



From Photo,

SIGNOR PAOLO TOSTI.

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A ROYAL MUSIC MASTER.

AN ILLUSTRATED INTERVIEW WITH SIGNOR TOSTI.

BY BARONESS VON ZEDLITZ.



I sat at the hospitable table of Signor and Signora Paolo Tosti a few days ago, the idea flashed across my mind that I should like to interview the popular composer.

In his home in Finchley Road, Signor Tosti becomes the most domesticated man imaginable. He takes a great pride in his charming house, which is graced by one of the loveliest women I know—his wife.

It was a revelation to me when I entered

his dwelling one day, to find him ardently engaged in the pursuit of his favourite hobby, upholstery. He makes the most graceful chairs, divans, and sofas with a dexterity which even a professional upholsterer could not surpass. His house contains a rare collection of autographic photographs, most of which he has framed himself, and his wife tells me that the delicately coloured lamp shades composed of pale sea-green silk which stand in Signora Tosti's boudoir were designed and fabricated by Signor Tosti himself.

WOMAN AT HOME

1894

But I am perhaps drifting from the immediate purpose of this paper, and will try to give as accurately as possible what the *maestro* told me about himself.

It was with some difficulty, however, that I induced Signor Tosti to recall the past.

"At Ortona *sul mare*, in the glorious Abruzzi, on the 9th of April, in 1847.

"In 1858 my parents sent me to Naples to study the violin, under Pinto, at the Royal College of St. Pietro a Majella, where from the age of ten to that of twenty-one I was



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[Stratton & Young, 24, Regent Street.
THE STUDIO IN MANDEVILLE PLACE.

He has always hitherto strenuously withstood any effort made to interview him, for he shrinks, not unnaturally, from speaking about the illustrious personages with whom he comes in contact almost daily.

His knowledge of colloquial English is so limited that he absolutely refuses to converse in our language, so he talks in his bright and chatty manner in French for the most part, often relapsing into his own familiar mother-tongue, Italian.

"Do be kind," I said to him in French, "and tell me something about yourself."

"What do you want to know?" Tosti inquired, while a kindly smile spread over his face. "Shall I tell you about the time when my meals chiefly consisted of oranges, bread and cheese? Those were struggling days, but they taught me more of life's vicissitudes than all my masters put together. I dislike speaking of myself, but for friendship's sake ask, and I will answer you."

"Tell me about your early days, when you were unknown," I said. "Where were you born?"

forbidden to study aught else. The Conservatoire was very conservative in those days, so that I was only able to study composition and harmony under the secret guidance of the venerable Mercadante, and of Conti.

"The life at the Conservatoire was very hard, and although Conti placed me in the position of *maestrino* under himself (at the meagre salary of sixty lire per month, it is true), I ran away to Ancona and struggled on. There I gave music lessons for a fee of fivepence an hour! This was the period of my career during which I chiefly lived on oranges and bread and cheese. But I must confess I never felt better in my life, although I watched and waited and persevered very ardently, in the hope that some day I might become other than a humble violinist striving and studying in the Valle Theatre at Rome. I remember how I used to sit in my obscure corner unnoticed and uncared for, staring at the boxes which contained all the great personages in Rome, and wondering whether it would ever fall to my lot to speak with one of the most beautiful

queens who ever graced a throne, Margherita of Savoy. My hopes and wishes were gratified later, but those days of poverty were dreadful to endure. My early compositions were laughed at, and yet I was so poor that in desperation I competed for the 500 lire prize to be given by the Florentine Art Society, and sent in a song which, needless to say, was immediately rejected. This very song, 'Vorrei Morire,' has since been one of my most conspicuous successes."

"Who was the first person to recognise your talent and give you a helping hand?"

"Well, there were many who wanted to be kind, but they were struggling like myself. I think, however, Sgambati was among the first to encourage me to work; in fact, he helped me to give my first concert at the 'Sala Dante' in Rome, where I produced some of my works with great *télat*. Sgambati composed a song for my benefit, which I sang, called 'Eravi un vecchio Sire.'"

"Can you recollect the name of your first song, Signor Tosti?"

"Yes, indeed; my very first song was composed with great effort, for I had been

countered refusals on all sides. Three publishers rejected it, and that, together with the second song I wrote, 'Lamento d'Amore,' remained for a long while unknown.

"Apropos of 'Non m'ama più,' I must tell you that while staying lately at Berk-hall, Sir Algernon Borthwick's country seat, we celebrated the anniversary of the day, just twenty-five years ago, when I composed it, and I was fêted as though it had been my birthday. My health was drunk, and later on in the evening I was asked to sing the song in question."

"Who was your first Royal pupil?"

"The gentle and attractive (then Princess) Margherita di Savoja, who was present at the concert which Sgambati helped me to organise in Rome, and who showed her gracious approval of my works by instantly appointing me as her singing-master. After this, of course, my luck began to change materially, and I rapidly made my way towards success.

"In what year did you pay your first visit to England?"

"I came to London in 1875, only to stay



From Photo by]

THE DRAWING ROOM. [Fradie & Young, 240, Regent Street.

dangerously ill, and it was during those tediously long days of recovery that I diverted my thoughts by the composition of the song which has since become very popular, 'Non m'ama più.'

'When I tried to get it published, I en-

for a short while; then I became acquainted with my kind and honoured protectress, the late Duchess of Cambridge. This dear lady took me under her protection, and bade me sing to her almost every day up to the date of her death. She was very old and infirm, you

know, and had but little to amuse her latter days.

"It was a great blow to me when she died," continued Signor Tosti, becoming very grave, "for we were the best of friends. See, here is her portrait, which I value among my most precious relics."

Signor Tosti handed me a picture of the late Duchess in a massive golden frame, and written on it by her own hand were the touching words: "À mon cher Tosti, qui par son talent sait alléger les souffrances de ma vieillesse."

The sufferings of the late Duchess were not to be relieved by medicines or outward ap-

time with her finger, and often humming *sotto voce* the airs he was singing to her.

With the exception of "Good-bye," which the late Duchess admired especially, she preferred those compositions of Signor Tosti written to Italian words, and strictly in the Italian style, to others which are more English in their character. It was through the intermediation of the Duchess's devoted and trusted friend, Lady Geraldine Somerset, that Signor Tosti was first presented to her Royal Highness, who had expressed a wish to hear him sing some particular song—one of her old Italian favourites. After this the Neapolitan *maestro* discoursed sweet music to the illus-



[From Photo by]

[Fradette & Young, 26, Regent Street.

A CORNER IN SIGNOR TOSTI'S STUDIO.

plications; but music, which she loved, never failed to calm and soothe her, producing a physical effect of a twofold nature, acting at once as a cordial and a sedative.

Her Royal Highness was a true musician at heart, and her memory was richly stored with the works of operatic composers now considered more or less old-fashioned. Among these, she chiefly delighted in the airs from "La Sonnambula," "Lucrezia," and "Lucia," which were included in Signor Tosti's daily programme of songs, and which he would recite to her while she lay on her *chaise-longue*. Of Signor Tosti's compositions, she delighted especially in hearing his faultless delivery of "Dopo," "Preghiera" and "Povera Mamma," and would listen enraptured, while beating

trious invalid well-nigh every afternoon, cheering her spirits and soothing her pains by the beneficent magic of his art.

Upon his watch-chain Signor Tosti wears a simple signet-ring, presented to him by the Duchess upon one of the many occasions when he sang to her.

Tosti's voice, though not by any means a powerful one, is of a singularly pathetic and sweet *timbre*. A friend, speaking of him the other day, described it as being in quality remarkably akin to that of the late Charles Gounod.

Although the *Commendatore* (Tosti holds this title by reason of the conferment upon him by the King of Italy of the Order of the Crown of Italy) lives in Finchley Road, he

still retains his studio in Mandeville Place, where he continues to give his singing lessons.

This suite, like his home, abounds in valuable relics and souvenirs of illustrious personages and Royal pupils; but among all these it is touching to see his wife's portrait, which is placed in a simple frame near the piano, so that he may be inspired by a glance at her sweet face when he is deep in the composition of a new melody. He prefers to give his lessons in town, he tells me, for he likes to keep his home exempt from care or business.

The *ménage* is a most united one, and although Signor and Signora Tosti have no children, the most important "person" in Finchley Road is Master Bobbie, a handsome fox-terrier, who rules his master and mistress in a delightful manner.

When either is indisposed, Bobbie considers it his duty to behave with becoming sympathy; curling himself up in his basket, he refuses to leave the room, shivering the while and making a pretence of being ill himself!

"Come and sing, Bobbie," exclaimed Signor Tosti; and up came Bobbie, while his master sang a tune to him, and Bobbie howled in accompaniment. "You see we are all musical here," continued the *maestro*, "and I have actually succeeded in making Bobbie *sing* in tune!"

After luncheon was over, Signor Tosti had a treat in store for me, he sang some of his latest compositions. When he is deeply inspired with a theme, it seems that the melody comes to him with the greatest facility imaginable. He first writes his music at his desk, and when it is finished he sings it over and tries it at the piano. He has a desk which is attached to the instrument, and which enables him to write with one hand and try the notes over with the other.

Signor Tosti carries a memorandum book about with him, ruled with musical lines, so that at any time when he becomes possessed

by an inspiration he can jot it down instantly. This little book, bears the appropriate title of 'Inspirations en chemin.'

"Which of your songs do you consider to have been the most popular in England?" I asked, later.

"Undoubtedly 'For Ever and for Ever,' and I also think that 'Bid me Good-bye' has had an exceptional success. In America I fancy 'The Venetian Song' has had the largest sale. Over a million copies of some of these songs have been sold, but in England, perhaps, 'That Day,' 'Vorrei Morire,' and 'Aprile' have shared the popularity of 'Good-bye' and 'For Ever and for Ever.' I have just finished three more songs (the manuscripts of those Signor Tosti showed me), and am just sending them off to my publishers, Messrs. Ricordi."

"Among all your distinguished pupils, to whom are you most attached?"

Signor Tosti seemed to be wrapped in thought for a moment, and I noticed a sad, far-off look in his eyes. Presently, without a word, he rose from the piano and placed a portrait in my hand, which bore the simple inscription: "A mon cher maître," and was signed "Leopold."

I understood then that the poor young Duke, who died in the flower of his youth, will never be supplanted in Tosti's heart by any other scholar.

Tosti is overwhelmed daily by importunate communications from strangers, requesting him to set their verses to music. "It would take me months," he told me, "to answer all the letters I receive on this subject. I do not keep a secretary, and cannot make a slave of my wife; therefore I fear that, leaving so many letters unanswered, my silence may be regarded as reprehensible. I assure you that I do not wish to appear to be rude; but my lessons and engagements prevent me from answering all the odd applications addressed to me by post."

Among his illustrious pupils are the Princess of Wales, Princess Beatrice, the Duchess of



SIGNOR TOSTI'S MUSICAL DOG.

York, and Princess Louise. Signor Tosti has sung innumerable times before Her Majesty the Queen; he arranges most of the Royal concerts.

In consequence of his valuable services rendered to the Royal family, Her Majesty

the souvenirs and interesting tokens of which the *maestro* is possessed, for he guards them all too jealously from the eyes of the world; suffice it to say that all his Royal pupils, as well as artists of all nationalities, have bestowed tokens of friendship upon him.

"Non m'ama più!" 1868

Andantino

Paolo Tosti

SOME BARS OF SIGNOR TOSTI'S FIRST SONG.

the Queen has conferred upon Signor Tosti the Jubilee Medal, and I hear that he possesses nine more decorations besides the two I have mentioned, which, however, he seldom if ever wears.

It would be impossible to enumerate all

Tosti's manner is most genial and kindly. He is never weary of alleviating the wants of struggling artists; he has hardly ever been known to refuse help when a deserving case presented itself.

In remembrance of our meeting, Signor

Tosti promised to write out a few bars of the beginning of his first and last songs composed up to to-day, and which he presents to THE WOMAN AT HOME as a slight souvenir. When I was leaving, Signor Tosti and his wife

sat down to play a game of their favourite pastime, draughts, while "Bobbie," sitting hard by, seemed to take an almost human interest in the pursuits of his beloved master and mistress.

"Te solo" 1893

lento

cres:

Tutti gli affanni e i desi-deri occu-r-ti.. *rit:..*

cres:

rit:

pp. Ho bi-so-gno di pianto!... *rit:..*

pp. b₂

Paolo Tosti

SOME BARS OF SIGNOR TOSTI'S LAST SONG.

