Zanoni

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

DEDICATORY EPISTLE First prefixed to the Edition of 1845

TO JOHN GIBSON, R.A., SCULPTOR.

In looking round the wide and luminous circle of our great living Englishmen, to select one to whom I might fitly dedicate this work,—one who, in his life as in his genius, might illustrate the principle I have sought to convey; elevated by the ideal which he exalts, and serenely dwelling in a glorious existence with the images born of his imagination,—in looking round for some such man, my thoughts rested upon you. Afar from our turbulent cabals; from the ignoble jealousy and the sordid strife which degrade and acerbate the ambition of Genius,—in your Roman Home, you have lived amidst all that is loveliest and least perishable in the past, and contributed with the noblest aims, and in the purest spirit, to the mighty heirlooms of the future. Your youth has been devoted to toil, that your manhood may be consecrated to fame: a fame unsullied by one desire of gold. You have escaped the two worst perils that beset the artist in our time and land, —the debasing tendencies of commerce, and the angry rivalries of competition. You have not wrought your marble for the market,—you have not been tempted, by the praises which our vicious criticism has showered upon exaggeration and distortion, to lower your taste to the level of the hour; you have lived, and you have laboured, as if you had no rivals but in the dead,—no purchasers, save in judges of what is best. In the divine priesthood of the beautiful, you have sought only to increase her worshippers and enrich her temples. The pupil of Canova, you have inherited his excellences, while you have shunned his errors,—yours his delicacy, not his affectation. Your heart resembles him even more than your genius: you have the same noble enthusiasm for your sublime profession; the same lofty freedom from envy, and the spirit that depreciates; the same generous desire not to war with but to serve artists in your art; aiding, strengthening, advising, elevating the timidity of inexperience, and the vague aspirations of youth. By the intuition of a kindred mind, you have equalled the learning of Winckelman, and the plastic

poetry of Goethe, in the intimate comprehension of the antique. Each work of yours, rightly studied, is in itself a CRITICISM, illustrating the sublime secrets of the Grecian Art, which, without the servility of plagiarism, you have contributed to revive amongst us; in you we behold its three great and long-undetected principles,—simplicity, calm, and concentration.

But your admiration of the Greeks has not led you to the bigotry of the mere antiquarian, nor made you less sensible of the unappreciated excellence of the mighty modern, worthy to be your countryman,—though till his statue is in the streets of our capital, we show ourselves not worthy of the glory he has shed upon our land. You have not suffered even your gratitude to Canova to blind you to the superiority of Flaxman. When we become sensible of our title-deeds to renown in that single name, we may look for an English public capable of real patronage to English Art, —and not till then.

I, artist in words, dedicate, then, to you, artist whose ideas speak in marble, this well-loved work of my matured manhood. I love it not the less because it has been little understood and superficially judged by the common herd: it was not meant for them. I love it not the more because it has found enthusiastic favorers amongst the Few. My affection for my work is rooted in the solemn and pure delight which it gave me to conceive and to perform. If I had graven it on the rocks of a desert, this apparition of my own innermost mind, in its least-clouded moments, would have been to me as dear; and this ought, I believe, to be the sentiment with which he whose Art is born of faith in the truth and beauty of the principles he seeks to illustrate, should regard his work. Your serener existence, uniform and holy, my lot denies,—if my heart covets. But our true nature is in our thoughts, not our deeds: and therefore, in books—which ARE his thoughts—the author’s character lies bare to the discerning eye. It is not in the life of cities, —in the turmoil and the crowd; it is in the still, the lonely, and more sacred life, which for some hours, under every sun, the student lives (his stolen retreat from the Agora to the Cave), that I feel there is between us the bond of that secret sympathy, that magnetic chain, which unites the everlasting brotherhood of whose being Zanoni is the type.

E.B.L. London, May, 1845.

INTRODUCTION.

One of the peculiarities of Bulwer was his passion for occult studies. They had a charm for him early in life, and he pursued them with the earnestness which characterised his pursuit of other studies. He became absorbed in wizard lore; he equipped himself with magical implements,—with rods for transmitting influence, and crystal balls in which to discern coming scenes and persons; and communed with spiritualists and mediums. The fruit of these mystic studies is seen in “Zanoni” and “A strange Story,” romances which were a labour of love to the author, and into which he threw all the power he possessed,—power re-enforced by multifarious reading and an instinctive appreciation of Oriental thought. These weird stories, in which the author has formulated his theory of magic, are of a wholly different type from his previous fictions, and, in place of the heroes and villains of every day life, we have beings that belong in part to another sphere, and that deal with mysterious and occult agencies. Once more the old forgotten lore of the Cabala is unfolded; the furnace of the alchemist, whose fires have been extinct for centuries, is lighted anew, and the lamp of the Rosicrucian re-illumined. No other works of the author, contradictory as have been the opinions of them, have provoked such a diversity of criticism as these. To some persons they represent a temporary aberration of genius rather than any serious thought or definite purpose; while others regard them as surpassing in bold and original speculation, profound analysis of character, and thrilling interest, all of the author’s other works. The truth, we believe, lies midway between these extremes. It is questionable whether the introduction into a novel of such subjects as are discussed in these romances be not an offence against good sense and good taste; but it is as unreasonable to deny the vigour and originality of their author’s conceptions, as to deny that the execution is imperfect, and, at times, bungling and absurd.

It has been justly said that the present half century has witnessed the rise and triumphs of science, the extent and marvels of which even Bacon’s fancy never conceived, simultaneously with superstitions grosser than any which Bacon’s age believed. “The one is, in fact, the natural reaction from the other. The more science seeks to exclude

the miraculous, and reduce all nature, animate and inanimate, to an invariable law of sequences, the more does the natural instinct of man rebel, and seek an outlet for those obstinate questionings, those ‘blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised,’ taking refuge in delusions as degrading as any of the so-called Dark Ages.” It was the revolt from the chilling materialism of the age which inspired the mystic creations of “Zanoni” and “A Strange Story.” Of these works, which support and supplement each other, one is the contemplation of our actual life through a spiritual medium, the other is designed to show that, without some gleams of the supernatural, man is not man, nor nature nature.

In “Zanoni” the author introduces us to two human beings who have achieved immortality: one, Mejnour, void of all passion or feeling, calm, benignant, bloodless, an intellect rather than a man; the other, Zanoni, the pupil of Mejnour, the representative of an ideal life in its utmost perfection, possessing eternal youth, absolute power, and absolute knowledge, and withal the fullest capacity to enjoy and to love, and, as a necessity of that love, to sorrow and despair. By his love for Viola Zanoni is compelled to descend from his exalted state, to lose his eternal calm, and to share in the cares and anxieties of humanity; and this degradation is completed by the birth of a child. Finally, he gives up the life which hangs on that of another, in order to save that other, the loving and beloved wife, who has delivered him from his solitude and isolation. Wife and child are mortal, and to outlive them and his love for them is impossible. But Mejnour, who is the impersonation of thought,—pure intellect without affection,—lives on.

Bulwer has himself justly characterised this work, in the Introduction, as a romance and not a romance, as a truth for those who can comprehend it, and an extravagance for those who cannot. The most careless or matter-of-fact reader must see that the work, like the enigmatical “Faust,” deals in types and symbols; that the writer intends to suggest to the mind something more subtle and impalpable than that which is embodied to the senses. What that something is, hardly two persons will agree. The most obvious interpretation of the types is, that in Zanoni the author depicts to us humanity, perfected, sublimed, which lives not for self, but for others; in Mejnour, as we have before said, cold, passionless, self-sufficing intellect; in Glyndon, the young Englishman, the mingled strength and

weakness of human nature; in the heartless, selfish artist, Nicot, icy, soulless atheism, believing nothing, hoping nothing, trusting and loving nothing; and in the beautiful, artless Viola, an exquisite creation, pure womanhood, loving, trusting and truthful. As a work of art the romance is one of great power. It is original in its conception, and pervaded by one central idea; but it would have been improved, we think, by a more sparing use of the supernatural. The inevitable effect of so much hackneyed diablerie—of such an accumulation of wonder upon wonder—is to deaden the impression they would naturally make upon us. In Hawthorne's tales we see with what ease a great imaginative artist can produce a deeper thrill by a far slighter use of the weird and the mysterious.

The chief interest of the story for the ordinary reader centres, not in its ghostly characters and improbable machinery, the scenes in Mejnour's chamber in the ruined castle among the Apennines, the colossal and appalling apparitions on Vesuvius, the hideous phantom with its burning eye that haunted Glyndon, but in the loves of Viola and the mysterious Zanoni, the blissful and the fearful scenes through which they pass, and their final destiny, when the hero of the story sacrifices his own "charmed life" to save hers, and the Immortal finds the only true immortality in death. Among the striking passages in the work are the pathetic sketch of the old violinist and composer, Pisani, with his sympathetic "barbiton" which moaned, groaned, growled, and laughed responsive to the feelings of its master; the description of Viola's and her father's triumph, when "The Siren," his masterpiece, is performed at the San Carlo in Naples; Glyndon's adventure at the Carnival in Naples; the death of his sister; the vivid pictures of the Reign of Terror in Paris, closing with the downfall of Robespierre and his satellites; and perhaps, above all, the thrilling scene where Zanoni leaves Viola asleep in prison when his guards call him to execution, and she, unconscious of the terrible sacrifice, but awaking and missing him, has a vision of the procession to the guillotine, with Zanoni there, radiant in youth and beauty, followed by the sudden vanishing of the headsman,—the horror,—and the "Welcome" of her loved one to Heaven in a myriad of melodies from the choral hosts above.

"Zanoni" was originally published by Saunders and Otley, London, in three volumes 12mo., in 1842. A translation into French, made by M. Sheldon under the direction of P.

Lorain, was published in Paris in the “Bibliotheque des Meilleurs Romans Etrangers.”

W.M.

PREFACE TO THE EDITION OF 1853.

As a work of imagination, “Zanoni” ranks, perhaps, amongst the highest of my prose fictions. In the Poem of “King Arthur,” published many years afterwards, I have taken up an analogous design, in the contemplation of our positive life through a spiritual medium; and I have enforced, through a far wider development, and, I believe, with more complete and enduring success, that harmony between the external events which are all that the superficial behold on the surface of human affairs, and the subtle and intellectual agencies which in reality influence the conduct of individuals, and shape out the destinies of the world. As man has two lives,—that of action and that of thought,—so I conceive that work to be the truest representation of humanity which faithfully delineates both, and opens some elevating glimpse into the sublimest mysteries of our being, by establishing the inevitable union that exists between the plain things of the day, in which our earthly bodies perform their allotted part, and the latent, often uncultivated, often invisible, affinities of the soul with all the powers that eternally breathe and move throughout the Universe of Spirit.

I refer those who do me the honour to read “Zanoni” with more attention than is given to ordinary romance, to the Poem of “King Arthur,” for suggestive conjecture into most of the regions of speculative research, affecting the higher and more important condition of our ultimate being, which have engaged the students of immaterial philosophy in my own age.

Affixed to the “Note” with which this work concludes, and which treats of the distinctions between type and allegory, the reader will find, from the pen of one of our most eminent living writers, an ingenious attempt to explain the interior or typical meanings of the work now before him.

INTRODUCTION.

It is possible that among my readers there may be a few not unacquainted with an old-book shop, existing some years since in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden; I say a few, for certainly there was little enough to attract the many in those precious volumes which the labour of a life had accumulated on the dusty shelves of my old friend D—. There were to be found no popular treatises, no entertaining romances, no histories, no travels, no “Library for the People,” no “Amusement for the Million.” But there, perhaps, throughout all Europe, the curious might discover the most notable collection, ever amassed by an enthusiast, of the works of alchemist, cabalist, and astrologer. The owner had lavished a fortune in the purchase of unsalable treasures. But old D— did not desire to sell. It absolutely went to his heart when a customer entered his shop: he watched the movements of the presumptuous intruder with a vindictive glare; he fluttered around him with uneasy vigilance,—he frowned, he groaned, when profane hands dislodged his idols from their niches. If it were one of the favourite sultanas of his wizard harem that attracted you, and the price named were not sufficiently enormous, he would not unfrequently double the sum. Demur, and in brisk delight he snatched the venerable charmer from your hands; accede, and he became the picture of despair,—nor unfrequently, at the dead of night, would he knock at your door, and entreat you to sell him back, at your own terms, what you had so egregiously bought at his. A believer himself in his Averroes and Paracelsus, he was as loth as the philosophers he studied to communicate to the profane the learning he had collected.

It so chanced that some years ago, in my younger days, whether of authorship or life, I felt a desire to make myself acquainted with the true origin and tenets of the singular sect known by the name of Rosicrucians. Dissatisfied with the scanty and superficial accounts to be found in the works usually referred to on the subject, it struck me as possible that Mr. D—’s collection, which was rich, not only

in black-letter, but in manuscripts, might contain some more accurate and authentic records of that famous brotherhood,—written, who knows? by one of their own order, and confirming by authority and detail the pretensions to wisdom and to virtue which Bringaret had arrogated to the successors of the Chaldean and Gymnosophist. Accordingly I repaired to what, doubtless, I ought to be ashamed to confess, was once one of my favourite haunts. But are there no errors and no fallacies, in the chronicles of our own day, as absurd as those of the alchemists of old? Our very newspapers may seem to our posterity as full of delusions as the books of the alchemists do to us; not but what the press is the air we breathe,—and uncommonly foggy the air is too!

On entering the shop, I was struck by the venerable appearance of a customer whom I had never seen there before. I was struck yet more by the respect with which he was treated by the disdainful collector. “Sir,” cried the last, emphatically, as I was turning over the leaves of the catalogue,—“sir, you are the only man I have met, in five-and-forty years that I have spent in these researches, who is worthy to be my customer. How—where, in this frivolous age, could you have acquired a knowledge so profound? And this august fraternity, whose doctrines, hinted at by the earliest philosophers, are still a mystery to the latest; tell me if there really exists upon the earth any book, any manuscript, in which their discoveries, their tenets, are to be learned?”

At the words, “august fraternity,” I need scarcely say that my attention had been at once aroused, and I listened eagerly for the stranger’s reply.

“I do not think,” said the old gentleman, “that the masters of the school have ever consigned, except by obscure hint and mystical parable, their real doctrines to the world. And I do not blame them for their discretion.”

Here he paused, and seemed about to retire, when I said, somewhat abruptly, to the collector, “I see nothing, Mr. D—, in this catalogue which relates to the Rosicrucians!”

“The Rosicrucians!” repeated the old gentleman, and in his turn he surveyed me with deliberate surprise. “Who but a Rosicrucian could explain the Rosicrucian mysteries! And can you imagine that any members of that sect, the most jealous of all secret societies, would themselves lift the veil that hides the Isis of their wisdom from the world?”

“Aha!” thought I, “this, then, is ‘the august fraternity’ of which you spoke. Heaven be praised! I certainly have stumbled on one of the brotherhood.”

“But,” I said aloud, “if not in books, sir, where else am I to obtain information? Nowadays one can hazard nothing in print without authority, and one may scarcely quote Shakespeare without citing chapter and verse. This is the age of facts,—the age of facts, sir.”

“Well,” said the old gentleman, with a pleasant smile, “if we meet again, perhaps, at least, I may direct your researches to the proper source of intelligence.” And with that he buttoned his greatcoat, whistled to his dog, and departed.

It so happened that I did meet again with the old gentleman, exactly four days after our brief conversation in Mr. D—’s bookshop. I was riding leisurely towards Highgate, when, at the foot of its classic hill, I recognised the stranger; he was mounted on a black pony, and before him trotted his dog, which was black also.

If you meet the man whom you wish to know, on horseback, at the commencement of a long hill, where, unless he has borrowed a friend’s favourite hack, he cannot, in decent humanity to the brute creation, ride away from you, I apprehend that it is your own fault if you have not gone far in your object before you have gained the top. In short, so well did I succeed, that on reaching Highgate the old gentleman invited me to rest at his house, which was a little apart from the village; and an excellent house it was,—small, but commodious, with a large garden, and commanding from the windows such a prospect as Lucretius would recommend to philosophers: the spires and domes of London, on a clear day, distinctly visible; here the Retreat of the Hermit, and there the Mare Magnum of the world.

The walls of the principal rooms were embellished with pictures of extraordinary merit, and in that high school of art which is so little understood out of Italy. I was surprised to learn that they were all from the hand of the owner. My evident admiration pleased my new friend, and led to talk upon his part, which showed him no less elevated in his theories of art than an adept in the practice. Without fatiguing the reader with irrelevant criticism, it is necessary, perhaps, as elucidating much of the design and character of the work which these prefatory pages

introduce, that I should briefly observe, that he insisted as much upon the connection of the arts, as a distinguished author has upon that of the sciences; that he held that in all works of imagination, whether expressed by words or by colours, the artist of the higher schools must make the broadest distinction between the real and the true,—in other words, between the imitation of actual life, and the exaltation of Nature into the Ideal.

"The one," said he, "is the Dutch School, the other is the Greek."

"Sir," said I, "the Dutch is the most in fashion."

"Yes, in painting, perhaps," answered my host, "but in literature—"

"It was of literature I spoke. Our growing poets are all for simplicity and Betty Foy; and our critics hold it the highest praise of a work of imagination, to say that its characters are exact to common life, even in sculpture—"

"In sculpture! No, no! THERE the high ideal must at least be essential!"

"Pardon me; I fear you have not seen Souter Johnny and Tam O'Shanter."

"Ah!" said the old gentleman, shaking his head, "I live very much out of the world, I see. I suppose Shakespeare has ceased to be admired?"

"On the contrary; people make the adoration of Shakespeare the excuse for attacking everybody else. But then our critics have discovered that Shakespeare is so REAL!"

"Real! The poet who has never once drawn a character to be met with in actual life,—who has never once descended to a passion that is false, or a personage who is real!"

I was about to reply very severely to this paradox, when I perceived that my companion was growing a little out of temper. And he who wishes to catch a Rosicrucian, must take care not to disturb the waters. I thought it better, therefore, to turn the conversation.

"Revenons a nos moutons," said I; "you promised to enlighten my ignorance as to the Rosicrucians."

"Well!" quoth he, rather sternly; "but for what purpose? Perhaps you desire only to enter the temple in order to ridicule the rites?"

“What do you take me for! Surely, were I so inclined, the fate of the Abbe de Villars is a sufficient warning to all men not to treat idly of the realms of the Salamander and the Sylph. Everybody knows how mysteriously that ingenious personage was deprived of his life, in revenge for the witty mockeries of his ‘Comte de Gabalis.’”

“Salamander and Sylph! I see that you fall into the vulgar error, and translate literally the allegorical language of the mystics.”

With that the old gentleman condescended to enter into a very interesting, and, as it seemed to me, a very erudite relation, of the tenets of the Rosicrucians, some of whom, he asserted, still existed, and still prosecuted, in august secrecy, their profound researches into natural science and occult philosophy.

“But this fraternity,” said he, “however respectable and virtuous,—virtuous I say, for no monastic order is more severe in the practice of moral precepts, or more ardent in Christian faith,—this fraternity is but a branch of others yet more transcendent in the powers they have obtained, and yet more illustrious in their origin. Are you acquainted with the Platonists?”

“I have occasionally lost my way in their labyrinth,” said I. “Faith, they are rather difficult gentlemen to understand.”

“Yet their knottiest problems have never yet been published. Their sublimest works are in manuscript, and constitute the initiatory learning, not only of the Rosicrucians, but of the nobler brotherhoods I have referred to. More solemn and sublime still is the knowledge to be gleaned from the elder Pythagoreans, and the immortal masterpieces of Apollonius.”

“Apollonius, the imposter of Tyanea! are his writings extant?”

“Imposter!” cried my host; “Apollonius an imposter!”

“I beg your pardon; I did not know he was a friend of yours; and if you vouch for his character, I will believe him to have been a very respectable man, who only spoke the truth when he boasted of his power to be in two places at the same time.”

“Is that so difficult?” said the old gentleman; “if so, you have never dreamed!”

Here ended our conversation; but from that time an acquaintance was formed between us which lasted till my

venerable friend departed this life. Peace to his ashes! He was a person of singular habits and eccentric opinions; but the chief part of his time was occupied in acts of quiet and unostentatious goodness. He was an enthusiast in the duties of the Samaritan; and as his virtues were softened by the gentlest charity, so his hopes were based upon the devoutest belief. He never conversed upon his own origin and history, nor have I ever been able to penetrate the darkness in which they were concealed. He seemed to have seen much of the world, and to have been an eye-witness of the first French Revolution, a subject upon which he was equally eloquent and instructive. At the same time he did not regard the crimes of that stormy period with the philosophical leniency with which enlightened writers (their heads safe upon their shoulders) are, in the present day, inclined to treat the massacres of the past: he spoke not as a student who had read and reasoned, but as a man who had seen and suffered. The old gentleman seemed alone in the world; nor did I know that he had one relation, till his executor, a distant cousin, residing abroad, informed me of the very handsome legacy which my poor friend had bequeathed me. This consisted, first, of a sum about which I think it best to be guarded, foreseeing the possibility of a new tax upon real and funded property; and, secondly, of certain precious manuscripts, to which the following volumes owe their existence.

I imagine I trace this latter bequest to a visit I paid the Sage, if so I may be permitted to call him, a few weeks before his death.

Although he read little of our modern literature, my friend, with the affable good-nature which belonged to him, graciously permitted me to consult him upon various literary undertakings meditated by the desultory ambition of a young and inexperienced student. And at that time I sought his advice upon a work of imagination, intended to depict the effects of enthusiasm upon different modifications of character. He listened to my conception, which was sufficiently trite and prosaic, with his usual patience; and then, thoughtfully turning to his bookshelves, took down an old volume, and read to me, first, in Greek, and secondly, in English, some extracts to the following effect:—

“Plato here expresses four kinds of mania, by which I desire to understand enthusiasm and the inspiration of the

gods: Firstly, the musical; secondly, the telestic or mystic; thirdly, the prophetic; and fourthly, that which belongs to love."

The author he quoted, after contending that there is something in the soul above intellect, and stating that there are in our nature distinct energies,—by the one of which we discover and seize, as it were, on sciences and theorems with almost intuitive rapidity, by another, through which high art is accomplished, like the statues of Phidias,—proceeded to state that "enthusiasm, in the true acceptation of the word, is, when that part of the soul which is above intellect is excited to the gods, and thence derives its inspiration."

The author, then pursuing his comment upon Plato, observes, that "one of these manias may suffice (especially that which belongs to love) to lead back the soul to its first divinity and happiness; but that there is an intimate union with them all; and that the ordinary progress through which the soul ascends is, primarily, through the musical; next, through the telestic or mystic; thirdly, through the prophetic; and lastly, through the enthusiasm of love."

While with a bewildered understanding and a reluctant attention I listened to these intricate sublimities, my adviser closed the volume, and said with complacency, "There is the motto for your book,—the thesis for your theme."

"Davus sum, non Oedipus," said I, shaking my head, discontentedly. "All this may be exceedingly fine, but, Heaven forgive me,—I don't understand a word of it. The mysteries of your Rosicrucians, and your fraternities, are mere child's play to the jargon of the Platonists."

"Yet, not till you rightly understand this passage, can you understand the higher theories of the Rosicrucians, or of the still nobler fraternities you speak of with so much levity."

"Oh, if that be the case, I give up in despair. Why not, since you are so well versed in the matter, take the motto for a book of your own?"

"But if I have already composed a book with that thesis for its theme, will you prepare it for the public?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said I,—alas, too rashly!

"I shall hold you to your promise," returned the old gentleman, "and when I am no more, you will receive the

manuscripts. From what you say of the prevailing taste in literature, I cannot flatter you with the hope that you will gain much by the undertaking. And I tell you beforehand that you will find it not a little laborious."

"Is your work a romance?"

"It is a romance, and it is not a romance. It is a truth for those who can comprehend it, and an extravagance for those who cannot."

At last there arrived the manuscripts, with a brief note from my deceased friend, reminding me of my imprudent promise.

With mournful interest, and yet with eager impatience, I opened the packet and trimmed my lamp. Conceive my dismay when I found the whole written in an unintelligible cipher. I present the reader with a specimen:

(Several strange characters.)

and so on for nine hundred and forty mortal pages in foolscap. I could scarcely believe my eyes: in fact, I began to think the lamp burned singularly blue; and sundry misgivings as to the unhallowed nature of the characters I had so unwittingly opened upon, coupled with the strange hints and mystical language of the old gentleman, crept through my disordered imagination. Certainly, to say no worse of it, the whole thing looked UNCANNY! I was about, precipitately, to hurry the papers into my desk, with a pious determination to have nothing more to do with them, when my eye fell upon a book, neatly bound in blue morocco, and which, in my eagerness, I had hitherto overlooked. I opened this volume with great precaution, not knowing what might jump out, and—guess my delight—found that it contained a key or dictionary to the hieroglyphics. Not to weary the reader with an account of my labours, I am contented with saying that at last I imagined myself capable of construing the characters, and set to work in good earnest. Still it was no easy task, and two years elapsed before I had made much progress. I then, by way of experiment on the public, obtained the insertion of a few desultory chapters, in a periodical with which, for a few months, I had the honour to be connected. They appeared to excite more curiosity than I had presumed to anticipate; and I renewed, with better heart, my laborious undertaking. But now a new misfortune befell me: I found, as I proceeded, that the author had made two copies of his work, one much more elaborate and detailed than the

other; I had stumbled upon the earlier copy, and had my whole task to remodel, and the chapters I had written to retranslate. I may say then, that, exclusive of intervals devoted to more pressing occupations, my unlucky promise cost me the toil of several years before I could bring it to adequate fulfilment. The task was the more difficult, since the style in the original is written in a kind of rhythmical prose, as if the author desired that in some degree his work should be regarded as one of poetical conception and design. To this it was not possible to do justice, and in the attempt I have doubtless very often need of the reader's indulgent consideration. My natural respect for the old gentleman's vagaries, with a muse of equivocal character, must be my only excuse whenever the language, without luxuriating into verse, borrows flowers scarcely natural to prose. Truth compels me also to confess, that, with all my pains, I am by no means sure that I have invariably given the true meaning of the cipher; nay, that here and there either a gap in the narrative, or the sudden assumption of a new cipher, to which no key was afforded, has obliged me to resort to interpolations of my own, no doubt easily discernible, but which, I flatter myself, are not inharmonious to the general design. This confession leads me to the sentence with which I shall conclude: If, reader, in this book there be anything that pleases you, it is certainly mine; but whenever you come to something you dislike,—lay the blame upon the old gentleman!

London, January, 1842.

N.B.—The notes appended to the text are sometimes by the author, sometimes by the editor. I have occasionally (but not always) marked the distinction; where, however, this is omitted, the ingenuity of the reader will be rarely at fault.

ZANONI.

BOOK I. — THE MUSICIAN.

Due Fontane
Chi di diverso effeto hanno liquore!

“Ariosto, Orland. Fur.” Canto 1.7.

(Two Founts
That hold a draught of different effects.)

CHAPTER 1.I.

Vergina era
D’ alta belta, ma sua belta non cura:
....
Di natura, d’ amor, de’ cieli amici
Le negligenze sue sono artifici.

“Gerusal. Lib.,” canto ii. xiv.-xviii.

(She was a virgin of a glorious beauty, but regarded not her beauty...Negligence itself is art in those favoured by Nature, by love, and by the heavens.)

At Naples, in the latter half of the last century, a worthy artist named Gaetano Pisani lived and flourished. He was a musician of great genius, but not of popular reputation; there was in all his compositions something capricious and fantastic which did not please the taste of the Dilettanti of Naples. He was fond of unfamiliar subjects into which he introduced airs and symphonies that excited a kind of terror in those who listened. The names of his pieces will probably suggest their nature. I find, for instance, among his MSS., these titles: “The Feast of the Harpies,” “The Witches at Benevento,” “The Descent of Orpheus into Hades,” “The Evil Eye,” “The Eumenides,” and many others that evince a powerful imagination delighting in the fearful and supernatural, but often relieved by an airy and delicate fancy with passages of exquisite grace and beauty. It is true that in the selection of his subjects from ancient fable, Gaetano Pisani was much more faithful than his contemporaries to the remote origin and the early genius of Italian Opera.

That descendant, however effeminate, of the ancient union between Song and Drama, when, after long obscurity and dethronement, it regained a punier sceptre, though a gaudier purple, by the banks of the Etrurian Arno, or amidst the lagunes of Venice, had chosen all its primary inspirations from the unfamiliar and classic sources of heathen legend; and Pisani’s “Descent of Orpheus” was but a bolder, darker, and more scientific repetition of the “Euridice” which Jacopi Peri set to music at the august nuptials of Henry of Navarre and Mary of Medicis.* Still, as

I have said, the style of the Neapolitan musician was not on the whole pleasing to ears grown nice and euphuistic in the more dulcet melodies of the day; and faults and extravagances easily discernible, and often to appearance wilful, served the critics for an excuse for their distaste. Fortunately, or the poor musician might have starved, he was not only a composer, but also an excellent practical performer, especially on the violin, and by that instrument he earned a decent subsistence as one of the orchestra at the Great Theatre of San Carlo. Here formal and appointed tasks necessarily kept his eccentric fancies in tolerable check, though it is recorded that no less than five times he had been deposed from his desk for having shocked the conoscenti, and thrown the whole band into confusion, by impromptu variations of so frantic and startling a nature that one might well have imagined that the harpies or witches who inspired his compositions had clawed hold of his instrument.

The impossibility, however, to find any one of equal excellence as a performer (that is to say, in his more lucid and orderly moments) had forced his reinstalment, and he had now, for the most part, reconciled himself to the narrow sphere of his appointed adagios or allegros. The audience, too, aware of his propensity, were quick to perceive the least deviation from the text; and if he wandered for a moment, which might also be detected by the eye as well as the ear, in some strange contortion of visage, and some ominous flourish of his bow, a gentle and admonitory murmur recalled the musician from his Elysium or his Tartarus to the sober regions of his desk. Then he would start as if from a dream, cast a hurried, frightened, apologetic glance around, and, with a crestfallen, humbled air, draw his rebellious instrument back to the beaten track of the glib monotony. But at home he would make himself amends for this reluctant drudgery. And there, grasping the unhappy violin with ferocious fingers, he would pour forth, often till the morning rose, strange, wild measures that would startle the early fisherman on the shore below with a superstitious awe, and make him cross himself as if mermaid or sprite had wailed no earthly music in his ear.

(*Orpheus was the favourite hero of early Italian Opera, or Lyrical Drama. The Orfeo of Angelo Politiano was produced in 1475. The Orfeo of Monteverde was performed at Venice in 1667.)

This man’s appearance was in keeping with the characteristics of his art. The features were noble and striking, but worn and haggard, with black, careless locks tangled into a maze of curls, and a fixed, speculative, dreamy stare in his large and hollow eyes. All his movements were peculiar, sudden, and abrupt, as the impulse seized him; and in gliding through the streets, or along the beach, he was heard laughing and talking to himself. Withal, he was a harmless, guileless, gentle creature, and would share his mite with any idle lazzaroni, whom he often paused to contemplate as they lay lazily basking in the sun. Yet was he thoroughly unsocial. He formed no friends, flattered no patrons, resorted to none of the merry-makings so dear to the children of music and the South. He and his art seemed alone suited to each other,—both quaint, primitive, unworldly, irregular. You could not separate the man from his music; it was himself. Without it he was nothing, a mere machine! WITH it, he was king over worlds of his own. Poor man, he had little enough in this! At a manufacturing town in England there is a gravestone on which the epitaph records “one Claudius Phillips, whose absolute contempt for riches, and inimitable performance on the violin, made him the admiration of all that knew him!” Logical conjunction of opposite eulogies! In proportion, O Genius, to thy contempt for riches will be thy performance on thy violin!

Gaetano Pisani’s talents as a composer had been chiefly exhibited in music appropriate to this his favourite instrument, of all unquestionably the most various and royal in its resources and power over the passions. As Shakespeare among poets is the Cremona among instruments. Nevertheless, he had composed other pieces of larger ambition and wider accomplishment, and chief of these, his precious, his unpurchased, his unpublished, his unpublishable and imperishable opera of the “Siren.” This great work had been the dream of his boyhood, the mistress of his manhood; in advancing age “it stood beside him like his youth.” Vainly had he struggled to place it before the world. Even bland, unjealous Paisiello, Maestro di Capella, shook his gentle head when the musician favoured him with a specimen of one of his most thrilling scenas. And yet, Paisiello, though that music differs from all Durante taught thee to emulate, there may—but patience, Gaetano Pisani! bide thy time, and keep thy violin in tune!

Strange as it may appear to the fairer reader, this grotesque personage had yet formed those ties which ordinary mortals are apt to consider their especial monopoly,—he was married, and had one child. What is more strange yet, his wife was a daughter of quiet, sober, unfantastic England: she was much younger than himself; she was fair and gentle, with a sweet English face; she had married him from choice, and (will you believe it?) she yet loved him. How she came to marry him, or how this shy, unsocial, wayward creature ever ventured to propose, I can only explain by asking you to look round and explain first to ME how half the husbands and half the wives you meet ever found a mate! Yet, on reflection, this union was not so extraordinary after all. The girl was a natural child of parents too noble ever to own and claim her. She was brought into Italy to learn the art by which she was to live, for she had taste and voice; she was a dependant and harshly treated, and poor Pisani was her master, and his voice the only one she had heard from her cradle that seemed without one tone that could scorn or chide. And so —well, is the rest natural? Natural or not, they married. This young wife loved her husband; and young and gentle as she was, she might almost be said to be the protector of the two. From how many disgraces with the despots of San Carlo and the Conservatorio had her unknown officious mediation saved him! In how many ailments—for his frame was weak—had she nursed and tended him! Often, in the dark nights, she would wait at the theatre with her lantern to light him and her steady arm to lean on; otherwise, in his abstract reveries, who knows but the musician would have walked after his “Siren” into the sea! And then she would so patiently, perhaps (for in true love there is not always the finest taste) so DELIGHTEDLY, listen to those storms of eccentric and fitful melody, and steal him—whispering praises all the way—from the unwholesome night-watch to rest and sleep!

I said his music was a part of the man, and this gentle creature seemed a part of the music; it was, in fact, when she sat beside him that whatever was tender or fairy-like in his motley fantasia crept into the harmony as by stealth. Doubtless her presence acted on the music, and shaped and softened it; but, he, who never examined how or what his inspiration, knew it not. All that he knew was, that he loved and blessed her. He fancied he told her so twenty times a day; but he never did, for he was not of many

words, even to his wife. His language was his music,—as hers, her cares! He was more communicative to his barbiton, as the learned Mersennus teaches us to call all the varieties of the great viol family. Certainly barbiton sounds better than fiddle; and barbiton let it be. He would talk to THAT by the hour together,—praise it, scold it, coax it, nay (for such is man, even the most guileless), he had been known to swear at it; but for that excess he was always penitentially remorseful. And the barbiton had a tongue of his own, could take his own part, and when HE also scolded, had much the best of it. He was a noble fellow, this Violin!—a Tyrolese, the handiwork of the illustrious Steiner. There was something mysterious in his great age. How many hands, now dust, had awakened his strings ere he became the Robin Goodfellow and Familiar of Gaetano Pisani! His very case was venerable,—beautifully painted, it was said, by Caracci. An English collector had offered more for the case than Pisani had ever made by the violin. But Pisani, who cared not if he had inhabited a cabin himself, was proud of a palace for the barbiton. His barbiton, it was his elder child! He had another child, and now we must turn to her.

How shall I describe thee, Viola? Certainly the music had something to answer for in the advent of that young stranger. For both in her form and her character you might have traced a family likeness to that singular and spirit-like life of sound which night after night threw itself in airy and goblin sport over the starry seas...Beautiful she was, but of a very uncommon beauty,—a combination, a harmony of opposite attributes. Her hair of a gold richer and purer than that which is seen even in the North; but the eyes, of all the dark, tender, subduing light of more than Italian—almost of Oriental—splendour. The complexion exquisitely fair, but never the same,—vivid in one moment, pale the next. And with the complexion, the expression also varied; nothing now so sad, and nothing now so joyous.

I grieve to say that what we rightly entitle education was much neglected for their daughter by this singular pair. To be sure, neither of them had much knowledge to bestow; and knowledge was not then the fashion, as it is now. But accident or nature favoured young Viola. She learned, as of course, her mother’s language with her father’s. And she contrived soon to read and to write; and her mother, who, by the way, was a Roman Catholic, taught her betimes to pray. But then, to counteract all these acquisitions, the

strange habits of Pisani, and the incessant watch and care which he required from his wife, often left the child alone with an old nurse, who, to be sure, loved her dearly, but who was in no way calculated to instruct her.

Dame Gionetta was every inch Italian and Neapolitan. Her youth had been all love, and her age was all superstition. She was garrulous, fond,—a gossip. Now she would prattle to the girl of cavaliers and princes at her feet, and now she would freeze her blood with tales and legends, perhaps as old as Greek or Etrurian fable, of demon and vampire,—of the dances round the great walnut-tree at Benevento, and the haunting spell of the Evil Eye. All this helped silently to weave charmed webs over Viola's imagination that afterthought and later years might labour vainly to dispel. And all this especially fitted her to hang, with a fearful joy, upon her father's music. Those visionary strains, ever struggling to translate into wild and broken sounds the language of unearthly beings, breathed around her from her birth. Thus you might have said that her whole mind was full of music; associations, memories, sensations of pleasure or pain,—all were mixed up inexplicably with those sounds that now delighted and now terrified; that greeted her when her eyes opened to the sun, and woke her trembling on her lonely couch in the darkness of the night. The legends and tales of Gionetta only served to make the child better understand the signification of those mysterious tones; they furnished her with words to the music. It was natural that the daughter of such a parent should soon evince some taste in his art. But this developed itself chiefly in the ear and the voice. She was yet a child when she sang divinely. A great Cardinal—great alike in the State and the Conservatorio—heard of her gifts, and sent for her. From that moment her fate was decided: she was to be the future glory of Naples, the prima donna of San Carlo.

The Cardinal insisted upon the accomplishment of his own predictions, and provided her with the most renowned masters. To inspire her with emulation, his Eminence took her one evening to his own box: it would be something to see the performance, something more to hear the applause lavished upon the glittering signoras she was hereafter to excel! Oh, how gloriously that life of the stage, that fairy world of music and song, dawned upon her! It was the only world that seemed to correspond with her strange childish thoughts. It appeared to her as if, cast hitherto on a foreign

shore, she was brought at last to see the forms and hear the language of her native land. Beautiful and true enthusiasm, rich with the promise of genius! Boy or man, thou wilt never be a poet, if thou hast not felt the ideal, the romance, the Calypso's isle that opened to thee when for the first time the magic curtain was drawn aside, and let in the world of poetry on the world of prose!

And now the initiation was begun. She was to read, to study, to depict by a gesture, a look, the passions she was to delineate on the boards; lessons dangerous, in truth, to some, but not to the pure enthusiasm that comes from art; for the mind that rightly conceives art is but a mirror which gives back what is cast on its surface faithfully only—while unsullied. She seized on nature and truth intuitively. Her recitations became full of unconscious power; her voice moved the heart to tears, or warmed it into generous rage. But this arose from that sympathy which genius ever has, even in its earliest innocence, with whatever feels, or aspires, or suffers.

It was no premature woman comprehending the love or the jealousy that the words expressed; her art was one of those strange secrets which the psychologists may unriddle to us if they please, and tell us why children of the simplest minds and the purest hearts are often so acute to distinguish, in the tales you tell them, or the songs you sing, the difference between the true art and the false, passion and jargon, Homer and Racine,—echoing back, from hearts that have not yet felt what they repeat, the melodious accents of the natural pathos. Apart from her studies, Viola was a simple, affectionate, but somewhat wayward child,—wayward, not in temper, for that was sweet and docile; but in her moods, which, as I before hinted, changed from sad to gay and gay to sad without an apparent cause. If cause there were, it must be traced to the early and mysterious influences I have referred to, when seeking to explain the effect produced on her imagination by those restless streams of sound that constantly played around it; for it is noticeable that to those who are much alive to the effects of music, airs and tunes often come back, in the commonest pursuits of life, to vex, as it were, and haunt them. The music, once admitted to the soul, becomes also a sort of spirit, and never dies. It wanders perturbedly through the halls and galleries of the memory, and is often heard again, distinct and living as when it first displaced the wavelets of the air. Now at

times, then, these phantoms of sound floated back upon her fancy; if gay, to call a smile from every dimple; if mournful, to throw a shade upon her brow,—to make her cease from her childishmirth, and sit apart and muse.

Rightly, then, in a typical sense, might this fair creature, so airy in her shape, so harmonious in her beauty, so unfamiliar in her ways and thoughts,—rightly might she be called a daughter, less of the musician than the music, a being for whom you could imagine that some fate was reserved, less of actual life than the romance which, to eyes that can see, and hearts that can feel, glides ever along WITH the actual life, stream by stream, to the Dark Ocean.

And therefore it seemed not strange that Viola herself, even in childhood, and yet more as she bloomed into the sweet seriousness of virgin youth, should fancy her life ordained for a lot, whether of bliss or woe, that should accord with the romance and reverie which made the atmosphere she breathed. Frequently she would climb through the thickets that clothed the neighbouring grotto of Posilipo,—the mighty work of the old Cimmerians,—and, seated by the haunted Tomb of Virgil, indulge those visions, the subtle vagueness of which no poetry can render palpable and defined; for the Poet that surpasses all who ever sang, is the heart of dreaming youth! Frequently there, too, beside the threshold over which the vine-leaves clung, and facing that dark-blue, waveless sea, she would sit in the autumn noon or summer twilight, and build her castles in the air. Who doth not do the same,—not in youth alone, but with the dimmed hopes of age! It is man’s prerogative to dream, the common royalty of peasant and of king. But those day-dreams of hers were more habitual, distinct, and solemn than the greater part of us indulge. They seemed like the Orama of the Greeks,—prophets while phantasma.

CHAPTER 1.II.

Fu stupor, fu vaghezza, fu diletto!
“Gerusal. Lib.,” cant. ii. xxi.

(“Desire it was, ‘t was wonder, ‘t was delight.”
Wiffen’s Translation.)

Now at last the education is accomplished! Viola is nearly sixteen. The Cardinal declares that the time is come when the new name must be inscribed in the Libro d’Oro,—the Golden Book set apart to the children of Art and Song. Yes, but in what character?—to whose genius is she to give embodiment and form? Ah, there is the secret! Rumours go abroad that the inexhaustible Paisiello, charmed with her performance of his “Nel cor piu non me sento,” and his “Io son Lindoro,” will produce some new masterpiece to introduce the debutante. Others insist upon it that her forte is the comic, and that Cimarosa is hard at work at another “Matrimonia Segreto.” But in the meanwhile there is a check in the diplomacy somewhere. The Cardinal is observed to be out of humour. He has said publicly,—and the words are portentous,—“The silly girl is as mad as her father; what she asks is preposterous!” Conference follows conference; the Cardinal talks to the poor child very solemnly in his closet,—all in vain. Naples is distracted with curiosity and conjecture. The lecture ends in a quarrel, and Viola comes home sullen and pouting: she will not act,—she has renounced the engagement.

Pisani, too inexperienced to be aware of all the dangers of the stage, had been pleased at the notion that one, at least, of his name would add celebrity to his art. The girl’s perverseness displeased him. However, he said nothing,—he never scolded in words, but he took up the faithful barbiton. Oh, faithful barbiton, how horribly thou didst scold! It screeched, it gabbled, it moaned, it growled. And Viola’s eyes filled with tears, for she understood that language. She stole to her mother, and whispered in her ear; and when Pisani turned from his employment, lo! both mother and daughter were weeping. He looked at them with a wondering stare; and then, as if he felt he had been harsh, he flew again to his Familiar. And now you thought you heard the lullaby which a fairy might sing to some

fretful changeling it had adopted and sought to soothe. Liquid, low, silvery, streamed the tones beneath the enchanted bow. The most stubborn grief would have paused to hear; and withal, at times, out came a wild, merry, ringing note, like a laugh, but not mortal laughter. It was one of his most successful airs from his beloved opera, —the Siren in the act of charming the waves and the winds to sleep. Heaven knows what next would have come, but his arm was arrested. Viola had thrown herself on his breast, and kissed him, with happy eyes that smiled through her sunny hair. At that very moment the door opened,—a message from the Cardinal. Viola must go to his Eminence at once. Her mother went with her. All was reconciled and settled; Viola had her way, and selected her own opera. O ye dull nations of the North, with your broils and debates,—your bustling lives of the Pnyx and the Agora!—you cannot guess what a stir throughout musical Naples was occasioned by the rumour of a new opera and a new singer. But whose the opera? No cabinet intrigue ever was so secret. Pisani came back one night from the theatre, evidently disturbed and irate. Woe to thine ears hadst thou heard the barbiton that night! They had suspended him from his office,—they feared that the new opera, and the first debut of his daughter as prima donna, would be too much for his nerves. And his variations, his diablerie of sirens and harpies, on such a night, made a hazard not to be contemplated without awe. To be set aside, and on the very night that his child, whose melody was but an emanation of his own, was to perform,—set aside for some new rival: it was too much for a musician’s flesh and blood. For the first time he spoke in words upon the subject, and gravely asked—for that question the barbiton, eloquent as it was, could not express distinctly—what was to be the opera, and what the part? And Viola as gravely answered that she was pledged to the Cardinal not to reveal. Pisani said nothing, but disappeared with the violin; and presently they heard the Familiar from the house-top (whither, when thoroughly out of humour, the musician sometimes fled), whining and sighing as if its heart were broken.

The affections of Pisani were little visible on the surface. He was not one of those fond, caressing fathers whose children are ever playing round their knees; his mind and soul were so thoroughly in his art that domestic life glided by him, seemingly as if THAT were a dream, and the heart the substantial form and body of existence. Persons much

cultivating an abstract study are often thus; mathematicians proverbially so. When his servant ran to the celebrated French philosopher, shrieking, “The house is on fire, sir!” “Go and tell my wife then, fool!” said the wise man, settling back to his problems; “do *I* ever meddle with domestic affairs?” But what are mathematics to music—music, that not only composes operas, but plays on the barbiton? Do you know what the illustrious Giardini said when the tyro asked how long it would take to learn to play on the violin? Hear, and despair, ye who would bend the bow to which that of Ulysses was a plaything, “Twelve hours a day for twenty years together!” Can a man, then, who plays the barbiton be always playing also with his little ones? No, Pisani; often, with the keen susceptibility of childhood, poor Viola had stolen from the room to weep at the thought that thou didst not love her. And yet, underneath this outward abstraction of the artist, the natural fondness flowed all the same; and as she grew up, the dreamer had understood the dreamer. And now, shut out from all fame himself; to be forbidden to hail even his daughter’s fame!—and that daughter herself to be in the conspiracy against him! Sharper than the serpent’s tooth was the ingratitude, and sharper than the serpent’s tooth was the wail of the pitying barbiton!

The eventful hour is come. Viola is gone to the theatre,—her mother with her. The indignant musician remains at home. Gionetta bursts into the room: my Lord Cardinal’s carriage is at the door,—the Padrone is sent for. He must lay aside his violin; he must put on his brocade coat and his lace ruffles. Here they are,—quick, quick! And quick rolls the gilded coach, and majestic sits the driver, and statelily prance the steeds. Poor Pisani is lost in a mist of uncomfortable amaze. He arrives at the theatre; he descends at the great door; he turns round and round, and looks about him and about: he misses something,—where is the violin? Alas! his soul, his voice, his self of self, is left behind! It is but an automaton that the lackeys conduct up the stairs, through the tier, into the Cardinal’s box. But then, what bursts upon him! Does he dream? The first act is over (they did not send for him till success seemed no longer doubtful); the first act has decided all. He feels THAT by the electric sympathy which ever the one heart has at once with a vast audience. He feels it by the breathless stillness of that multitude; he feels it even by the lifted finger of the Cardinal. He sees his Viola on the stage,

radiant in her robes and gems,—he hears her voice thrilling through the single heart of the thousands! But the scene, the part, the music! It is his other child,—his immortal child; the spirit-infant of his soul; his darling of many years of patient obscurity and pining genius; his masterpiece; his opera of the Siren!

This, then, was the mystery that had so galled him,—this the cause of the quarrel with the Cardinal; this the secret not to be proclaimed till the success was won, and the daughter had united her father's triumph with her own! And there she stands, as all souls bow before her,—fairer than the very Siren he had called from the deeps of melody. Oh, long and sweet recompense of toil! Where is on earth the rapture like that which is known to genius when at last it bursts from its hidden cavern into light and fame!

He did not speak, he did not move; he stood transfixed, breathless, the tears rolling down his cheeks; only from time to time his hands still wandered about,—mechanically they sought for the faithful instrument, why was it not there to share his triumph?

At last the curtain fell; but on such a storm and diapason of applause! Up rose the audience as one man, as with one voice that dear name was shouted. She came on, trembling, pale, and in the whole crowd saw but her father's face. The audience followed those moistened eyes; they recognised with a thrill the daughter's impulse and her meaning. The good old Cardinal drew him gently forward. Wild musician, thy daughter has given thee back more than the life thou gavest!

"My poor violin!" said he, wiping his eyes, "they will never hiss thee again now!"