

CREMONA FIDDLES.

The Romance of a Dealer—Tarisio and His Discovery.

Mr. Charles Reade, in an article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* under the above head, writes with the subcaption, "The Romance of Fiddle-dealing."

"Nearly fifty years ago a gaunt Italian called Luigi Tarisio arrived in Paris one day with a lot of old Italian instruments by makers whose names were hardly known. The principal dealers whose minds were narrowed, as is often the case, to three or four makers, would not deal with him. M. Georges Chanot, younger and more intelligent, purchased largely, and encouraged him to return. He came back next year with a better lot; and yearly increasing his funds, he flew at the highest game; and in the course of thirty years imported nearly all the finest specimens of Stradiarius and Guarnerius France possesses. He was the greatest connoisseur that ever lived or ever can live, because he had the true mind of a connoisseur and vast opportunities. He ransacked Italy before the tickets in the violins of Francesco Stradiarius, Alexander Gagliano, Lorenzo Guadagnini, Giofredus Cappa, Gobetti, Morgliato Morella, Antonio Mariani, Santo Magini, and Matteo Benti, of Brescia, Michael Angelo Bergonzi, Montagnana, Thomas Balestrieri, Storioni, Vincenzo Rugger, the Testori, Petrus Guarnerius, of Venice, and full fifty more, had been tampered with, that every brilliant masterpiece might be assigned to some popular name. To his immortal credit, he fought against this mania, and his motto was "*A tout seigneur tout honneur.*" The man's whole soul was in fiddles. He was a great dealer, but a greater amateur. He had gems by him no money would buy from him. No 91 was one of them. But for his death you would never have cast eyes on it. He has often talked to me of it; but he would never let me see it, for fear I should tempt him.

Well, one day George Chanot, Sr., who is, perhaps, the best judge of violins left, now Tarisio is gone, made an excursion to Spain, to see if he could find anything there. He found mighty little. But, coming to the shop of a fiddle-maker, one Ortega, he saw the belly of an old bass hung up with other things. Chanot rubbed his eyes and asked himself was he dreaming. The belly of a Stradiarius bass roasting in a shop-window! He went in, and very soon bought it for about forty francs. He then ascertained that the bass belonged to a lady of rank. The belly was full of cracks; so, not to make two bites of a cherry, Ortega had made a nice new one. Chanot carried this precious fragment home and hung it up in his shop, but not in the window, for he is too good a judge not to know the sun will take all the color out of that maker's varnish. Tarisio came in from Italy, and his eye lighted instantly on the Stradiarius belly. He pestered Chanot till the latter sold it him for 1,000 francs, and told him where the rest was. Tarisio no sooner knew this than he flew to Madrid. He learned from Ortega where the lady lived, and called on her to see it. 'Sir,' says the lady, 'it is at your disposition.' That does not mean much in Spain. When he offered to buy it she coquetted with him, said it had been long in her family; money could not replace a thing of that kind, and, in short, she put on the screw, as she thought, and sold it him for about 4,000 francs. What he did with the Ortega belly is not known—perhaps sold it to some person in the tooth-pick trade. He sailed exultant for Paris with the Spanish bass in a case. He never let it out of his sight. The pair were caught by a storm in the Bay of Biscay. The ship rolled; Tarisio clasped his bass tight, and trembled. It was a terrible gale, and for one whole day they were in real danger. Tarisio spoke of it to me with a shudder. I will give you his real words, for they struck me at the time, and I have often thought of them since:

'Ah, my poor Mr. Reade, the bass of Spain was all but lost.'

Was not this a true connoisseur? a genuine enthusiast? Observe! there was also an ephemeral insect called Luigi Tarisio, who would have gone down with the bass, but that made no impression on his mind. *De minimis non curat Ludovicus.*

He got safe to Paris. A certain high priest in these mysteries, called Vuillaume, with the help of a sacred vessel, called the glue-pot, soon rewedded the back and sides to the belly, and the bass being now just what it was when the ruffian Ortega put his finger in the pie, was sold for 20,000 francs.

I saw the Spanish bass in Paris twenty-two years ago, and you can see it any day this month you like; for it is the identical violoncello now on show at Kensington, numbered 188. Who would divine its separate adventures, to see it all reposing so calm and uniform in that case—'*Post tot naufragia tutus.*'"