

"Oh yes," said the boy.

"Who taught you the pretty words you sung?"

"Who taught me?—why no one—I was only answering my birdie's song."

"But you were singing poetry."

"What is that?" said the unconscious child.

"Can you tell me your name?" asked Gravina, thinking it in vain to attempt explaining what poetry was, to a child who poured it forth intuitively.

"Pietro Tropossi," was the reply.

"Have you any father and mother?"

"Yes, my father is here," and looking into the booth he called: "Father, father, come here."

A very good looking man, neatly, but coarsely dressed, came to the door of the booth, and seeing two fine looking gentlemen, who he thought could have no business with him, he would have withdrawn, but Gravina stepping forward, said:

"Is this your son?"

"Yes, Signior; he is my youngest, and my best."

"You have others then," said Gravina. "Will you give this boy to me? I will educate him as my own son; he shall have the best instruction the city affords, and I will consider him a gift from Heaven to be carefully nurtured, and attended to; indeed, you must give him to me."

The astonished father knew not what to say. How could he part with his best beloved child! And yet the advantages of the proposition flashed with lightning quickness across his mind; he was poor, his children could have none of the luxuries of life, and few of the advantages of education. Pietro had already discovered wonderful talents, being distinguished in his own loving little circle, as the "Child Improvisatore," and his parents had often lamented that they should not be able to place him with some of the distinguished masters in Rome. Tropossi knew who it was with whom he was conversing, for Gravina was well known, not only as the best lawyer in the city, but for his general benevolence and cultivated taste, which had made him a favourite among all classes of people. Reading in the father's face the struggle between his judgment and his feelings, Gravina urged still more ardently the gift of the child.

"Oh, give me till tomorrow, and I will talk with the boy's mother," said Tropossi. "If my Francesca consents to part with her son, I will not deny him to you, though our own home will be desolate indeed without our singing bird."

Pietro had stood by, listening to the conversation between his father and the stranger. He did not quite understand it, but *felt* that it related to himself; he was attracted to the good lawyer by the kindness of his manner, and already loved him. Gravina now put a piastre into his little hand, a thing which had never before met his gaze, and bade him an affectionate adieu, having told the father he would call the next day for his answer.

"Are you mad?" said Lorenzini, as they turned away from the group. He really thought his friend had lost his senses, so wild a proceeding did it seem to him, thus to adopt a child, about whom he knew nothing, except that he had a sweet voice, and a lovely face.

Gravina's keen perception had been struck by the very intellectual expression of the child's face; having no wife or children, he had long felt a strong desire for something to love; his early days had been passed in devotion to his profession, and now that the snows of life's winter were gathering on his head, his heart yearned, as what human heart does not, for some object of affection to cling to, for some one to soothe and cheer his declining days. He had never yet found one, on whom to lavish his bounty and affection, though he had looked among his own kinsfolk and friends; and now, when he least expected it, in one of the humbler streets, and humblest stations in Rome, he found what he had so long coveted. Perhaps his mind might have been particularly attuned to harmony on that day, for no voice had ever so thrilled him as that of the innocent child, whose sweet song had interrupted his discussion with Lorenzini; and when he found that he was almost an infant, and that the words were the spontaneous impulse of the moment, he seemed to him a being of a higher sphere, sent upon an errand of mercy, to fill the void in his yearning heart.

The Improvisatore seems the very impersonation of Italy,—the genius of the country. It is a beautiful and divine inspiration which clothes the gleaming thought in the harmonious language of poetry, and makes even the every day incidents of life to breathe of romance and the imagination. Italy is the only home of the Improvisatore; no where else does the poetic mind go forth so like a mountain torrent, sweeping away the barriers of prose reality; other countries have produced as great poets, but they have written by line and measure, with the paper and pen before them; and only in moments of partial insanity have they been known to utter themselves, as if spell-bound by the genius of numbers. But in Italy it is a birth-right, a gift of nature, not to the many, but to the few, and those who possess the talent are looked upon with almost sacred awe. Gravina saw at a glance that nature, in denying to Pietro the gift of a noble and wealthy home, had bestowed upon him that which, if rightly cultured, is her greatest boon.

The expression of the boy's face was truly poetic, his voice soft as an angel's whisper, and there was a delicacy and refinement in his whole appearance, which contrasted strangely with his coarse attire. The day and night seemed endless to the impatient lawyer, so anxious was he to know if he could transplant this tender flower to the more genial climate of his own luxurious home.

Early on the next day, Gravina was at the booth.