VICTOR HUGO AND THE COMPOSERS.

Students of dramatic effect may be invited to consider the number of different ways in which the great musical situation of "Lucrezia Borgia" has been presented on the stage and always with success. In the original version of the drama Victor Hugo had furnished the revellers, who were about to be interrupted in their festivities by the chants of a funto be interrupted in their testivities by the chands of a fun-eral procession, with a blasphemous song. While God and St. Peter were made the subject of jests in the binqueting-hall the monks in the street outside kept repeating "Aures habent, sed non audiunt!" words which do not, we believe, form part of any known service for the dead, but which are admirably in place where the poet has introduced them. The irreligious verses being thought too strong, verses of a voluptuous character were substituted for them; and the contrast between the singing of the pleasure-seekers and that of the mourners reminding them that they must die was profoundly impressive, without giving cause for offence. This is the situation which Donizetti has reproduced in his opera, and out of which, notwithstanding the mingled recklessness and grace of the drinking song, he has made very little in a dramatic point of view. In the drama not a musical note has been heard until suddenly the praise of wine and its usual stage comitants is sung . -

Amis, vive l'orgie!

J'aime la folle nuit Et le vin et le bruit Et la nappe rougie, &c. &c.

When the monks commence their dirge, that, again, is the first time that choral singing has been heard in the piece; and the solo, full of life, and the chorus, which tells only of death, stand out from the rest of the work in striking opposition one to the other. In the opera the music counts simply for what it is worth. The attention of listeners is not all at once excited by the drinking song, nor by the chorus which interrupts it, or rather which follows it without interrupting it (for Donizetti naturally did not like to break up his pretty melody). Of them, also as regards the special dramatic meanhear not." Similarly the great musical effect of "Le Roi s'amuse" goes for little in "Rigoletto," and that of "Hernani" the sudden, unexpected sound of the horn, with its terrible significance has quite a travia of the world have its terrible significance, has quite a tragic effect; it would be the voice of fate, if fate possessed a voice as well as a hand. In the opera, on the contrary it seems rather absurd, after the perpetual blasting of innumerable brass instruments, that so much fuss should be made about one little horn. To go back to "Lucrezia Borgia," the singing of the drinking song in that drama, as produced at the Opéra Comique for Mdme. Ristori, is replaced by spoken declamation; and still the contest between the joy of the victims and the warning voices of the chetti.

burial party, to which for a time they give no heed, is highly effective. From a comparison, however, of the various modes of presenting Victor Hugo's thoroughly dramatic idea, it must appear that his own is infinitely the best. Understanding the true nature and requirements of the musical drama better than Donizetti and Verdi, he never saw in any of his pieces for the stage the subject for an opera; while, on the other hand, he himself made a libretto, and an a lmirable one— probably the best that exists—out of his own "Esmeralda," otherwise "Notre Dame de Paris."

"Esmeralda" has been set to music by no less than eight composers, of whom Mdlle. Bertin was the first. It was, indeed, for this young lady, that Victor Hugo prepared his "Esmeralda" libretto. The seven other composers who have set "Esmeralda" to music are Mazzucato and Campana, both Italians; Prince Poniatowski, a Pole; Dargomijski, a Rus-Italians; Prince Poniatowski, a Pole; Dargomijski, a' Russian; Lebau, a Belgian; Fry, an American; and Wetterhahn, a Hungarian. It is understood, too, that Sir Julius Benedict has, or had, an "Esmeralda" in hand, of which the libretto was, we believe, furnished to him by Mr. Boucicault. "Locrezia Borgia" has been set by Donizzetti alone; "Le Roi s'amuse" by Verdi alone ("Rigoletto"); "Angelo" by Mercadante ("Il Giuramento"); "Les Burgraves" by Matteo Salvi; "Marie Tudor" by Pacini and Kachperoff; "Marion de l'Orme" by Bottesini and Carlo Pedrotti; "Hernani" by Gabussi, Mazzucato, and Verdi; and "Ruy Blas" by Howard Glover, Chiromonte, Besenzoni, Prince Poniatowski, and Marchetti.

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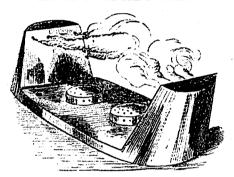
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