd was well known, and as week after week rolled round, it was natural to ask how she was getting on, and the reply always came that she was no better. Time went on and it became a settled fact that Miss Rodd was a confirmed invalid and that such she would continue until a kind Providence took mercy on her by allowing death to end her sufferings. None of the villagers anticipated any other ending. Our astonishment can better be imagined than described, therefore, when Mrs. Bert Wells hailed us one morning with "Well, editor, we have some news for you to-day." "What is it?" "Why, Miss Rodd has gone on a visit to Columbus friends." "Why, I thought she was a confirmed invalid?" "So she was, but she has been improving so much lately that she is now able to help herself a good deal, and it was thought a change of scene would do her good."

"That is certainly news," replied the quill-pusher, "and good news too; but what cured her?" "Dr. Williams' Pink Pills," replied Mrs. Wells. We then decided to ask Miss Rodd upon her return for an interview, but it was some time before it took place, owing to the limited time at our disposal between trains, and partly owing to a desire to wait and see if the improvement was likely to prove permanent. However, after many put-offs, we finally called at the home of Mrs. Doolittle, a sister of Miss Rodd's, who has carefully cared for her during the long illness. At the request of the editor Miss Rodd made the following statement:—"I am fifty years of age and have lived in Brooklin ten years. Five years ago I was taken ill with acute rheumatism, and have not done a day's work since. The trouble began with my feet and the swelling extended to my arms, wrists and shoulders, and finally settled in my neck. I had such pain that I was obliged to use a walking stick to ease me in moving about, and two and a half years ago the stick had to make way for a crutch. At this time I used to get up a little each day, but it was not long before I was denied even this privilege, and the next six months I was perfectly helpless and bed-ridden. I could not even turn my head or put a cup of tea to my mouth. I got completely discouraged after ineffectually being treated by two physicians and trying the different medicines recommended for my ailment. While I was in this helpless condition my niece came in one day and prevailed upon me to try Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. After taking two boxes I felt a slight change for the better so I continued to take them, with the effect that I continued to improve slowly ever since. I now sleep well, have a good appetite and have gained in flesh. I can stand now, walk about and even got in and out of the buggy upon the occasion of my late visit to Columbus. Since that time, too, I feel stronger and my reason for still using a crutch is on account of my knees being weak and a desire to not overtax my strength. Jubilee Day was the first time in twenty-one months that I was able to put my foot outside the door and I am satisfied had I tried Dr. Williams' Pink Pills in the first place instead of the other medicines used, I would have been spared much suffering. I am sure I owe my improvement to these Pills alone." Mrs. Doolittle who, as we have previously stated, attended her sister through her trying illness, was equally strong in her recommendations as to Dr. Williams' Pink Pills having effected the radical change, and the three of us agreed that it would be only just that this case should be brought to the notice of suffering humanity in the hope that it might prove a blessing to more than Miss Rodd, who still continues to improve and who hopes to again be able to do her full day's work at no distant date.

Dr. Williams' Pink Pills cure by going to the root of the disease. They renew and build up the blood, and strengthen the nerves, thus driving disease from the system. Avoid imitations by insisting that every box you purchase is enclosed in a wrapping bearing the full trade mark, Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People."

THROUGH RATE WARS.

Patron, in a Western railroad station—Gimme a ticket to Gulchtown.

Ticket Clerk—Yessir. Seven an' a half.

Patron—Seven dollers and a half to Gulchtown? Why, that's only a few stations from here.

Ticket Clerk, sharply — Sevenahalf, Lively now.

Patron—Don't want it. Give me a ticket for China by way of Gulchtown.

Ticket Clerk, briskly—Here you are, sir. Five dollars.

A WESTERN "LIMIT."

Disgusted Passenger—I thought this was the limited express.

Conductor—That's what it's called, sir.

Passenger—Huh! What is there limited about it?

Conductor, after reflection—The time for meals.

ABSENT MINDED.

Toothache, old man? Pshaw! When I have it I just go home to my wife, she kisses me—and it's gone!

Is—is you wife home now?