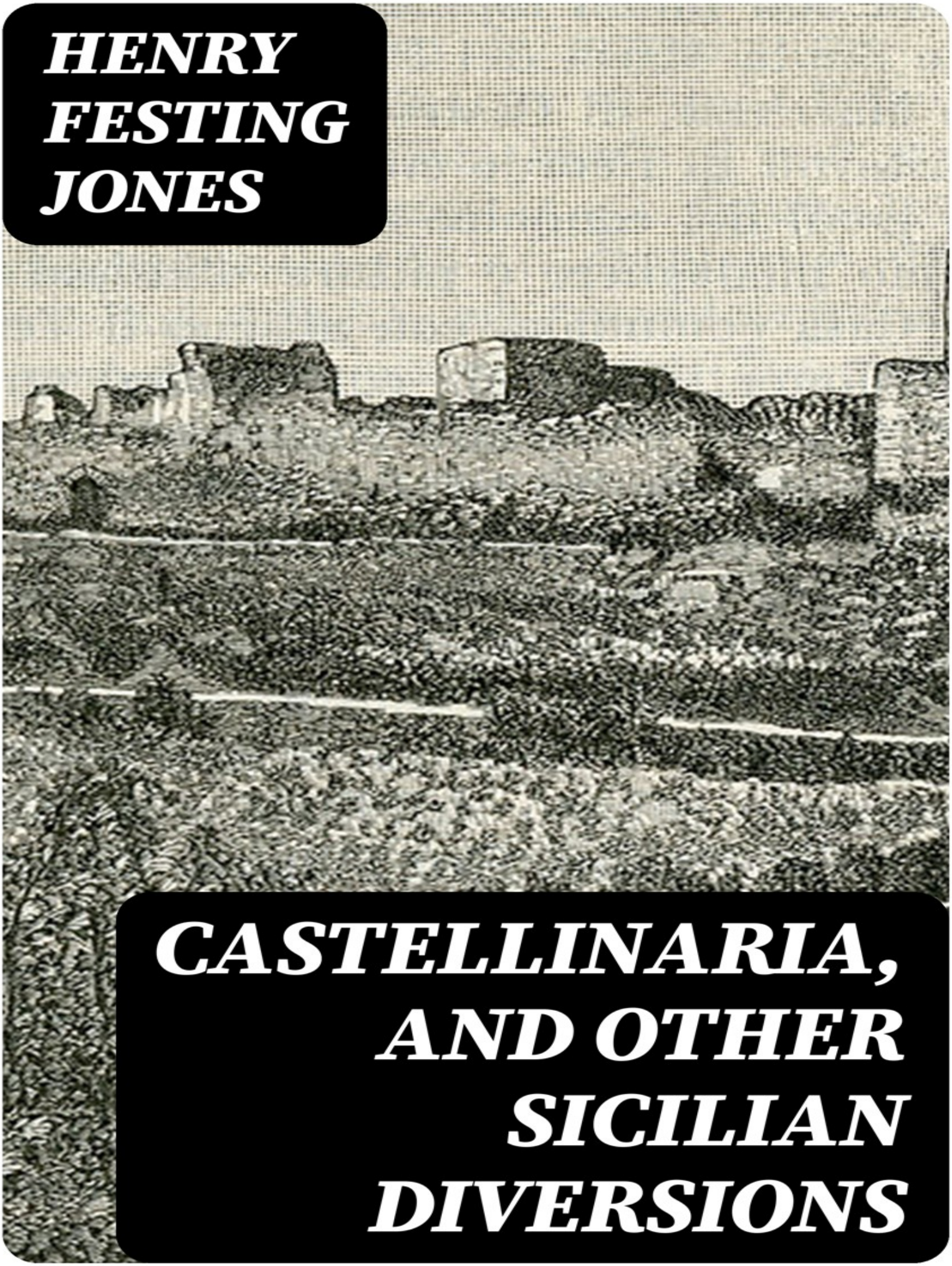
HENRY FESTING JONES



CASTELLINARIA, AND OTHER SICILIAN DIVERSIONS

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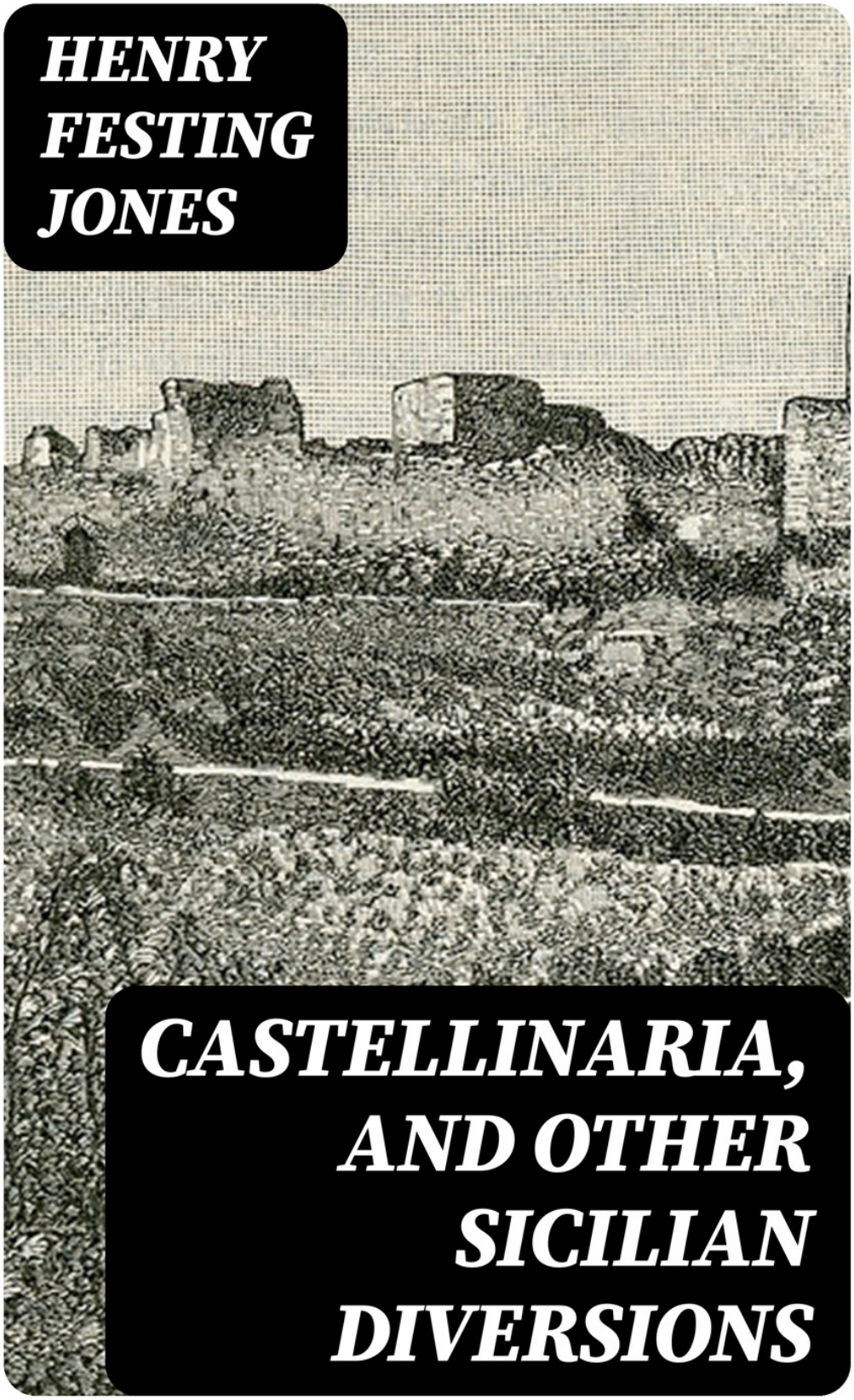

CASTELLINARIA, AND OTHER SICILIAN DIVERSIONS

Henry Festing Jones

Castellinaria, and Other Sicilian Diversions

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PREFACE

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It is probable that every book contains, besides misprints, some statements which the author would be glad to modify if he could. In Chapter V of *Diversions in Sicily* it is stated that the seating arrangements of the marionette theatre in Catania would be condemned by the County Council, which I believe to be correct, but, on visiting the theatre since, I find I was wrong in saying that there are no passages; I did not see them on my first visit because the audience hid them.

Again, in Chapter XVI it is stated that Giovanni Grasso enters in the third act of *La Morte Civile*, whereas he enters in the second act. I have since seen the play several times, and, though it is tedious, it is not so much so as to justify a spectator in thinking any of its acts long enough for two.

In Chapter IV I say that the Government makes an annual profit of £3,000,000 sterling out of the lottery, but I do not say whether this profit is gross or net. There is a paragraph in the *Morning Post*, 12 September, 1911, which states clearly that never since the union of Italy has the State lottery been so productive as in the present year of Jubilee; the gross yield has been £3,715,088, and the net gain, after deducting commissions and prizes, £1,489,180.

In Chapter XV it is stated that the words of the play in Signor Greco's marionette theatre in Palermo are always improvised except in the case of *Samson*. This is incorrect. The words of the long play about the paladins are improvised, but they have in the theatre the MSS. of several

religious plays by the author of *Samson*, who was a Palermitan, Filippo Orioles. All who are interested in the legends, folklore, popular entertainments, superstitions, and traditions of the people of Sicily are under deep obligations to Giuseppe Pitrè, of Palermo, Professore di Demopsicologia, for his numerous volumes treating of those subjects. In *Spettacoli e Feste Popolari Siciliane* he gives the little that is known of Filippo Orioles, who died in 1793 at the great age of one hundred and six years. The subject of the most famous of his plays is the Passion of Jesus Christ, and its title in English signifies The Redemption of Adam. It has had an immense success throughout Sicily; it has been copied in MS. many times, printed continually, performed over and over again in theatres, in churches, in the public squares, and in private houses. It was written for living actors, and Signor Greco considers it too long for a performance by marionettes, so when they do it in his teatrino they treat it even more freely than our London managers treat a play by Shakespeare. Copies are difficult to procure because their owners keep them jealously. Professore Pitrè has, however, lately added to our obligations by publishing a reprint of the play: *Il Riscatto d'Adamo nella Morte di Gesù Cristo*; Tragedia di Filippo Orioles, Palermitano; Riprodotta sulla edizione di 1750; con prefazione di G. Pitrè. Palermo: Tipografia Vittoria Giliberti, Via Celso 93. 1909. A copy of this reprint is in the library of the British Museum.

Many of the friends who have helped me to write this book are named in the following pages, many more are unnamed. I hereby tender my thanks to all of them.

I specially thank Signor Cesare Coppo, of Casale-Monferrato, who, although he is not a Sicilian, has helped me in a manner which I will only hint at by saying that he could give a better account than I can of Peppino Pampalone, of Castellinaria.

To an English friend, Mr. Joseph Benwell Clark, I am indebted for the drawing on the title-page and on the cover. When any of the audience leaves Signor Greco's marionette theatre in Palermo to smoke a cigarette or to drink a glass of water between the acts he receives a ticket with a picture of two fighting paladins, which he gives up on returning. I brought away one of these tickets as a ricordo of the marionettes. The picture is not very clear, because it is printed from a wood-block that has been a good deal worn. Mr. Clark has made from it a drawing which looks more like what the artist originally intended, and I trust that Signor Greco will not be angry with us for assuming his permission to reproduce the picture.

In correcting the proof-sheets I have had the assistance of my sister, Miss Lilian Isabel Jones, and of my friend Mr. R. A. Streatfeild. I am much obliged to them both for the care which they have exercised.

I must not conclude without saying that Castellinaria still remains as in Chapter II of my previous book, "not so marked on any map of Sicily."

September, 1911

CASTELLINARIA

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CHAPTER I
CHANGES IN THE TOWN

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Enrico Pampalone entered the world with a compliment to his godfather, for of all the days in the year he chose to be born on my birthday. Peppino sent me a telegram at once, then a formal invitation to the christening, then a letter, an extract from which I translate:

> With immense joy I inform you that Brancaccia has given to the light a fine, healthy boy. Mother and child are well and send you their salutations. We are all beside ourselves with delight at this happy event and my father is talking of his grandson all day long. In accordance with your promise, you ought to hold the baby at the baptism, but, as I absolutely cannot permit you to undertake so long a journey for this purpose, I am sending you a formal document and I beg you to return it to me at once signed with your name in order that the ceremony may take place with as little delay as possible.
>
> We are all looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you playing with your godchild which you will be able to do on your next visit.

The formal document was to the following effect:

> WHEREAS I the undersigned have undertaken the duty of acting as godfather to Enrico the new-born son of Giuseppe and Brancaccia Pampalone of the Albergo

della Madonna (con giardino) Castellinaria Sicily AND WHEREAS I am detained in London for several weeks and desire that the baptism of the said infant shall not be delayed on that account NOW I DO HEREBY APPOINT Luigi Pampalone the father of the said Giuseppe Pampalone to be my substitute for me and in my name to hold the said Enrico Pampalone his grandson at the sacred font on the occasion of his baptism and to do all such other acts and deeds as may be necessary in the promises as fully and effectually as I could do the same if I were present in my own person I hereby agreeing to ratify and confirm all that the said Luigi Pampalone shall do by virtue of this writing AS WITNESS my hand this day of

I filled up the date, signed the document, and returned it to Peppino, and he told me all about the ceremony. By virtue of the christening I became the padrino of Enrico, who became my figlioccio, and I also became the compare of Peppino and Brancaccia and in some spiritual way a member of the family. Peppino sent me a post-card every week, and so I learnt that the baby was the finest ever seen, and weighed more and ate more than any baby that had ever been born in Castellinaria. Then there came information about the first tooth and the first intelligent, if unintelligible, sounds. Soon he was three months old, then six, then a year, and still I had not seen him.

When at last I returned to Sicily, he was more than a year old, and came down to the station to meet me. He laughed as soon as he saw me, threw away his india-rubber ball, and signified that he was to be given to me. Whatever he wants

is always done at once and, as he never wants anything unreasonable, the method is working out admirably. I took him from Brancaccia, and he nestled down in my arms, all the time gazing up at me with an expression of satisfied wonder, as though at last he understood something that had been puzzling him. Peppino was present, but effaced himself by helping Carmelo with what he calls my “luggages.” I suppose I exchanged the usual greetings with the parents, but they did not count, I had seen them since their marriage; this time I had come to see Enrico. There was some difficulty about getting into the carriage, because they thought I could not do it unless they took him away, and he did not want to be taken away. When we were settled, and Carmelo was driving us up the zig-zags, I said:

“Of course you don’t expect me to know much about babies, not being married or anything—but isn’t he an unusually fine child for his age?”

Brancaccia was much flattered and replied that recently, when they had bought him some new clothes, he took the size usually sold for babies of twice his age. This made Peppino laugh at his wife, and say that the compare might not know much about babies, but he knew how to get on the right side of Ricuzzu’s mother.

“Why do you call him Ricuzzu?” I asked.

“Ricuzzu is Enrico in Sicilian.”

“Then I shall call him Ricuzzu also.”

“Of course, yes.”

The motion of the carriage soon sent the child to sleep. I handed him back to Brancaccia, and looked at her as she sat with him in her arms. She was more beautiful than

before, because of something that has eluded the skill of all the painters who have striven to capture it for their hortus siccus of the Madonna and Child, something that Enrico had awakened in her heart, and that I saw glowing in her eyes and throbbing in all her movements.

“Isn’t he like Peppino?” asked Brancaccia.

“He is the very image of Peppino,” I replied; but I noticed that he also had Brancaccia’s blue eyes, and was promising to have her black hair.

We arrived at the Albergo della Madonna (con giardino) and Peppino took me up to my room. Brancaccia had been before us, and had put an enormous bunch of flowers in water on the table to greet me. I went out on the balcony, just to make sure that the panorama was still there, and, after putting myself straight, descended into the garden, where I found Peppino waiting for me, and where we were to have tea in the English manner—”sistema Inglese,” as Brancaccia said.

The English system is not always in working order at a moment’s notice, so we had time for a walk round. The afternoon breeze was conducting a symphony of perfumes, and, as we strolled among the blossoms that were the orchestra, we could identify the part played by each flower; sometimes one became more prominent, sometimes another, but always through the changing harmonies we could distinguish the stately canto fermo of the roses, counterpointed with a florid rhythm from the zagara. If Flaubert had been writing in Sicilian, he could have said “una corona di zagara,” or, in English, “a wreath of orange-blossoms,” and he need not have worried himself to death

by trying to elude the recurrent “de” of “une couronne de fleurs d’oranger.” There was also music of another kind coming from a passero solitario (the blue rock thrush) who was hanging in a cage in a doorway. We spoke to him, and he could not have made more fuss about us if we had been the King of Italy and the Pope of Rome paying him a visit.

I said, “Aren’t you pleased with your beautiful garden, Peppino?”

He replied, “Yes, and other things too. Sometimes I am cross with my life; but I think of Brancaccia and the baby, and I look around me, and then I says to myself, ‘Ah, well, never mind! Be a good boy!’“

Presently we came to a fountain which, when I turned a tap, twisted round and round, spouting out graceful, moving curves, and the drops fell in the basin below and disturbed the rose-leaves that were sleeping on the water. I also found an image of the Madonna and Bambino in a corner, with an inscription in front promising forty days’ indulgence to anyone who should recite devoutly an Ave before it. I understood this as well as one who is not a Roman Catholic can be said to understand such a promise, and better than I understood another image to which Peppino called my attention. It was a small coloured crockery S. Giuseppe, standing on the top of the wall and looking into the garden, protected by a couple of tiles arranged over him as an inverted V, and held in place by dabs of mortar.

I said, “Why do you keep your patron saint on the wall like that?”

He replied that it had nothing to do with him. The land over the wall belongs to the monks, and they put the saint

up to gaze into the garden in the hope that Peppino's father might thereby become gradually illuminated with the idea of giving them a piece of his land; they wanted it to join to their own, which is rather an awkward shape just there. The influence of S. Giuseppe had already been at work four years, but Peppino's father still remained obstinately unilluminated.

Carmelo brought the tea and set a chair for Ricuzzu, who has his own private meals like other babies but likes to sit up to the table and watch his father and mother having theirs, occasionally honouring their repast by trying his famous six—or is it seven?—teeth upon a crust, which he throws upon the ground when he has done with it. So we all four sat together in the shade of the Japanese medlar-tree and talked about the changes in the town since my last visit.

First Peppino repeated something he had told me last time I was there, before Ricuzzu was born. It was about the horror of that fatal night when he heard his father crying in the dark; he went to his parents' room to find out what was the matter, and heard the old man babbling of being lost on Etna, wandering naked in the snow. Peppino struck a light, which woke his father from his dream, but it did not wake his mother. She had been lying for hours dead by her husband's side.

When the body was laid out and the watchers were praying by it at night, the widower sat in a chair singing. He was not in the room with the body, he had his own room, and his song was unlike anything Peppino had ever heard; it had no words, no rhythm, no beginning and no end, yet it

was not moaning, it was a cantilena of real notes. It seemed to be a comfort to him in his grief to pour these lamenting sounds out of his broken heart. All the town came to the funeral, for the family is held in much respect, and there were innumerable letters of condolence and wreaths of flowers. When it was over, Peppino wrote a paragraph which appeared in the *Corriere di Castellinaria*:

> A tutte le pie cortesi persone che con assistenza, con scritti, con l'intervento ai funebri della cara sventurata estinta, con adornarne di fiori l'ultima manifestazione terrena desiderarono renderne meno acre it dolore, ringraziamenti vivissimi porge la famiglia PAMPALONE.

He showed me this and waited while I copied it. When I had finished he went on, talking more to himself than to me:

"The life it is not the same when we are wanting someone to be here that is gone away. When we were young and this person was living, things it was so; now we can understand this person who is gone, and things it is other. This is not a good thing. Now is the time this dear person should be living; now would we be taking much care."

For many weeks they feared lest the father might follow the mother, but he began to take a new interest in life on the day when Peppino brought home his bride, and when Ricuzzu was born he soon became almost his old self.

"Things it is like that," said Peppino; "the young ones are coming to dry the eyes that have tears in them because the old ones are going away."

Brancaccia’s attention was occupied by the tea and the baby, and by trying to follow Peppino’s talk. He has been giving her English lessons and, though she has not yet got much beyond saying, “Me no speakare l’Inglese,” she is quick enough to know what he is talking about, especially as she has heard most of it before. She now said a few words in dialect, evidently reminding him of something, and he at once began to tell me about their wedding tour. He had told me some of it last time I was there, and how he had wanted to take his bride to England and show her London, but they had not time enough, and that journey has been put off for some future occasion. They went to Venice, which was a particularly suitable place, because his cousin Vanni was there with his ship, the *Sorella di Ninu*, unloading a cargo of wine; they crossed by night to Naples, and Peppino showed Brancaccia Pompeii and all the sights; then they went to Rome for a few days and on, through Florence, to Venice. They stayed there a week, and then Vanni, having unloaded his wine, took them down the Adriatic and brought them safely home again.

“It was sun,” said Peppino, “and we was in Venice, Sammarco Place, where is—how speak you the colomba?—Excuse me, it is the dove. And there was different other people also—love-people, the young ones that go to the field in the spring to take the flower Margherita, and to be pulling the leaves to know the future, plenty many; also sposi, and some that bring the macchina to make the picture, and the bride was to be standing with the colomba in the hand. She put the grain in the hand, and would have a colomba that was with his feet in her finger and eat the

grain; but the bridegroom was not clever to take the photograph and the colomba was—what is it?—he was finish his grain and flied away, and she was telling to her sposo:

“‘Now you are not clever to take the photograph and you shall be obliged to pay for another packet of grain.’

“In the second time, not only a colomba was in the hand but also another one was stopping in the hat very large with the colomba, too large, I am not certain that the bridegroom was able to take all the photograph.”

Whereupon Brancaccia interposed, producing the result, and I exclaimed:

“Why, it is Brancaccia herself! I did not know you meant that this happened to you. I thought you were telling me about other sposi, not about yourselves.”

Then they laughed together, and I saw that Brancaccia, by showing me the photograph, had let out more than was intended, unless perhaps it was all intended; either way, no harm was done, and I was allowed to put the picture in my pocket.

Carmelo came to clear away the tea, and I said:

“It seems to me, Peppino, that you have a new waiter. What has become of Letterio?”

“Ah! you do not know about Letterio. Now I shall tell you.”

At this point it became necessary for Brancaccia to disappear somewhat suddenly with the baby.

“It was festa,” said Peppino, “and Letterio was drinking and his friends were telling to drink some more, and he was drinking plenty much. Then was he going out in a very hurry and was telling that he would be married very directly and

was meeting a girl and was telling: ‘Please, you, marry me this day.’ And the girl was telling: ‘Go away, Letterio, you are a drunk man.’ And he was finding another girl and they was telling the same things—plenty girls—all that day. Afterwards many weeks are passing and Letterio don’t be asking to be married, he was telling always that he would not be married never, never, never; also with the suspicion that no girl would take him. Excuse me, it is like the man who was fell down from the horse and was telling that he was go down—was not fell down. And it was festa again and Letterio was drinking plenty much again and was going on the street again and was meeting a girl again and was telling: ‘Please, you, marry me very directly.’ And the girl was replying: ‘Yes.’“

“But surely,” I exclaimed, “surely they were not so silly as to get married when he was sober, were they?”

It seemed, however, that they were. To save the expense and avoid the chaff that would have attended a marriage in Castellinaria, they went to the next village for a couple of days and returned married.

“But when the man,” said Peppino, “must be finding the courage in the bottle, this is not a good thing. The courage for the happy marriage must be in the heart. We know that good wine it is sincero, it makes to be speaking the truth; yes, very likely. But the wine it is sometimes traditore, it can also be telling the—what is bugia? Excuse me, it is the lie.”

“And so Letterio is married?”

“Look here, he was married. Now I shall tell you. Oh! what a bad woman she was! Impossible to keep her in the albergo. ‘Please go away, Letterio; I am very sorry; you and

your wife also.’ And went away, to his home in Messina and his wife also. In the winter was coming the disaster, the terremoto, the earthquake, and the city was finished to be consumed and the train was bringing the fugitives all day and all night. I was down to the station, Brancaccia was making ready the beds, Carmelo was driving them up and was bringing more and then more—broken people, also whole people, all without nothing, very undressed, and the albergo was became a hospital, a refugio, and the doctors were committing operations upon them in the bedrooms and were curing them and curing them till they died and went away in the cimitero—Oh! it was very pitiful—and sometimes they were repairing them and sending them away in the train. And I was making the journey with the hopeness to un-dig Letterio. During three days was I searching the mournful ruins of Messina but I don’t be finding Letterio, nor alive nor dead, nor his wife, and I am unhappy; also Brancaccia is unhappy. This is why she was now going away with Ricuzzu.”

“Oh! I thought probably the baby had—”

“Yes, many times that is the explication, but this time it is other; it is that she don’t like to be hearing the story of Letterio. I shall tell you that Brancaccia is a gentle person, very tender in the heart.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “of course she is. But are not you both making too much of this? You could not have known there would be an earthquake in Messina. If there was to be one it might have been in some other city, and they would not have been destroyed.”

“Look here; perhaps she was not a so bad woman; perhaps some day she would be making a little Ricuzzu and would be learning to be a good woman.”

“She might learn very slowly or not at all; and think of her poor husband all the time!”

“Let us talk of something other. Do you remember Alfio Mascalucía?”

“Perhaps; what did he do?”

“You were always calling him Bellini.”

“In the barber’s shop opposite? Of course, I remember him, but I had no idea he had such a magnificent name or I never should have dared to take liberties with it.”

I remembered him very well. I remembered going into the shop one day and he was alone, busy writing at a table in the corner. He said he was composing a polka. He had ruled his own staves because, like Schubert, he could not afford to buy music paper; he wanted all the money he could save to pay a publisher to publish his polka—just as we do in England—and if it succeeded his fortune would be made. I felt a sinking at the heart, as though he was telling me he had been gazing on the mirage of the lottery until he had dreamt a number. He had filled about two pages and a half with polka stuff, but had not yet composed the conclusion.

“You see, what I must do is to make it arrive there where the bars end” (he had drawn his bar lines by anticipation); “that will not be difficult; it is the beginning that is difficult—the tema. It does not much matter now what I write for the coda in those empty bars, but I must fill them all with something.”

I said, “Yes. That, of course—well, of course, that is the proper spirit in which to compose a polka.”

As I had shown myself so intelligent, he often talked to me about his music and his studies; he had an Italian translation of Cherubini’s *Treatise*, and had nearly finished all the exercises down to the end of florid counterpoint in four parts. His professor was much pleased with him, and had congratulated him upon possessing a mind full of resource and originality—just the sort of mind that is required for composing music of the highest class. He explained to me that counterpoint is a microcosm. In life we have destiny from which there is no escape; in counterpoint we have the canto fermo of which not a note may be altered. Destiny, like the canto fermo, is dictated for us by One who is more learned and more skilful than we; it is for us to accept what is given, and to compose a counterpoint, many counterpoints, that shall flow over and under and through, without breaking any of the rules, until we reach the full close, which is the inevitable end of both counterpoint and life.

I called him Bellini because he told me that the composer of *Norma* had attained to a proficiency in counterpoint which was miraculous, and that he was the greatest musician the world had ever known. This high praise was given to Bellini partly, of course, because he was a native of Catania. London is a long way from Catania, and in England perhaps we rather neglect Italian music of the early part of last century. Once, at Casale-Monferrato, I heard a travelling company do *I Puritani*; they did it extremely well, and I thought the music charming, especially one sparkling little

tune sung by Sir Giorgio to warn Sir Riccardo that if he should see a couple of fantasmas they would be those of Elvira and Lord Arturo. Alfio may have been thinking of the maxim, “Ars est celare artem,” and may have meant to say that Bellini had shown himself a more learned contrapuntist than (say) Bach, by concealing his contrapuntal skill more effectually than Bach had managed to conceal his in the *Mass in B minor*. While my hair was being cut I examined the polka with interest; it was quite carefully done, the bass was figured all through and the discords were all resolved in the orthodox manner; after the shop was shut he came over to the albergo and played it to us on the piano in the salon. I should say it was a very good polka, as polkas go, and certainly more in the manner of the Catanian maestro than in that of the Leipzig cantor.

“And what about Alfio?” I asked. “Did he also marry a bad woman?”

Then Peppino told me the story of the Figlio di Etna. He called him this because he came from a village on the slopes of the volcano, where his parents kept a small inn, the Albergo Mongibello, and where also lived his cousin Maria, to whom he was engaged. In the days when he used to talk to me about his counterpoint, Alfio was about twenty-four, and always so exceedingly cheerful and full of his music that no one would have suspected that his private life was being carried on in an inferno, yet so it was; a widow had fallen in love with him, and had insisted on his living with her. “And look here,” said Peppino, “the bad day for Alfio was the day when he went to the house of the widow.” He was too much galantuomo to resist; he had not forgotten

Maria but he thought she could wait, and besides, he was at first flattered by the widow's attentions and amused by the novelty of the situation; but he never cared for the widow, and soon his chains became unbearable. As Peppino said, "There don't be some word to tell the infernalness it is when you are loved by the woman you hate." He exercised his contrapuntal ingenuity by devising schemes for circumventing this troublesome passage in the canto fermo of his life without breaking any of the rules, and finally hit upon the device of running away. So many men in a similar difficulty have done the same thing, that his professor, and even the stern Cherubini himself, would have condemned the progression less on account of its harshness and irregularity than because of its lack of originality. He scraped together about fifty francs and disappeared to Livorno where he soon found work in a barber's shop, cutting hair, trimming and shaving beards and whiskers, and making wigs for the theatre. He wrote the widow two letters containing nothing but conventional compliments, and displayed his resource and originality by posting one in the country and sending the other to a friend in Genoa who posted it there.

After about three months of freedom, counterpoint and hair-dressing, he was sent for to return to his village for a few days and vote; Peppino anticipated my inquiry about the money for the journey by protesting that he knew nothing about the details of politics. However it may have been managed, Alfio got leave from his employer, went home and voted. He said nothing about the widow, but he promised Maria to return and marry her in a year, when he

should have saved enough money. He did not know how he was going to do it, but he had to say something. Then the silly fellow must needs go for a day to Castellinaria to salute his friends in the barber's shop there—just as murderers seem never to learn that it is injudicious to re-visit the scenes of their crimes. Naturally the widow heard of his being in the town, they met in the street and had a terrible row. What frightened poor Alfio most was a sort of half persuasion that perhaps he had behaved badly to her. But he did not relent; he returned to his village, bade farewell to his family, embraced his adorata mamma, renewed his promise to Maria, went down to Catania, entered the station and turned pale as he saw the widow sitting in a corner with a parcel and a bundle.

"Where are you going?"

"I am coming with you."

He had let out that he would return to Livorno in a few days, and she had resolved to accompany him, wherever he might be going. She had sold all her furniture in a hurry and come to Catania, knowing that he must start from there. She waited for him inside the station when it was open, outside when it was shut; she had to wait four days and four nights. She refused to leave him. She bought her own ticket and travelled with him. They settled down in Livorno—if that can be called settling down which was a continual hurly-burly; the only repose about it appeared in the bar's rests to which poor Alfio's counterpoint was now reduced. He grew irritable, abused her and beat her; but she was one of those women who love their man more passionately the more he knocks them about. Maria sent him a post-card for his

onomastico, and the widow got hold of it. This led to his leaving the house for a few nights, but she had always taken his money for housekeeping, so he had not enough to leave the town, and she came to the shop in the daytime and made such a disturbance that he was frightened into returning. He dreamt of disguising himself in one of his own theatrical wigs and escaping so, but the idea was too like some of those contrapuntal combinations which, as Cherubini says, may be employed in a study-fugue, but which in practical music, as in practical life, have to be weeded out by artificial selection.

Then his mother fell ill, and the family sent him the money to go home to embrace her. The widow had put some of his money by for an emergency. She was not going to lose sight of him again, especially now that she knew about Maria; she bought a ticket and came too. They spent the night at her brother's house in Catania and Alfio was to go next day to his village. She said she would come too, he said that nothing would induce him to take her with him. She implored and stormed and spat and swore, knowing all the time she could not appear in his village as belonging to him, and fearing that he intended to manipulate his going home alone into a way of escape. She pretended to acquiesce but, in the morning, as he was passing through the Quattro Canti she was there, disguised as a man in her brother's clothes, and before Alfio could recognise her she had stabbed him in the back and he fell down dead.

"But, Peppino," I exclaimed, "this is a worse tragedy than the other. What a horrible woman!"

“The Padre Eterno was very angry that day when he made the bad woman.”

“Where is she now?”

“In prison.”

“That is no satisfaction to poor Alfio.”

“No; and not satisfaction to his family. His mother died of grief during that they were telling her his murder.”

“And Maria?”

“Maria is telling that she would becoming a monkey-woman.”

“What do you mean?”

“How do you say in English the lady-priest, the monaca?”

“Oh! yes,—a nun. But it seems a pity she should take such a serious step. It is a dreadful story, Peppino.”

“Yes; and I am fortunate because I also meet the bad woman.”

“Was Alfio’s widow a friend of yours?”

“No; I meet her in London.”

“I’m glad she did not stab you.”

“Not the widow—some other woman.”

“I don’t quite understand.”

“It is difficult to understand—difficult to be sure when it is the bad woman. The bad woman is like mosquitoes—not wanted but would not go away.”

“Tell me what happened.”

“When I was in London, I was at this place where is the—please, what is campo? No, not campo, but where is the beast with the horn in the head—the cervo?”

“Ah! yes, the deer. You mean the Zoological Gardens.”

“No, no. This place where is the villa with the red palazzo and the chief labours of painting and beds and chinesy images are over the place where is coming the fire in the winter-time, and on the wall is also the armatura and the deer it is in the trees on the side of the river.”

“I believe you mean Hampton Court.”

“Yes, and was telling to the lady—she was a very kind lady—”

“But please, what lady? Alfio’s widow was not at Hampton Court?”

“She was the wife of the plumber.”

“I am afraid I am very stupid, Peppino, but I don’t seem to get hold of it. Who is the plumber?”

“I meet him at Margate; also his lady, his wife; they invite me to their house; I accept their invitation.”

“But Margate is not Hampton Court.”

“No, they inhabit Hampton Court; they go to Margate for the villeggiatura, for the—how do you say?—for the baths of the sea.”

“Oh, now I understand. You met them at Margate and they invited you to call on them at their house at Hampton Court.”

“Of course, yes. And when I arrive, the husband, the plumber, he went away with his tools for his work in a sack, and his lady she says to me, ‘Please sit down.’ And we talk together. She was a very kind lady. And presently—she was on the sofa by the window and I was in a chair by the fire—presently her husband return. I was like a fish not in his water, but oh! it was my salvation. Why must he be leaving us together? She was a very kind lady. And then to be

returning without noise, so soon and so sudden. Do you think—?”

I did not know. It looked rather like it, but the psychology of the Hampton Court plumber resembles the Italian music of the early part of last century in that it is but little studied among us. So I congratulated him on his escape, and inquired whether any of Alfio’s compositions had been published.

“Alfio don’t be writing no compositions.”

“He told me he was composing music.”

“Alfio never compose something. Too busy. Look here, the student that shall be always making the exercise he don’t be never composing the music.”

“But that polka? Don’t you remember he came over to the albergo and played us his polka?”

“Alfio don’t write the polka. His professor gave him the polka to copy for study.”

“Oh! I see. Well, now don’t you think we have had enough tragedies? Has nothing pleasant happened in the town since—? What a stupid question! Here is Brancaccia bringing the answer.”

Brancaccia not only brought the baby, she also brought to show me the clothes in which he had been christened, just as on my last visit, before he was born, she had brought and shown me the clothes in which she had been married. I have a confused recollection of fine muslin and embroidery and pretty gay ribbons. I remember more clearly her necklace of Sicilian amber which has been in the family for generations and, in the natural order of things, will one day be passed on to the wife of Ricuzzu. Each piece of amber is

circular, flat underneath and convex above, and is surrounded with a fine golden band whereby it is joined to the next, side by side. The two smallest, at the back of the wearer’s neck, near the clasp, are about as big as threepenny bits, and the pieces increase in size through sixpences, shillings, florins, half-crowns, until the one in the middle on her breast is nearly as large as a five-shilling piece. They are all sorts of colours, honey-yellow, rich orange, Venetian red, brown sherry, some clear and some clouded, some have insects in them, some when held properly in the sunlight, have a fluorescent, hazy tinge like the blue in a horse’s eye, some are a peacock-green and others a deep purple. The largest piece is green, and has objects in it which Brancaccia says are cherry-blossoms. Peppino accepts his wife’s view because it amuses him to call this piece The Field of Enna, where Proserpine was gathering flowers when Pluto carried her off, and these are the flowers she was gathering. But he knows that this kind of amber is called Simetite, because it is the fossilised resin of some prehistoric tree that used to grow on the upper reaches of the river Simeto which rises at the back of Etna, beyond Bronte, and falls into the sea near Catania; whereas Castrogiovanni, which is the modern Enna, is not on the Simeto. Castrogiovanni is, however, not far from the upper part of another river, which falls into the Simeto near the sea. And he argues that if The Field of Enna was washed down the Castrogiovanni river it may still have exuded from a tree of the same kind as those that used to grow on the Simeto, and in any case it had to pass through the mouth of the Simeto before reaching the sea, and so it may be called

Simetite. Having got into the sea, it was thrown up in a storm or found in a fisherman’s net.

Then I must be shown the mule, with his beautiful harness, and the new cart which Ricuzzu had received as a birthday present from his grandfather; so we went to the stable. The cart was painted with the story of Orlando’s madness, showing first how he had gone to bed in his boots; or rather how he lay outside a bed that was too short for him with all his armour on, like a lobster on a dish. This occurred in the house of a contadino who was standing with a lighted candle in his hand and had brought his wife. They did not know to whom they were speaking, and were telling him that the room had been occupied last by a knight and his lady and that the lady, in gratitude for their hospitality, had given the contadina a bracelet, saying that she had received it as a present from Orlando. And Orlando was exclaiming:

“Show me that bracelet.”

In the second picture the contadina had brought the bracelet, and Orlando was sitting up, contemplating it and saying:

“It is the bracelet which I gave to Angelica. The last occupants of this bed must have been that fatal woman and her husband Medoro. I am Orlando Paladino.”

These were the two panels on one side of the cart. On the other side, the third picture showed Orlando, who had got off the bed, and was standing up delivering a long “Addio” in the manner of Othello—one could almost hear the words: “Orlando’s occupation’s gone.” The contadino and his wife were furtively leaving the room, perhaps because