

age could swim and dive like a porpoise. Of course, my grand ambition was to be a sailor. Every boy that lives near a harbour has that ambition at some period in his life.

I had arrived at the age of ten before any thought was taken of my education. Of course, I knew the little things that my mother had taught me—my alphabet, and how to read the stories in a big red and blue picture book that had been presented to me on an eventful birthday.

**ARRANGING THE BOY'S FUTURE.**

I remember one night as though it were but yesterday that I was sent to bed early. My father had given me a task to do, and, like many other bad little boys in the world, I failed to do it. I know that my father thought me the worst boy in the world, and the greatest trial that fond parents ever had (all fathers think that). As I lay there serving my well-earned punishment, I heard my parents talking about me. My father was for apprenticing me to a mechanical engineer that he knew; but my mother insisted that I was too young to apprentice and that it was wrong that I should have no education. The discussion terminated with me condemned to the Bronzetti Institute. I say condemned, as my father seemed to think that it was a fitting punishment for so bad a boy; but my mother was very much pleased. The school was very similar to lots of other private day schools, and I soon accepted the restraint and discipline as being a matter of course.

There was one boy in the school that I shall never forget. His name was Peter. Peter and I seemed to be antagonistic spirits from the start. He greatly incensed me the first day by making grimaces and mule ears at me. They soon discovered that I had a good boy soprano voice. In this I became an immediate rival of Peter's; for, to the time of my arrival, he was the best singer of the school.

The head-master of the school was a very shrewd man, as I look back to it now. He used to tell us that if we were good children and behaved properly he would take us to sing at such and such a wedding, and we would be given cake and sweets, and be able to see the bride, and all sorts of nice things. So we, poor little fools! would work hard, and rehearse after school hours, and sure enough, we would be taken to the wedding, and sure enough, we would receive cake and sweets and see the bride. But the clever old man never shared the money he received. Oh, we were taken to lots of nice places—concerts, entertainments, religious fetes and the like! In fact, the twelve little boys were in great demand; but all we ever received was candy.

**PUNISHING A RIVAL.**

At the end of the second year I was presented a gold medal as being the best singer in the school. This so enraged my rival, Peter, that he attacked me viciously with his fists. I returned his blows, and gave him better than he sent, and before we could be separated chianti flowed from Peter's nose. It must have been a humorous scene, to see two little boys fighting viciously for the doubtful honour, each in his Sunday clothes, before the assembled parents and faculty. However, sympathy seemed to be with Peter, for the head-master, or Presidente, as we called him, reprimanded me severely before everybody. I became greatly enraged then, and tore off my gold medal and threw it on the floor at his feet. Then my father came up and said he would take care of me. On arrival at home he gave me a spanking, and I vowed then and there I would sing no more in the institute. And I never did.

About a year after that event I was appointed to the mechanical engineer. I took little interest in my new work, but showed some aptitude in mechanical drafting and calligraphy. In fact, it was in this position that I first became interested in sketching. For a time I thought that I would attend the art schools, and visions of becoming a great artist arose within me. But the voice triumphed, and all my spare time was put in at singing.

When I was fifteen my mother died. I had stayed at the mechanical desk only because of her pleadings, so I left immediately, determined to devote myself permanently to music. My father was so incensed at this action that a great scene ensued, in which he told me that he was done with me and my music, and

in the future I could shift for myself. Whether the poor old man thought to drive me back to my apprenticeship, or really gave me up as a disgrace to him, I have never been able to determine; but with the stubbornness of his own son I left the house.

And now began my wanderings. In the course of time they have taken me to remote corners of the earth; they have taken me before great personages; they have given Caruso a host of friends—no acquaintances, but friends.

Let me tell you the odd way I began my career as a professional vocalist. I had lodgings in a house close to the church of Sant' Anna alla Paludi, where the organist himself was a singer. Just to amuse myself, I used to sing in my room, and the organist heard me. One day, having contracted a serious throat trouble, he sent for me and asked me to sing in his place. To say I consented is inside the mark. I jumped at the chance. I jumped with my best energy and enthusiasm, afraid it might get away.

**HIS FIRST PAY FOR SINGING.**

The organist taught me the Litany; and for a long while after that I sang at the Tuesday services; for Tuesday is the day dedicated to Saint Ann, and her church is then thronged with worshippers. It was really a tremendous job I had undertaken, since the services lasted practically all day; but I was paid—paid in real money. How much, do you imagine? I'll tell you, without exaggerating. With my hand on my heart, I do solemnly declare that for every day's work faithfully performed in the church at Sant' Anna alla Paludi, Enrico Caruso received the dazzling sum of one lira—twenty cents! Yes, actually!

I kept my lodgings unchanged; they were convenient to the church and sufficiently suited to my needs as a student of mechanical engineering, for I hadn't as yet abandoned my first occupation. Just across the street lived an apothecary named Schinardi, whose son was studying the piano. Mischievous rogue that I was, I couldn't help plaguing him; whenever Schinardi began practising, I would begin singing. Bursting with rage, he would dash to the window and shout to me across the street, "Quit that singing! For heaven's sake, quit it!" I saw that I was making a bit.

But it seems that even a tenor voice has "charms to soothe the savage breast." Early one morning there came a knock at my door. Opening to the visitor, whom should I behold but the young pianist I had so long been tormenting! At the first glimpse of him, I was sure a storm was brewing. But, no, I next perceived he was all smiles and good nature. In the kindest way in the world he explained that he had had a great idea: I to come to his house during his hours of piano practice, he to teach me some charming romanzas. I agreed, with a glad heart. Thus I got my first knowledge of romantic music, and it was by young Schinardi that I was introduced to society.

There's a story that once I was hired to serenade a Juliet by a Neapolitan Romeo who had the guitar but lacked the romantic voice. I hate to spoil that jolly yarn. The thing might well enough have happened in those days; but, unfortunately for legend, the story isn't true. The reporter who set it going had no doubt heard about my taking part in serenades, but failed to understand what we Italians mean by that word. In Italy, when distinguished visitors come to town—deputations, Cabinet Ministers, or other celebrities—we treat them to a serenade; and it's a gorgeous affair, with a big orchestra to furnish the accompaniments.

Though I still got lots of calls to sing in churches, where the maestro would sometimes compose pieces expressly for my voice, I enjoyed the serenades far better. So I was as happy as a lark when I received an invitation to sing at the centenary of the Virgin of Cotrone. The festival lasted fifteen days, and my success was most gratifying. One of the serenades was in honour of the Prince of Wales, now King Edward VII., who had come to Cotrone on board the Royal yacht. This gave me my first opportunity to appear before royalty.

Sometimes reporters come to me and beg for anecdotes connected with what they are kind enough to call my "days of triumph." They urge me to tell of my acquaintance with the "crowned heads of Europe." They forget that even a grand opera star may retain some remnants of modesty. And if you, good reader, or you, indulgent editor, have looked for such tales in this story of my

life, I shall have to answer you as I answer the reporters. Put yourself in my place, and ask yourself if you would not do the same. I say to the reporters, "Niente," which is Italian for "Nothing." Then I shake hands with them as amiably as I can after their absurd request, and walk away. Wouldn't you, under the circumstances?

The life was fascinating, however; I was free, and my work placed me in contact with all sorts of people, and took me into unexpected places. In the course of time I became a favourite of society, and my fees rose accordingly.

One dear lady, impressed with my voice and with every confidence in my future, arranged for me to go to singing teacher, so that I would get proper training in the use of the voice. I had taken possibly ten lessons, when to my consternation something happened to my voice. At first I contemplated suicide, then I thought of the mechanical table, and all the while I carefully avoided my lonely patroness and her friends. One day I was going up a back street—I must have been at the very bottom of my well of despair—when a hand fell upon my shoulder, and a merry voice chided me for having avoided those that had taken such an interest in me. It was the baritone Messiani. To him I was compelled to confide my misery and its origin.

Ah, how sympathetic he was! "Poor little shaffer! You used your voice too much for so young a pipe. Come with me to my studio; you must have some place to go," he said.

When we got there he asked me to sing, that he might judge if I had indeed ruined my voice.

And sing I did. As I sang Messiani at first looked surprised, then burst into a great laugh—a merry, aggravating laugh. If ever in my life I have been near to committing murder, it was that afternoon. All that saved me was lack of a weapon. As it was, I hurled a brass candlestick at him, and was hysterically searching the apartment for a suitable weapon.

Seeing my anger, he addressed me. "Cease, my boy! It is cruel of me not to explain. Your voice is grand. It has changed. I will give you a card to Vergine, and he will make you."

So I went to Vergine. He tried my voice, and said that while it was of good opera quality it was not of sufficient volume for opera. He with much reluctance prophesied that I could not earn more than four hundred francs a month; but on account of his great regard for Messiani he would take me for four years if I would sign a contract, as he couldn't be bothered unless I would stay the whole term.

I gladly agreed. The contract read that I was to pay twenty-five per cent. of my earnings for five years of engagements; but little did I appreciate that I was binding myself to another Shylock. Truth to tell, he taught me much regarding the use of the voice, but he never encouraged, never disclosed, the fact that I had a voice worthy of serious consideration. Upon the termination of my contract to study, he gave me such advice, then reminded me that I owed him twenty-five per cent. of all my receipts. Even then I did not appreciate what I had signed.

I soon obtained an engagement in the opera house at Naples, and achieved some success. On all pay days my Shylock was on hand to receive his percentage. The interest of the manager was eventually aroused, and I showed him my contract.

"Why," he said, "you will have to work for this skintint the rest of your life. Your contract reads that you will have to sing for him five years of actual singing. Days that you earn nothing do not count." My indignant manager figured that this would occupy me until the age of fifty.

Finally I decided to see a lawyer. He advised me to stop payment, which I did. Shylock took the case to court, and luckily for me the courts were as wise as Portia. I was instructed to pay twenty thousand francs besides what I had paid, and that finished him. Now, if he had not been so avaricious, he

might have had as his share two hundred thousand francs in the following five years; but he was too greedy, and so killed the goose that laid the golden egg.

In Italy, every man has to serve his time in the army, and shortly after this incident I was called upon. Happily for me, my military duties were short-lived, for I drew the attention of the remainder of the regiment. He had heard me sing in the barracks, where I practised in my leisure.

The Major questioned me closely one day, and, having great regard for my voice, made my duties for the period of active service very light. He also advised me as to how I might be entirely exempted from active service if I had friends of influence to take up my cause.

So I started to unroll the red tape that should free me, singing all the while in the barracks, to the great delight of the soldiers and officers. My position became such in the course of time that when a popular soldier was imprisoned for some slight offence, I could obtain his freedom by volunteering to sing any song the officer on duty would care to hear.

I will remember one lovely Easter day when the officers gave a luncheon to the soldiers of the regiment. At one end of the table sat the commander, Major Nugiante; at the other end, facing him, sat Caruso.

After the luncheon, it was proposed and universally seconded that I should sing the "Wise Song" of the *Cavalleria Rusticana* in honour of the Major. My song was greeted with most enthusiastic applause, and cries of encore.

The Major alienated everyone by raising his hand, and presently rose to make a speech. What was our surprise and chagrin when he delivered a very sharp lecture directed against the regiment in general and myself in particular, saying that it was unpardonable to compel me to sing at each beck and whim, and criminal to request it after a meal, and that I was a fool and didn't deserve the gift I held so lightly, and that if in the future there was a repetition he would not only put in irons the person, regardless of rank, who compelled me to sing, but he would punish me too.

I was in the barracks for two months altogether, and released when my brother volunteered to serve out the time in my stead.

On release I was engaged for a season of opera at Caserta, and from this time on my operatic career has simply been a case of being lifted from one round of the ladder to the next.

After singing in one Italian city after another, I went to Egypt; from there back to Paris; and then to Berlin; thence to the Argentine. From there I went to Rio Janeiro, where I was honoured by President Campos-Galles for singing at a gala performance given in honour of the President of Argentina, who was on an official visit to the city. From Rio I went to sing in London; and now I have just finished singing a second season in New York, the greatest opera city in the world.

And such, dear reader, is the opera story of Caruso. There is another Caruso, a plain, every-day fellow, with a dear wife and affectionate friends, who still wishes he were an artist, who loves to draw and model in clay, who collects rare coins, has a large library of picture books, and a home he is proud of near Florence. But this Enrico is, as I say, just a plain, every-day Italian fellow, and I know you don't want to know anything about him.

**THE GUINEA POEM!**

A CHEQUE FOR £1 1/2 has been sent to the writer of this verse, Mrs. B. K. Drurie Hill, Wanganui.

When buying things, we all do hope to get the very best. Remember, then, that SAPON Soap out-classes all the rest.

WIN A GUINEA! Prize Poem published every Saturday. Best four-SH(ORT)-line poem verse about "SAPON" wins each week. SAPON wrapper must be enclosed. Address: "SAPON," Oriental, Washington, P.O. Box 635, Wellington. Write for free Art Booklet, containing 23 valuable hints on washing.

**TO HOUSE-FURNISHERS AND FURNITURE SELLERS!**

...CALL AND INTERVIEW...

**Louis Lewis,** Auctioneer, House Salesman and Valuer.

'Phone 1078. 14, VICTORIA STREET EAST, AUCKLAND.