

made the libretto totally different from the other, and Rossini finished the music in thirteen days, during which he never left the house. "Not even did I get shaved," he said to a friend. "It seems strange that through the 'Barber' you should have gone without shaving." "If I had shaved," Rossini explained, "I should have gone out; and, if I had gone out, I should not have come back in time."

The first performance was a curious scene. The Argentina Theatre was packed with friends and foes. One of the greatest of tenors, Garcia, the father of Malibran and Pauline Viardot, sang Almaviva. Rossini had been weak enough to allow Garcia to sing a Spanish melody for a serenade, for the latter urged the necessity of vivid national and local color. The tenor had forgotten to tune his guitar, and in the operation on the stage a string broke. This gave the signal for a tumult of ironical laughter and hisses. The same hostile atmosphere continued during the evening. Even Madame Georgi-Righetti, a great favorite of the Romans, was coldly received by the audience. In short, the opera seemed likely to be damned.

When the singers went to condole with Rossini, they found him enjoying a luxurious supper with the gusto of the *gourmet* that he was. Settled in his knowledge that he had written a masterpiece, he could not be disturbed by unjust clamor. The next night the fickle Romans made ample amends, for the opera was concluded amid the warmest applause, even from the friends of Paisiello.

Rossini's "Il Barbiere," within six months, was performed on nearly every stage in Europe, and received universally with great admiration. It was only in Paris, two years afterward, that there was some coldness in its reception. Every one said that after Paisiello's music on the same subject it was nothing, when it was suggested that Paisiello's should be revived. So the St. Petersburg "Barbiere" of 1788 was produced, and beside Rossini's it proved so dull, stupid, and antiquated that the public instantly recognized the beauties of the work which they had persuaded themselves to ignore. Yet for this work, which placed the reputation of the young composer on a lofty pedestal, he received only two thousand francs.

Our composer took his failures with great phlegm and good nature, based, perhaps, on an invincible self-confidence. When his "Sigismonde" had been hissed at Venice, he sent his mother a *fiasco* (bottle). In the last instance he sent her, on the morning succeeding the first performance, a letter with a picture of a *fiashetto* (little bottle).

### III.

The same year (1816) was produced at Naples the opera of "Otello," which was an important point of departure in the reforms introduced by Rossini on the Italian stage. Before speaking further of this composer's career, it is necessary to admit that every valuable change furthered by him had already been inaugurated by Mozart, a musical genius so great that he seems to have included all that went before; all that succeeded him. It was not merely that Rossini enriched the orchestration to such a degree, but, revolting from the delay of the dramatic movement, caused by the great number of arias written for each character, he gave large prominence to the concerted pieces, and used

them where monologue had formerly been the rule. He developed the basso and baritone parts, giving them marked importance in serious opera, and worked out the choruses and finales with the most elaborate finish.

Lord Mount Edgcumbe, a celebrated connoisseur and admirer of the old school, wrote of these innovations, ignoring the fact that Mozart had given the weight of his great authority to them before the daring young Italian composer:

"The construction of these newly-invented pieces is essentially different from the old. The dialogue, which used to be carried on in recitative, and which, in Metastasio's operas, is often so beautiful and interesting, and now cut up (and rendered unintelligible if it were worth listening to) into *pezzi concertati*, or long singing conversations, which present a tedious succession of unconnected, ever-changing motives, having nothing to do with each other; and if a satisfactory air is for a moment introduced, which the ear would like to dwell upon, to hear modulated, varied, and again returned to, it is broken off, before it is well understood, by a sudden transition in an entirely different melody; time, and key, and recurs no more, so that no impression can be made, or recollection of it preserved. Single songs are almost exploded. . . . Even the *prima donna*, who formerly would have complained at having less than three or four airs allotted to her, is now satisfied with having one single *cavatina* given to her during the whole opera."

In "Otello," Rossini introduced his operatic changes to the Italian public, and they were well received; yet great opposition was manifested by those who clung to the time-honored canons. Sigismondi, of the Naples Conservatory; was horror-stricken on first seeing the score of this opera. The clarionets were too much for him, but on seeing third and fourth horn-parts, he exclaimed: "What does the man want? The greatest of our composers have always been contented with two. Shades of Pergolesi, of Leo, of Jomelli! How they must shudder at the bare thought! Four horns! Are we at a hunting-party? Four horns! Enough to blow us to perdition!" Donizetti, who was Sigismondi's pupil, also tells an amusing incident of his preceptor's disgust. He was turning over a score of "Sémiramide" in the library, when the *maestro* came in and asked him what music it was. "Rossini's," was the answer: Sigismondi glanced at the page and saw 1. 2. 3. trumpets; being the first, second, and third trumpet parts. Aghast, he shouted, stuffing his fingers in his ears, "One hundred and twenty-three trumpets! *Corpo di Cristo!* the world's gone mad, and I shall go mad too!" And so he rushed from the room, muttering to himself about the hundred and twenty-three trumpets.

The Italian public, in spite of such criticisms, very soon accepted the opera of "Otello" as the greatest serious opera ever written for their stage. It owed much, however, to the singers who illustrated its roles. Mme. Colbran, afterward Rossini's wife, sang Desdemona, and Davide, Otello. The latter was the predecessor of Rubini as the finest singer of the Rossinian music. He had the prodigious compass of three octaves; and M. Bertin, a French critic, says of this singer, so honorably linked with the career of our composer: "He is full of warmth, *verve*, energy, expression and musical sentiment; alone he can fill up and give life to a scene; it is impossible for another singer to carry away the audience as he does, and, when he will only be simple, he is admirable. He is the Rossini of song; he is the greatest singer I ever heard." Lord Byron, in one of his letters to Moore, speaks of the first production at Milan, and praises the music enthusiastically, while condemning the libretto as a degradation of Shakspeare.

(To be Continued.)