

the feet of a very strict Gamaliel, Padre Mattei. The youth was no dull student, and in spite of his capricious indolence, which vexed the soul of his tutor, he made such rapid progress, that, at the age of sixteen he was chosen to write the cantata, annually awarded to the most promising student. Success greeted the juvenile effort, and thus we see Rossini fairly launched as a composer of the earlier operas which he poured out for five years. It is not needful to speak, except, that one of them so pleased the austere Marshal Massena, that he exempted the composer from conscription. The first opera which made Rossini's name famous through Europe was "Tancredi," written for the Venetian public. To this opera belongs the charming "Di tanti Palpiti," written under the following circumstances: Mme. Melanotte, the *prima donna* took the whim during the final rehearsal that she would not sing the opening air, but must have another. Rossini went home in sore disgust, for the whole opera was likely to be put off by this caprice. There were but two hours before the performance. He sat waiting for his macaroni when an exquisite air came into his head, and it was written in five minutes.

After his great success he received offers from almost every town in Italy, each clamouring to be served first. Every manager was required to furnish his theatre with an opera from the pen of the new idol. For these essays he received a thousand francs each, and he wrote five or six a year. Stendhall, Rossini's spirited biographer gives a picturesque account of life in the Italian theatres at this time, a status which remains in some of its features to-day.

"The mechanism is as follows: The manager is frequently one of the most wealthy and considerable persons of the little town he inhabits. He forms a company consisting of *prima donna*, *tenoro*, *basso*, *cantante*, *basso buffo*, a second female singer, and a third *basso*. The *libretto* or poem, is purchased for sixty or eighty francs from some unlucky son of the muses, who is generally a half starved abbe, the hanger on of some rich family in the neighbourhood. The character of the parasite so admirably painted by Terence, is still to be found in all its glory in Lombardy, where the smallest town can boast of some five or six families of some wealth. A *maestro* or composer, is then engaged to write a new opera, and he is obliged to adapt his own airs to the voices and capacity of the company. The manager intrusts the care of the financial department to a *registrarario*, who is generally some pettifogging attorney who holds the position of his steward. The next thing that generally happens is, that the manager falls in love with the *prima donna*, and the progress of this important amour gives ample employment to the curiosity of the gossips.

The company thus organized at length gives its first representation after a month of cabals and intrigues which furnish conversation for the town of the importance of which the residents of large places can form no idea. During months together a population of eight or ten thousand people do nothing but discuss the merits of the forthcoming music and singers with the eager impetuosity which belong to the Italian character and climate. The first representation if successful, is generally followed by twenty or thirty more of the same piece, after which the company breaks up.

From this little sketch of theatrical arrangements in Italy some idea may be formed of the life which Rossini led from 1810 to 1816. Between these years he visited all the principal towns, remaining three or four months at each, the idolized guest of the *dilettanti* of the place. Rossini's idleness and love of good cheer always made

him procrastinate his labours till the last moment, and placed him in dilemmas from which only his fluency of composition extricated him.

His biographer says:—"The day of performance is fast approaching, and yet he cannot resist the pressing invitations of these friends to dine with them at the tavern. This, of course, leads to a supper, the champagne circulates freely, and the hour of morning steals on apace. At length a compunctious visit shoots across the mind of the truant composer. He rises abruptly; his friends insist on seeing him home; and they parade the silent streets bareheaded, shouting in chorus whatever comes uppermost, perhaps a portion of a *miserere* to the great scandal of pious Catholics tucked snugly in their beds. At length he reaches his lodgings, and shutting himself up in his chamber is, at this, to every day mortals, most ungenial hour, visited by some of his most brilliant inspirations. These he hastily scratches down on scraps of paper, and next morning arranges them, or in his own phrase, instruments them amid the renewed interruptions of his visitors. At length the important night arrives. The *maestro* takes his place at the piano-forte. Theatre is overflowing, people having flocked to the town from ten leagues distance. Every inn is crowded, and those unable to get other accommodations encamp around the theatre in their various vehicles. All business is suspended, and during the performances the town has the appearance of a desert. The passions, the anxieties, the very life of a whole population are centered in the theatre.

Rossini would preside at the first three representations, and, after receiving a grand civic banquet, set out for the next place, his portmanteau fuller of music paper than of other effects, and perhaps a dozen sequins in his pocket. His love for jesting during these gay Bohemian wanderings made him perpetrate innumerable practical jokes, not sparing himself when he had no more available food for mirth. On one occasion, in travelling from Ancona to Reggio he passed himself off for a musical professor, a mortal enemy of Rossini, and sang the words of his own operas to the most execrable music in a cracked voice, to show his superiority to that donkey Rossini. An unknown admirer of his was in such a rage that he was on the point of chastising him for slandering the great musician about whom Italy raved.

Our composer's earlier style was quite simple and unadorned, a fact difficult for the present generation, only acquainted with the florid beauties of his later works to appreciate. Rossini only followed the traditions of Italian music in giving singers full opportunity to embroider the naked score at their own pleasure. He was led to change this practice by the following incident. The tenor singer Velluti was then the favourite of the Italian theatres, and indulged in the most unwarrantable tricks with his composers. During the first performance of "L'Aureliano" at Naples, the singer loaded the music with such ornaments that Rossini could not recognize the offspring of his own brains. A fierce quarrel ensued between the two, and the composer determined thereafter to write music of such a character that the most stupid singer could not suppose any adornment needed. From that time the Rossini music was marked by its florid and brilliant embroidery. Of the same Velluti spoken above an incident is told, illustrating the musical craze of the country and the period. A Milanese gentleman, whose father was very ill, met his friend in the street. "Where are you going?" "To the Scala to be sure." "How! your father lies at the point of death." "Yes! yes! I know, but Velluti sings to-night."—*Geo. T. Ferris.*