

## Pietro.

Pietro's parents lived in Florence, that most beautiful city of Italy. They were poor and had many children—so many, in fact, that Gerardo grumbled not a little when the baby Pietro was laid in his arms.

"One more mouth to feed," said he, "when there is not enough food in the house now for half of them."

He laid the baby down with an impatient sigh and went out to the nearest tavern. Bread cost but one small silver piece, while the drink cost two, but Gerardo silenced his conscience (if he had any) by reflecting that the liquor braced him up much more than the bread would have done.

It began with the day of Pietro's birth and never seemed to quite pass away—this idea that he was in the way. He was neglected, cuffed and blamed for all the mischievous pranks of his brothers, the consequence of which was he grew up a slender, delicate boy, hungry for love and kind treatment, which, needless to say, he never received. Yet I am quite sure he could not have told you what he wanted. He would not have known how to express it. He grew up an outcast—a pariah from human love and tenderness.

"He's a fool," people said of him, and his father fully agreed that it was so. "He's a fool," they said, and having thus satisfied their own minds, they lost no time in telling others, until it was generally conceded throughout their neighborhood that Gerardo's last boy was a perfect fool!

Indeed, he did not seem like the other children. They were full of life and animal spirits, as children should be; ready for a fight at any moment, and always boisterous and noisy. Pietro would steal away by himself and stay for hours. They watched him once to see where he went and followed him up to the big cathedral of St. Mark's, where they found him, with rapt looks and hushed breath, listening to the great organ. The organ with its grand throbbing music pleased him far more than the beautiful singing. He was ill for days when they kept him at home, and only recovered when they permitted him to worship the beloved organ once more.

"He's a fool," they all said with one accord.

"A bigger fool than we thought him!" they agreed.

One day an Englishman who was sojourning in Florence was strolling through St. Mark's admiring the beautiful paintings and listening to the music when he came upon a little boy half hidden against a pillar—a little boy with a most woe-begone face. The tears rolling down each side had washed two white paths through the dirty little face, making him look more forlorn and uncared for than ever. The Englishman could talk like a native and was so struck by the beauty of the great mournful eyes and quivering lips, through which the breath came in quick short gasps, that he unconsciously drew nearer, intending to speak.

The boy made such a picture sitting as he did where the purple light from one of the great windows bathed him in amethyst glory, with his dirty little face turned toward the organ loft, and the mournful brown eyes, full

to overflowing, drinking in seemingly the glorious music, that the man felt like an intruder and stopped for a moment lost in admiration. The music rose and fell and died away, and little Pietro came back to earth once more and rose from his seat by the pillar ready to go back home. Then it was that he saw the stranger—a man who looked at him with kind, enquiring eyes and who asked his name. Pietro answered him, full of amazement. He felt very awkward in the light of those kindly eyes.

"Do you like music?" the stranger asked.

"Oh, I love it," Pietro answered with kindling eyes.

"Will you come and see me, Pietro, I want to talk with you. Can you play the organ? Violin? Harp? Perhaps you sing?"

Pietro shook his head to each one of the questions and the ever-ready tears began to fall.

"Never mind; perhaps you will some day. I have many musical instruments at my house, and I will show them to you; perhaps if you are a good boy I will play for you. Have you ever heard any one play on the violin? No? Well, I am ready to wager that you will like it better than the organ."

"When shall I come, sir?" said Pietro.

"Why, any time you want to. To-morrow morning, perhaps, and you must ask for Mr. Brittain. Can you remember? Mr. Brittain at the Villa Romola."

Pietro could hardly wait for the morrow to come. He was so absent-minded and indulged in so many day dreams that his father more than once remarked:

"That boy grows a bigger fool every day he lives."

Early next morning Pietro knocked at the gate of the Villa Romola. The English servant eyed him with disfavor and went muttering to the house.

"There's a dirty little Eytalian outside asking for you," she announced with extreme reluctance.

Paul Brittain looked up indifferently; but suddenly remembering that he wanted a model for the picture he was at work upon (for he was an artist as well as a musician) he said, good-naturedly:

"All right. Betty send him in."

He had forgotten all about Pietro, but it all came back to him as the boy advanced timidly into the room.

"Aha! So you did not forget. Well, I am in a musical mood this morning, so come with me."

He led the way across a corridor into a long, low music room. A piano stood in one end, strewn with papers; three or four violins and a guitar lay on a table, and near the window stood a harp. Paul smiled at Pietro's astonished looks and bade him sit down. Then he picked up one of the violins and began to play. Paul Brittain was no genius, certainly, but he played well, and Pietro sat as still as a mouse, afraid almost to breathe. Oh, if he could only play like that! A great sigh swelled up from his little heart. The player understood the sigh, and picking up one of the violins he gave it into Pietro's hands and showed him how to hold it,

It was not a very expensive instrument and he would not miss it among so many, so he let Pietro take it home with him. Pietro departed after promising to take good care of it and come the next day. With his inborn love of music it did not take him long to master the first difficulties, and Paul Brittain was quite proud of his pupil.

But there came a day when Pietro's heart was sad, for Mr. Brittain was going back to England. Before going he took Pietro to see an old music teacher—the one who played the organ in St. Mark's—and left Pietro in his charge with his lessons paid for a year in advance.

The old man took infinite pains with his young pupil, and he in his turn worked hard to please. One day there was to be a great musical festival in honor of some one of the saints, and a great singer from Rome was coming to sing a solo. He came but at the last moment took a severe cold, and was unable to speak above a whisper. The master was in despair, when Pietro suggested that he substitute an organ solo instead. That would not do, but an idea came to him—he would have Pietro play on his violin, with the organ accompaniment. They practiced a beautiful prayer, and the eventful day arrived. Pietro was nervous and frightened, and at the last minute whispered to the master, telling him not to play any accompaniment. The master saw he was in a state of intense excitement, and, fearing the organ might annoy him, he consented.

Pietro stepped forward to the little iron railing which ran around the organ loft and softly drew his bow. The master started. It was not the piece which Pietro had practiced but Pietro heeded not. His eyes rested upon the beautiful picture of the Madonna which hung over the altar. People turned round at the unwonted sound. A violin in a church had never before been heard of. They saw a slender boy with mournful eyes and a face which seemed faintly illumined. The soft notes rose and fell, swelled and then died away to be taken up again and carried into a perfect storm of sobs which seemed to come from the very heart of the boy who played. Perhaps he was telling the pathetic story of his own little, storm-tossed life. The beautiful andante ceased and a grand passionate strain swelled up to the vaulted roof, fairly carrying the people with it, so breathlessly they listened. The tender, mournful eyes of the boy seemed to gain inspiration from the sweet-faced Madonna and her beautiful babe, and the beautiful music rose in triumphant waves and then softly, softly ceased.

As he wiped the moisture from his face the audience below, forgetting time and place, burst into tumultuous applause. The old master's glasses were dim and his hand trembled as he reached for his handkerchief. The applause increased and Pietro was obliged to step forward once more. He bowed with awkward grace and again drew back out of sight.

The Roman singer watched Pietro as he played. Surprise, wonder and admiration took possession of him. He paid a visit to Pietro's parents and obtained permission of them to take