

***GIOVANNI
VERGA***



***UNDER THE SHADOW
OF ETNA: SICILIAN
STORIES FROM
THE ITALIAN
OF GIOVANNI VERGA***

Giovanni Verga

Under the Shadow of Etna: Sicilian Stories from the Italian of Giovanni Verga

EAN 8596547252139

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.

HOW PEPPA LOVED GRAMIGNA.

JELI, THE SHEPHERD.

RUSTIC CHIVALRY.

THE STORY OF THE ST. JOSEPH'S ASS.

INTRODUCTION.

Table of Contents

Giovanni Verga was born at Catania, in Sicily, in 1840. His youth was spent in Florence and Milan. He afterwards lived in Catania again, where he had an opportunity of studying those types of the Sicilian peasantry which he introduces so effectively, and with such dramatic suggestion, into many of his stories and sketches. After experiencing grievous family losses he returned to Milan, where he now resides.

In "L'Amante di Gramigna" Verga gives, in the form of a letter to his friend, the novelist, S. Farina, a sort of brief exposition of his literary Creed. Much of the drama is left to the imagination of the reader, who sees through the lines the action hinted at in a word or a phrase. Thus, in the story just mentioned, no definite time-limit is assigned. Months elapse, but only a passing expression gives the clue to it. It is amazing how definite is the idea left in the mind. It gives all the vividness of reality.

"Cavalleria Rusticana," or "Rustic Chivalry," has been known all over the world by its operatic setting by Mascagni. "La Lupa," which is scarcely less strong and vital, has been chosen by another Italian composer, Puccini, as the subject for a two-act opera. These two, as well as "L'amante di Gramigna" and "Jeli il Pastore," illustrate the deeper passions of the Sicilian peasantry. Verga's sardonic humor is shown in "Gli Orfani." How the sordid poverty of the people stands out in the comparison between the sorrow over the dying ass, and the utterly materialistic grief at the loss of the painstaking second wife!

"La Storia dell' Asino di San Giuseppe," well illustrates the average treatment of the long-suffering, long-eared mules and asses which make so picturesque a part of the scenery of Italian and Spanish countries. It is a document for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and well deserves to be circulated together with "Black Beauty." What pathos in the sudden transfer of the poor little beast from comparative comfort, at least from the "dolce far niente" of its foalhood, to the grim realities of life, and its steady and fatal decline through all the gamut of wretchedness and degradation, to die at last under the weight of its burdens! And what side glances on the condition of those unfortunate Sicilians who live in what ought to be the very garden and Paradise of the world, and yet are so oppressed by unregulated Nature and too well regulated taxes!

It is no land of the imagination into which we are brought by Verga; there is no fascinating glamour of the virtuous triumphing after many vicissitudes, and seeing at last the wicked adequately punished. Here it is grim reality. The poor and weak go relentlessly to the wall; innocence and humble ignorance are crushed by experienced vice, the butterfly is singed by the flame; there is little joy, little peace. The fleckless sky shines down brilliantly on wreck of home and fortune; the son must go to the army, and the daughter to her shame; the father's gray hairs must be crowned with dishonor, and despair must abide in the mother's breast. But yet the stories are not wholly pessimistic, nor do they give an utterly hopeless idea of the Sicilian peasant. He shows his capabilities; the woman her fiery zeal and

faithfulness, even when on the wrong track. You see that education and a little real sympathy might make a great people out of Verga's "Turiddus" and "Alfios." There are dozens of others of Verga's short sketches which would repay translation, but the little collection of Sicilian pictures here presented is marked by quite wonderful variety and contrast. They well illustrate the author's genius at its best.

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.

*"Hedgecote," Glen Road,
Jamaica Plain, June 19, 1895.*

NOTE.

Some of the Italian titles applied to the characters in these stories are retained. They are untranslatable; to omit them takes away from the Sicilian flavor, which is their great charm. Thus the words *compare* (*con* and *padre*) and *comare* (*con* and *madre*), literally godfather and godmother, are used in almost the same way as "uncle" and "aunt" in our country districts, only they are applied to young as well as old; *gnà* is a contraction for *signora*, corresponding somewhat to our *mis'* for "Mrs." *Babbo* is like our "dad" or "daddie." *Massaro* is a farmer; *compagni d'armi* are district policemen, not quite the same as *gens d'armes*; *Bersegliere* is the member of a special division of the Italian army.

HOW PEPPA LOVED GRAMIGNA.

[Table of Contents](#)

UNDER THE SHADOW OF ETNA.

HOW PEPPA LOVED GRAMIGNA.

Dear Farina, this is not a story, but the outline of a story.

It will at least have the merit of being short, and of having fact for its foundation; it is a human document, as the phrase goes nowadays:—interesting perhaps for you and for all those who study the mighty book of the heart. I will tell it just as I found it among the country paths, and in almost the same simple and picturesque words that characterize the tales of the people; and really you will prefer to find yourself facing the bare and unadulterated fact rather than being obliged to read between the lines of the book through the author's spectacles.

The simple truth of human life will always make us thoughtful; will always have the effectiveness of reality, of genuine tears, of the fevers and sensations that have inflicted the flesh. The mysterious processes whereby conflicting passions mingle, develop and mature, will long constitute the chief fascination in the study of that psychological phenomenon called the plot of a story, and which modern analysis tries to follow with scientific care, through the hidden paths of oftentimes apparently contradictory complications.

Of the one that I am going to tell you to-day I shall only narrate the starting point and the ending, and that will suffice for you, as, perchance, some day it will suffice for all.

We replace the artistic method to which we owe so many glorious masterpieces by a different method, more painstaking and more recondite; we willingly sacrifice the effect of the catastrophe, of the psychological result as it was seen through an almost divine intuition by the great artists of the past, and employ instead a logical development, inexorably necessary, less unexpected, less dramatic, but not less fatalistic; we are more modest, if not more humble; but the conquests that we make with our psychological verities will not be any less useful to the art of the future. Supposing such perfection in the study of the passions should be ever attained that it would be useless to go further in the study of the interior man, will the science of the human heart, the fruit of the new art, so far and so universally develop all the resources of the imagination that in the future the only romances written will be "Various Facts?"

I have a firm belief that the triumph of the Novel, the completest and most human of all the works of art, will increase until the affinity and cohesion of all its parts will be so perfect, that the process of its creation will remain a mystery like the development of human passions; I have a firm belief that the harmony of its forms will be so absolute, the sincerity of its reality so evident, its method and justification so deeply rooted, that the artist's hand will remain absolutely invisible.

Then the romance will seem to portray a real event, and the work of art will apparently have come about by itself, spontaneously springing into being and maturing like a natural fact, without any point of contact with its author. It

will not have preserved in its living form any stamp of the mind in which it originated, any shade of the eye that beheld it, any trace of the lips that murmured the first words thereof as the creative fiat; it will exist by its own reason, by the mere fact that it is as it should be and must be, palpitating with life and as immutable as a statue of bronze, the author of which has had the divine courage of eclipsing himself and disappearing in his immortal work.

A few years ago, down by the Simeto, they were giving chase to a brigand, a certain Gramigna,^[1] if I am not mistaken, a name as cursed as the weed that bears it. The man had left behind him, from one end of the province to the other, the terror of his evil reputation. Carabineers, *compagni d'armi*, and cavalry-men had been on his track for two months, without ever succeeding in putting their claws on him; he was alone, but was equal to ten, and the evil plant threatened to take firm root.

Moreover the harvest-time was approaching, the crops already covered the fields, the ears bent over and were calling to the reapers, who indeed had their reaping-hooks in their hands, and yet not a single proprietor dared show his nose over the hedge of his estate, for fear of meeting Gramigna, who might be stretched out among the furrows with his carbine between his legs, ready to blow off the head of the first person who should venture to meddle with his affairs.

Thus the complaints were general. Then the prefect summoned all those gentlemen of the district—carabineers and companies of armed men and told them two words of

the kind that makes men prick up their ears. The next day an earthquake in every nook and corner:—patrols, squadrons, scouts for every ditch and behind every wall; they hunted him by day, by night, on foot, on horseback, by telegraph, as if he had been a wild beast! Gramigna eluded them every time, and replied with shots if they came too close on his track.

In the fields, in the villages, among the factories, under the signs of country taverns, wherever people met, Gramigna was the only topic of conversation,—that wild chase, that desperate flight. The carabinieri's horses returned dead-tired; the soldiers threw themselves down in utter weariness on the ground when they got back to the stables; the patrols slept wherever chance offered; Gramigna alone was never tired, never slept, kept always on the wing, climbed down precipices, slipped through the harvest-fields, crept on all fours among the prickly pear-trees,[2] made his way out of danger like a wolf by means of the hidden channels of the torrents.

The chief argument of every discourse at the cross roads, before the village entrances, was the devouring thirst from which the fugitive must suffer in the immense, barren plain, under the June sun. The lazy loungers opened wide their eyes.

Peppa, one of the prettiest girls of Licodia, was expecting at that time soon to marry *compare* Finu, called "*Candela di sego*" (the tallow-candle), who had landed property and a bay mule, and was a tall young man, handsome as the sun, who carried the standard of Santa Margherita without bending his back, as though he were a pillar.