

# The True Witness,

AND

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

VOL. XXI.

MONTREAL, FRIDAY, DEC. 16, 1870.

NO. 18

## THE LOST PORTRAIT; OR, THE STOLEN CHILD.

"Ecoutez!—listen!" said Monsieur Herbois to his companion; there is that divine voice again!"

"Mais c'est une voix d'enfant!—it is a child!" returned Monsieur Michelet.

"Yes, it is the voice of a child; but what a voice!" exclaimed Herbois, standing still, and holding the other by the arm, in order to arrest his steps also; "so pure, so sweet, and even so steady; and what a perfect intonation!—Did you ever hear anything so enchanting?"

"It is very remarkable, certainly, for a child," replied Michelet. It proceeds from this cottage; let us go round to the door and inquire about her."

"Douceur!—softly! Come this way a bit," said Herbois, laying his finger on his lip, and drawing his friend in an opposite direction.

The cottage from which this sweet voice proceeded stood alone in a valley of the Apennines, not far from the town of Spoleto; and the two strangers who had approached it from behind, now retreated the way they had come. "The truth is," continued Herbois, "it was to hear that voice I sent for you from Rome."

"Then I think you might let me hear a little more of it," replied Michelet.

"I hope we shall hear a good deal of it," answered Herbois, with a mysterious nod of the head. "What do you say to carrying her off with us to Paris?"

"With all my heart," replied Michelet; "that voice, well cultivated, will be a fortune. What friends has she? Will they give her up?"

"That is the difficulty," answered Herbois; "and here it is I want your assistance. You must know that it was about three months since, on my way to Naples, that I first heard that voice. The day was cold, and whilst they were waiting for the horses at Spoleto, I had walked forward to warm myself; when suddenly, as I passed near this spot, my ears were arrested by these delicious tones. For some minutes I stood transfixed with delight and surprise; and as I was instantly struck with the immense advantages to be derived from the possession of the child, I was about to enter the cottage for the purpose of making inquiries, and opening a negotiation when the *vetturino* overtook me, and I had to continue my journey. On my arrival at Naples, however, I wrote to old Martinelli, who, by-the-by, has given up teaching, and retired to end his days at Spoleto; which he left, some sixty years ago, a beggar-boy without shoes or stockings, in order to make his livelihood by singing through the streets. Well, I wrote requesting him to make inquiries about the girl and her friends, and to find out on what terms they would give her up; not doubting, from their apparently mean circumstances, that they would be willing enough to resign her on such an advantageous speculation. But I had reckoned without my host."

"You offered a sum down?"

"I offered a hundred crowns; at least I authorized Martinelli to do so, if he thought fit. But it appears that the grandfather of the girl had once before received an application of the same kind, and had rejected it with such indignation that Martinelli said it would be of no use in the world to think of it; the old man being in the first place devotedly fond of the child; and in the next, having, for some family reasons, an insuperable objection to her going on the stage."

"How are we to get her then?" returned Michelet.

"There is no way but stealing her that I know of," replied Herbois.

"Stealing her!" echoed the other, rather gravely.

"It's all for her own good, you know," answered Herbois. "Isn't it much better that that beautiful voice be cultivated, and that she should make her fortune, and the fortunes of her family, too, than that she should languish here for the rest of her life in poverty and obscurity?"

"Well, perhaps it is," answered Michelet, whose notions of right and wrong were apt to be a little confused as well as those of his friend. In short they were both *entrepreneurs* for the French opera, and as their ideas ran but in one channel, they did very honestly believe that no destiny could equal that of a *prima donna* in the great European theatres.

Finding, as he had expected, that his friend threatened no very vigorous opposition to his nefarious project, Herbois now set about explaining to him the plan he had formed for its execution. Whilst they are discussing this question, we will introduce our readers to the inhabitants of the cottage.

Giuseppe Marabini was the possessor of a small vineyard, which had been in his family and descended from father to son, for several generations. He was thus a proprietor, and raised somewhat above the degree of a peasant, although the produce of this little patrimony was not sufficient to exempt him from a necessity for the closest economy. Fortunately, however, he had no numerous family to provide

for; one little girl being the only fruit of his union with Paula Batta, a young girl of the village, who brought him no dowry but a good temper, a pretty face, and a very sweet voice; which last qualification was not the least of her attractions to Giuseppe; and it was much to the satisfaction of both parents that they found the young Paulina had inherited this endowment. The child sang like a nightingale, and being also very pretty, she was the delight of her father and mother. By the time she was fifteen these attraction, combined with the additional one of her being the heiress of the little vineyard, had brought half the young peasants of the neighborhood to her feet. But Paulina did not care for them, and was in no hurry to be married; indeed, she frequently declared to her young companions that she did not mean to marry at all, for she was quite sure she should never be so happy as she was with her father and mother; and she remained inexorably fixed in this opinion till she was nearly sixteen, when the arrival of Marco Melloni, her cousin, entirely changed her views on the subject. Marco was the son of her mother's sister, Teresa, and had quitted home at an early age in the quality of page to a lady of rank. He had since risen to some higher grade of service; and the family he then lived with being at Rome, he had taken the opportunity of visiting his relations.

Marco was a very different person from the suitors that Paulina had found it so easy to reject. He had seen the world; his manners and conversation were quite polished and fashionable; he talked of Paris, and Vienna, and London; of concerts, operas and balls; and, moreover, he wore very fine clothes; and Paulina soon began to perceive that her inexorable resolution to lead a single life had been somewhat prematurely announced.

The gallant Marco of course fell in love with his pretty cousin, and when, at the end of his fortnight's holiday, he returned to Rome, he carried with him her promise to become his wife on his next visit provided her father and mother did not object to the match; which, however grieved to lose their daughter, they did not think they had any good grounds for doing. So their consent being gained, and everything arranged, Marco returned to claim his bride before his master and mistress quitted Rome; and then carried her off with him to the north.

Now, unfortunately, although Paulina sang like an angel, she could not so much as write her name; so that the separation between herself and her parents was entire. For the first few months, indeed, Marco occasionally wrote them a line to say they were well; and in one of his letters he mentioned that the count, his master, was so charmed with Paulina's fine voice, that he had undertaken to provide her with lessons in singing, which pleased and flattered the poor people very much. Gradually, however, this little link between the parents and their child dropped; and many a sigh and tear it cost the former that, owing to the travelling propensities of Marco's employers they had no means of gaining intelligence of her, even through the intervention of the scribes to be found at Spoleto; they did not know where to address a letter. Some years had passed in this state of uncertainty and privation, when one day the *vetturino*, who was weekly in the habit of passing that way, drew up his horses at their door, and handed out of the coach a lady extremely elegant in her appearance and attire, but apparently in very bad health. He then lifted out a child, and having set it and their luggage down at the door, he mounted his seat and drove away again; whilst Paula and Giuseppe stood at the window watching these unusual proceedings, and wondering what was to come next. A mistake it was of course; for what could so fine a lady want with them?

Meanwhile, the stranger having watched the carriage till it had passed a corner, and was out of sight, turned towards the door, which was open, and entered the house; whereupon the two old people, half in hope and half in fear, advanced to meet her; and when she lifted her veil, they saw it was their daughter; but so faded, so changed, so sad, that whether to rejoice or weep, as they embraced her, they knew not. For her part, poor soul, tears were the only expression that she was capable of, or which suited her mingled feelings of joy and grief; and without being able to utter a word, she sank into a chair, and wept freely; whilst the child, with wonder painted on its large dark eyes stood staring at the scene.

As soon as the parents had recovered from their surprise, they gave their daughter the tenderest welcome, and sought by every means in their power to relieve her mental afflictions and minister to her bodily comforts. But poor Paulina had returned with ruined health, and "a broken and contrite heart;" and the only consolation she seemed capable of receiving was the promise made by her parents to take charge of her child, and devote themselves to its welfare. "Let her live with you, father; if she must marry, if she will marry, let it be to some one here on the spot; never let her leave her home; and, above all things, if she should inherit a voice—I fear she will for she sings

already—never let it be cultivated! Let her sing to please you, let her voice echo amongst her native hills; but oh, never, never within the walls of a theatre!" Such were her constant prayers and injunctions from the day she arrived till the day she breathed her last breath in their arms, which was just three months after they had seen her descend from the coach at their door. From that moment, Nina—the little girl was called—became the darling of their hearts. They brought her up in the same simple way in which they had brought up her mother; indeed, they knew of no other. She helped to do the housework and to tend the vines; and although inheriting more than her mother's beauty, and a voice almost unparalleled in sweetness and power, she could neither read nor write. They had already fixed their eyes on a young peasant of the neighborhood to be her husband, when she was old enough; which would be in five years from the period at which our story commences, for she was now between ten and eleven years of age.

"Wife, wife!" said Giuseppe, as he approached the cottage an evening or two after the conversation between Herbois and Michelet. "Why are you sitting out so late?—Nina, you should make your grandmother go to bed; you know she is not well."

"Grandmother wouldn't," answered Nina. "I did ask her."

"The cool air is so pleasant," answered Paula, rising with her husband's assistance; "and I don't think I shall enjoy it many more evenings, for I grow weaker and weaker."

"The more reason for your not sitting out in the chill," returned Giuseppe. "Come along in." And almost angry at her imprudence, he led her into the house.

"The only thing that concerns me," said Paula, after a pause, "is to think how you will be able to take care of Nina when I am gone."

"What do you mean?" said Giuseppe, impatiently; for although he feared that Paula was really very ill, he could not bear to have his apprehensions confirmed.

"She is now approaching an age in which she will want me more than ever, just as I am going to be taken from her," continued Paula.

"I'll go and call her in," said Giuseppe, looking towards the window, through which, although it was dark, they could see Nina leaning over the railing that separated their little garden from the road, whilst her sweet voice resounded in their ears as she chanted her evening hymn to the Blessed Virgin.

"Leave her a little, she is very well where she is, and she likes to be out of doors; besides, I mean to speak to you about her husband, for you must prepare yourself for what is to happen. I know I cannot live long;" and, therefore, much to the distress of the old man, Paula entered into the subject of her own approaching decease, giving him her directions and advice with regard to the future management of their beloved grandchild.

"Hark!" said he in the course of the conversation; "who can that be playing the flute so charmingly?"

"It's beautiful!" said Paula, who loved music as well as her husband.

"Listen, grandmother—listen," cried Nina, running up to the door.

"Yes, my child, we hear," returned Paula. "I only hope her love of music may not lead her into any mischief," she continued. "That scapegrace Pietro—I suppose that is his flute—is endeavoring to make up to her; but you must not let him;" and then, resuming her former subject, she entered at length into her views of what would be best for the happiness of their beloved charge.

"It's time she was in now, though," said she, when the conversation was concluded.—

"You had better call her."

"Nina," cried Giuseppe, going to the door; "Nina, child, come in. Why do you stay out so late?"

"But Nina did not answer."

"She is gone after that flute; it's Pietro's flute, depend on it; and he has enticed her out that he may whisper nonsense into her young ears. I don't like that lad. Hark! I hear a carriage; I hope the child is not out in the road."

"I'll go and fetch her in," said Giuseppe, proceeding towards the gate; but as she was not there, he opened it, and went upon the road. It being now so dark that he could not see above a yard or two on either side, he stood still and called, but Nina did not answer. Then he walked a little one way, and a little the other, still calling "Nina, Nina," but still no Nina answered; upon which he re-entered the house to fetch his stick; and whilst he and his wife vowed vengeance against Pietro for enticing the child away, he directed his steps towards the cottage inhabited by that gay deceiver's mother, whether he did not doubt she was gone, as she had occasionally done before, bewitched by Pietro's musical accomplishments.

But, alas! Nina was not there, nor had it been Pietro's flute they had heard, that was clear; for the boy was lying in bed with a hurt leg. Who, then, was the musician that had enticed her away? Nobody could tell. The old man passed the night in seeking her all

round the neighborhood; Paula passed it in tears and prayers. Vain tears—vain prayers! Nina was seen in the valley no more. All that could be learned was, that the *vetturino*, who knew her well by sight, from so often passing the door, had seen a carriage with post-horses near Florence, in which sat two gentlemen and a little boy, whose face struck him as bearing a remarkable resemblance to Nina. The child seemed to know him too, for he had started up and put his head out of the window; but the gentlemen pulled him back, and drew up the glass. The man promised to make inquiries when he returned to Florence; but he could learn nothing; so many strangers visited that city, that the impression made by each was too evanescent to be retained.

For some weeks after this cruel misfortune, Paula languished between life and death, and then expired, bidding Giuseppe never to resign his search after their lost darling. "Seek her in the great cities," said she; "they have stolen her for her voice." When she was dead, and Giuseppe had laid her in the earth, he sold his cottage and his vineyard, and with the proceeds in his pocket, he set out with a wallet on his back and a stick in his hand, to traverse the earth in search of his grandchild.

Seven years had elapsed—Pietro was married and had two children; the cottage where these scenes had transpired was pulled down; the vineyard was a vineyard no longer; and the sorrows and distresses of their former owners had become a tradition in the neighborhood, when one day a stranger arrived to inquire for Giuseppe Marabini. But no one could give him any intelligence; Giuseppe had gone away, nobody knew whither, and had never been heard of since his departure. But although these worthy people could give no intelligence themselves, they were not the less desirous of obtaining some from the traveller. They wanted to know whence he came, who sent him, and whether he could tell them what had become of Nina. But it was in vain they surrounded and questioned him; he evidently came to make inquiries, not to answer them; and not a word could they extract to satisfy their curiosity. When they were assured of the hopelessness of their endeavors, they drew aside from him, in order to discuss the question by themselves, whilst he mounted his horse, and rode away as he came.

On that very same day a poor old man was treading heavily and sadly along the road between Dover and London. His clothes were worn and shabby, his tall spare figure was bowed by age and sorrow, his face was thin and wan, and his long white hair fell almost to his shoulders; he helped himself along by the aid of a stick, and under his arm he carried an old violin, which he ever and anon stopped to play when he arrived at a farm-house or village.—Gradually toiling on from day to day, he at length reached the metropolis; and as he could not speak a word of English, and was at a loss in what direction to seek a lodging, he set himself down upon a door-step to rest and deliberate; and after a little while, in hopes of attracting the attention of the charitable, he commenced playing on his instrument. Presently a window was thrown up above his head, and two fair young faces looked out.

"That is the very tarantella I have been longing for!" exclaimed one.

"It's the very same that Miss Dallas played, I declare," cried the other. "Oh, what fun! Now we'll get it; and she shall have the pleasure of hearing us play it the very next time we meet."

"How delightfully savage she will be, after tossing up her head, and telling us she never gave copies!" said the first; whereupon, having called to the old man not to go away, they rang the bell, and desired the servant to take him into the dining-room.

"We want you to give us the music of that tarantella," said they to him; "of course we will pay you for it."

"Pardona!" said the old man, shaking his head.

"Ah—you are a foreigner?" said they, addressing him in French, which he understood enough of to comprehend them; and on learning what they wanted, he said he would be too happy to oblige them, if they could take down the music from his playing it—for to write it himself he was unable, as he only played by ear.

This was accordingly done, and when finished, they thanked him, and offered him five shillings in remuneration. But poor as he was, the gallantry of the old foreigner recoiled from being paid for this little service; and bowing respectfully, he told them he was too happy to oblige their signorinas, and that he required no other reward than the pleasure.

"How unlike an Englishman!" said one of the ladies.

"An Englishman would have held the two half-crowns in the palm of his hand, and looked at them with an air of astonishment and disappointment, as if he could not conceive what he meant by offering him so little," said the other; and this trifling trait of character having interested them in favor of the poor stranger, they proceeded to make some further inquiries as to his situation.

"Then you travel about, and support yourself by your violin?"

"Sì, signora," answered the old man. "And have you never been in London before?"

"Never," he replied.

"Then how will you find yourself food, or a lodging, when you can speak no English?"

The old man said he did not know, but he had encountered great difficulties before, and he hoped God would protect him still.

"I wonder if Thomas could recommend him to a lodging," said one of the ladies; "let us inquire if he is at home."

Thomas, who was their brother's groom, said he could get him a lodging in the Mews, where master's horse stood, if he could pay for it.—Without referring to the stranger on the subject, the young ladies said they would be answerable for the rent for a month at any rate; agreeing that they owed him as much as that for the music. So, having desired the groom to give him something to eat below, the poor foreigner, after partaking of some bread and cheese, was conducted to the house of Thomas's acquaintance, and introduced into a more tidy room than he would probably have had the luck to discover for himself.

Mrs. Hudson was a laundress, and a widow with one son, a scapegrace, on whom she doted, to her own and his great injury; for she had indulged him most injudiciously in his childhood; and now that he was grown up, she sacrificed the fruits of her laborious industry to supply the idle and dissipated habits her former weakness had engendered.

George Hudson was a fine young man too, in spite of his faults; he was handsome, good-natured, lively, and really fond of his mother in his heart; but then he was so thoughtless and extravagant, so destitute of any fixed principles, and so often led astray by worthless companions, that he was always getting into scrapes and difficulties. However, the agreeable qualities he possessed rendered him a great favorite with the young women of his acquaintance, and amongst the rest, had won him the heart of a cousin of his own, called Lucy Watson, who lived in the capacity of housemaid in a baronet's family. Now, it happened about this time that Lucy's master, Sir Henry Massey, was about to be married; and it was arranged that, on the day of the wedding, after the bride and bridegroom had left London, the servants were to celebrate the joyful event by a ball, to which each should invite his own friends and relations. So Lucy of course, invited George and his mother; and George begged leave to bring his friend Jack Pearson, a capital fellow, and a very good dancer.

Great were the preparations above stairs and below for this grand occasion; and great was the excitement and expectation on the part both of the entertainers and their visitors; whilst good Mrs. Hudson, who by this time had become much attached to the poor foreigner, her lodger, thought it such a pity that he should not be happy as well as the rest, that she persuaded Lucy to extend her invitation to him, on the plea that his violin would be a valuable acquisition to the party. So, after making some demur about the shabbiness of his clothes, the old man having consented to accompany them, they all four repaired to Grosvenor street, where they found a large party already assembled in the servant's hall.

As the poor stranger really played a good deal better than the musician they had engaged for the occasion, he was extremely well received, and made very welcome; whilst his lame attempts at English contributed much to the hilarity of the party, many of whom could not conceive why he should prefer calling the candle a *chandelle*, or the chair a *chaise*; Joey, the stable-boy, taking particular pains to correct his parts of speech, and make him comprehend that a *chaise* "was quite another sort of 'bob, what took'd a horse to drawing of it!" Altogether, the evening passed away gaily enough, and everybody went home well pleased.

"It was capital fun, wasn't it, old boy?" said George to the stranger on the following morning; and the foreigner, perceiving that an assent was expected, smiled, and said: "Oui, Oui!"

This passed whilst they were taking a later breakfast than usual, and George fell to expatiating on Jack Pearson's capital dancing; he was so glad he had taken him; he was much the best dancer there; and so forth; when the eulogium was suddenly interrupted by some very unexpected visitors—no less a person than Sir Henry Massey's house-steward, accompanied by two extremely suspicious-looking strangers.

"I am sorry to interrupt you," said Mr. Terry, as they all rose to receive him; "but a very unpleasant circumstance has occurred. An article of value has disappeared—a miniature of my lady set in diamonds, which was brought yesterday from the jeweller's just after the carriage had driven away; and which, intending to forward by the mail, I had unfortunately brought down to the steward's room."

"And what do you suppose is become of it?" inquired George, looking as he felt quite unconcerned in the matter.

"Somebody must have laid hand on it, I'm