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ROT YOUR ITALIANOS!

BY A MAN BEHIND HIS AGE.
(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

(Concluded.)

No modern play-wright seems to have the faintest notion that there is a time proper for singing, and a time proper for holding one's tongue. Shakespeare introduced songs, and they should not they? True; but Shakespeare never went a single inch out of his way to accommodate a song. His men and women sing exactly as men and women ought to do—at the proper time, and in the proper manner; two qualities which we, who sing away, "à bravo ou à mala," have most unaccountably lost sight of. I quote the following words from the last number of *Maga*, without curtailing, partly for the excellence of the criticism, and partly because they supplied the text for these, my present rude lucubrations: "Joanna Ballie," says the critic, for he is speaking of no less a name, "takes care to be no people sing in situations in which it is natural for them to do so; the songs are sung by those who have little or nothing to do—(so Anacrusis, in *As you Like It*.)—and indeed when nothing very interesting is going on; and they are supposed not to be spontaneous expressions of sentiment in the character, but, as songs in ordinary life usually are, compositions of other people, which have often sung before, and which are only generally applicable to the present occasion. These few words, which are not at all a hint, this great poetess has laid down the principles on which alone can any musical drama be constructed agreeably to nature."

So much for theatrical song-singing: to pick the way, I have yet another crow to pluck before I leave it, inasmuch as the best of the song is sung, the more it tends, by acting an encore, to dispel still further the illusion of the stage. The grand object of the drama is, of course, to "hold the mirror to nature;" that it may admire (which it does without vanity) its own beauties, and see among its own follies and deformities, the most among its secondary aims, I take to be the endeavour to impress the spectator with grief, as far as such a thing is possible, that scene which passes before his eyes are not only but realities—to make him give himself up to the illusion of the moment, annihilating both time and space from the instant the curtain rises—transporting himself through air, and across oceans—undergoing a metamorphosis—now a "royal Dane," now an "antique Roman,"—and substituting his pristine John Bullism into the second-rate son of the basin glides delicately from behind the curtain, to announce entertainments of the morrow. I do not know whether or no my principle be correct, but that as it may, it is that upon which I do to act myself, if the gods would only allow. But no; the powers of the one-shilling gallery are a straight forward, matter-of-course of deities, that have no notion of being deluded in any way whatever; tailor squeaks tailor, barber out-braves barber, out-claps baker, butcher out-whistles her; the play stands still, the actors refer to their old attitudes, the song is sung; and Miss Snevellicci, act as she will, for the rest of the evening, Miss Snevellicci and Miss Snevellicci only. I never yet Richard dream of a second time; but did it ever be the pleasure of the British to demand such an effort, (and there are many things, as far as I see, more impossible) I could regard the exhibition with exactly the same degree of complacency. But running away from my friend the music.

Suppose a lady of fashion now a days as soon think of admitting that she did adore Italian music, as he would of condescending her age. For my part, I look upon Italianizing dames prettily much as sturdy and old look upon the Graecizing patriots—"non possumus ferris, Quiritis, Graecam." There is no end to our unattractive songs—Jampridem Syrus in Tiberian de-

luit Orontes!—Italians, and French, and Germans—the Swiss family This, and the Dutch family That, and the Russian family Totter—Chanteurs, Montagnards, Siffleurs, and Chincloppers—Alpine minstrels, and Bohemian minstrels, and minstrels from the Lord knows where; verily, the plague of foreigners as upon us, and of all live plagues defend me from this! Were the evil confined to the boards of the Opera-House, or the purlieus of Leicester Square, I should not mind it so much, though it would still be had enough. But this is, alas! far from being the case. Read a programme of a fashionable morning concert—the probability is, that you will not find one English song in the list. Walk into a fashionable drawing-room, and ask Miss Mary or Miss Caroline to favour you with a little music—fifty to one she strikes up some Italian rhapsody, of which you understand not a syllable, but which you are bound to pronounce the most beautiful thing you ever heard in your life, as you would escape being set down for a greater Goth than even Alaric himself. An English audience, gazing for wonderment at a modern morning concert, puts me strongly in mind of a congregation of Roman Catholics at their devotions. They are alike most admiring and devout listeners to a service, of the meaning of which nine-tenths of them have no more comprehension than a cow has of mathematics. But the evil does not stop at morning concerts and crowded soirées; like the frogs of Egypt, it invades our very chambers, and takes its station unresisted by our parlour fire-sides—those very citadels of John Bullism—our very children of ten years old practise bravuras, and prattle of Donizetti.

The honest old English song never was at a greater discount than in this most musical age. We do not get a decent one once a year; and, when we have that luck, it endures only for a week. Our modern fashionable ballads are the most execrable compounds of mawkish sentimentality that ever melted the soul of a nurse-maid—full of pale high brows, and dark flashing eyes, and long flowing tresses of raven blackness—strong spirit—vibrating, and heart-tempests—appealing violence. Unhappy music affects doom! henceforth to a perpetual state of ancient maidenhood; for there is no longer any "immortal love;" to marry her to. Even good music, when burdened with the trashy words with which these days are afflicted, is, to my thinking, three parts ruined; but this is a matter about which our modern musicians trouble their heads very little—words are made for tunes, not tunes for words; and one would think they were made by contract into the bargain; sometimes they rhyme, and for the most part scan; but as to any thing beyond, why, a black swan would be nothing to the rarity. Our list of modern song-writers (I do not mean mere "metre-ballad-mongers," and Haynes-Bayley-sites, but good honest song-writers) is small indeed; of living ones we have scarcely any. Moore seems to think he has done enough, and so he has, for fame; for there is immortality enough and to spare in the Irish melodies. Allan Cunningham has written several stirring strains—why is his pen idle? Poor Captain Morris is dead!—peace to his manes! his songs (and so were Dibdin's) were superb in their way—that is, when men were reasonably well advanced in the second bottle. Of Burns, I fear I may say little but the name is known in these parts, save a few. Walter Scott has written some glorious songs, but who sings them? and last "not least in our dear love," Felicia Hemans has penned some strains of passing beauty, which one would think the world would willingly not let die; yet, are all these passing away silently to their oblivion, to be recalled, now and then, only by such old-fashioned folks like myself and the mayjors.

We, English, I suppose, neglect our own music more than any people upon the face of the earth, and with as little reason for so doing. We are the most loon-loving nation under the sun; we borrow pretty nearly every thing—our dresses, our habits of life, and now, at last, our music. We are not an idle people, nor a foolish people; but somehow or other we have got hold of a notion that nothing of our

own is worth a brass farthing, and that every thing belonging to every body else is worth its weight in gold. We go upon tick for taste, and we are put off with an inferior material into the bargain. I never yet heard an overture, or a fantasia, or a fugue, or an aria, that could stand any thing like a comparison with three-fourths of the old Irish and Scottish melodies, which one scarcely dares call for, for fear of being stared down by a parcel of people who never even heard of their existence. Those of Scotland, in particular, have to me, though I am no Scotchman, an inexpressible charm. I can not listen to "Auld Robin Gray," and "Ye banks and braes," and "My love is like the red red rose," and fifty more that I could name, every night of my life, without being weary of them. These, after all, are the strains that come home to our hearts; these are the sounds at which the very falling of a pin is an interruption—a grating harsh discord—to our ears—which float around us in our slumbers—which haunt us in our ramblings—which are with us in the woods and by the streams, lapping in elysium of harmony the discordant and jarring passions of our most unmusical "working day world." The concert-room, with its "intricacies of laborious song," moves our wonder and charms our ear; but it stirs not our feelings; we are no more touched by "Viviva," much as we may applaud its execution, than we are by the street-minstrel, whom we bribe by a whole penny to bestow his oft-repeated "All round my hat," on the unsuspecting inhabitants of some more distant locality. "I cannot enjoy music, any more than I can read poetry, in a crowd—except it be our own magnificent National Anthem, or some strain which stirring us with the sound of a trumpet, summons up at once in a thousand bosoms other and nobler associations than those which music more generally endeavors to awake; strains at which every heart beats more proudly—to which every tongue bursts forth in involuntary chorus—wh-oh kindle to a blaze in our bosoms all the pride, and the honor, and the love of our fatherland, which, though they may for a time burn dimly, may never, like the Shesh's fire, be wholly extinguished. To revel in the full luxury of music, I must have no hired minstrel, no crowded benches, no glare of lamps, no "bustle, squeeze, row, gabbery, and jaw;"—I must have a still calm eve, in some quiet bowyer far removed from the "ham of human cities," with "one fair spirit for my minister," who needs not to ask or to be told what string to strike—one who loves, as I love, the "auld world songs"—and simple melodies of a more simple generation—none whose purer taste rejects the

Shakes and flourishes, outlandish things, That nair, not grace, an honest English song." But cling still to the "merit, not the less precious that we seldom hear it," the pathetic simplicity which nature prompts—whose heart is in the strain she wakens, forgetful for the time of external things, and breathing only in its own created atmosphere of harmony. This is to me a banquet at which there is no chance that that appetite should sicken, and so die." To such a feast I would even be selfish enough to wish no fellow guests. I would have no voice to break the spell—to startle the spirit from its trance of enchantment—to mar with the sounds of earth the tones which bless us with dreams of heaven.

Our own Shakespeare, in one of the most exquisite productions of his genius, has drawn a lover of music after my own heart. I love that music-loving Duke of Illyria before he has spoken two lines:—

"Now, good Casario, but that piece of song, That old and antique song we heard last night: Methought it did relieve my passion much. More than light airs, and recollected terms, Of these most brisk and giddy-paced times."

And again, "Mark it, Casario—it is old and plain:—The spinners, and the knitters in the sun, And the free maids that weave their thread with bones, Do woe to sing it."

Yes! Shakespeare has sought for the standard of taste in music in a quarter which may

perchance provoke the sneer of the professor but he has sought in the true one, for all that—he has sought for it in the people—in the class to whom music is the only one of the fine arts capable of being thoroughly enjoyed;—who turn confused from scientific and perplexed combinations of sound, to some more simple strain which they can feel, and understand, and remember—whose taste is the taste of nature, and therefore the true one.

Coleridge's "Lines composed in a Concert-Room" are a host in my favor. Truly, indeed, does he say of the crowds who ordinarily fill those receptacles, "these feel not music's genuine power;" and beautifully does he long to change the "long-breathed singer's untuned strain," for the melodies of the "unnoticed minstrel," who

Breathes on his flute sad airs, so wild and low That his own cheek is wet with quiet tears."

Byron is on my side, notwithstanding he asserts himself to be "a liege and loyal admirer of Italian music." The clever stanza which dashes off the "long evenings of duets and trios," wants the foiling—marred as its effect is by the jingling rhyme—which characterises the following one, in which he speaks of

The home-Heart-balls of Green Erin or Gray Highlands, That bring Lochaber back to eyes that roam O'er our Atlantic continents or islands; The calculations of music, which o'er the All mount, incoers with dreams that they are high lands.

No more to be beheld but in such vision!"

Yes! it is not the grand crash of the orchestra, or the painful effort of the concert-room—it is not your "Babylon's bravuras" that stir the heart of the wanderer who roams "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," among strangers in a strange land; but the honest simple strains of the people—homey things which sink deep into the home-sick heart—strains which have cheered his evening hours among friends far away—remembrance of all that man holds dearest—of friends, of kindred, of love, of home. There is many a hardy Swiss heart that melts at the *Ranz des Vaches*, to which the overture to *Guillaume Tell* would be an unintelligible and powerless congregation of sounds.

"Music," says Addison, "is to delude the laws and rules from the general sense and taste of mankind, and not from the principles of the art itself; or, in other words, the taste is not to conform to the art, but the art to the taste. Music is not designed to please only chromatic ears, but all that are capable of distinguishing harsh from agreeable notes. A man of an ordinary ear is a judge whether a passion is expressed in proper sounds, and whether the melody of those sounds be more or less pleasing."

To these "chromatic ears" it is the fashion now-a-days for John Bull to pretend—and he seems determined to wear them long enough in all conscience; but, though he has forgotten the national music to attach himself with all the fervor of a renegade to her foreign sisters, I cannot help thinking, and hoping, that we shall yet see the day when he will be pleased to resume the more "ordinary" organs which naturally belong to him—when the strains "which pleased of yore the public ear" shall once more claim their ancient place in his estimation; and the manes of the exasperated mayores be appeased by the restoration of the long-exiled "simple ballad."

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