



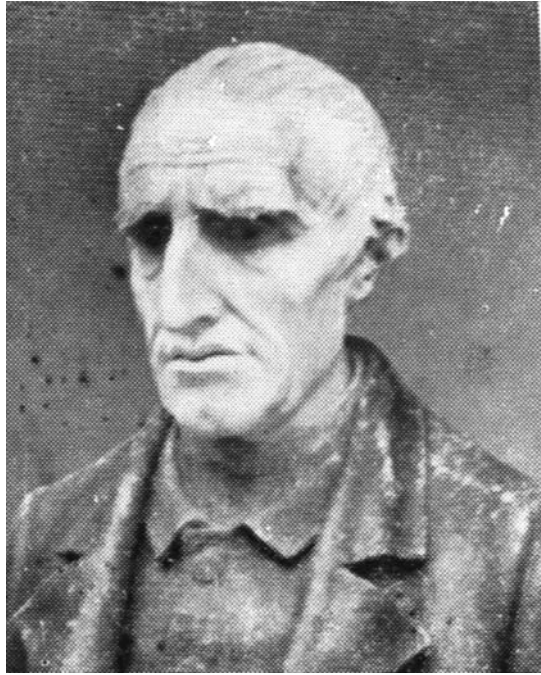
**A Short Acknowledgement on the Life of
Natale Talamini**

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**Dedicated to the Children
In the Elementary Schools
Of Cadore**

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Natale Talamini

December 25, 1808 – April 6, 1876

The Life of Natale Talamini

On the western most border of Cadore, close to the territory of Zoldano, Agordino and Austria, is the picturesque Val Fiorentina. The great mountain Pelmo serves as the background to the east, it is the source of a spring of water that begins as a humble stream and becomes a torrent from which the valley takes its name and all that it crosses. Another stream, the Codalungaⁱ, borders the Italian and Austrian territory and to the right of it we see in front and higher up, Col di San Lucia and Livinallungo, at one time a village belonging to the Cadore region. At the foot of the valley, where the Fiorentina and the Codalunga end, entering into the Cordevole, one sees to the north Caprile, the first village of Agordino. It is an interesting small village that displays above a column, even today, the glorious Lion of Saint Mark. Ahead rises a perpendicular and dominant cliff where one can still see the vestige of the very old fortress of Pietore, which gave name to the small village of Rocca. Moving towards the west, appears the lofty Marmolada whose ice is perpetual. The Val Fiorentina is very beautiful and picturesque with dark forests that alternate with pleasant meadows: forests, meadows, pastures and deserted sights, with tracts of sterile nature and naked summits and running water all forming a wonderful variety of nature and together producing a harmony of light and color. Almost in the middle of this valley, to the right of the brook with the same name, in this extreme part of the Kingdom of Italy, is situated the village of Pescùl. A hamlet of the Comune of Selva, with some 300 inhabitants, who live there at 1452 meters above sea level, where the soil gives nothing more than rye, barley, peas and beans. They live there with a single pathⁱⁱ that joins them to the other villages, and one cannot arrive there without crossing from the Oltrechiusa, Forada or ascending the Zoldana Valley and passing the narrow alpine pass of Crotto, or from Caprile coming backwards from Fiorentina. Here they call it a part of Cadore thrown away and forgotten. Nevertheless this remote and obscure country village of Pescùl was the home of a generous spirit. Since the beginning of the 15th century Pescùl distinguished itself through the personage of a man named Gabriele, who was the governor of the fortress, Rocca di Pietore. He was a high-spirited and very powerful man. Then came Negrone, his son, who was a magnanimous and robust man and a stern patriot. He was considered to have been one of the most handsome Cadorine men of that time; unfortunately an enemy of the fatherland vilely assassinated him, in Pieve. Donato, a son of Negrone, who learned the art of ironwork from his father, held, like his father, the most important office of the Cadorine Comunita.

II

In this small village, on Christmas night (Natale) of 1808, was born Natale Talamini. The Talamini family of Pescùl is a part of the Talamini family of Zoppè, and this is a branch of the family Talamini Tonòn of Vodo. The first of the Talamini, who migrated to Pescùl from Zoppè, was Antonio, who had the nickname *Duro* (Hard). He was married to Giacoma Zenero. They are the grandparents of the poet. Natale's father, Bernardo, was born on January 17, 1780 and on July 9, 1805 he married Bortola, daughter of Giacomo Pampanini and Anna Marie Del Negro, who was five years younger than he. Theirs was a very prosperous and prolific marriage having ten children.

- Antonio the sculptor, who died in Rome in 1853;
- Natale the poet (1808-1876);
- Santo, died in 1853 at Borca, where he established his family;
- Giuseppe, died from the cold crossing the Forada;
- Giacoma;
- Maria, who married a man by the name of Bonifacio and settled in Venice;
- Bortolo, the notary died in Belluno in 1883;
- Elena;
- Luigi, the only one who kept the house in Pescùl;
- Natale Junior, called Natalino, who became a priest, and served in Maresòn di Zoldo, and has passed away.

Our Natale passed his childhood years and his youth learning to read and write from the village teacher, Andrea Bonifacio Protti. He would occupy himself, as is the custom of the Cadorine children not belonging to an aristocratic family, by working as a shepherd, learning and learning farming and forestry. His father fabricated needles of brass, and he would peddle the needles throughout the villages of Cadore, Zoldo and Agordo with Natale following along helping him.

A man of natural talent, quick, sincere and austere Bernardo Talamini was the primary educator developing the intellect of his children. As he worked and during the late hours of the night, he would read to them a very detailed story from the Old or New Testament, making them comment and showing examples of virtues to follow and vices to avoid. Their mother, an

affectionate and pleasant woman, was a traditional woman, “everything for the husband, the house and the children”. She had a good heart and on her knee the children learned the first lessons of love. A dear and good family were the Talamini’s; one of those families not then rare in our mountains, who in the middle of poverty or of sufficient means sprout forth the seeds of noble virtue, like loyalty, pride, faithfulness, piety, sincerity, by which they guided and molded the character of their children, who, if they did not become great certainly became honorable.

In the environment, as they now say, of an educational instruction, Natale showed a subtle inclination to study beyond that of an elementary education. His father sent him to the Latin school of the parish priest of Pescùl, Don Bartholomew Befit. The youngster made so much progress in such little time it was evident to the father and to the teacher, they not delay the idea, then frequent in Cadore, to make him a priest.

III

Natale Talamini was sent to Udine to study humanity and rhetoric, then philosophy in the Episcopal Ginnasio-Liceo, and theology at the Seminary. He had as a teacher of *belle lettere* professor Peruzzi, a person from Friuli, who was a celebrated Latin teacher. For philosophy he had the Friulan professor Gortan and his teachers for the holy discipline were Foraboschi and Tonchia. In every area of instruction he always distinguished himself, especially in Latin, Italian and history; so much so that before he completed his theological studies the Bishop, Emanuele Lodi, assigned him to teach Latin in the *ginnasio* (secondary school). It is thought he was brought to Udine in 1824 or thereabout. Every year his father made a trip to Udine to visit him and to acquire merchandise. Every year Natale would travel from Udine to spend the autumn vacation in Pescùl. He celebrated his first mass in Pescùl in 1832 and on that day the holiday and the table was rendered less poor, as a friend of the family, a certain Giambattista Bonifacio, presented a ram to the father of the new priest.

Now a priest Natale Talamini would return to Udine, called by his Bishop who would send him to Latisana with the celebrated abbot Bianchetti, from Feltre, so he could be educated in eastern languages with the intention of making him a professor in the seminary. In fact during the years of 1833 and 1834, not surprisingly, we find Talamini as a professor of eastern language. But this same education was also the reason he had his first falling out with the bishop and the reason for his dismissal from the Seminary. The real truth of all this, rather

than that innocent eastern language, always innocently taught in the Italian Seminary, was the perception that the young priest was too bold for the synod, too familiar with the distinguished and scholarly people from the city, but as a parish priest, too outspoken and independent in his principles; all the things that, at that time, a teacher and a priest were not recommended to do. Natale Talamini would never dishonor the flag under which he sided, nor would he taint the priestly vestments he wore, but born to the struggle, intolerant of every chain, his thoughts extended beyond the circle of the sanctuary, while in the sanctuary, need it be said, he found himself somewhat uneasy his spirit caught between affirmations and negations, he began as we have seen and as we shall see, become annoyed, more than one.

IV

Dismissed from Udine we find him, at the beginning of 1835, in Venice where he went on the advise of his father. In Venice he found his brother, Antonio, a student at the Accademia di Belle Arti, who then was placed in the studio of the sculptor, Garbato, in the Campiello della Feltrina. Antonio, who was a good sculptor was called to Florence and from Florence to Rome. While in Venice, he made his brother Bartolomeo accompany him and frequent the Liceo di San Caterina. They both shared, with each other, their scarce bread, offering the means for each to complete their education. Revived again at the beginning of the year he went to celebrate the mass of San Trovaso in the house of the Count Girolamo Contarini dai Scrigni and he gave private lessons to the children of the podesta Correr. Inclined to the mission of being an educator and a tutor and aspiring to teach, he was selected, in January 1836, as a substitute professor of Humanity in the I.R. Ginnasio di San Procole. After three years of apprenticeship and enduring the special examinations, with a decree on October 16, 1838, he was named permanent professor replacing another Cadorine professor, Abate Dr. Pietro Costantini. His colleagues included Gerardi, the Prefect of Studies, Lazzari for catechesis, Rova, Torre and Pesavento professors of grammaticism, and a very close colleague who would alternate with him teaching the two classes of humanities and rhetoric, the good priest of Villaveria, Giuseppe Capparozzo. He occupied this office first at San Procolo, then at San Giovanni Laterno, where the Ginnasio was transferred, from 1849, until the fall of Venice and the return of the Austrians.

Our professor was truly a wonderful man of character. The government tolerated him, as long as he occupied the position, but it was not to be believed he was left in peace. Known

for his liberal positions he was watched. The discourses he delivered on scholastic holidays and even the thesis he gave to his scholars were subject to control. Poor Talamini, what torment he incurred! How he must have shuttered at the repressive force, and for how many years! And always with the police around, like the eyes of Argus, he would have to guard himself, having to think before he could talk, and paying a great deal of attention when he would talk, what he would read, what he would write and almost to the point of what he would think! How difficult was it to find the courage that now becomes the collective good.

His battlefield was the school. As professor he had his own quality didactics, not learned at the school, not drawn from books, but derived from his own soul directed from fear and developed more from the heart than from the mind, more from feeling than from reason. From the translations of the Latin classics, he did at the schools, that prose created a poet. Gifted with a good memory, he cited to memory long passages of the classics. He knew both Greek and Roman history extensively, as well as mythology. He disregarded that which one calls critical philology and history to cure the aesthetic, for him it was enough that from a phrase, a personality or a fact of history flowed a symbol, a feeling an idea. He trained passing from room to room, like a peripatetic. This is how he composed, and also how he shaved his beard, and between one hit and another of the razor, he walked around the bedroom and ruminating, in a soft voice, his verses. But that quality didactic was nothing in comparison to the education. Little is made of the exercises practiced by the ecclesiastical priesthood; who feels truly called to the scholastic priesthood. As a professor he did not have that arrogant authority behind which frequently hides a lack of talent and doctrine, but what he derived was affection. To his students he was more like a father or a friend who was a professor, affable and loving with a warm and imaginative word, animated by life, faith, and hope, he knew, following the precept of Plato, to find the way more level and more easy to enter into the soul. In teaching history not being able to restrain oneself from dangerous terrain and the burning modern history, not even in his "alma Vinegia", he escaped to Greek and Roman history. But what came across in one of those great personalities or facts, he knew how to illuminate and animate them and represent them under an appearance most dear, in the Milziadi, in then Leonidi, in the Bruti, in the Virginii, in the Catoni to present and symbolize the future avengers of liberty. As such he formed and tempered the character of his students, he awakened them, making them love the good, the life, the activity, the honor, he prepared them to not obscure destiny.

Many distinguished and talented students departed from his school, among those we remember are Giacomo Calvi, the lawyer Leiss, and Fontana, Verona, Vittorio Salmini, Paolo Fambri, Federico Berchet, and among those still living, most of all and very affectionately is Michele Spanioⁱⁱⁱ, now the president of the Sezione alla Corte d' Appello of Venice who we have on more than one occasion to remember. Talamini loved them all as if they were his own children, he would present them with good books, he continued to always show them his affection, his loving interests, even when they were no longer his students. He would gleam sensing some of them would achieve glorious goals, as he would be sad seeing anyone of them fail and fall along the way, knocked down by doubt and disappointment. How wonderful it would be if his students were enthralled with him, if the image of the venerated teacher never left their mind, not even when he closed himself off in the obscurity and solitude of his native mountains, and when they arose to important offices! And if any of them ever happened to meet the old professor, even twenty or thirty years later, when he was a judge, an attorney, a president, a deputy, or elegantly dressed, the poorly, dressed, old priest would open his arms, like a father, and affectionately embrace him.

It would not be possible to complete this chapter without reporting here what Paolo Fambri, the most clever of his pupils, and a great man of value, now dead, wrote about Natale Talamini.

" Once upon a there was in Venice, a long time before 1848, a professor, a certain Don Natale Talamini, a man of education and of many talents, but most of all, a man with a great, strong and very independent soul. Some of our heroes were equal to him, but none of them were superior to him in nobility and in the pride of personal and civilian virtues.

This soul, rebellious to all real and formal servitudes, who used to raise himself as if he had despised all the arrogance of power, of fortune and also of hierarchy, knew no limits in paying respects to noble intellects and patriotic services. This was not only for him a feeling, but it was also a principle.

Every scholastic year he would give his pupils facts and arguments to be developed into two or three formats in which these facts, these virtues of public gratitude would demonstrate and inculcate, like the one virtue he wanted to see rise to the highest of all, private and intimate gratitude.

He would not stop at that. Besides the conscious homage to knowledge, valor and services, he asserted also that an unconscious homage existed. He pretended that from these highest virtues that ennobled and almost feign ignorance would irradiate, in its appearance a look, something capable to inspire a very deep reverence toward the non-perverts. It is for this reason that not one of us, his

pupils, could escape, among other things for instance, the double treatise in verses and in prose of the famous episode of the Cymbrian soldier who, overcome by a respectful fear did not dare kill Mario.

He required the composition to end with this arguable but sharp and very noble conclusion: that the respectful fear of that soldier should have been looked upon as the proof of him being incapable of any other sort of fear, because", (here are, verbatim, the words of the theme that our gray-haired pupils remember) "there are some fears which even the brave are unable to conquer and there is a courage which even the wretched are unable to conquer.

Whoever reads these words of a half century ago, will understand immediately that many men came out of the school of the Abbot Natale Talamini, who, almost all, faced many kinds of sacrifice, and danger or still feel, in remembering him, their cheeks humid and their exuberant 60 years old hearts throbbing.^{iv}

VI

The much-awaited days came closer, it came in 1846 with Pope Pio IX, and in 1847 with his reforms. The Austrian police begin to smell, more than ever, the odor of powder and feel the signs of the coming storm.

Natale Talamini, was staying at the house at Santa Maria del Giglio and then at the Campo Santa Lucia. In 1847 he lived at San Zaccaria in Calle del Rimedio in the same house with his friends Pacifico Valussi and Niccolo Tommaseo, and what friends! In the autumn of 1847, while he was spending vacation in Pescùl, the police entered his room in Venice, opened his wardrobe and searched all his papers. On one of the first days in February 1848, returning to the house after having said mass at San Fantino, he saw the house surrounded by armed guards. They had come to arrest Tommaseo, as they had already arrested Daniele Manin. Talamini, concerned for the fate of his two friends, accompanied Manin's wife to the Direzione di Polizia to obtain permission to see the incarcerated. They were refused. Talamini protested so that he also was arrested.

Finally, that memorable March arrived and the Italian spring broke. It was really the year for which Talamini awaited. Oh the joy to finally be able to vent the anger and the disdain for all those repressed times, to the fervor for the enthusiasm of the fatherland that had been held back and restrained with difficulty! Oh, the voluptuousness of the words openly said in the face of the sun, the hymns, the patriotic songs and the fraternal embraces.

The crusaders came from everywhere, and among the crusaders were many of Talamini's pupils. And it is not certain if he was intoxicated or mad with joy, he mingled with the crowd to whisper to them that they made him proud. He bestowed to everyone two, gleaming scudi. Who knows how long he searched to find them, as the coins were new and gleaming.

But his thoughts principally turned to Cadore. It is he who drew the attention of the Provisional Government to it, with the effective cooperation of Agostino Coletti, it is he who obtained arms and a capitano. That capitano was Pietro Fortunato Calvi. Led by Calvi, the Cadorini gloriously resisted and held off, for a month, nearly 20 thousand Austrians who had encircled Cadore like an iron circle. And when Cadore finally surrendered, Calvi went to Venice, which had not yet surrendered. He was made capitano of the *Lega dei Cacciatori dell'Alpi*, comprised of residents of Venice and many Cadorini who had already fought with him. But the moral leader, that man, who with the cooperation of Giovanni Antonio Talamini Minotto, another distinguished Cadorino, the originator who urged the formation and placed in middle to maintain it was Natale Talamini.

Even before 1848 Talamini was held in high regard and esteem in Venice. One recalls an event early that year as General Marmont was passing through the Piazza San Marco, the general it was rumored had betrayed Napoleon I, when the crowd saw him they cried out to him, "*To Death!*". Talamini who, by chance, was there approached the general and taking him by the arm said, "Come with me, I do not want Venice stained with the crime!" And the population, quivering, held back for the moment. Is it no wonder that in the election of January 27, 1849 two districts elected him as their representative to the Veneto Assembly. In the affairs of those two years not surprisingly he dedicated all he had, as well as the stipend, except for enough on which to live. He was one of the heated voters of the *Decreto 2 Aprile* and when one cautious person asked, "What shall we give our children to eat?" he opened his shirt and showing his bare chest he replied with sublime force, "We shall nourish them with our flesh!" To those present these words seemed to be nothing more than a grand boast, but to those since then and to those who presently look back on that time with imagination and with feeling, they make impression especially in the soul of those who knew the man who made that pronouncement. With these words he revealed himself, the person from the mountains with a rough exterior, but with an open and strong heart, with the most generous of feelings, a man with a fervid imagination and an errant and passionate mysticism. The patriotic poet, the poetic patriot, the fighter, the visionary, alive and true, Natale Talamini

VII

Venice fell, Talamini together with his brother Bortolo, who was then at the fort in the estuary of Chioggia having made it his duty to become a patriot, would return to their mountains. With a sad heart they departed Venice, at that time in the hands of the Austrians, and they saw their Cadore in the hands of the Croats, one can only imagine how they felt. Discouraged by the weight of many national misfortunes, he withdrew into the solitude of Pescùl, with the intent of recording political memories that were brought to mind by the events. He hoped for the next resurrection of the fatherland.

Although Austria may have departed from the mountains, the idea of protection was the pretence of a great lie, because the police did not cease, for an instant, to oppress him with searches, or keep an eye on him for nearly two years. Then one night, in August 1851, the gendarmes of Pieve were sent to Pescùl and arrested him. It was the time when those involved in the organization called *prestito nazionale*, which was exposed by Mazzini, were arrested. It was also the time in which Luigi Dottesio from Como and Vincenzo Maisner of Venice were spreading, in the Veneto, the banned books which were printed at the publisher of Capolago. It was the time in which Filippo De Boni, from Feltre, gathered associates for a newspaper that had the intention of preparing for a revolutionary uprising. Many other arrests were made during that year, to silence the others, Dottesio and Maisner were arrested, and then Luigi Coletti and Natale Talamini were arrested. The reason for the arrest of Talamini was a letter that he had received from Filippo De Boni, whom he did not know.

He was taken to the prison of San Severo in Venice, where he was kept for more than six months, from August 1851 until January 1852, during which time they put him through an insidious trial, that poor spirit did not waiver even for an instant. They had no proof to convict him, but they did not have any reason to free him. From January 1852 to May 1853 he was kept in the fortress of Legnago, sixteen months of confinement and oppressive heat and then another nine months, from May 1853 until February 1854, at Palmanova. In all, for more than two and a half years, he was in prison, a true Austrian injustice and disgrace.

VIII

Family troubles also contributed to increase his bitterness. The much, loved father died on August 3, 1847 leaving an honorable name. He was greatly missed! In 1853, while he was in prison at Palmanova, two of his brothers died. First, during July in Borca, Santo died leaving six loving children; then in Rome, on December 6, Antonio, the young sculptor died just as he was set to achieve glory. In Pescùl he still had his younger siblings and his beloved mother, a septuagenarian. He would retire to the small country village of Borca, on the slopes of Antelao, to be a father and an educator to the children of his brother Santo, and to take care of running the family affairs.

But the ordeal of incarceration and his constant struggle with affliction and pain left the body debilitated and also weakened his mind, and the poor priest closed himself off from the world in the solitude of his Cadore. He was absorbed in one idea, the fatherland, *aeternum servans sub pectore vulnus*, like Juno of Virgil. That is to say, smoldering in his heart and in his mind was that hatred towards the foreigners and his anticipating the day of the insurrection. From the time in 1854, when he was released from prison, a new twilight had already broken for the Italian redemption. Talamini departed to spread, among his mountain people, the news of new ideas and of new hopes. And his means were both the spoken word and his poetry. A mass, a graduation, a marriage, the ordination of a parish priest were occasions for him to express in sonnet and canons, the great concepts of love, liberty and the unity of the fatherland. He wrote infrequently, but thought and composed on the road and retained it all in his memory. He would say mass every day for the fatherland. If someone offered him alms for the mass he would refuse, saying they should pledge it to the fatherland. For the same reason he refused the position of professor which the merciful Massimiliano wanted him to be reinstated, with an arrear of the stipend. He stated he preferred, "to remain naked but free." With this idea of the fatherland he became, some said, almost crazy. Some mornings he would wake up, very early, ascend the mountain above Borca, an appendage of the formidable Antelao, and turning to the east he joyously blessed Cadore, then turning to the south he would bless Italy, afterwards holding his hat looking towards the west and Mount Pelmo he would pray for his family and for Pescùl and finally turning to the north, towards the unfaithful Ampezzo and Austria, he would make a vulgar but very significant gesture of supreme disrespect, quickening his pace he would return down the slope. He would seldom leave Borca, but sometimes he would travel to the District of Pieve to visit friends or for Cadorine concerns. He visited the Pampanini family in Chiapuzza, and his friend Don Matteo in Valle, at Venas the Gei family, at Ferarolo the Lazzaris and Zuliani families, at Pieve the Coletti family

and in Calalzo his friend Don Biagio Jacobi. I do not believe he ever went outside the boundaries of Cadore after his return from prison and before 1866. Only one time did he venture as far as Mestre, to the villa of the distinguished patriot Count Zilio Bragadin, who tried to persuade him to accompany him to Venice. But it was in vain. To do what in Venice? To see the Austrian soldiers passing stiffly by, with the ends of their swords hitting the pavement? It was one spectacle he would not have been able to withstand.

In October 1861 he went to Pescùl to give his beloved mother a last kiss. She died there on the 16th of that month and was buried and mourned; and for her wonderful virtues, as a homemaker and to honor her son, prayers were said for her in most of the churches of Cadore.

IX

1859 came and went, 1860 came and went and finally 1866 arrived, and here Talamini, arose again with the fatherland. Leaving his solitude he took himself on foot to nearly all of the villages of Cadore, as a messenger of the new era to teach and prepare the people for the new times. In the meeting held at Pieve, by the officials of Cadore, on July 26, 1866, he was the speaker who delivered the speech to those at the meeting and he toasted the banquet. He praised, with noble words, those who had fallen in the battle of Tre Ponti; he would write an address to the King, deliberately or from common sense, divulging the bad news that Cadore might be united with the Tyrol. This was the principal reason Giuseppe Zanardelli visited Cadore as the Commissario of the King. I remember, like it was yesterday, to having seen, at the end of August of that year, Giuseppe Zanardelli, crossing Saint Giustina Square in Auronzo, receiving applause from the crowd. In the center were two Cadorine priests, one was Monsignor Gabriele Gregori, Archdeacon of Cadore and the other was Natale Talamini, and I remember it with great pleasure and with great emotion, because it was then, for the first time, I saw the patriot and the poet, whom I did not previously know, “Se non come per fama uom s’innamora”. When the Comuni were called to elect the *Consiglieri Comunali* for the first time, he would publish an appeal to the voters urging them not to fall from the tragic consequences of a ruinous protection into the opposite excess, that is, too much freedom: a very sensible appeal which should forever be a practical handbook for the administrative voters.

In November 1866 Talamini finally revisited his Venice, after the last of the Austrian troops had exited the city and entered he who aspired to be the first soldier of the Italian Independence, Vittorio Emanuele. He returned to Cadore. Besides having been named cavaliere, one of the first of four Cadorine cavalieri, another fulfillment also waited the venerable patriot. The Cadorine people wanted him to be their first representative to the National Parliament. He went to Florence and took part in the second session of the IX Legislature, which lasted scarcely two months. In the general election of 1867 he was not re-elected. Talamini did remain in the Veneto Assembly, and would have found himself like a fish out of water in the Italian Parliament. Although he always looked forward to the future, he remained more a man of 1848. In his platform to the voters he wrote, "io sarò col Ministero, sarò contro, secondo le mie convinzioni, che mirano all'unificazione e compimento d' Italia materiale, morale, intellettuale, l'uomo per l'Italia e non l'Italia per l'uomo, ecco la mia divisa;" he wrote as he thought, and thought he should be able to say, "should you vote against your conscious for party doctrine?" Poor talented poet, you were a poetic politician, but it was not for this world!

The politics of this world is the art of giving assurances for this opinion or that, it is the art of winning or keeping the power of a party, it is the art of making things according to interests, making in silence the case of needs for every sense of humanity and of justice. Your politics was the old way, that of Aristotle, who saw the art of governing as caring for the people, listening to what would be the best method for their well being. And you found yourself in agreement with the greatest poets. Decidedly, poets are not men of politics!

The politics of Natale Talamini was manifested in his prose and verses. In prison he believed the worst enemy of the Italians have been the Italians themselves, with the discord, the lack of love, and the only method of redemption was virtue; that Italy had to think of itself, and not wait for the help of foreigners! In 1859 he did not see any joy in the assistance given to us by the French, thinking of the great debt we encountered with them. He always wanted Italian unity; but he favored, at the same time, reconciliation between the Church and State, vigorously maintaining that the love of the homeland and the love of the religion were indivisible. In 1866, thinking about the way the Veneto region was liberated, he exclaimed, "the day much dreamed of has come, but Alas!, without glory, without love silent like an autumn day". He did not have too much faith in the alliances, in fact he wanted a self-made

Italy, made to shift for itself, not bound to another nation. A fact, as anyone can see, not very practical. At the inside he wanted a government honest, morale, paternal, and farsighted, a fact that can be, must be and that each of us should finally hope that it would be.

XI

The years that passed from 1866 to 1875 signaled the period of his prose pamphlets, a poetic prose. He was right in saying first the *Cadorine* proverb, “*tra’l vecio e’ l novel se ris-cia la pel*”, “Between the old and the new, you are risking your skin”, because in the changes following the arrival of the Italian government, the old problems swarmed again, the new ones appeared, and as it happens, together with good aspirations, rose to the surface also those bad ones. The most flawed of all was the division of the Cadorine forests, and our poet struggled, fought, wrote and won. The forest of Cadore are still, for the most part, undivided fortunately for the population, who if by malevolence of the administration or by ignorance of the government may or may not have committed the crime of dividing it, which would have been equivalent to destroying it, and Cadore would cease to exist. With the help of God I do not want to see that day!

Since 1838 Talamini, also advocated also for the railroad which, alas, is still a desire^v. But the work to which he devoted fourteen years of struggle was the establishment of the *Consorzio Cadorino* for the claims and administration of the joint property of the Comunita Cadorina, which returned to Cadore the Candidopoli sawmills, the inheritance left by Candido Coletti, and the need to erect, in Cadore, an educational institution. The Consorzio was established by a Royal Decree on October 11, 1875 and then, as if the poet had nothing more to accomplish, he died, and the death may have spared him the sadness of seeing how his institution, not born strong, suffered the fatal consequences of a failed system, though not through the fault of the people, it just died a slow death.

XII

It was the first of February of 1876 when he said to a person from Vodo, in a moving tone, almost scolding himself, “It has been November since I have been to my dear Pescùl”. On February 9, drawn by his strong love of family he departed for Borca, against the wishes of his nephews. He departed for the slopes of Forada, accompanied to a certain point by one of

his nephews, then he wanted to travel alone. He crossed the Forada, alone, in February, through the high snow, a fatiguing, dangerous and I would say fool-hearty act. For Talamini this passage was not new, many times he had previously made this passage, many times this very robust and very tenacious creature was capable of leaving Borca, in the morning, and going to Pescùl to say mass. He would walk for five hours on an empty stomach, climbing the dangerous mountain. Leaving Forada alone and unprepared on a land covered with snow, with little or no footprints on the road and not a vestige of a human, silence everywhere, only interrupted by the sudden squeaks of some large bird of prey. The poor Don Natale climbed, panting, out of breath, now sinking into the snow, tiring himself, many times clinging onto some shrub sticking out from below those white sheets, of ice and snow. One very white cloud wrapped around Mount Pelmo and concealed the view of the sky and the land. Talamini, covered by a cold sweat, his feet and hands frozen, exhausted and half alive, finally arrived at the summit. I am certain he turned around, like he had the habit of always doing, to look at the Boite Valley and at Antelao, then I am certain he prayed for his brother, Giuseppe, who had died, as he said, of the cold in Forada, unaware that soon the same fate awaited him.

Coming down from the peak with the snow that was melting and then attached to his feet and his legs, after ten hours of walking, he would finally arrive in Pescùl. Everyone expected, that upon his arrival he would rest. Not in the least! He went to visit the school and then he made a trip to the village of Selva dispensing to them *Regole di salute*. That poor man, he looked after the health of others and neglected himself! He had frozen feet and did not know or did not want to know, continuing to suffer and to be silent about it. But on February 15, when he was unable to bear the pain, he was put to bed and on that bed he lived 52 days amid atrocious spasms, without complaining and rebelling against any medicine. The body having been frozen became infected with gangrene and open and festered sores. The doctor amputated three toes from his feet; already he was half dead, and yet he expected to get up and be healed within a few days. He was like this until March 25 when he developed asthma and became faint. The first night of April he began the death-rattle, accompanied by a very high fever and heavy sweating. On April 6, which would be his last day, his nephews Giulio Alessandro and Santo had come from Borca to visit him. He asked them of news of Italy and spoke of his unfinished poems. At 11:00am, he asked and received Viaticum, and then in his last hours he wildly called out for his brother Bortolo, who could not make the trip from Belluno. Then he recited, with a hoarse and faint voice, interrupted by the hiccups of death, a verse by Dante: *“L’ora del tempo e la dolce stagione”*; then he added *“o cara Italia,*

come ti ho amato!" Feeling his life was leaving he said, "I am in danger," then he was blessed with the Holy Oil and lifting his eyes, still showing sparkles of light and of life, he whispered the name of Christ and the Blessed Mary and was at the point of death. He died a few minutes after 2:00pm in the afternoon on Thursday April 6. The *dolce stagione* attracted him even at death's door, he was born and he died, and I am certain the last feeling he was capable of having was the immense bitterness to have to close his eyes on the sun of Italy and to leave his much beloved Cadore, for which he had done so much, but for which he desired to do so much more. Would he be sorry to have led a life that had not given him any tribulations and sorrow? What force pulled him from Borca to Pescùl during the winter and against the wishes of his nephews? Was it misfortune, was it grace, was it a presentiment that led him to die there, where he had been born 68 years before?

The news of the death of Natale Talamini drew a crowd to Pescùl to visit the venerable body exhibited in the same room where he died. A crowd, which Pescùl maybe would never see again, was present on April 10 at his funeral. Borca, his second homeland, honored him on April 25 and on May 8, for the thirtieth day of death, Pieve honored him. He spoke for all of Cadore, and in his honor there was present a representative from every village of Cadore and Zoldo as well as Longarone, Belluno, Udine and Venice.

The funeral ceremony was held in the Church, from the top of the double staircase of the Comunita Cadore, he who writes these pages was entrusted to read to the people, gathered in the square, the funeral commemoration of the man who had many times honored both Cadore and Italy.

On that day was published this classic epitaph by Monsignor Giovanni De Dona, and I am convinced there is no more deserving way to complete this biographic acknowledgement:

◆────────────────────────────────◆

*Al Sacerdote
D. Natale Talamini
Di Pescullo
Ove nacque il 25 dicembre 1808 e morte il 6 aprile 1876
Insigne cultore
Delle lettere greche latine e italiane
Che trattò con penna maestra
E ad amati e riamanti discepoli
Per lunghi anni pubblicamente insegnò
Amatore verace d'Italia
La cui redenzione dalla interna vilezza
E dal giogo straniero*

*Colla parola col consiglio coll'opera
Massime nella difesa dell'indomata Venezia animosamente procurò
A costo di fieri patiment di strazianti prigione
Amatore svisceratissimo
Del nativo Cadore
Di cui
Canto negli inni le alpestri bellezze
E con indefessa costanza di studi di scritti di fatiche
Vegliò e rivendicò le prerogative e i diritti
E l'antica unità di vita risuscitò
IL CADORE
Siccome a cittadino grandemente benemerito
Con pubbliche esequie
Rende solenne tributo
Di onore di affetto di riconoscenza
8 maggio 1876*

◆————◆

To the priest
D. Natale Talamini
Of Pescùl
Where he was born December 25, 1808 and died April 6, 1876
A great student
Of Greek, Latin and Italian studies
He was a teacher
He who loved and in return was loved by students
For many years he taught
A true lover of Italy
Whose redemption from the internal vile
And from the foreign yoke
With word, with advise and with action
Utmost in the defense of the untamed Venice
At the cost of suffering and agonizing imprisonment
A passionate lover
Of his native Cadore
Of which
He sang the hymns of the very beautiful alpine mountains
And with untiring perseverance of studies and writings
He kept watch over and demanded the prerogatives and the privileges
And the old unity of a life revived
IL CADORE
A great and worthy citizen
With public obsequies
Renders a solemn tribute
Of honor, affection and gratitude
May 8, 1876

◆————◆

He was buried in the remote and lonely cemetery of his native alps, close to his parents. A small gravestone placed on the wall outside the church of San Fosca that guards the cemetery, has this inscription:

Here rests
beside his loved ones
Natale Talamini
And his bones quiver with love for the homeland.

XIII

He was bent over but yet he was a robust person, scarce and untidy hair fell in locks surrounding a very ample forehead, furrowed by profound wrinkles, he had blue eyes that flashed now and then. This man who was wonderfully educated would be satisfied with very little, in fact too little. His was not a cynicism, his was a stoic disposition. Accustomed to deprivation, a little dry bread to him was enough for dinner and the bare ground to him was good enough for a bed. His clothing was very neglected. A pair of worn out socks, a pair of gaiters falling half unbuttoned that he bound to his legs, a waistcoat, of uncertain design, closed up to his neck that kept hidden a pale black tail-coat and a poor blue collar, a small hat without form, a pair of rough and repaired shoes and the well known and antique *veladone*, from which, inside the pockets, protruded a bundle of cards, brochures, and documents relative to the Cadorine questions – this was how he dressed.

Only one time do I remember having seen him dressed well. It was in December 1866, at Belluno when he departed for Florence as the Cadorine Representative to Parliament. The blue collar had given way to a good white collar, the suit was of an ambiguous color and was covered by a new, rich overcoat, a fine hat covered his head and his face was clean shaven.

He would get up very early in the morning and he would walk, he would always walk, making long and tiring climbs, and he never used a cane, or umbrella one of those small conveniences of life used by men more agile. He was always without a cent in his pocket. Born poor, he lived poor. He spent his meager income as a priest and professor, as we already said, first on both of his brothers, later he used the money from masses and from his poor pension in alms and in assistance. For this last purpose he would borrow money, especially for the printing of his pamphlets he was publishing for the benefit of Cadore.

In Cadore he was very well known and very popular. Someone would always recognize him and point him out to a visitor as a great country person. Almost in every village he had his favorites from which he received hospitality and in which he confided his ideas and writing. He held his friends sacred and he made it a point to visit not only the friends, but also their family and the friends of the friends. Son of the people he preferred to be among the people; with the rich and the powerful he was not accustomed. He however esteemed the latter for what they deserved, without any flattery or pleasantry. He was rather frank, so much that not all the time was he polite, without reticence, without restrictions or without a double meaning. He would willingly stop to talk with the children, telling them a verse or a proverb, or one of his sayings which he had placed on a paper and scattered about in a short collection. He loved the young children full of faith, hope and love.

In conversation, he listened and asked questions more than he talked, and when he did talk he was concise, sententious and emphatic. To look at him one could tell he was both easily distracted and attentive, one understood that his brain continually worked, swirling, searching, investigating. When he talked on the subject of Cadore one needed to dedicate yourself to him, to enter into his thoughts, and embrace his ideas. Very often, either spontaneously or at the insistence of friends, he would recite a sonnet or a part of a song, then he would pose, an accent, the inspiration of a bard. In the middle of a serious argument he would suddenly utter a trifling statement, he always had a quick, and frequently witty quip or a maxium, incisive and full of common sense.

The persuasion for Justice and for the cause that he supported was so rooted in him that he identified himself with the cause and then all the enemies of the cause would become his personal enemies. That is when he became really angry. Then he would speak of his adversaries with a great contempt and he would then make them the target of his cutting maxiums, his sharp satires. This is when, although he was a fervent supporter of peace, harmony and love, he would not love them nor would he forgive them.

He hardly ever talked of himself such that I, who passed many wonderful hours with him, never heard him talk about nor know anything that relates to his younger years, or of his life as a professor, of his life in prison or of his poetry. Now writing of him, many times I have found myself short of information, as if I am dealing with a man or a poet from another period of time.

He was a peculiar man in everything, a man who truly came from, "the coarse ranks", a man who felt all the beauty and the strong emotions of life, who supported all the struggles of

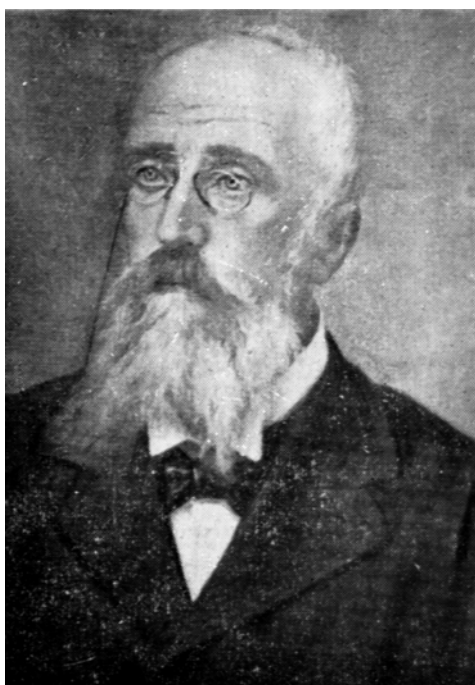
thought and the feelings, a man who, for all the good he attempted to do and did for Italy, for his neighbors and for Cadore, he received as a reward more aversion than love, more contempt than admiration, more carelessness than attention, a man who strongly dignifiedly suffered, a simple soul who devoted himself to sacrifice; a poet who may have written, among beautiful verses, also some bad ones but a man who had always been ready to give his like Goffredo Mameli and Alessandro Poerio, a man whose character was superior to the talent, a man whose word, as Manzoni says, was the example of his life, therefore he was a man who had all the elements on which great men are built as those who resist to the oblivion of posterity and leave behind a mark that neither the oblivion nor the ingratitude can wipe out.

A Short Acknowledgement on the Life of

Natale Talamini

Dedicated to the Children
In the Elementary Schools
Of Cadore

Written by
Antonio Ronzon



Professor Antonio Ronzon

Born in Vigo di Cadore in 1848, he died in Lodi in 1905. He studied in Belluno and Padova eventually becoming a grammar school and high school teacher. His love and affection for his small homeland led him to study the history of Cadore. Beginning in 1873 and then on there was not an event of some importance, occurring in Cadore, he did not record in a publication. He was the founder of the Cadorine Library located in his hometown of Vigo di Cadore.

Principal publications by Antonio Ronzon

1. *Viaggio nel' Alta Italia, fatto dal convitti M. Foscarini* (1872)
2. *Da Pelmo a Peralba-Almanaco Cadorino anni quattro* (1873-1876) Series 1
3. *La famiglia Mainardi di Lorenzago nel Cadore, Memoria storica* (1875)
4. *I pievani di Vigo. Cenno storico* (1875)
5. *Calvi e i Cadorini. Memorie storiche e biografiche* (1875)
6. *Torino e Milano* (1875)
7. *Natale Talamini* (1877)
8. *Il Cadore descritto sotto l'aspetto geografico, storico, biografico, artistico* (1877)
9. *Il Piave* (1879)
10. *Da Venezia a Cadore* (1879)
11. *I Convitti Nazionali* (1880)
12. *Della Fama di Tiziano* (1880)
13. *Rindemèra Scene del 48 in Cadore* (1881)
14. *La egina Margherita in Cadore.* (1882)
15. *Le scuole antiche e moderne di Lodi* (1883)
16. *I Vicari del Cadore* (1884)
17. *Sul Prato: novella cadorina* (1885)
18. *Una gita nella piccola Svizzera italiana* (1885)
19. *Daggio di precetti e temi per la compoizione italiana per il ginnasio superiore e il liceo* (1888)
20. *Francesco de Lemene* (1890)
21. *La chiesa sei Santi Ermagora e Fortunato* (1892)
22. *Medici e medicine in Cadore sotto la Repubblica di Venezia* (1894)
23. *Da Pelmo a Peralba-Almanaco Cadorino anni tre* (1894-1895-1896) Series 2
24. *Luigi Coletti* (1894)
25. *La Pieve e i pievani di Santo Stefano del Comelico* (1895)
26. *Il privilegio della Comunità del Cadore ad essa accordato dall Repubblica di Venezia nel 1420 al tempo della dedizione* (1895)
27. *Arti Sorelle* (1897)
28. *Natale Talamini* (1897)
29. *Archivo Storico Cadorino* (1898-1903)
30. *Luigi Rizzardi* (1901)
31. *La "Laudiade" di Jacopo Gabiano*

ⁱ This book, on the life of Professor N. Talamini, was written by Professor Ronzon more than thirty years ago when the Austrian Empire forced themselves onto the soil of Italy.

ⁱⁱ Today the road conditions are different. To the Forada a good road was constructed by the Military Corp of Engineers, at the time of World War I, almost as far as Forcella; for the Zoldana Valley, the Staulanza and Forcella del Crotto is a good road practicable for vehicles, and from Caprile a road for vehicles well maintained.

ⁱⁱⁱ He died in December of 1910 at the age of 84 years.

^{iv} This is an excerpt for an article published in the newspaper *La Venezia* 1890, n. 114, under the title *Fango lanciato alto* regarding the courage shown by the students of Bologna against Giosuè Carducci.

^v The Professor Ronzon wrote this in 1897.

A special note of thanks is extended to my friend, Professor Tommaso Sbarra, who assisted me in the translation of this work.