

THE FIRST OPERA.

A few days ago I received an unexpected visit from my friend, Charles Emerson. We had not met for some time ; for such is the state of the art that, although one of the first musicians of the day, and a composer of no ordinary genius, he has been compelled to reside for the last three years in a small country town, devoting his youthful energy to the monotonous duties of an organist's situation, and the professorship of two young ladies' boarding-schools. We had, of course, much to say to each other on matters musical ; and in the course of the evening, he related to me the fate of his first and only opera. I had just thrown together a few remarks on the obstacles opposed to the progress of music in England, by the absurd attempt to unite opera and the drama in the same establishment, when it struck me that this simple narration would far more forcibly illustrate the fact. As we had grown exceedingly confidential, and he did not disguise from me a single event, I feel that I cannot do better than endeavour to relate his story as nearly as possible in his own words.

"I need scarcely tell you" (he commenced) "with what glowing anticipations of future eminence I folded up my first opera, and sent it, forthwith, to one of the principal theatres. The music had been seen and praised by many whose opinion I had a right to be proud of, and I was young and sanguine enough to imagine that this was a sufficient guarantee for its instant production. I waited long and anxiously. At length it was returned to me, so clean, so unruffled—that, had it not been for the enclosed note, I should have imagined that it had been scarcely opened. Nothing daunted, however I sent it to another, and in turn, to every theatre in London, but with no better success. I was just beginning to despair, when I accidentally met with a gentleman, at a party, who had some influence at one of the chief theatres. This gentleman, it appeared, had been mainly instrumental in presenting the lessee with a testimonial from the company, in honour of his having paid them their salaries. He was kind enough to take me by the hand, and having introduced my opera at the very establishment to which I had first sent it, I had shortly the satisfaction of receiving a letter requesting that I would call on the acting manager in the course of the week.

"I had, as you may imagine, like most persons who have seen little of theatres, magnificent ideas of the fairy regions to which I was now about to be conducted ; so that I was not a little disappointed when, on entering the stage-door, I beheld a miserable, dirty lobby, with a door leading into a gloomy passage, and on which was the announcement that nobody could be admitted except on business. A large card-rack, alphabetically divided, and full of letters and cards, was fastened close to the wall, and several fire-pails were arranged systematically over the door.

"As nobody took the slightest notice of me, I addressed a man who was eating at a rickety table in a corner, and inquired if Mr. Medium was there. Without at all disturbing himself from his repast, he replied that he was there, but couldn't be seen.

"This was rather chilling ; but I instantly renewed the attack.

"At what time," said I, "will he be disengaged ?"

"Don't know," said he,—"May be two—may be three o'clock ;—can't say at all."

"Feeling that I was entirely at the mercy of these men,

I resolved to suppress the chagrin I felt at this reception, and seating myself upon a bench near the fire, patiently awaited my time. Whilst I remained there, many persons passed through the lobby, and vanished, with a professional air, through the mysterious door. Occasionally a magnificent equipage would drive up, and an elegantly-dressed lady, alighting from it, would brush past me, followed by a fierce-looking gentleman, with a small horsewhip in his hand, who seemed disposed to revenge the slightest attempt at insult. At length my patience was quite exhausted, and seizing a person who was passing through, I asked him if he would take my card to Mr. Medium. He was evidently struck by my determined air, and replied that he would if he could see him. Another half hour passed, and I was about to quit, in utter desperation, when the door opened half-way, and a man called out, 'Person waitin' for Mr. Medium?' I rushed forward, and, following my conductor through a number of dark passages, and across what I supposed to be the stage, was ushered into the presence of the acting manager. As soon as I entered the room, he rose, bowed politely, and unlocking a drawer, drew forth my manuscript, and addressed me thus :—

"Mr. Emerson, I am happy to inform you that your opera has been approved.' (I bowed.) 'But I must also tell you that many alterations will be necessary.' (I shuddered.) 'In the first place, we have no second tenor that we can depend upon : and I would, consequently, recommend you to cut the whole of *his* music out. In the next place, the *scena* in the first act, and the long trio in the forest scene, would never be stood by a theatrical audience, depend upon it."

"But, sir," I ventured to say, "these very pieces have been pronounced by musicians to be amongst the best things in the opera."

"Very likely," replied he, advancing towards me, and speaking kindly ; "very likely indeed ; but, my dear sir, these were the opinions of *musicians only* ; and, in a house devoted solely to music, would of course be of the greatest value. *Here* you must not forget that we are in a *Theatre* : we have to act to boxes, pit and gallery—and, when you have had as much experience as I have in these things, you will thank me for the advice I am about to give you. Take your opera home—make the alterations required—and think yourself exceedingly lucky to get before the public in any way."

"I felt that these words were spoken from the heart, and, warmly taking him by the hand, I promised to obey him implicitly. I took the manuscript away, cut and altered it to order, and, in a week from my interview with Mr. Medium, it was actually put into rehearsal.

"It will be unnecessary to detain you with an account of the various miseries I had to undergo before its production. Without possessing any real qualifications for the office, I found myself compelled to act as universal pacificator to the company—and as, during the whole of the rehearsals, no sooner was one petty jealousy appeased than another arose to supply its place, you may imagine that I had no easy time of it.

"At length the eventful evening arrived, and, with a palpitating heart, I took my seat in a private-box. The overture began ; every bar was listened to with breathless