

believe his eyes. This stubborn pessimist, however, seemed quite incapable of feeling a joy which he had been unwilling to hope for. The Russian Revolution, to his entire satisfaction, ruined everything in which he might feel content. He writes: 'The Russian Revolution exercised a kind of paralysis over me. No matter how European civilization can cure its wounds,

the Russian Revolution obsesses my mind as the most amazing fact of the war.' One admires Signor Panzini's haste to discover the sadness of things, and is struck once more by the way in which the writer — just as he does in his stories — discovers the comic side of life. Merry when he is inventing, sad when he is observing — such he appears in his works, taken as a whole

## OYSTERS OF SAINT DAMIAN

BY ALFREDO PANZINI

*[Alfredo Panzini is a distinguished Italian scholar and writer whose novel, Il padrone sono me, attracted much favorable comment among critics a year or two ago and was called by Pirandello 'one of the masterpieces in the Italian language.' He was born at Sinegaglia in 1864, studied under Carducci at the University of Bologna, and became a teacher of philology at the Milan University and others. His earliest works were humorous sketches and personal reflections and memories. Only after many preliminaries of this kind did he begin to write novels. After the war he gave up scholarship, and is devoting himself entirely to literature.]*

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I HAD been spending the morning struggling to explain the poetry of Romeo di Provenza, and I really felt the need of a little refreshment. At that moment I happened to pass one of the finest and most fashionable restaurants in the city.

'Well, well. Yes,' I said to myself, 'yes, I'll go in here. Just for once in a way it won't do any harm. How much extra shall I spend? A lira or two, and have n't I just drawn my salary? *Nonne meruimus hodie stipendium?*' And thinking thus, without further reflection and giving myself no time to change my decision, I swung the glass door back jauntily and strode into a beautiful room where long tables were spread with fine linen of dazzling

whiteness and where huge padded divans, upholstered in velvet, tempted you to sit down. I had chosen the restaurant solely because of its culinary reputation, and I was not disturbed in the least at the prospect of enjoying it alone. To tell the truth, I should have gone there before if I had not felt a certain aversion for these head-waiters with their smooth-shaven faces who look haughtily down on you over the tops of their high stiff collars, lead you to your table, place themselves straight in front of you, and seem to read the history of your life as if they would say: 'What are you doing here? You are no millionaire, no nobleman, no debauchee, no impresario of operatic stars — no, not even a business man.

You look like an honest fellow struggling with the world. For shame! What has brought you into a place like this which you are not used to? Hurry up and get out of here.' And they don't so much as thank you even if you tip them heavily.

Such was the train of my thoughts — but human judgment is subject to errors as you shall presently see.

Scarcely had I stepped inside when the owner — for it was evidently he who sat enthroned above the great marble counter — rose and came toward me, making me a very agreeable and highly deferential bow. He was a fine young fellow, slender, elegantly dressed, so cool and ruddy that he might have been a sherbet, and with such a flourishing air that he really did honor to the house.

'If the quail and the snipe in your restaurant,' I thought to myself, 'are as tender as you look, your place deserves its reputation. But watch out, my young friend. Never go off on any voyage of exploration into unknown countries, for if, by misfortune, you should fall among the anthropophagi, your return would be highly improbable.' Such was the harangue that I delivered within my mind even while I was replying to his smile and bow with a politeness equal to his own. Still smiling, he made cabalistic signs to a head-waiter so smart and so correct that in any other place I should have taken him indifferently for an honorable deputy, a fashionable lecturer, or some handsome æsthete. Yet he was nothing but an ordinary waiter.

He approached me, took off my overcoat, accepted my hat and stick, and led me to a retired table occupied by two silent Englishmen, who were eating with so much grace that they might have been absorbing pills in a drug store. From time to time one would murmur 'Yes,' while I, for my

part, reflected that though their countrymen might eat with the extremest delicacy and restraint, they made up for it by the voracity with which they gobbled up nations and peoples. No sooner was I seated than my waiter, standing straight before me with one hand lightly resting on the table, asked:—

'Would you like to begin with a paté with truffles? It's just out of the oven, and very good.'

First rate! Let us begin with the paté. I accepted.

'What wine would you like? We have some bottled Barolo, which is exquisite.'

'I do not doubt it, but I think I shall content myself with vin ordinaire.'

'Very good.'

An instant later he placed before me a gleaming metal porte-fiasco containing a bottle of Tuscan wine with the label, 'Chianti. Extra old.'

'This is too much,' said I. 'This must be a very expensive wine.'

'No, sir,' said the waiter, 'you will only drink what you want of it.'

With the tenderest care, I slowly poured the delicious drink into an elegant crystal tumbler, which I sipped with delight, thinking, as I did so, of the line in Redi's poem: 'Montepulciano, king of all the wines.'

As for the paté, it was of the rarest quality, though perhaps a little too highly spiced for my taste. As I was cutting the crust, I reflected that a cook who could prepare such a delicacy was really worthy of the gratitude of mankind. Presently the waiter reappeared and with an engaging smile suggested:—

'Now I should advise some *cappellati* from Bologna. They are fresh this morning and very fine.'

It would have been rude to refuse such disinterested advice. I accepted the *cappellati*, which were quite as perfect as the paté with truffles.

'Now I shall bring Signor a quail roasted with mushrooms.'

I had already had enough, for my usual simple fare rarely went beyond a soup and a single course, but that paté had amazingly enlarged my capacity, and then it seemed a little stingy to stop with that. 'Still,' I said to myself, 'a quail with mushrooms would certainly reach a fantastic price which I could hardly afford.'

No doubt the waiter read my dismay in my face, for he hastened to add: 'A specialty of the house!'

How could I refuse? I did justice to the quail, which was in every way worthy of its high reputation. Its only fault was that it helped to bring down the level of the wine in the flask, which somewhat confused my thoughts.

'Now that is enough, my friend,' said I to the waiter, when he had taken away the miserable remainder of the quail, — there is nothing more dismal than such fragments! — but without paying any attention and with an air of authority he set before me a plate covered with a fine napkin beneath which, in their large, pearly shells, reposed six perfectly enormous succulent oysters.

'But I did not order these,' I cried, rather indignant.

'That is true,' said the waiter with the grace of a man of the world, 'but the oysters,' he added in a low voice, 'are extra. To-day,' he explained still lower, 'is Saint Damian's day.'

'What? I never heard that oysters had him for a patron!'

'No, no, sir, oh no! Not the oysters, but the son of the proprietor is called Damian, and as to-day is his name-day it is his custom to offer on this occasion an extra dish to those clients who honor us with their presence on this day of rejoicing in his family.'

What could I say? I might have doubted him had I not happened to lift my eyes to the counter where I

beheld the elegant young man with the agreeable name of Damian, smiling at me as if to say: 'Go ahead, it's perfectly true, the waiter is telling the truth. Eat them without any fear of owing us anything.' What more could I ask? Delicately lifting one of these precious mollusks, with all the perfume of seaweeds and sea breezes in it, I made a mouthful of it. I admit that the memory of that moment is 'still precious to my heart,' as the divine poet writes, though unfortunately I could not quote the entire passage because of my excessive libations. One by one the five other precious oysters suffered the same fate.

'A glutton,' I thought to myself, 'is very clever in making the earth and the air and the sea minister to his tastes. The vice of gluttony may be deplorable and unworthy of humanity, yet certainly the weakness of our nature makes us succumb to it more often than we should.' By an association of ideas, the empty shells made me remember the beautiful line of Zanella in his poem 'On a Fossil Shell': —

When thou didst wander with the nautilus  
Ere man disturbed thy course . . .

The oysters disposed of, the waiter placed before me a basket of fruit: mandarin oranges, dates, and other products of that holy land which is the mother of all things fine and good. Impossible to say: 'No fruit!' After such a meal it would hardly have appeared correct. Suddenly my happiness was troubled by a cruel thought: 'Why does n't a professor's salary permit him to have such a meal every day?' As a matter of fact, every single course was costing more than the 5.80 lire which I have allowed myself through twelve years' service as a master-teacher. And to get rid of the feeling of regret, which served no good purpose save to disturb the digestion, I called the waiter.

'What do you desire, sir?'

'The bill.'

He drew forth a black-leather notebook, brandished a terrifying pencil, and the crisp new notes which I had just drawn from the Finance Ministry wavered before my eyes.

'There you are, sir. Luncheon at our regular price, lire 2.50,' — he glanced at the flask, — 'fifty centesimi for wine. Total, three lire.'

I breathed again. Nothing could be more reasonable. I was on the point of crying: 'I'll come every day!'

'It's a system of the house,' said this noble waiter modestly.

'Bring me a cup of coffee.'

'Would you like a little glass of cognac?'

'Why not? *Semel in anno* —'

When he returned with them, he murmured in my ear: 'Would you like a contraband cigar? I have some excellent Havanas.'

'Oh, that's not honest!' I cried.

'Don't mind that. The inspector-general of customs dines here frequently, and he never smokes anything but my Havanas. He even has an extra supply laid by.'

'Oh, well, if that is the case — *Regis ad exemplum totus informabitur orbis* —'

And the excellent waiter offered me a marvelous Havana whose light and azure smoke, mingling with the fog of the wine and the liqueur, melted me into a sensation of infinite well-being. 'The world is fair, the future is superb,' I repeated with the great poet. Yes, certainly the world was fair, and I never even heard the sounds of the dining-room, which was gradually filling with the fashionable world. Suddenly I heard the door of the *comptoir* move gently, and as I slowly opened my eyes I beheld young Damian seating himself timidly before me. 'What can he want?' I asked with my eyes wide open this time. A placating,

almost affectionate smile illuminated his beaming face. Then this distressing remark stopped all my digestive processes short: —

'I see that you do not recognize me, Professor, but I know you very well.'

'Alas,' I sighed within my heart, 'my poor incognito so suddenly lost!'

'It is true, sir, that I have not the honor —' I stammered, while he continued to smile.

'I was your pupil ten years ago. You do not remember me any more, but I know you very well, Professor.'

I sighed deeply, and with a feeling of excessive delicacy I found myself a little vexed to be caught by a pupil in flagrant gluttony.

'Nevertheless,' I replied, 'I appreciate your remembering me. I am even extremely touched, but I teach so many young people that it is a little difficult to remember every one.'

'But you ought to remember me, Professor,' he insisted, still keeping up that unvarying smile.

'No, really,' I said.

'My name is Damian Saltori. That name ought to remind you of an incident.' He waited a few moments before uttering that terrible reproach: 'It was you, Professor, who inexorably refused to pass me in my examination. You even said: "Flunked." Now see what a good memory I have!'

'What story is this he is telling me,' I thought with dismay. Farewell my peaceful digestion! I do not know exactly what I replied, probably something like: 'Oh, forgive me, I did not do it purposely. If that is the case, I am very, very sorry.'

'But I owe everything to you, Professor,' exclaimed the enthusiastic young man. 'I owe my happiness and my fortune to you! How many times I wanted to stop you in the street to express my gratitude, and I never had the courage. To-day, when you came

into my restaurant, I permitted myself —

'I don't understand,' I replied, very ill at ease and somewhat fearful that my former pupil still remembered that figure of speech called irony.

'Why, it's clear, clear as daylight! Don't you remember what you said to me?'

'Good heavens, no, no!'

'You said to me: "You're a fine fellow, but for classical studies certain talents are necessary of which you have not a trace. One must have a bit of the artist, and you have n't any. You're an oyster, an oyster!" Now see whether I remember well or not!'

The memory of those oysters, so exquisite and so savory but a moment or two before, made me blush, for my palate still retained their delicate flavor.

'No, really,' said I, extremely embarrassed.

'Yes, yes,' said young Damian. 'You even uttered another truth still more evident, which my parents were unwilling to admit. They wanted me to take my degree at any price to distinguish the family name with a Doctor's title, and they even thought about having me given private lessons at home, but I never could go Latin, and Italian exercises were a pure horror. So in firing me you did me the greatest favor.'

'But I don't remember —'

'Don't you remember a scene that took place between my father and you, Professor? Or that deputy, the family lawyer, who demanded my examination book from the chief of the examination committee in order to carry it up to the

Minister of Education and demand a revision?'

'Oh yes, now I do remember. It was the Honorable Signor — Perhaps I had better not mention his name?'

'That fine deputy,' continued the sympathetic Damian, 'insisted that two and two should make six at any price. The chairman of the examination committee insisted on the same thing, and when you obstinately refused to admit it my father shrieked — I still laugh when I think of it: "What? I give my customers credit for hundreds of lire, and you, for a single point —"'

'What did you expect, Signor?'

'You did quite right, Professor. After the failure my parents understood. They sent me to Switzerland, as I always wanted them to, and I learned business and languages. I wanted to make my father's business grow, while my father, on the other hand, wanted to get rid of it. To-day I am a very happy man. You see,' he concluded, 'Cornelius Nepos was never meant for me.'

'Of course, of course!'

My former pupil insisted on helping me into my overcoat, himself held out my hat and stick, and begged me to return often to do honor to his house.

'I shall never forget the feast of Saint Damian,' said I.

'You are only too kind, Professor,' he said, opening the door for me. And I marched out of the restaurant, as if I had been a banker or a fat businessman who never counts the cost of his luncheon, with a magnificent Havana between my lips.

## A PAGE OF VERSE

### CHARTERHOUSE-SQUARE

BY A. R.

[*Morning Post*]

PAUL's bell rang eight  
Over the square,  
And Beauty walked  
The evening there.

Paul's Dome lifted  
O'er greening trees —  
A benediction  
Of rest and peace.

Paul's Dome keeping  
His London town;  
The half moon looking  
From heaven down.

From a dim heaven  
Of pearl and blue  
Her misted silver  
Glimmering through.

And, praising God  
That the world was fair,  
A blackbird fluted  
Across the Square.

### THE SWORD-BLADES

BY GEORGE BUCHANAN

[*Irish Statesman*]

I HAD a dream of sword-blades  
in war at a river-bend,  
a winter sun on the war-men,  
who shouted and made an end;  
wrinkled and weird their faces,  
they brandished, cried out, and  
fought,  
singled a foe and slew him,  
with a wild exulting thought.

I had a dream, when the sword-blades  
were finished and gone by,  
of a strange lonely silence  
over the trees and sky.

### THE QUARRY

BY WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

[*Adelphi*]

As the windhover  
Drops on the shrew,  
Love, O young lover,  
Swoops down on you,  
Bears your heart heavenward,  
Tears it in two —

Swift with his capture  
Soars through the light —  
Yours the fierce rapture  
Of agonized flight,  
Talon-torn, terror-winged,  
Into blind night.

### THE MONUMENT

BY HUMBERT WOLFE

[*Beacon*]

I DON'T know what  
the Monument  
was meant by its builders  
to represent.  
'The fire of London!'  
But did they intend  
to show they were glad  
it came to an end?  
Or was the memorial  
erected in pity,  
because they foresaw  
the rebirth of the City?